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Book Review

Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning
Zoltán Dörnyei, Peter D. MacIntyre, and Alastair Henry (Eds.). Bristol:
Multilingual Matters, 2015. 456 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78309-256-7

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Beginning with Gardner and Lambert's initial foray into the study of second language (L2) motivation over 50 years ago, various theoretical approaches have been used to investigate this key aspect of language learning. However, although motivation is inherently unstable and iterative, researchers have primarily searched for static, linear relationships between learner characteristics and motivated behaviour. Consequently, there is a general consensus that the shifting reality of L2 motivation has yet to be adequately explained (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

A research paradigm has been sought that can capture the fluctuating aspects of L2 motivation, and since the early 2000s, scholars have been increasingly interested in the possibilities of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST), a theoretical framework from the natural sciences that investigates how conditions and components interact within a system in unpredictable and constantly changing ways. However, CDST's emphasis on whole system interconnectedness and nonlinear change poses significant challenges to conventional research methods, and the editors of *Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning* state that during the past ten years "scholars spent much more time *talking* about research in a dynamic systems vein than actually *doing* it" (p. 1). To address this impasse, this anthology of CDST-themed conceptual summaries and empirical studies has been compiled to stimulate related research.

The book begins with nine chapters of conceptual summaries that introduce central themes of CDST presented from a general applied linguistics perspective. Especially useful in this section is Diane Larsen-Freeman's chapter *Ten Lessons from Complex Dynamic Systems Theory* in which she outlines key CDST components such as "nonlinearity" and "openness and nonfinality". Equally helpful is Phil Hiver's explanation of the essential concept of "attractor states", the patterns into which a system tends to self-organize. Ema Ushioda also contributes an insightful chapter on conceptualizing a language learner's context within a CDST approach in which she suggests attempting to "think big and small at the same time" (p. 53), emphasizing the dynamic relationship between learners' external contextual environments and their internal thought processes.

The book's second section contains twelve empirical studies of L2 motivation using CDST-themed research designs. Asia is well represented in this section, with established scholars presenting five studies from Hong Kong, Japan, and China. Highlights include Tomoko Yashima and Kumiko Arano's use of a theoretical

framework that combines CDST with Valsiner's three-level model of human development to investigate Japanese university students' decision-making processes and motivational changes in non-credit English classes. Also in Japan, Kay Irie and Stephen Ryan explore how the study abroad experience affects the L2 self-concepts of students at a Tokyo university using Q methodology, an innovative data collection technique that involves participants sorting and ranking a variety of statements regarding their L2 motivation. In a Hong Kong secondary school, Letty Chan, Zoltán Dörnyei, and Alastair Henry investigate the motivational patterns of English learners through retrodictive qualitative modeling, a promising new method using teacher focus groups to identify learner archetypes and interviews to explore the archetypes' developmental trajectories.

While the book's conceptual summaries and empirical studies are useful resources, perhaps of greatest value is the practical advice on conducting research from a CDST perspective offered by the editors in the concluding chapter. They advise against attempting to apply a dynamic framework post hoc to data collected through conventional research methods, because these typically lack data density. Instead they emphasize that "applying a dynamic perspective should begin right at the design stage" (p. 424), and using the book's empirical studies as examples, they give step-by-step suggestions for identifying a focal system to investigate, framing an appropriate research question, and selecting a suitable methodology.

With its focus on research and theory, *Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning* is intended for a research-oriented audience. Teachers looking for motivational strategies will not find ready answers. Also, newcomers to the dynamic paradigm will feel somewhat adrift throughout the book due to the steep learning curve presented by CDST's abstract concepts and counterintuitive terminology. Given that CDST has only recently been imported into the L2 acquisition field and will be unfamiliar to many readers, an additional chapter devoted to a beginner's primer on the basics of dynamic systems theory would be helpful. That said, this anthology provides a much-needed bridge between conventional and dynamic approaches to L2 motivation research, and it is an important step toward a more complete understanding of the motivational ebbs and flows of language learning.

References

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Longman.

About the reviewer

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