TOWARDS DISCURSIVE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE CASE OF MOTIVATION

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a major change of orientation in social psychology. It has involved a radical redefinition of the paradigm subscribed to, the nature and objectives of scholarly enquiry, and the kinds of materials and methods used in analysis. This new orientation is discursive social psychology. Inspired by such fields of research as discourse theory, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and rhetoric it does not see social psychological phenomena, such as knowledge, emotions, attributions, memory, assumptions and attitudes as examples of an already existing, inner reality of mental representations. Instead, discursive social psychologists – Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell, Michael Billig, Derek Edwards and John Shotter, to mention a few – approach phenomena relevant to social psychological enquiry as constructions. More specifically, they focus on the ways in which representations of reality are artfully worked up in specific interactions and texts, the resources used in such constructions and the functions and effects these constructions have within the context of the interactions or texts.

In research into the social psychology of second language (L2) learning (i.e., work on for example learner assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivation) such a major reorientation has not taken place. Most of the work so far has been carried out within the positivist paradigm. Within this framework, motivation, for example, has been envisioned as primarily a cognitive entity or process which is best investigated with psychometric methodologies (see also Ellis 1994: 508). A major objective in this kind of research has been the construction of

models of the learner-internal and -external factors in play in L2 learning, the testing of hypotheses generated with the help of such a model in the form of test batteries, and the prediction of problems in L2 learning. No work, to our knowledge, has so far been done within the discursive framework.

In this article we make an attempt to show that there is now an alternative available to the mainstream tradition of social psychology of L2 learning, and how this alternative, which could perhaps be called *discursive social psychology of L2 language learning,* could be a useful and fruitful one for the investigation of such issues as affect, beliefs, attitudes and motivation. The specific example with which we will show the usefulness of the discursive approach is *motivation* – language learners' reasons for, orientation towards and interest in language learning.

A central argument in our discussion is that a discursive approach to L2 learning can offer scholars a means of gaining valuable insights into the ways in which L2 learners themselves display and negotiate in speech or writing their understandings and orientations towards L2 learning. In this way, scholars can also gain a better understanding of the complex ways in which learners – both individually and as a specific social group – understand and give meaning to their experiences. Further, in this kind of research, some of the outcomes may be quite unexpected, even surprising, and yield quite new perspectives into L2 learning as a social and psychological phenomenon.

We attempt to show that a discursive social psychological orientation towards the study of L2 motivation involves a number of important reconsiderations at several levels of enquiry. It involves a radical theoretical re-evaluation and re-definition of the object of enquiry. Analysing L2 motivation discursively also requires different kinds of research data compared to the kinds of data used in psychometric studies of motivation. Further, this kind of shift of orientation means that the analysis needs to draw on distinctly different philosophical conceptualizations and to rely on very different methodologies compared to mainstream studies on L2 motivation.

In this article we first present some central tenets of the mainstream tradition in research on L2 motivation. This is followed by a presentation of what we see as the basic tenets and implications of the discursive approach to the study of L2 motivation. An underlying motivation of the present paper is our on-going research on L2 learner identity. Unfortunately, space does not allow us here an actual analysis of the ways in which the learners in our data build up accounts of their L2 motivation – the article remains therefore theoretical in its orientation.

2. Mainstream research on L2 motivation

Research on L2 motivation goes back to the late 1950s, and until very recently it has been dominated by the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner

(1985). Drawing on ideas in social psychology, the two pioneers have developed a socio-psychological or educational model of L2 learning. The model has undergone several revisions over the years. Importantly, motivation plays a major role in it, and it is considered one of the key learner factors that affect L2 achievement. More recently, attempts have been made by other scholars (Au 1989; Crookes – Schmidt 1991; Oxford – Shearin 1994; Dörnyei 1994a, 1994b) to broaden the theoretical basis of research on L2 motivation by turning to other disciplines, such as education and psychology for fresh insights. As Oxford and Shearin (1994: 13) put it, they have wanted to "maintain the best of existing L2 motivation theory and push its parameters outward." However, despite their criticism of earlier research on L2 motivation, many of these researchers have only ended up suggesting alternative ways of defining the concept, having little to offer in terms of solid empirical work on the topic. Moreover, the basic assumptions underlying mainstream research on L2 motivation, since the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert, have largely remained unchallenged.

