

*ATLANTIS**Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*

37.2 (December 2015): 271-276

ISSN 0210-6124

David Lasagabaster, Aintzane Doiz and Juan Manuel Sierra, eds. 2014. *Motivation and Foreign Language Learning. From Theory to Practice*. 190 pp. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. ISBN: 978-9-0272-1322-8.

LUIS SEBASTIÁN VILLACAÑAS DE CASTRO

Universitat de València

Luis.Villacanas@uv.es

The present volume, edited by Lasagabaster, Doiz and Sierra, brings together different perspectives on the interrelation between motivation and foreign language learning. Following the editors' introduction, which carefully summarizes the main ideas explored in each chapter—hence my decision not to organize this review in the same way, but rather to focus on a general aspect that has the potential to encompass all of them—the volume is divided into two parts, each of four chapters. Whereas the first part is theoretically oriented, the second comprises individual studies. The volume ends with the editors' epilogue, in which an attempt is made to present a unified reading of the contributions.

I would like to begin this review by commenting on precisely this epilogue. There, Lasagabaster, Doiz and Sierra conclude that the perspectives gathered in the book are theoretically compatible, but I for one felt that a clear choice was being made in each chapter, and that the contributors were aware of opting for different alignments from those assumed by others. All the authors explore, either implicitly or explicitly, an issue which language teachers or researchers in the field of Foreign Language (FL) education often come across: demotivated learners. However, they do not give the same solution to this common problem and at times the lack of consistency among their proposals seems somewhat problematic. Basically, most of the contributions to this volume reenact the old alternative between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation (Deci and Ryan 1985), which is reformulated in different ways. I do not intend to discuss whether these two approaches are really theoretically compatible, as the editors seem to suggest. What interests me mostly is the fact that these approaches do clash with each other whenever teachers leave the realm of theory and enter the sphere of practice. For it is then that teachers must decide which take on motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic, they choose to favor in their classes, a decision which expresses itself in terms of pedagogical choices which, in turn, translate into specific class proposals and activities, each with its own structure, coherence and

internal meaning. In other words: practice demands FL teachers to make a choice between two different approaches to motivation that may not be contradictory in theory but which (on account of the pedagogical demands that govern language teaching) cannot be harmonized into single class proposals.

Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim, who author chapter one, exemplify the first response to the alternative presented above, separating their proposal from the rest. Their chapter favors extrinsic motivation insofar as it interprets that the key element in motivation lies in the future and on ideality, as their insistence on *goals* seems to suggest. For them, FL learners become motivated when their classes connect with their personal goals. It is then that a Directed Motivational Current (DMC) may arise, one which pushes the whole learning process towards goal attainment, as is described in this chapter. According to these authors, goals are immediately related to the visions that learners have of their own *possible selves*, which represent what “individuals *might* become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming” (20).

The main problem I find in this argument is that, by making motivation so dependent on outside goals, and goals in turn so dependent on future self possibilities, the authors seem to trust non-existing entities (the future, the realm of individual possibility) to become the main transforming forces in FL education, and not the qualities of the immediate educational context. This move runs against all the efforts made by constructivist (and transformative) pedagogies to provide a scientific base to language education by focusing on the learners’ reality (Cummins et al. 2005). Here ideal dimensions are placed in its stead. Rather than uncritically espousing learners’ goals and self-representations, constructivism builds on a learner’s cognitive and affective background (including their goals) as the first step in an organized and meaningful transition towards a more adequate knowledge of reality and potential ways of transforming it. By contrast, in this chapter at least—I am not assessing Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim’s entire contribution to motivation studies, which is too significant to summarize here—they seem either to have relinquished all hope of this educational transition ever taking place, or they simply do not consider it necessary. In their framework, the aim of FL education is understood as helping students reach their goals rather than helping them create more meaningful and judicious ones. For instance, never do Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim question the adequacy or feasibility of the goals that students’ develop from their own imagined possible selves, nor do the authors relate the two constructs to the learners’ families or larger communities. In my opinion, this may become counterproductive in the long run. When motivation rests in goals alone, students who fail in attaining their (impossible) goals may end up lacking any motivation whatsoever to continue with their FL education.

