
Conference Review

CUE 2011 Conference:

Foreign Language Motivation in Japan

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The CUE 2011 Conference on Foreign Language Motivation in Japan took place at Toyo Gakuen University in Tokyo on the weekend of July 2 and 3. Over two days it attracted upwards of 200 participants, who were able to draw inspiration from the 80 presentations and workshops that represented varying aspects of motivation, from classroom strategies and learner autonomy to intercultural awareness and identity. The event also offered six invited guest speaker presentations and two plenary speeches by Kimberley Noels and Ema Ushioda, who are actively pushing the field of SLA forward by exploring the nature and interaction of foreign language motivation, identity, and culture. We, the authors of this review, met before the conference and divided up the presentation schedule to ensure maximal coverage of presentations. We afterwards shared with each other what we had learned from those presentations. Below, we will alternate in expressing some of our opinions and experiences of the conference.

Plenary Speeches

The conference kicked off with a plenary by Professor Kimberley Noels from the University of Alberta, Canada. It is important to note that Noels is a professor of social and cultural psychology, rather than a language instructor, so much

of her speech presented a different viewpoint than we were used to hearing. Her discussion included an explanation of a motivational model called Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), which plots motivation on a continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic. She encouraged us as teachers to develop an awareness of these forms of motivation when seeking to motivate our students.

Noels explained that Self-Determination Theory also describes how motivation in language learners is related to their psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. She presented a comparative study which suggested that even though Japanese are generally defined as a more collectivist society, autonomy is still a key factor in predicting Japanese foreign language learners' motivation. Consequently, Noels postulated that Self-Determination Theory, which was developed in the United States, is still applicable to all Asian cultures, including Japanese culture. Subsequently, she encouraged language teachers and researchers in Japan to foster the relevance of autonomy among learners and provide learners choices in order to promote independent language learning.

Sunday's plenary speaker, UK-based Professor Ema Ushioda from the University of Warwick, summarized the current research field on language learning motivation. She stated that with most of the research in this field being conducted in the past ten years, it is relatively new, and nearly 80% of it to date has been done in Japan. Foreign language motivation is a vibrant research field in which four books have been produced in little over six years (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Murray, Gao, and Lamb, 2011; Nakata, 2006). Referring to the work of the conference featured speakers—Hiromori, Kikuchi, Nakata, and Yashima—she pointed out that there are three areas of research inquiry in Japan: analyzing de-motivation, investigating changes in motivation, and exploring what learning English means for students. In her talk Ushioda also highlighted that issues of foreign language motivation in different educational contexts—including de-motivation from “problematic” Japanese educational contexts—in Japan, have had a major impact on second language (L2) motivation literature.

Ushioda emphasized that the research on learner motivation in Japan not only contributes to reshaping L2 motivation theory, but also offers alternative concepts

of international orientation (Nakata, 1995) and international posture (Yashima, 2002). It also focuses on teachers' perceptions of student motivation (Cowie and Sakui, 2011) and encourages students to participate actively in transforming educational practice (Murphey et al., 2009). Basically this presentation made us both feel that there were opportunities for novice researchers like us to catch up with the past research and to pursue further findings in this field.

Individual Presentations

Next, we would like to share a number of noteworthy individual presentations from the weekend. The presentation by Brian G. Rubrecht and Kayoko Ishikawa entitled "Examining a bilingual double's short-term return to the U.S." was my (Graham's) personal favorite. In twenty-five minutes Rubrecht systematically took audience members through a case study of his 13-year-old daughter, carefully covering her background, concisely explaining his study's methodology, and drawing attention to appropriate references without overloading the audience (all without the assistance of his co-presenter who was out with the flu). The conclusion was that for his daughter the trip abroad became a powerful source of motivation for language learning, because she recognized the gap between her ideal L2 self and her actual L2 self and became determined to close it. This presentation served as motivation for me to explore the opportunities of bilingual case-study research, and coincidentally demonstrated methods that I could use to do research with my own "double" children.

Kay Irie and Damon Brewster worked in tandem with their students for the presentation "One curriculum, four learners, many stories", a report on a longitudinal study of several first-year students enrolled in compulsory English courses. Through this case study, they attempted to explore how contextual and experiential factors shape learners' L2 selves. They underlined the fact that L2 selves can both function and fail as motivational guides. In my (Umida's) opinion the presenters did a great job by sharing the stories of their learners with the audience. The audience will perhaps forget most of the theoretical part of the presenters' talk, but they will remember the learners' stories for a long time: similarities and differences between them and how they struggle towards

imagined L2 selves.