2.1. Research paradigm: positivism

Until very recently, almost all research on L2 motivation, whether theoretical or empirical, has been conducted within the positivist paradigm with all its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. However, as these assumptions (for details, see e.g., Guba – Lincoln 1994; Maycut – Morehouse 1994) have been taken for granted, they have seldom been made explicit in studies on L2 motivation.

Ontologically, researchers within the mainstream tradition have adopted a realist view of the world. Accordingly, L2 motivation is expected to be governed by laws comparable to those in the natural sciences, and all that remains for researchers to do is to uncover the "true" nature of L2 motivation of specific groups of learners and its effect on their L2 achievement. These are then reported in the form of time- and context-free generalizations. Epistemologically, it is assumed that the investigated object is an entity external to and independent of the investigator, and so it is possible for the researcher to study L2 motivation without influencing it or being influenced by it. Or as Guba and Lincoln (1994: 110) stress, it is expected that "inquiry takes place as through a one-way mirror". Furthermore, the objectivity of findings is thought to be ensured simply by researchers following a specific set of steps in the process of doing research, including the making of observations of the world, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses.

2.2. Definitions of motivation in mainstream research on L2 motivation

Within the dominant research tradition, L2 motivation was originally defined by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985) as a combination of effort, desire, and affect (or attitudes towards the L2). In addition, a distinction was made between integrative and instrumental orientation. These refer to the reasons why the learner studies an L2: s/he may wish to become a member of the L2 community; or alternatively, s/he may want to gain social recognition or economic advantages by mastering the L2. Later, alternative definitions have been suggested by a number other researchers (e.g., Crookes – Schmidt 1991; Oxford – Shearin 1994; Dörnyei 1994a, 1994b; van Lier 1996: 98-122), with an additional distinction made between intrinsic (or innate) and extrinsic (or environmental) motivation, among others. Furthermore, it has been suggested that motivation might vary from one situation or task to another (Julkunen 1989), and that it should also be looked at from the perspective of L2 learners (Sajavaara 1994).

One of the most recent definitions has been put forward by Williams and Burden (1997: 111-142). Their definition differs from the others in a number of respects. To begin with, motivation "is only meaningful in relation to a particular action", and it is construed as a state of arousal that leads an L2 learner to decide to act, which in turn, makes her/him put an effort in order to achieve goals in L2 learning. Furthermore, motivation is claimed to be influenced by both L2 learner internal and external factors. The internal factors include the L2 learner's interest, self-concept, attitudes, and mastery of the L2. In contrast, the external ones include variables such as significant others involved in the process of learning the L2, including teachers and parents, and the environment in which the learning takes place. Importantly, placing motivation within a social constructivist approach, Williams and Burden stress that L2 motivation is of a social origin, and that the focus should be on what the L2 learner her/himself makes out of her/his efforts to learn an L2, and the role of motivation and other factors involved in it.

Over time L2 motivation has turned out to be a far more complex phenomenon than was originally thought of. However, all definitions of L2 motivation within the mainstream tradition can be characterized as cognitive to varying degrees: compare the earliest definition with the most recent, for example, which emphasizes that motivation is a result of interactions that L2 learners have with others. At any rate, L2 motivation is viewed as a learner-internal state or trait, or alternatively, choices or stages in a decision process in the learner's mind. It is important also to note that most of the attempts at redefining L2 motivation have remained theoretical: these reformulations have not been put to empirical test yet, which is in stark contrast with the earlier work of Gardner and Lambert

(1972) and Gardner (1985). Over the years, the pioneers (together with their students) have measured L2 motivation in a number of studies with a variety of L2 learners in different parts of the world, thus setting the standards for other researchers to follow. (It is for this reason that only their classic studies are referred to in the following.)

