Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity
Interview and Facebook

Patrick Kiernan

Abstract
Whereas motivation in English language teaching has traditionally been explored through quantitative analysis of questionnaires (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009), this paper argues that narrative accounts of identity such as life story narratives or online communications may offer an alternative account that is closer to the experience of the learner. The paper explores motivation among highly motivated advanced English language learners through the stories they told about themselves in peer interviews and compares these with representations of themselves on Facebook. The learners were freshmen at a Japanese university selected for an elite ‘S’ class based on a standardised test. In practice, most of the class were 'returnees' who had spent extended periods overseas during their childhood or adolescence. The peer interviews were video-recorded as part of a teacher initiated class project aimed at sharing learning histories. In contrast, the online social networking site Facebook was a student initiated forum for communication with class members and friends overseas. The sources were compared using a systemic functional linguistic model (Egginis, 2004; Halliday, 2003) to highlight generic differences and the role of language in formulating identity. The paper illustrates how interviews and Facebook entries offer two very different outlets for providing an image of self and compares and contrasts them as ways into exploring the slippery concept of motivation.

Introduction

What is it that makes people ‘tick’? What is it that makes some language learners highly motivated while the majority seem rather less so? Motivation is an elusive concept at the best of times and while I do not intend to offer definitive answers to these questions I would like to outline an approach to exploring them which draws on the dynamic of narrative, rather than traits usually explored in survey research. I propose that motivation can be usefully explored by considering how motivated learners build identities through narratives of self. In order to do this, I will introduce a classroom
project concerned with the learning experiences of advanced and motivated undergraduate learners of English in Japan as an example. As I will explain more fully below, the data for this project was originally intended to be peer interviews in English between the learners but came to embrace their interaction on Facebook as I began to realise the value it held for the learners as a means of communication and self-expression. I propose that rather than trying to tie down motivation, it may be more effective to consider motivation as closely related to shifting narratives of self. Accordingly, an effective way to analyse them (and one of particular relevance to language teaching) may be to consider the ways in which the language used in formulating narratives of self contributes to a sense of motivation. One advantage of looking at narratives is that they offer the possibility to describe past unmotivated selves and their perceived relationship to the present. Such concepts as 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and 'imagined communities' which also implicate a dynamic or narrative understanding of motivation may also be useful.

Motivation in English language teaching (ELT) has been explored first in relation to the motivational dichotomies integrative-instrumental and intrinsic-extrinsic (Brown, 1993) and later in terms of responses to specific learning contexts (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). More recently however, there has been a move towards exploring motivation in relation to identity (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). This approach, rather than attempting to tie down motivation to discrete replicable features, recognises that motivation is closely related to perceptions of who one is, including a sense of past and future self. Narrative is a particularly apt medium for exploring these dimensions of motivation since stories are structured to represent and evaluate experience across time and space.

In this paper, I begin with a brief overview of identity research relevant to ELT. This is followed by an introduction to the learners involved in the project which is the focus of this paper and the peer interview project from which the data discussed herein derive. I then provide a general introduction to Facebook to set its use in the project in context. The sections following this outline first a general systemic model of genre to highlight contrasts in the interview and Facebook data, then a description and narrative analysis of one of the interviews, and finally an account of how the very different channel of Facebook communications contribute to the representation of self. This, in turn, leads into a discussion of the implications of the description and analysis for exploring motivation. I conclude by proposing some further directions for the exploration of motivation through narrative as well as a call to open up linguistic research to explore emerging arenas for communication such as Facebook and Twitter.

