

Book Review

***The impact of self-concept on language learning*, edited by Kata Csizér & Michael Magid (2014).** Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 424 pages, Paperback €39.95, ISBN: 9781783092369

Berta Torras-Vila
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

(Review received 6 December 2016, accepted 8 December 2016, final version 10 December 2016)
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.708>

The impact of self-concept on language learning was edited by Kata Csizér and Michael Magid. The editors have done a magnificent job in pulling together an excellent resource book that includes all major theories and directions in the field of SLA motivation.

This compendium updates the volume entitled *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*, edited by Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda (2009), in which Dörnyei presented the L2 Motivational Self System. The present volume expands on that by further contributing, theoretically and empirically, to this line of research. Thus, this anthology addresses a field of research that has inevitably become a mainstay in SLA, due to the weight that self-concept theories and identity-related issues have gained within this field of inquiry, and in educational contexts in general. Motivation is always at the core of any learning experience, either because of its presence or its absence.

Therefore, this volume includes theoretical frameworks about the L2 Motivational Self System and self-guides, as well as empirical studies involving English learners and teachers. A wide range of theories connected to self-concept are discussed and deeply explored, while empirical views are also provided. More specifically, this book includes and expands on all major theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explore issues related to language learners' motivation. In this sense, the thoroughness of the constructs, theories and empirical studies presented is so vast that it certainly requires a high level of attention from the reader. The fact that in this volume motivation is looked at from a cognitive and affective point of view is worth mentioning.

The book turns out to be an essential resource for various reader profiles who are invested in SLA research and, more specifically, in language learning motivation. Researchers doing inquiry in this field will find it an extremely useful resource that undoubtedly covers all aspects and perspectives around language learning motivation. While it might be of interest to anyone studying language learning motivation (teachers, trainers, students, researchers, etc.),

the volume might be quite challenging for readers who are not familiar with this field of inquiry and its concepts.

Even though the tone of the book is rather academic, this volume can also serve as a guide for teacher-researchers, in that it contains plenty of empirical studies that offer new and inspiring insights into the field. The discussions of the findings in the empirical studies presented become profitable for practical implications in the classrooms. Thus, teachers in the field can benefit from very interesting perspectives on the self and the role that it plays in students' language learning processes. Likewise, these sections provide educators with practical recommendations that might be implemented in the classroom and that might place the self-concept at the core of the language learning process.

The volume is composed of 21 chapters, all of which discuss relevant issues within the field of language learning and motivation. The chapters are organized into different parts, and each section aims to explore different areas within the SLA motivation field.

In chapter 1, an introductory chapter, the editors briefly outline the aims of this anthology. Following this introductory chapter, the book contains three differentiated sections, all of which are focused on different aspects within the field.

Part 1, entitled 'Theories related to self-concept', consists of 3 chapters which present theories of self-concept. In Chapter 2, the first chapter in this section, Zoltán Dörnyei discusses the importance of self-concept in the field of SLA, emphasizing the role of future self-guides and vision in L2 learning processes, as well as providing a short summary of his L2 Motivational Self System, its theoretical roots and the conditions that will lead to action. The author does not leave practical implications aside, and he reminds the reader of the key role of educators in creating or enhancing conditions to invoke personal visions of the future. In Chapter 3, written by McEown, Noels and Chaffee, the authors argue that putting together different theoretical frameworks leads to richer understandings of L2 motivation, while they discuss conceptual differences and similarities among the three theories they present. Again, they discuss theoretical considerations, but empirical data are also presented. The last chapter in this section is Chapter 4, where Mercer points out the outstanding difficulties that defining the self encompasses. While acknowledging the complexity of this notion, the author combines contemporary integrative models of the self with network theory (complexity theories), while she argues that the self and people's networks are inextricably bound together. Mercer's model of the self considers both personal and social aspects, while it also embodies time and context issues. Her use of methodological tools that might not be

categorized as conventional (images and multimedia data) is worth highlighting. Moving beyond the utility of this chapter from a researcher's point of view, I would emphasize the implications for foreign language teaching: "understanding the self in this way suggests that an accessible way of engendering affirmative change to a person's self-concept is by helping the learners to develop an array of positive, language-related relationships" (Mercer, 2014, p. 67).