2.3. Data and methods in mainstream research on L2 motivation

Within the positivist paradigm, it has been assumed that, once L2 motivation has been defined (or to put it in another way, *preformed*) by researchers and furthermore, once its relationships to other factors involved in L2 learning have been worked out in the form of a theory or model, it is possible to discover its "real" nature. However, as motivation is a learner-internal entity, it is not readily available for direct observation. Therefore, it has to be measured by resorting to indirect means.

L2 learners can be asked to fill out a questionnaire, for example. However, before doing so, motivation needs to be broken into its components, and these in turn have to be operationalized so that the questionnaire (later turned into a standardized test battery) eventually contains sets of questions to measure each of these. For example, in The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery developed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985), desire was measured by statements ranging from *"Compared to my other courses, I like French: a) the most; b) the same as my other courses; c) least of all"* to *"If I had an opportunity to see a French play, I would: a) go only if I had nothing else to do; b) definitely go; c) not go"*. All that remains for L2 learners to do is to choose the most appropriate from among a number of response alternatives on answer sheets. The assumption underlying this procedure is that L2 learners carry within themselves fairly fixed entities such as motivation and that in getting at these by whatever appropriate means language is a direct reflection of these. In other words, this means accepting a mirror view of language (Potter 1996): language simply reflects more or less accurately the objective world out there.

In addition, hypotheses have been formulated in order to make predictions concerning the relationships among the different motivational components and L2 achievement. On the basis of their model of L2 learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985) came up with five hypotheses to test, including "The integrative motive hypothesis" and "The active learner hypothesis". Accordingly, integrative motive was expected to be positively related to L2 achievement, and integratively motivated learners to be successful because they were thought to be active learners. In order to verify the hypotheses, data from the questionnaires have been subjected to statistical procedures to find out significant correlations.

Importantly, the testing of the hypotheses among motivational and other factors involved in L2 learning has been done with samples of L2 learners selected on the basis of specific criteria. In this way, it is ensured that findings can then be generalized to larger populations that they are representative of.

In short, the psychometric research on L2 motivation has typically been hypothetico-deductive, with a preference for quantitative methods and controlled measurement.

2.4. Goals of research in mainstream research on L2 motivation

The ultimate goal of mainstream research on L2 motivation has been explanation, or the establishment of causal links between L2 motivation and L2 achievement. This has been done by seeking verification for the hypotheses formulated at an earlier stage. In a sense, the empirical studies on L2 motivation can be characterized as reductionist on a number of grounds. First of all, these have had a tendency to regard L2 motivation as relatively stable in nature, viewing it from the perspective of an outsider and what is more, very much out of context; secondly, the studies have sought to establish links between one variable and another at a time, allowing only for unidirectional relationships among selected variables. Thirdly, in collecting data, variation in responses has been kept to a minimum by letting subjects only choose from among a few response alternatives (instead of allowing them to respond in their own words, for example). Moreover, the quantitative processing of the responses has also tended to suppress variation in the data.

Furthermore, the studies on L2 motivation can be described as confirmatory. To put it simply, either evidence has been found to support the hypotheses, or evidence has not been found. In this sense, the studies conducted within the mainstream paradigm hardly reveal anything unexpected as their outcomes. In their studies, Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985) found, for example, that an integrative orientation correlated positively with L2 achievement. However, as Au (1989) points out, this has not been a consistent finding: there are other studies that lend little or no support to this hypothesis.

Traditionally, three criteria have been crucial in judging the rigour of empirical research (Guba – Lincoln 1994). These apply to studies on L2 motivation conducted within the mainstream paradigm, too. The first criterion is reliability, and the concern is whether, or not, the findings of a study have been consistent. The second criterion is validity. Internal validity refers to the extent to which a study measures what it is supposed to measure, whereas external validity refers to the extent to which its findings can be generalized to other groups. The final criterion used in evaluating research within the positivist paradigm is objectivity. In doing research, measures have to be taken to make sure that the researcher remains neutral and unbiased.