**Motivation research and ELT**

Learning a foreign language is a huge undertaking and cannot be done without an
intense effort on the part of the student. The following description in a classic textbook for ELT teachers captures the immensity of the commitment needed:

Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into the new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language. Second language learning is not a set of easy steps that can be programmed in a quick do-it-yourself kit. No one can tell you "how to learn a foreign language without really trying." (Brown, 1993)

Indeed, while there may be a range of features such as 'language aptitude' which contribute to successful foreign language learning this element of 'really trying' appears to be what sets apart the many would be foreign language learners from successful learners. In order to really try however, one needs to be motivated. Accordingly, motivation is an unavoidable concern for ELT teachers, students and the researchers. Motivation seems easy to identify in the classroom as all teachers have a sense of how motivated particular students or classes are. Teachers themselves are also widely recognised as being key elements in the motivation or otherwise of students in ELT as elsewhere (Palmer, 2007). Nevertheless, understanding motivation is infinitely complex because it is intimately related to what it means to be a human being. As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) point out: theories of motivation attempt to explain 'why humans think and behave as they do' (p. 4). ELT researchers into motivation have worked with prominent theories of motivation in psychology but also done empirical work into motivation in ELT contexts.

Due to the complexity of motivation as a theoretical concept general theories of motivation have often been reductionist in the sense that they try to subsume motivation within categories such as those describing human needs. Ausubel (1968, pp. 368-79) for example focuses on six needs: (1) exploration (of the unknown); (2) manipulation (of the environment); (3) activity (physical and mental movement); (4) stimulation (from other people/ideas); (5) knowledge (processing and internalising of (1)-(4)) (6) ego-enhancement (acceptance and improvement of the self). Maslow (1954) represented needs as a pyramid with more basic instinctive needs at the bottom and higher aspirations at the top. In Figure 1, I have indicated how Maslow’s model might be reinterpreted to allow each level to represent a different kind of motivation within language learning.

According to Maslow’s model, the needs at the lower levels need to be met in order for human beings to be motivated to pursue those at the higher levels. However, the need for self-actualisation was also considered one of the most powerful motivating forces. In the case of language learners, finding ways to engage language learners to
Self-actualisation
Language learning as self-fulfilment

Self-esteem: language learning as 'social capital'

Belongingness and love needs
Language learning as communication

Safety needs: survival in other language communities, or for maintaining peace with outside language cultures

Biological and physical needs: language for employment or basic needs in a foreign environment

Figure 1 A representation of Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs indicating how English language learning might figure at each of the levels.

wards self-actualisation would seem particularly powerful. Although research in ELT later turned its attention to psychological research, particularly after Crookes and Schmidt’s (1991) paper made a call to do so, the agenda for ELT research into motivation in the 70s and 80s was set by Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) seminal paper on motivation drawn directly from the classroom. Building on twelve years of research into ELT learners in Canada, they identified two fundamental sources of motivation: ‘instrumental’ and ‘integrative’ highlighting the importance of the latter. Instrumental motivation referred to motivation oriented towards specific career goals or the acquisition of technical language skills such as translation. ‘Integrative motivation’ referred to gaining acceptance within the target community. This model seemed particularly well suited to a second language situation such as migrant or second language learners of French in Canada but seems less relevant to foreign language situations such as Japan. Indeed, Lukmani (1972) offered counter evidence that instrumental motivation was more important for Marathi-speakers learning English in India for professional purposes for whom a target community of speakers in which to integrate was absent. The development of the concept of ‘English as an International Language’ (EIL) as a communicative medium independent of its native speakers (Kachru, 1992b) and the development of localised ‘Engishes’ (Kachru, 1992a) adds further weight against the notion of prominence of integrative motivation. In spite of this, Yashima (2009) has proposed that for Japanese learners the motivation to integrate into an imagined international community may be a relevant reinterpretation of Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) model. An earlier reformulation which drew on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was the distinction between ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation. Extrinsic motivation represented rewards and punishments whereas internal motivation referred to deeper personal needs such as Maslow’s self-actualisation. Brown (1993) summarised the potential integration or the ‘integration-instrumental’ and
Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity

Table 1  Motivational dichotomies adapted from Brown, 1993, p. 156.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Extrinsic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>L2 learner wishes to integrate with L2 community (e.g., learner preparing</td>
<td>Someone wishes the L2 learner to learn L2 to integrate (e.g., parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for foreign marriage or move abroad)</td>
<td>send children to L2 school to prepare for move abroad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>L2 learner wishes to achieve goals which require L2 (e.g., learner seeking</td>
<td>External power wants L2 learner to learn L2 (e.g., corporation sends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to become translator or foreign language teacher)</td>
<td>employees abroad for language training)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'integrative-instrumental' dichotomy as illustrated in Table 1.

