

The previous sections of this chapter have established a clear rationale for this study:

This study aims to investigate the social, historical, linguistic and individual factors that combine to shape the L2 motivation of university students by drawing on a sociocultural framework as well as the concepts of discourse and communities of practice. Given my interest in L2 motivation in interactional contexts, I have also sought to discover in what ways learners' motivation is constructed in interaction between L2 English learners and L1 speakers. Therefore, this study adds to an emerging line of research that examines the relationship between L2 learners' motivation and language use. This investigation is of international significance in an era when English is extending its reach to yet further areas of the globe.

Four female students at a comprehensive university in a municipality directly under the central government in the northern China and four female English L1 speakers were selected to take part in the dyadic interaction program. The Chinese participants were deliberately chosen to be similar in age, gender, English proficiency levels and personality, in order to allow me to focus on the contextual and individual factors associated with motivation. Specifically, two research questions were addressed:

1. How is the English language learning motivation of students at a tertiary level in China constructed? In what ways are the social and educational discourses that have shaped contemporary China and the university they study in taken up by the students as they construct motivation and identities?

2. How is the learners' motivation constructed in the situated context of interaction with English L1 speakers over a prolonged period of one academic year? In what ways do discourses at the micro level impact on the construction of motivation in this specific context?

These questions imply the need for a methodological approach that can fully capture the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of motivation over an extended period of time and that allows for an exploration of the linkage between motivation and learners' English language in use. This approach should enable the researcher to transcend the challenges of context and time faced by L2 motivation research, the limitations of the 'individualistic perspective' taken by social psychology and motivational psychology and concerns about quantitative approaches that measure motivation as a cluster of social psychological and attitudinal variables.

In this study, multiple research methods were employed, with an approach broadly aligned with critical ethnography. Although questionnaires were administered to assess and access various individual variables associated with motivation in the learning of English at different points of time, this study was primarily qualitative in nature. Interviews were conducted every four to five months to obtain insights into fluctuations in learners' motivation in studying English during the university period, providing information on the delicate interplay of multiple interrelated factors that come into play in their motivation development. Diary entries recording what the participants felt, thought and did in and after interactions and other English-related activities revealed more aspects of their experiences and served to cross-reference interview data. Recorded interactions, which furnish a very rich situated context for the investigation of language learning, permitted a more profound look at the relationship between motivation and language in use. Specific techniques, such as correlation, member checking, mechanically recorded data, negative case analysis and constant comparison enhanced the trustworthiness of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

The rest of this book will be structured as follows. The second chapter reviews the literature on current L2 motivation research and proposes a more socially, and multi-level approach to L2 motivation. The third chapter describes the methodology of the investigation. The fourth chapter introduces the specific sociocultural setting in China, the learning communities the learners engage with, and the participants. The fifth chapter presents the findings on the construction of motivation among four English learners from the perspective of various social dimensions. The sixth chapter examines the construction of motivation in learners' moment-to-moment interaction with English L1 speakers. The seventh chapter discusses the ways in which the findings have advanced understanding of motivation and explores the implications of the study for theory, research and practice.