2.5. Implications and applications of mainstream research on L2 motivation

Research on L2 motivation within the positivist paradigm has been carried out mainly for two practical reasons relevant to L2 teaching. First, based on the measurements of L2 motivation, predictions can be made concerning the success of L2 learning of various groups of learners in future. Second, by comparing L2 motivation of a specific group of L2 learners with the theoretical constructs developed by researchers and earlier findings from other groups, control can be gained over their L2 achievement by pointing out possible discrepancies or weaknesses in their motivational constructs. By providing L2 learners with training it is hoped that these can then be eliminated and thus their L2 achievement enhanced. In doing this, researchers have taken on a role of all-round experts as opposed to their subjects, that is, L2 learners who are viewed as less knowledgeable. This rests on the assumption that L2 motivation is part of the objective world and that deep down it is possible to detect its "real" nature.

2.6. Problems with mainstream research on L2 motivation

Over the years the mainstream tradition of studying L2 motivation has received a great deal of criticism. For example, the basic model has been subjected to a number of revisions which have centered, on the one hand, on the theoretical difficulties entailed in it in conceptualizing and defining motivation, and distinguishing it from such concepts as orientation, attitudes and affect, on the other (see, e.g., Au 1989; Crookes – Smith 1991; Oxford – Shearin 1994; Dörnyei 1994a). Yet another problem has been the question of operationalization and measurement. It is not clear to what extent the direct questions geared at pinning down learner motivation, illustrated by for example the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, reflect what they are supposed to measure (Au 1989). Further, except in the case of Gardner and Lambert, there has been very little empirical verification of the definitional framework; consequently, the model has remained a logical rather than an empirical one (Au 1989). Most importantly, however, some scholars working within the mainstream tradition have pointed out that the theoretical framework for the study of L2 motivation does not enable the examination of the complicated changes over time in reasons for learning a language or the identification of the various kinds of motivation that are present in learners at any moment of time, or that different attitudes and goal orientations seem to be important in ways that vary from situation to situation (Crookes – Schmidt 1991; Oxford – Shearin 1994).

Despite this kind of budding awareness among mainstream scholars, the solution, for them, has often been to further elaborate on the model of L2 motivation originally introduced by Gardner and Lambert, adding, as Dörnyei puts

it (1994b: 522) "more boxes to the schematic representation, while keeping the established main relationships". In principle, none of these scholars question the validity of the basic framework. They thus end up in a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, they acknowledge that learner motivations may be complex and variable, but, because of their adherence to the mainstream tradition, they are prevented by it, both theoretically and analytically, from investigating the specific ways in which this variation actually manifests itself in learners' talk, writing and action.

The incapacity of the mainstream motivation research to tackle the variability and situatedness of L2 motivation is, for us, the justification for stepping outside the mainstream tradition and turning to discursive social psychology. Most significantly, the discursive approach allows an investigation of motivation as something that learners themselves construct in speech or writing, in various situations and interactional settings, for various purposes, functions and effects. Next, we will sketch what could be some of the basic assumptions of a discursive approach to motivation in L2 learning.

3. Towards discursive research on L2 motivation

3.1. Paradigm: social constructionism

The examination of L2 motivation as a discursive phenomenon is based on the view that language does not reflect reality in any "direct" or "natural" way; instead, through and with language, we are constantly involved in processes of constructing versions of reality (Wittgenstein 1953; Guba – Lincoln 1994). This does not, however, mean that reality does not exist outside our constructions of it, nor that it ceases to exist if we stop talking about it. Rather, this view of reality as constructed allows researchers to focus on how the real-world phenomena are produced, and differentiated from one another, by whom constructions are made, when and for what purposes. For example, within the context of our research, this orientation towards reality means that instead of taking the existence and reality of "motivation" for granted, as a cognitive given, it is considered something that can be produced in various ways by different people in the accounts and interactions in different situations and settings (see also Potter's discussion of how attitudes are approached discursively, in Potter, in press). These different practices (talk among friends, classroom interactions, official documents, educational literature, academic papers such as the present one, for example) all in their own ways both reproduce and transform our existing understandings of L2 motivation.