In due course however, these constructs themselves began to be questioned (e.g., Au, 1988) with a new agenda being set by Crooks and Schmidt (1991) who offered a detailed critique of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and called for a reintegration with mainstream psychology on the one hand and a practitioner validated concept of L2 motivation on the other. Crooks and Schmidt (ibid) argued that motivation should be explored in the context of the classroom in a way that matched with the experience of language teachers and learners. Accordingly, where the paradigm initiated by Gardner and Lambert (1972) has been called the 'social psychological period' of motivational research (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011) that which followed Crooks and Schmidt (1991) became the 'cognitively situated period'. An example of research in this period is Covington's (1992) self-worth theory which highlights the importance of 'face' and maintenance of self-esteem in the classroom. Covington observed that students may adopt self-handicapping strategies such as not preparing for a test as a defensive strategy against failure which was easier to deal with as a failure to act than as a lack of ability. Even among the advanced and highly motivated students described in this study, I found evidence of defensive strategies.

A more recent trend in ELT motivational studies over the last decade identified by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) is the 'process oriented period'. This is of particular relevance here as it is concerned with changes over time, and hence implicitly the narrative of the language learning experience. However, one reason that 'the narrative turn' (Berger and Quinney, 2004) which has had widespread influence on the humanities has so far had little impact on motivational studies is that in common with psychological research into motivation in general ELT motivational research has been almost exclusively limited to quantitative studies (Ushioda, 1996; 1998 and Williams and Burden, 1999 are two exceptions). Considering the complex nature of motivation and the longstanding associations that it has had with identity, motivational research potentially has much to benefit from being explored through qualitative research grounded in a theory of narrative identity.
A narrative approach to identity

Approaches to exploring identity, like those taken to exploring motivation have ranged from those rooted in a psychological perspective viewing the self as emanating from a biologically determined human psyche acting in response to social conditions, to more socially deterministic models where social influences are seen as shaping the psyche. However, as Post-Modern approaches have taken hold, both biological and social determinism have been called into question. Instead of seeking out identity in a hidden psyche or broad-ranging social categories, Post-Modern approaches look increasingly at the local (Pennycook, 2010) influences and on how identities are realised or played out in discourse, whether this be government declarations, media reports or everyday conversation. This approach attempts to take account of both social and psychological influences in context. The lack of determinism allows for negotiation of identities within discourse and evokes power relations in each situation. One consequence of this wiggle room for identities is that they are recognised as varying according to time and place while appealing to different value systems. It is for this reason that ‘narrative’ or a storied approach to exploring identity has proved useful to identity researchers across the humanities. Even in psychology, there has been a return to the long overlooked research into autobiographical memory (pioneered by Galton, 1879) with a growing recognition of its importance in identity formulation (see discussion in Draaisma, 2006; Kiernan, 2010). Only recently has motivational research begun to take account of the fact that motivation is something that ebbs and flows and that motivation for language learning may be interlinked or in competition with other motivations (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). Ushioda (1998) was one of the first to point to the importance of time in relation to motivation but the implications of this have not yet been taken up within mainstream motivational research. Studies that have explored narrative identity in language learning that have touched on motivation would include Kanno’s longitudinal study of returnees (2003) as well as her account of language learning in bilingual schools (2008); Norton’s Identity and Language Learning (2000); and most recently Kamada’s (2010) longitudinal study of Japanese students with one foreign parent. By exploring learning histories recounted by learners it becomes possible to view motivation from a learner’s perspective, albeit one in a state of flux. The traditional way to elicit learner narrative is through interviews by the researcher. However, it has been pointed out that peer interviews may be more desirable and certainly a learner-learner interview, even if carried out as a project for the teacher seemed likely to offer a more interesting data source.
The Class and the Interview Project