Albeit indirectly, the need to take learners’ ideas and beliefs into account is also tackled in Alastair Henry’s contribution (chapter five), but his proposal seems a more balanced one. His text analyzes Swedish high-school students’ spontaneous ideas concerning FL learning, together with the impact the latter may have on learners’

motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, etc. In the course of his research, Henry discovered that Swedish students' beliefs on the success of FL education were likely to be inadequate, but that this did not prevent these notions from shaping their attitude and motivation towards the school subject (108-109). For instance, especially extensive among male Swedish high-school students was the assumption that they had learned most of what they knew in English through outside-school activities, an idea which often became translated into less motivation for the EFL class, which led in turn to more fragile school learning.

In line with Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim, Henry's chapter puts weight on learners' beliefs and ideas insofar as behavior is likely to be influenced by what one believes to be true, not only by what actually takes place. However, not only does Henry search for the reasons behind these beliefs—namely, bad pedagogical practice on the part of FL teachers, whose class activities did not awaken the students' interest nor provided them with any real academic challenge—but he then tries to find possible ways to change these spontaneous assumptions. And the solution, he suggests, is for teachers to improve their FL pedagogy and thereby raise students' motivation inside the FL high-school classroom, for example, by “bridging between the worlds in and outside the classroom” (99).

This improvement can also be carried out through other strategies. In fact, in line with Henry's final analysis, most of the chapters included in this volume explore two basic ways to increase learners' motivation for EFL education, and suggest doing so as a result of improving students' educational experience in the classroom. Accordingly, these chapters enact an *educational turn* in the study of motivation—as Lorenzo defines it in chapter seven—which opposes the dominant perspective, being as it is focused largely on extrinsic goals, as exemplified by Dörnyei, Muir and Ibrahim in this volume. By contrast, the rest of the chapters suggest that the main motivational problem in FL education lies not in its inability to contribute to the realization of the students' external goals, but rather in “what students find as monotonous language activities in the EFL classroom, a state of demotivation that many teachers find frustrating” (118, in chapter six). In other words: the motivational problem in FL education has a pedagogical origin. This diagnosis is shared by those trends of language research which attempt to prove that qualitative aspects of language exposure (i.e., the quality of the teaching) are more, or at least as, determinant for language learning, as quantitative aspects (i.e., time exposure) (Cummins 2005). Accordingly, whereas the authors of chapter one seem to take for granted that FL education should be meaningless and boring, the rest of the contributors to the volume do not relinquish the hope that learners may become motivated by what is done in their FL classrooms and not simply by focusing on their own private goals. That is, they try to portray FL education as an activity that is worthwhile in itself, and not only because of the goals that learners will be able to attain once they have learned the FL.

Of course learners' external realities, hopes and goals must be taken into account by the teacher, yet only as elements to be incorporated in pedagogy in order to create a more meaningful class experience—i.e., one which will hopefully transform those realities, hopes and goals to make them more reasonable and beneficial for the community. Students' realities are thus put to work at the service of education, not the other way around. FL learning finds its justification in the educational present and not in the professional future; not in the possible self, but in the learning self that participates actively in the learning process.

As I said above, two ways to fulfill this purpose are explored. One is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach through which the FL becomes a means for *academic classroom communication*. This strategy is developed in chapter six (by Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra) and chapter seven (by Lorenzo). The other path increases students' intrinsic motivation by drawing their attention to the meta-cognitive dimensions involved in their own learning. This approach is described in chapter two (by Ushioda) and chapter three (by Coyle). All four of these chapters have in common the aim of making the FL learner's classroom experience more interesting and motivating. Whereas the first two attempt do so by drawing on subject matters which learners may consider appropriate for the school context (science, history, literature, mathematics, etc.), the latter two do so by considering the learning process an interesting subject matter in itself, one worth exploring in the FL classroom. In chapter two, for instance, Ushioda argues convincingly that the meta-cognitive dimensions of learning should be addressed explicitly by the teacher in order to help students progress adequately through the higher FL levels, when language becomes more difficult, learning less evident, and numerous obstacles can impact negatively on motivation. By addressing these problems on time, teachers can ensure that students remain capable of engaging in all activities, and make the most of the learning experience. Coyle's take on the meta-cognitive dimension is different since it involves encouraging the students to adopt a research stand on their own learning. That is to say, not only should the teacher become a researcher but also the learners, who are thus invited to reflect, justify and negotiate with the teacher the dimensions that ultimately shape their own learning environment. Along the lines of Collaborative and Participatory forms of action research (Banegas and Velázquez 2014), language learners are thus allowed to produce knowledge about their preferred FL classroom practices, but also to use this knowledge to make decisions they will be strongly committed to.