Our constructions of reality are not, however, totally idiosyncratic or subjective but are embedded within social practices and draw on discursive frameworks of knowledge (see e.g., Foucault 1986; Fairclough 1992). Our versions of reality are routinely worked up as part of social practices and action. These practices are normative in the sense that in order to maintain or negotiate a sense of a shared social order, we need to orient towards the conventional expectations about social action they imply. In this sense, our versions of reality are shaped by social practices and discursive frameworks of knowledge. On the other hand, these contexts of action are also enabling: they provide us with the means with which we can meaningfully act, talk about and make sense of reality.

Discursive social psychology is commonly associated with a relativist metatheory rather than a realist, positivist metatheory (Potter, in press). What counts as knowledge in discursive social psychology is not the analysts's direct observations of objective reality but the analytic and interpretative accounts of the ways in which the phenomenon in question are produced within its own context. This kind of orientation also involves a fundamental sense of self-reflexivity of research. To put it simply, discursively oriented researchers are aware of the fact that the devices through which science is written are heavily implicated in the process of fact construction (Potter 1996: 229; Ashmore 1989; Mulkay 1985 and Woolgar 1989). Scholars thus need to define their own position and also spell out in what way the devices they use contribute to the construction of facts in their own research writing. In this way, the scholar him/herself cannot be bracketed off from the analytic process: s/he and the investigated object are not entities independent of one another. That discursive research is fundamentally self-reflexive should not, however, be taken to mean that its findings are simply rhetorical collections of personal observations and evaluations by the positioned scholar. As will be shown in more detail later, self-reflexivity is counterbalanced with a conscientious and systematic attention to data, and with theoretically backed up interpretations of findings.

In terms of research on L2 motivation, this epistemological stance means, most importantly, that the kind of knowledge the scholar hopes to retrieve is the product of his/her close analytic and interpretative attention and rhetorical "packaging" of the ways in which L2 learners produce accounts of their motivation. This also means that the whole of the analysis needs to be contextualised, critically investigated in relation to the analyst's analytic, interpretative and rhetorical operations and their implications.

3.2. A discursive definition of L2 motivation

By now it may be obvious that within the discursive framework the term motivation needs to be redefined in a way that departs from the mainstream definition. First, the term motivation is easily associated with the idea, made familiar to us by mainstream L2 motivation research, that it indeed is something within people's heads from which it can be extracted with the right kind of

methodology. Because of this kind of association "motivation" is thus perhaps not the best possible term to use in this context. Some other term or terms might be more appropriate. More specifically, if motivation is taken as something constructed in people's talk and writing, no ready-made definition of what it is can be taken as a starting point in analysis. Consequently, rather than imposing a definitional grid on people's ways of speaking and writing, the analyst should identify and analyze the actual ways in which people themselves label, and talk about their motivations, interests, reasons and investment in L2 learning.

In short, discursive social psychology sees L2 motivation as performed rather than preformed. By "motivation" the discursive scholar thus means the variety of people's practices of talking/writing about motivation in particular settings and for particular interactional and social purposes (see Potter, in press). Or, to put it in another way, "motivation" means people's formulations, their claimed versions of psychological states constructed on the basis of vague (but not wholly unspecific) "feelings" and more general discursive resources, which serve rhetorical purposes in accounting for themselves and others in response to challenges from those around them (see also Shotter 1993: 182; Edwards 1997).