The interview data discussed in this paper derive from a project carried out with an intact class of 24 first year students at a Japanese university. The students were majoring in the School of Business Administration and were taking the English class as a required class. Students at the university were assigned to classes based on their English ability as determined by a standardised test. The class discussed here was the highest class level known as the elite ‘S’ class. Originally, there were 25 in the class but one student transferred to a British university before this project began in the second semester. In practice, most of the class were what are known as ‘returnees’, in other words they had spent periods of their childhood and education overseas. Being a returnee often meant that they were ‘biculural’ as well as ‘bilingual’. The remainder of the class were those who had made remarkable progress with their English in Japan. In the class, there was one Korean student and there were two students who had one non-Japanese parent. Even within my three years experience teaching at this institution, this class stood out from the beginning for their openness in speaking out during class, their self-expression as individuals but also integration as a group. This integration was helped by the fact that they had English classes together four times a week (twice in my class and twice with a colleague). The students were also remarkable both for their high level of English ability and motivation to develop their English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher 1</th>
<th>First Semester</th>
<th>Second Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Global Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>Topic: Global Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills: Discussion and debate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: Business writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Topic: Intercultural Communication</td>
<td>Topic: Educational Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills: Presentation</td>
<td>Skills: Academic writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The module for the project described here is shaded in grey.

In keeping with current trends for teaching advanced learners, this course was focused on developing English skills through a focus on ‘content’ as illustrated in Table 2. Each module focused on a specific content area or ‘topic’ but also emphasised the development of a specific skill area. Here I am concerned with a research / classroom project conducted during the ‘Educational Issues’ module. The assignment was for each student to interview another student in the class about their education background for approximately one hour outside class time. The interviews were video recorded by the students who borrowed cameras from the university Media Center. Pairings were decided by the students and the use of video cameras, scheduling of recording slots and transferring the data to DVDs was administered and carried out by one of the Media Center staff. Once
the students had viewed the interview they prepared a written summary. Later in the course, students used these summaries and reflections on their own experiences together with readings they had researched themselves to write a course paper. The project was a requirement for the course but permission to use the recordings, summaries and essays for my research was obtained first from the university and then individually from the students. While verbal agreement was obtained in advance, signed agreements to allow the data to be used were collected after the project had been completed. As some students preferred that the data be treated anonymously, all students will be referred to using pseudonyms.

Facebook and student communications

Although the students in this class were extremely motivated and produced what I considered some outstanding work, this is not to say that they did not have other agendas than those I had for them as a teacher. Where some of today's students find distractions in their mobile phones, the students in this class were preoccupied with Facebook. I saw this in practice when we went to do some work in the computer room where reading and posting messages to online friends including each other took place alongside the day's assignment from the teacher. On one occasion this even led to a Skype (video conferencing) session with the student who had transferred to the UK, including a brief exchange between myself and the student. While Facebook was something of a distraction from assigned work, I gradually realised that it served an important function for this class both to keep in contact with their friends overseas and as a form of social bonding for the class. While in-class I, as their teacher, channelled them to explore serious topics such as experiences of culture shock or to debate the need for learning English early or the importance of study abroad, Facebook served as a forum for sharing the rest of their lives which included music, sport, foreign culture and travel experiences or more importantly hanging out or partying together, making jokes and teasing each other.

Facebook is widely known and used today but a recent enough phenomenon to deserve some introduction here. Facebook is a free online networking service which allows people to post a profile and an unlimited amount of messages, photos or video clips as well as links to songs or other media or information available online. It displays some notable differences when compared with the hitherto dominant online communication arenas such as BBSs, homepages and blogs. Bulletin Board Services (BBSs) are typically limited to a particular theme and overseen by an administrator. Posting of multimedia is limited. Facebook has no administrator and individuals may post as many photos or videos as they wish. Homepages like Facebook belong to individuals but are hard work to set up and administer and are not connected to others. A blog is an interactive forum but like a homepage is largely formatted and controlled by an individual
Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity

who writes extensive 'posts' (hundreds of words) with occasional comments from readers. Facebook typically consists of short posts of 50 words or less and sometimes a single sentence addressed either to individual 'friends' or the group of friends with access to the page. If the blog is like a series of written speeches, Facebook is more a clutter of conversations at a party sharing of photos and thoughts of the moment. Consider the following exchange from Facebook posted below a link to a music video:

P1: 'man this link is out'
P2: 'give it a few minutes to load'
P1: 'cool set!'