Part 2, 'Self-concept and language learning', is devoted to self-concept and its possible benefits in language learning processes. Drawing on the theories presented in Part 1, the chapters in Part 2 focus on specific notions and/or contexts. Chapter 5, by Csizér and Kormos, looks at plausible connections between motivational selves, self-regulation and autonomy in different age groups of English language learners. Following, in Chapter 6, written by Kim and Kim, the scholars investigate how L2 Motivational Self System and self-regulatory processes work differently in different educational levels. Chapter 7, by Lyons, presents a longitudinal study that attempts to portray the extent to which self-concept impacts motivation. Next, Chapter 8, by four different authors, Noels, Chaffee, Michalyk and McEown, delves into contextual factors, such as culture, while they look at the extent to which these might influence learners' autonomy. Following, Chapter 9 explores an Australian context and its authors, Jones and Bramley, delve into the relationship between self-concept, motivation and bicultural identities. In Chapter 10, Irie and Brewster present the idea of experiential capital and how it might affect language learning. Chapter 11, by Iwaniec, explores how self-constructs influence learners' regulation of their language learning processes. In Chapter 12, Miyahara explores emerging self-identities, emotions and identity construction, while attempting to bring social and psychological dimensions of identity construction. Chapter 13, by King, is contextualised in Japan and it delves into social anxiety and silent behaviour. Next, Chapter 14, written by Yue, attempts to investigate Chinese learners' willingness to communicate in the L2 classroom. Finally, before concluding Part 2, in Chapter 15, Polat researches the ways in which the L2 Motivational Self System is connected to socialization, identification and L2 accent attainment.

Part 3 of the book, entitled 'Self-concept and language teaching', focuses on research from teachers' perspectives. This section consists of 2 chapters. The section begins with Chapter 16, in which Mezei presents a study showing how teachers' motivational strategies that are connected to the self have a direct relationship with pupils' motivation. The section

concludes with Chapter 17, written by Kimura, which explores motivation from a teachers' perspective in L2 classrooms in Beijing.

In Part 4, 'Intervention studies', practical applications of the motivational theories presented so far are discussed. Part 4 is made up of three chapters and it turns out to be truly inspiring, as it puts theory and practice together and, therefore, presents useful practical strategies to incorporate self-concept into practical classroom reality and, hence, to develop and work on students' motivation towards the target language. First, Chapter 18, by Magid, presents a motivational programme drawing on the L2 Motivational Self System, presenting strategies to nourish students' ideal L2 selves. Second, in Chapter 19, Chan shares her research experience with Chinese university students, which involved an imagery training programme directed at the learners' possible selves. The section concludes with Chapter 20, by Mackay, which locates the reader in a Catalan context and explores practical implications of the L2 Motivational Self System on Catalan EFL learners.

Future research directions' is the title of Part 5, the last section of the book. It is composed of only one chapter (Chapter 21). The editors of the volume conclude their anthology by pointing out the directions that research in SLA Motivation should take.

To conclude, the present volume is a piece of research that focuses on a very specific field of SLA, but the importance of such field turns this book into a reference volume. It can be easily recognized for its ability to address a wide range of fields of interest that seem to have the possibility to interweave. It might also be appropriate for those teacher-researchers aiming at satisfying their pedagogical curiosity, as well as for those who are specifically getting immersed into the field of SL motivation. Similarly, it leaves intriguing doors open for those who might be willing to explore new methodological paths within the field, many of which are already referred to by the authors of this volume.

The fact that the book facilitates continuous and enriching interaction among different theoretical backgrounds is worth emphasizing. The field of language learning motivation is so vast that putting all present research into a single volume through interdisciplinary approaches seems to be rather challenging. However, the editors of the book and all its contributors succeed in meeting their purpose.

References:

- Dörnyei, Z. & Ushioda, E. (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Mercer, S. (2014). Re-imagining the self as a network of relationships. In K. Csizér & M. Magid (Eds.), *The impact of self-concept on language learning* (pp. 51-69). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Author information

Berta Torras-Vila is a primary school teacher. She holds a Master in The Acquisition of English and Intercultural Communication (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and a Master in TESOL/Applied Linguistics (University of Bristol). She recently completed her PhD on the role of student-teachers' imagined identities in their investments in English in the context of the English-Medium Primary Education Bachelor's Degree offered by the UAB.

Email: berta.torras@uab.cat

To cite this article:

Torras-Vila, B. (2016). Book Review. The impact of self-concept on language learning, edited by Kata Csizér & Michael Magid (2014), Multilingual Matters. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 9(4), 82-86. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.708>