Importantly, with the help of such a conceptualization of motivation, it thus becomes possible to examine motivation as variable, situated and rhetorical, which is something the mainstream approach, despite its good intentions, is theoretically and analytically ill equipped to do.

3.3. Data in discursive research on L2 motivation

Also the kinds of research data that discursive social psychology uses are different from the materials used in mainstream research. Instead of questionnaires and test batteries discursively oriented scholars rely on written autobiographies (see e.g., Gergen 1994), oral stories about the self (Kohler Riessman 1993; Linde 1993; Polanyi 1985), and, most recently, naturally occurring conversation (Edwards 1997; Edwards – Potter 1992; Wooffitt 1992). These kinds of data enable the examination of the specific rhetorical moves in the construction of life in a particular interactional or textual context. A discursive approach takes written autobiographies, oral self narratives and conversation as discursive action, as performative domains of social action in which occasioned, interaction-oriented accounts of life are artfully worked up (Edwards 1997: 272-292; Edwards – Potter 1992). Or, to put it otherwise, data, including even written data, are understood within the discursive framework as forms of social accounting or public discourse (see also Gergen 1994: 188). In this respect, discursive work is radically different from some earlier social psychological work which mainly focused on written narratives and envisioned

them as yielding pictures of events from the narrator's lives (see e.g., work done in ethnography and oral histories), or pictures of the narrator's minds, their perceptions or understandings of events in their lives (see e.g., Bruner 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne 1988).

In terms of the investigation of L2 motivation, this kind of orientation towards data means that care should be taken that the materials collected by the researcher are of the type that allow the investigation of the ways in which people display and negotiate constructions of their motivation. In our research (see e.g., Leppänen – Kalaja 1995) we have attempted to compile such a data pool by collecting two types of materials. First, we collected written autobiographies from learners of English as a foreign language. These learners, studying in three different educational institutes at the tertiary level, were asked to write, on the basis of a set of orientative questions, their histories as learners of English. These stories were to begin with their first encounters with the English language and describe their experiences with English both outside and inside school. Secondly, we asked these students also to discuss, in pairs, their experiences as learners of English. To help the students get started, similar orientative questions were used in the discussions as in the first assignment. The pair discussions were recorded and transcribed.

It is important to note that in the analysis of these data we take into account that both of them are occasioned productions. In the case of written autobiographies this means, for example, that we need to pay attention to the fact that the learners draw on autobiography as a culturally familiar narrative form, and to the ways in which the reason for their autobiographies, our research project with its orientative questions, may have shaped their writing in significant ways. Similarly, in the case of the pair discussions, the orientative questions and the situation, physical setting and interactional context need to be taken into account as relevant dimensions of analysis.

3.4. Methodology in discursive research on L2 motivation

Discursive social psychology has a strongly analytic focus. It endeavors to carry out systematic and close qualitative micro-analyses of interaction or specific texts through which issues related to social structure and setting can be examined. This kind of data-driven nature of analysis does not mean, however, that the methodological orientation of discursive social psychology is naively inductive. Rather, data are always analyzed against a backdrop of theoretical concerns derived from discursive social psychology and focusing on specific themes such as racism, prejudice, attitudes (Potter, in press). Likewise, the qualitative methodology does not imply subjectivity or haphazardness of analytic observations, but validity of observations is ensured through the systematicness, replicability and detailed nature of the analytic procedures.

No matter what the actual data in question, the principles that guide analysis are the same: the analysis tackles the specific ways in which stories, or conversational participants' contributions are rhetorically or interactionally designed, to manage their own credibility and counter alternatives, to report past events but also to explain and justify the events (Edwards 1997: 271-277; Potter – Wetherell 1987; Potter 1996). The analysis of narratives includes such questions as where the narrators choose to begin their stories, what they include in them, to whom, for whom or for what they are being told, what alternatives are being countered or aligned with and, (in the case of naturally occurring oral stories) at what juncture stories are told and what current interactional business is being managed (Edwards 1997: 277). The analysis of conversation focuses on the specific details of interaction, and relate conversational micro-features of this kind to broader issues of social structure, and social setting (see Potter, in press; Billig et al. 1988; Boden 1994). With both types of data, the specifics of rhetoric, or interaction, are also considered from the perspective of what functions or possibilities for interpretation they make socially available (Eskola 1990: 328), and what ideological effects they have (specifically with respect to how discourse positions people in terms of power (Potter – Wetherell 1989: 187; Jokinen et al. 1993: 43).