Although the participants are separated in time and place, Facebook allows this brief 'conversational' exchange. While serving the practical purpose of assisting with playing the clip, the friends 'meet' to share enjoyment of the music.

In Japan, the use of Facebook needs to be understood in relation to Mixi, the most widely used domestic networking service. Both Mixi and Facebook provide a forum for sharing photos and other media but while Mixi has a Japanese interface, Facebook offers a choice of 68 languages. More interestingly, whereas Mixi promotes cliques of friends who may join a variety of exclusive groups by invitation using handle names, Facebook only requires a mutual agreement to be 'friends' to view all the content on the page. Although private subgroups can be formed on Facebook too, sharing tends to be done in a semi-public space open to the wider community of 'friends'. Mixi therefore fits more closely the societal patterns of group oriented interaction associated with Japanese culture. As in Japanese culture in general, 'insider' and 'outsider' on Mixi are clearly defined in relation to a specific identity feature like belonging to a university club or seminar course. My wife, for example, belongs to a Mixi group for mothers who share the same Chinese animal year of birth (though not necessarily the same year) and have children of this same animal year. Also, Mixi relationships are typically exclusively online (hence the handle names) whereas those on Facebook tend to be an extension of those offline. A recent report on international Facebook usage also revealed this tendency towards exclusiveness in Facebook usage. While Malaysians apparently have the distinction of having the highest average number of friends, apparently reflecting a great openness towards friendship indicative of a multicultural society where parties are open to all comers, Japan reportedly have the lowest average (Zeta, 2010).

This distinction between Facebook and Mixi and cultural patterns of usage are important here because Facebook was the choice for communication for the class already introduced above because of its openness to international appeal. For most classes of Japanese students, Mixi would seem a more natural option (Akimoto, 2010). At the time this class began, Facebook was relatively new to Japan but was introduced by the
first student in their self-introductions on the first day. While some already had Facebook accounts to keep in touch with friends overseas the rest quickly joined, making it a student-initiated forum for the class. Participation in Facebook, the more international forum was a reflection of the internationalisation of these students who used Facebook to keep in touch with friends overseas.

**Interview data analysis**

The analysis of the project described here was carried out using a qualitative linguistic approach to exploring the data. A qualitative linguistic analysis of the kind described here aims to look in depth at a specific situation and group of learners. The data is not large quantities of responses to identical stimuli (as it would ideally be in quantitative surveys) but rather language in context. The ‘instrument’ for data collection is the interview. However, the interview is not seen as probing some underlying truth about the interviewee, but rather of eliciting talk which can be explored as a way of understanding how language is used to evoke a sense of self (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003).

In order to explore the data collected by the students the interviews needed to be transcribed and then coded according to the areas of interest. This paper is limited to the exploration of a single interview together with the relevant essay and references to Facebook. The coding was carried out using NVivo, a program which allows for the storing and tagging of transcripts alongside the student essays, Facebook extracts and the recordings themselves. Once tagged, the sections with shared coding can be retrieved together.

**Interviews and Facebook**

I am proposing here that motivation is intimately related to identity work — the ongoing business of presenting a sense of self. The presentation of the self probably occurs in some form in all communicative situations, however some communicative situations seem particularly conducive to it and therefore of greater interest to researchers. Narrative interviews concerned with the interviewee’s life history is perhaps the most obvious source of such data as well as being one of the most readily available to researchers. I am particularly interested in motivation among language learners as in some way related to this identity. If this is the case communicative situations where identity work related to the area of motivation one is interested in exploring are particularly valuable.