My (Umida's) favorite was Sandra Healy's presentation on the use of visual images to motivate EFL learners. The presenter illustrated how visual images could motivate L2 learners through promoting the development of curiosity and the lowering of students' affective filters. According to Healy, images can be used to present language points, to offer systematic practice, and even to stimulate creative and imaginative spin-offs. She emphasized that bearing in mind that the Japanese are often regarded as visually orientated learners, and that computers and the Internet have changed our views, visuals should be often used in our classrooms. The list of classroom activities she gave included student generated *kamishibai* stories, presentations on social issues and discussions as a response to artwork. In conclusion, she encouraged all teachers, even those who consider themselves non-artistic, to add art and image-related activities to their classes.

Mary Hillis' and Jason Stayanchi's presentation "Emotive variables in motivation" was concerned with the effects of emotion on L2 vocabulary learning. They worked with one of their students and used several questionnaires designed by Stayanachi as well as informal interviews conducted by Hillis for data collection. According to the presenters, a heavy workload as a result of part-time jobs and homework from classes as well as sleep deprivation were major contributors towards the learner's de-motivation. Although the feelings of fatigue or ambivalence are not unique, we teachers often forget how these emotive variables can affect learners' behavior and learning. At the end of their talk, the presenters gave a very practical suggestion to the audience: space tests evenly across the semester. Don't keep all the tests for the end if you want your students to be more successful, and thus be more motivated!

In Closing

In general, we felt that the plenary speeches were very motivating to both novice and experienced teachers and researchers, and that most of the presenters came to this conference prepared with presentation content that closely followed the conference theme, motivation in foreign language learning, as well as clear presentation tools, largely in the form of PowerPoint. Although a number of

presentations strayed from their abstracts and stretched the limits of what could be considered motivation related, a majority of presenters accomplished the most challenging task of finishing their talk in the allotted twenty-five minutes. Some speakers seemed determined to fit the empirical research of an entire PhD thesis into their presentations, which is needless to say more than a little too much. The savviest presenters left the last five minutes open for questions and discussions, which were often fruitful and allowed audience members to get more out of their presentations. When compared with recent JALT national conferences, we noticed presentations at this CUE conference were based more heavily on theoretical or empirical research than on practical, ready-to-use classroom activities. If you came expecting the latter, you might have been disappointed by this trend and the difficulties in associating practical classroom applications to some of the theories and numbers. We wonder if in the future it would be possible to add an extra descriptive field to presentation abstracts where presenters state whether their presentation was more practical or more theoretical in nature.

Of course, conferences like this are not just about making and attending presentations, but also about expanding our networks. We met a lot of new people and got chances to put faces to names. One case of both of these for me (Graham) was with the current president of JALT, Kevin Cleary. Upon meeting Kevin, in my great ignorance, I unwittingly asked him the capacity to which he was involved in JALT. He very modestly explained his role, and we had a laugh while I removed my foot from my mouth. Another person I met motivated me to be more diligent in maintaining my blog, to transform it into a monthly newsletter, and use it as a way to keep in touch with people in my home country. This renewed dedication also allows me to keep myself sharp by looking out for the subtle things in daily life differences that make Japan so unique.

The venue was in an excellent location, as it was only ten minutes on foot from the nearest station and only one transfer away from Tokyo station. All of the presentation rooms were in pristine condition, with state-of-the-art audio-visual hookups and more than generous seating for each presentation. We have but one criticism of the site: food and open drinks were restricted to student lounges which were not large enough to accommodate the conference attendees,

and at lunchtime people were forced sit on the floor due to a lack of seating.

However, this small problem with space could not undermine our positive experience at the CUE 2011 Conference on Foreign Language Motivation in Japan. We both gained valuable ideas for our classrooms, and as a result of the broad interdisciplinary focus of the conference, gained a better understanding of the field of language learning motivation and the different approaches to using this new-found knowledge. However, it was the intangibles of networking and the synergy-like effect of being in an environment surrounded by dedicated peers that reaffirmed our deepest beliefs in EFL teaching. These intangibles provided us with a sense of motivation to improve ourselves as teachers and researchers, which in turn made the weekend worthwhile for both of us. We would like to thank all of the conference organizers for their hard work and dedication to making this event possible. We are looking forward to the opportunities that future CUE conferences provide us with!

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