In terms of the study of L2 motivation, the methodological framework sketched above implies that rigorous qualitative analysis is carried out on the ways in which learners artfully build up their constructions of their motivation to learn English within the conventional format provided by the written autobiography, on the one hand, and within the interactional context of pair discussion, on the other. Further, these micro-level findings need to be related to "macro" issues relevant to understanding the learners' talk and texts L2 on motivation from broader social, institutional and cultural perspectives.

3.5. Goals of discursive research and its possible implications and applications

More specifically, the ultimate goal of research on L2 motivation within the discursive framework is the identification, analysis and explication of the ways in which motivation (i.e., reasons, interest, desire, involvement in L2 learning) is constructed in talk and text by the learners. Further, analysis needs to address what resources the learners' draw on in their constructions and what functions and effects their text and talk about their motivation actualizes.

An important outcome of this kind of analytic orientation is that it can both increase our understanding of the specifics of talk about motivation and enable their investigation in relation to broader issues of social structure and setting. In addition, it provides a platform for more theoretical discussions of the social psychology of L2 learning, of the reproduction and change of assumptions, beliefs, knowledge and practices related to motivation. Because of these ana-

lytical and theoretical orientations of discursive research, it is difficult to see any immediate practical applications of its findings in L2 teaching settings, for example. In this respect, it is very different from mainstream research into motivation.

4. Conclusion

In this article an attempt was made to introduce discursive social-psychological thinking into the field of L2 learning. This was done by first summarizing what the mainstream research tradition in L2 learning had been like and then contrasting it with a discursive one, illustrated with research on one aspect of L2 learning, that is, motivation. More specifically, research on L2 motivation was outlined as it has been carried out within a positivist paradigm since the late 1950s, then problems were pointed out within it, and finally consideration was given to a social constructionist paradigm.

The discursive research tradition goes back to the late 1980s. The tradition was originally a radical departure from mainstream social-psychological research, and it is only natural that it was first applied to issues of relevance to social psychologists, such as attitudes, attribution, memory, feelings. The adoption of this research tradition has forced scholars to reconsider the basic assumptions underlying research, definitions of terms, research data and methods, and importantly also the goals of their studies.

In this article, it was strongly argued that this kind of thinking be extended to L2 learning. In this way, new insights could be gained into issues relevant to the field of L2 learning and teaching, including motivation. To begin with, consider the definitions of motivation. Instead of regarding it as an entity located in an L2 learner's head, motivation would be viewed as a construction in the L2 learner's talk or writing. Furthermore, within the discursive tradition it would be possible to give due consideration to the variability of motivational accounts given by L2 learners, for example, concerning their interest in, reasons for, and investment in their efforts to learn an L2, not only from one situation to another over time, but also within one and the same situation. Moreover, it would be possible to pay due attention to the ways learners work up their motivational accounts in the course of interactions, what resources they draw on, and also importantly, what functions they make their accounts serve. All these, it was argued, would involve theoretically motivated micro-analysis of naturalistic spoken or written data from subjects. For the purposes of our own research project we have collected life stories written by L2 learners and discussions in pairs. Unfortunately, space did not allow us to illustrate analysis of our data. In this respect, this article remains theoretical. However, we hope we have managed to show the potential of the discursive approach to L2 learning. It seems to us that this is just the beginning of many new fascinating insights into issues in

the fields of second and foreign language learning and teaching that can be extended beyond motivation to learner attitudes, beliefs, cognitive styles, strategies, etc.

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