As recounted above, I initially set out to analyse interviews among learners in a specific class but decide to include contributions on Facebook to my data. Here I consider the differences between these two very different communicate genres from the
Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity

point of view of a systemic functional model. I choose this approach because systemic functional linguistics is designed to account for generic differences in meaning as illustrated in Table 3.

| Table 3 A summary of the differences in terms of ‘field’, ‘tenor’ and ‘mode’ between Facebook and interviews |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Interview                                      | Mode                                            | Tenor                                           |
| Education, life story, learning experiences     | Speaking (long) (based mainly on pre-written questions) | Formal ‘interview’ mode (but drawing on established interpersonal relationship) |
| Facebook                                       | What is happening now                          | Writing (short), images, video and sound (spontaneous (?) response) |
| Travel                                          | Travel                                          | Very informal                                  |
| Shared experience such as parties              | Mixed codes, abbreviation and emoticons and ‘pop’ spelling |

Viewing the interviews and contributions to Facebook as two kinds of texts they can be contrasted in terms of field (the content topic); mode (the channel of communication: written or spoken, face to face or otherwise) and tenor (level of formality, interpersonal realisation of power relationships). As can be seen from the summary in Table 3, using these three criteria, the interview and Facebook represented two more or less mutually exclusive communicative genres. The field or topic content of the interviews compared with Facebook postings was very different. Notably from a narrative perspective, where the interviews reached back into their childhood past and also sometimes looked forward to future goals, Facebook entries were concerned with the very recent past or immediate future. Prominent themes on the Facebook pages of these students were travel, parties and communications with friends. English study occasionally interrupted as a background distraction as in the following:

have to study a lot after awesome trip to Canadian Rockies!> <many readings, assignments and fuckin’ mid term. I WILL NEVER FORGET GREAT ROCKIES

Interestingly, in terms of traditional motivation theory discussed earlier, the student shows clear integrative motivation, valuing her experience in Canada using English here, but evaluating study as a negative distraction. Turning to mode, where the interviews were spoken one-on-one, face-to-face communications in English (with some occasional use of Japanese), Facebook was dominated by the written word, but interspersed with links to video or audio clips and photographs. Photographs were particularly important, providing the one of the most common focal points for comment. The requirement that the interview last for approximately an hour also meant that interviewees were encouraged to speak at length, whereas Facebook exchanges were often extremely short. One
way of describing the following exchange would be to liken it to a brief conversation, yet it relies on effects that are specific to the written mode.

china どう？
fukin amazinggg

This exchange occurred some months after the interview project when one of the class had moved to Shanghai on as an exchange student. The question from his former classmate meaning ‘How is China?’ combines the English word with a Japanese casual question. The additional gs on the end of amazing seem to mimic oral emphasis but are explicitly graphic. Another example of this is the following exchange between this student and a female friend:

sexyyyy
sexxxayyyyyy

In terms of tenor, such spellings also contribute to an informal code which is ubiquitous on the Facebook postings and embraces emoticons and mixed codes including Korean, French, German, Japanese and English. In contrast, while often informal, there was also use of formal interview-like questions and formats and, perhaps related to this, even explicit allusions to the absent teacher as if present. Now it is time to consider a specific interview.

A narrative interview

This section provides a description of one of the narrative interviews and indicates how it might be explored to contribute to an understanding of motivation. The interview was between two students who will be referred to here as ‘Hanako’ and ‘Taro’. I choose to report on these two here because both were particularly serious, hard working and highly motivated students whose high level of English seems mainly attributable to their efforts to develop their English. At the same time they came across as fun-loving, relaxed rather than studious types. Taro interviewed Hanako about her life experience of learning English. He also revealed something of his own experience during this interview as well as in his interview with another student who I will call Sakura. In his term paper, Taro focused on the importance of learning English early, considering the usefulness of beginning English education at elementary school. In the paper he referred to three articles, two of which are positive about it with the third underlining the need for increased training to implement elementary school English education successfully. Considering these in conjunction with his and Hanako’s experiences he argues for
beginning English in elementary school. Although English has only recently become mandatory in the upper years of state elementary schools, Hanako and Taro began their English education in elementary school.