Finally, the two chapters devoted to CLIL succeed in describing it as a coherent development of the intuition—first formulated by communicative language teaching—according to which language can only be learnt indirectly (Corder 1990, quoted on page 142 of this volume). This intuition was taken a step further towards concretion through Task-based approaches to FL education, by presenting interesting and meaningful proposals (projects, problem-solving, etc.) as the direct

aim of FL teaching, and suggesting that language content should be addressed only indirectly and to the extent that it is necessary to fulfill the assigned tasks. According to Lorenzo, “in CLIL . . . the real justification for the task is learning academic content. L2 acquisition should remain a by-product of the classroom interaction when working on other subjects” (143). Language education is thus justified on the grounds of proposals which the students might consider meaningful (and one can only become motivated by what one understands), not on the grounds of decontextualized language content goals that have to be attained no matter what. In spite of the counterintuitive nature of this pedagogical argument, Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra prove in chapter seven that the indirectness that characterizes CLIL provides learners with more affordances for language learning, accompanied by increased student motivation.

Contributions by Vera Busse (chapter eight) and Magdalena Kubanyiova (chapter four) add to the diversity and richness of this volume by introducing frameworks for teachers to analyze their own practice and its impact on learners’ motivation. Busse presents a concrete educational FL situation where she found it hard to strike a balance between *challenge* and *feedback*; negative consequences ensued, which bore out the ongoing significance of these two terms, carefully analyzed by Hattie in 2009. Kubanyiova, on the other hand, reformulates elements in Dörnyei’s original insights into motivation and comes up with a model of Language Teacher Conceptual Change (LTCC) aimed at helping teachers overcome their received wisdom on FL education as a first step towards embracing sounder pedagogical approaches. All in all, as the editors claim in their introduction, the volume succeeds in addressing the topic of motivation and foreign language learning from three different angles: “the teachers, the learners and the learning context” (2); as such, it is especially recommended for researchers, teachers and teacher-educators who wish to enrich their own perspective on how to translate and manage the motivational variables in real classroom contexts.

WORKS CITED

- BANEGAS, Darío Luis and Aurelia Velázquez. 2014. “Enacting a People-Oriented Curriculum in ELT with Teenage Learners.” *Profile* 16 (2): 199-205.
- CUMMINS, Jim. 2005. “La hipótesis de interdependencia 25 años después.” In *Multilingüismo y multiculturalismo en la escuela*, edited by David Lasagabaster and Juan Manuel Sierra, 113-32. Barcelona: ICE-HORSORI, Universitat de Barcelona.
- CUMMINS, Jim, Vicki Bismilla, Patricia Chow, Sarah Cohen, Frances Giampapa, Lisa Leoni, Parminder Sandhu and Padma Sastri. 2005. “Affirming Identity in Multilingual Classrooms.” *Educational Leadership* 63 (1): 38-43.
- DECI, Edward and Richard M. Ryan. 1985. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour*. New York: Plenum.

Received 24 November 2014

Revised version accepted 18 December 2014

Luis Sebastián Villacañas de Castro (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Language and Literature Education at the University of Valencia (Spain), where he lectures and researches on EFL education and critical pedagogy. He has recently published the article “‘Why Should I Study English if I’m Never Going to Leave this Town?’ Exploring Alternative Orientations to Culture in the EFL Classroom through CAR,” (2015) in the *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37 (4), and the book *Critical Pedagogy and Marx, Vygotsky and Freire: Phenomenal Forms and Educational Action Research*, in Palgrave Macmillan (2015).

Address: Departament de Didàctica de la Llengua i la Literatura. Av. Tarongers, 4. 46022, Valencia, Spain. Tel.: +34 963983826.