Hanako and Taro, as it turned out, both went to private single-single sex schools with an extensive English curriculum. They avoided the usual pressure of exams by following their school through from elementary school to the university (which was co-educational). They also both decided to spend their final year of high school abroad (Hanako in Kansas in the US and Taro in Vancouver, Canada) even though none of their friends did.

Taro began his interview with Hanako at the beginning asking about where she was born and grew up then following through her English schooling, asking detailed questions about her experience memories and motivations, but also sharing his experience, particularly where there were obvious parallels. Hanako was born and brought up in a wealthy district of Tokyo. Her English education began with her mother who she explained was an English literature graduate and so well qualified to teach her. As Taro observed both during the interview and in his paper, this seemed to have been the foundation of her English ability. She explained both that it gave her an advantage when her classmates began learning and allowed her to progress while there were problems with her classes at school. Both during elementary school and junior high school, she described classes that were ‘destroyed’ apparently referring to a breakdown in class discipline. The teachers of these classes eventually quit, one suffering from a ‘mental illness’ presumably brought on by the stress of teaching an unruly class. Following this incident in junior high school, she had a ‘very strict’ teacher who as she put it: ‘forced us to learn’. Hanako explained that she ‘made us study before class’ by asking them questions and ‘getting mad’ if they didn’t know the answer. Taro, took care to ask about her English grades at the various stages of her schooling and while acknowledging that they were always good, also claimed that ‘it was the only thing I was good at’. By the time she reached high school, she admitted ‘I was kind of known for being good at English’ while at the same time insisting ‘but I wasn’t really’. She explained that she just memorised the English sentences so that she always did well in the written tests but was much poorer at speaking and listening. As she put it ‘I was not satisfied’. Far from being a false modesty, this dissatisfaction with her English ability seemed to be an important factor in her decision to spend a year of high school abroad. She also says that she studied much harder once she had made the decision to study abroad, even though she did not tell any of her friends about it until after she was accepted for her programme. When Taro asked her specifically about her reasons for studying abroad she highlighted three: (1) her sister had studied abroad in Oregon and apparently enjoyed it; (2) she had grown up with an intimate group of school friends and wanted to break outside of it; and finally (almost seeming to forget) (3) she wanted to improve her English. She described her
father's response to the decision as overwhelmingly positive and her mother's initially as 'well you can go if you want, but you don't have to, you know' but ultimately as 'Just go! Yeah, go!' Her best friend was just shocked and when the rest of friends found out talk of farewell parties began 'way too soon'. She seemed to underplay the effort that was involved in getting onto the programme, explaining that she was able to choose a country (the US) and was told only that it would be 'South' which she took to be Texas. She knew Texas had coastline and so remarked 'I thought, "Oh, I am going to become a beach-bum"'. It was only in passing that she revealed that the fuzziness of her destination was 'because I had to take the test several times before I passed.' The final revelation that she was going to Kansas which she had never heard of seems to have come as something of a shock. Indeed, as she only discovered after she arrived, it was not only land-locked but had no mountains for her to use the snowboard she had brought with her. Despite this, the winters were cold and long. Although she described communication problems early on the fact that she had overcome this was belied both by her fluent conversation with Taro and the detailed description she gave of the family with whom she stayed. She also talked about her ambitions for the future studying and working abroad but this is enough of her story for a commentary.

**Commentary on the interview**

Hanako's story is not a particularly complex one in itself but does reveal the problem of pinning down motivation, even if for example one were to limit the question to her motivations to study abroad. The first of the three reasons she provides are her sister's example which would have given her an example of what was possible. Belief that a goal is achievable is an important feature of motivation. Still, following a sibling's example seems inadequate to account for a move which, she made clear, was almost incomprehensible to her peers. The wish to break out of the limited community in which she had grown up seems logical but again seems to mark her off from her risk-averse peers as a risk-taker. It could also be seen as a feeling disequilibrium of which her peers were unaware. Her dissatisfaction with her English perhaps parallels this. It is not my intention to pose or solve the whys and wherefores of Hanako's actions, instead what strikes me as interesting about her story is that prompted by Taro's questions about her English learning she paints a picture of an English education which while far from perfect, nevertheless came to encourage her on to identify herself strongly with English without becoming self-satisfied with her achievements. In Maslow's terms, her decision to study abroad seems to be one related to self-actualisation but it could also be seen as rooted in experiences such as the teacher who forced her to study. While revealing herself to be a highly motivated student for whom English held a particular importance throughout her education Hanako does not dwell in this and offers hints at a fun-loving
Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity

personality who enjoys parties with her friends, imagines herself becoming a beach-bum and brings her snowboard with her to the US without researching whether or not there are any ski-slopes nearby. This aspect of her personality was much more clearly foregrounded on Facebook. If Hanako's interview with Taro revealed a student for whom English has become a part of her destiny, Facebook seems to show her, her classmates and friends from at home and abroad living this destiny as an ongoing party. Postings inevitably depict her with friends or groups of friends which even are year after the project are dominated by her classmates.

Some observations on the class interviews as a whole

Hanako's is but one story and the stories of her classmates were very different. While Hanako seemed to take her destiny with English in hand with her decision to study abroad others had little choice spending periods of their childhood abroad as a result of their parents work. Whereas a large part of Hanako's learning in Japan was based on study, others such as Ken who spent much of his childhood overseas and described himself as 'culturally more American' saw learning as about building friendships and opportunities to learn English such as through sport. Interestingly, Ken spoke with a natural accent and use of colloquialisms but often found himself fishing for vocabulary from his interviewer.

Despite such variation there were a number of recurring themes in the interviews which were as follows:

* Learning English young is not necessarily important (though as we have seen Hanako and Taro felt it was).
* Dominance of English learning can be detrimental to one's first language (Japanese and in one case Korean. Kanji was particularly problematic for these Japanese advanced learners of English).
* Initial difficulty in communicating while abroad (and consequent suffering, or dissatisfaction) led to greater (and ultimately successful) efforts to improve
* Communication through sports was essential for the boys
* Currently concerned about losing some English ability as the result of living in Japan
* Proud of the achievement of learning English but a degree of uncertainty about how well this ability matched up with others in the class.
* Study abroad is the best way to learn English.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced an English class interview project with some reference to
Facebook postings by members of the same class with a view to exploring motivation in relation to narratives of identity. In one sense, my approach followed a typical approach to exploring motivation as I focused on highly motivated learners and sought to understand why it is they are motivated. However, rather than working with questionnaires and focusing on quantifying features of motivation, I have tried to sketch out an approach to exploring motivation as it is located in narratives of identity. Focusing on one learner in particular, I have hinted at how narratives elicited in interviews may offer a broader perspective on identity albeit requiring an analysis of particular cases which offer little hope of being extrapolated to a broader population. What I have reported here, may best be considered as scratching the surface or a descriptive foray into exploring motivation in relation to narrative identity. Nevertheless, it is an approach which I believe would benefit from being taken further. In order to do this a more extensive analysis would be needed both of detailed segments and of the whole data which I have only represented here by the final thematic summary. As well as a more in depth analysis of data such as that outlined here, there is a need for more longitudinal data which considers motivation through successive interviews over time. Finally, Facebook while perhaps an unlikely source for understanding learner motivation per se seems to offer a potentially valuable source for understanding learners and for contextualising constructs of self displayed in interviews. A large-scale project, rather than seeking to increase the number of learners might instead seek to broaden the range of textual resources, juxtaposing conversations inside and outside the classroom, exploring Facebook, as well as looking at email exchanges and emerging mediums such as Twitter. This approach might help move towards a new paradigm for motivation studies that draws on a richer account of narrative identity.

References


Exploring Motivation through Narratives of Identity


Williams, M and Burden, R. L. (1999) Students developing conceptions of themselves as language
