



Review of Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions

Funda Ölmez^{a *}

^a Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, Ankara 06800, Turkey

Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions, Zoltán Dörnyei, Alastair Henry, and Christine Muir. New York: Routledge (2016). xvii+203 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-77732-3 (pbk)

© 2016 EJAL & the Authors. Published by *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics (EJAL)*. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

The intriguing and miscellaneous nature of language learning motivation and its influence on different phases of language learning have long been one of the initial concerns of both researchers and practitioners in second / foreign language (L2) education. Accordingly, motivational constructs have been explored from various angles within the scope of different models of L2 motivation (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985). Moreover, the everlasting interest in L2 motivation reflected evidently on the quantity of published works pertaining to the relevant construct given the fact that more than 400 publications involving articles in established journals and book chapters particularly on L2 motivation have been produced even between 2005-2014 (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015).

Despite the abundance of materials on L2 motivation, *Motivational Currents in Language Learning: Frameworks for Focused Interventions* undoubtedly manages to take a further step towards explaining language learning motivation. Departing from a totally novel perspective in their book, Dörnyei, Henry and Muir coin the term *Directed Motivational Current (DMC)* to indicate a considerably vivid and unique motivational involvement resulting from a wholehearted commitment to a vision, and focus on different aspects of these currents and their interaction with language learning motivation. After several important studies on the concept of DMC by Dörnyei and his colleagues (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, & Muir, 2015; Dörnyei, Muir, & Ibrahim, 2014; Henry, Davydenko, & Dörnyei, 2015; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013), this book apparently offers the most comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the DMC construct within the field of L2 education. The book consisting of a total of nine chapters initially introduces the notion of DMCs, focuses on various aspects of the construct and its relationship with language learning motivation in the following chapters and finally offers insights for generating DMCs in L2 classrooms. While

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90-312-297-8575
E-mail address: fundaolmez@gmail.com; funda.olmez@hacettepe.edu.tr
<http://dx.doi.org/>.....

shedding light on various features of the concept, the book enriches the exploration of the relevant construct with extracts from interviews with people with outstanding DMC experiences from different parts of the world.

The introductory chapter sets out to familiarize the reader with the concept of directed motivational currents. Dörnyei et al. make use of a metaphorical analogy about ocean currents, and define a DMC as “an intense motivational drive – or surge – which is capable of stimulating and supporting long-term behavior (such as the learning of an L2)” (p. 2). After introducing the concept, the chapter highlights the distinctive characteristics of a DMC and underlines how a DMC differs from a high level of overall ongoing motivation in that a DMC emerges as an optimal and infrequent motivational disposition obviously distinguished from normal levels of learner motivation with its remarkable intensity. Building on a comparison of DMCs and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975, 1988, 1990) ‘flow experience’, the authors delineate the similarities and differences between the two concepts. While the two constructs are alike preeminently in that they both are characterized by a state of complete absorption, the relevant concepts mainly differ from each other in terms of timescales, underlying reasons for engagement and their structure. Following this brief summary of the construct of a DMC and its comparison to flow, the authors share the DMC stories of three L2 learners from three different contexts: (1) a second language learning setting, (2) a foreign language learning setting, and (3) a world-language acquisition setting. Extracts from the interviews of these L2 learners reveal the salient aspects of strong DMCs. Drawing on the common characteristics of the DMC experiences of these learners, Dörnyei et al. conclude the chapter by emphasizing the major themes related to DMCs: (1) *specific and significant goals*, (2) *identifiable triggering factors and launch*, (3) *the structure of the process*, (4) *positive emotionality*, (5) *attenuation and aftermath*. The following chapters depict the aforementioned features of the construct of DMCs in more detail.

In Chapter 2, “DMCs Versus Long-Term Motivation”, Dörnyei et al. initially clarify the way the concept of DMCs came out into the scope of second language acquisition (SLA) research in an attempt to account for the underlying factors essential for the emergence of sustained motivation within the process of L2 acquisition in the long term. Following the exploration of the evolution of motivation construct in L2 research within the developmental phases of *social psychological period*, *cognitive-situated period*, *process-oriented period* and *socio-dynamic period* in Dörnyei and Ushioda’s (2011) terms, Dörnyei et al. argue that the notion of DMCs is in line with the socio-dynamic period. As asserted by Dörnyei et al. (2015), this is due to the capability of the relevant construct to coordinate a variety of complex factors and to get rid of different impediments by means of an intense commitment to an ultimate goal. The chapter then maintains that the DMC concept was structured as an *extension* of the notion of vision, and that beyond the existence of a certain vision, an ideal pair of a vision accompanied by an appropriate action plan energizing the whole process reflects the construct of a DMC. Attributing the lack of this construct in mainstream motivation theories to independent handling of motivation and emergent behavior as well as the neglect of temporal characteristics of motivation in these theories, the authors point out that DMCs are of critical value for sustained behaviors such as mastering of an L2. Drawing on the similarity between the essence of DMCs

and the basis of motivational disposition resulting in long-term behaviors, they utilize the analogy of the last piece of a puzzle for the notion of DMCs and maintain that DMCs reflect an “optimal form of engagement” (p. 33), and therefore that long-term motivation may partially involve some certain characteristics of this ideal form in a sense. The authors lastly conclude that the benefits of exploring this construct lie in the fact that they provide an extensive framework for motivating students in L2 classrooms in the long run.

Chapter 3, “Vision: The ‘Directed’ Aspect of DMCs”, focuses on the way DMCs aim at and proceed towards a certain target. Highlighting the invariant directional nature of the DMC construct, Dörnyei et al. underscore the overall goal guiding the process and maintain that it is this pre-established target that yields *cohesion* to the endeavor of an individual as well as a *focus* to the energies exerted by the relevant person. In this vein, the characteristics of the defined goal or target which represents the imagined end result of one’s desires and efforts come to the fore. The authors, therefore, place an emphasis on one’s *vision* in that this target self-image reflecting the long-term goal pre-defined by an individual is among the most prominent determinants of his or her commitment to this target in the long run and how much effort s/he will put into it in turn. Moreover, this vision guides the whole process by signaling a well-framed concrete image of the person in the future both visually and emotionally. The authors elaborate on the principal features of the specified goals by stating that these goals need to be *self-concordant*; in other words, they need to relate fully and bear a genuine meaning to the individual and his or her identity. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that *proximal subgoals* are worthy of further interest as a crucial constituent of the DMC construct in that these shorter-term goals facilitate the actions taken by the individual by providing a feeling of satisfaction resulting in a sense of progress towards the pre-established overall goal. Building on refinement of the key characteristics of the ‘directed’ aspect of motivational currents, the chapter finally provides some motivational strategies related to goal setting and striving to be utilized in L2 classrooms (Dörnyei, 2001), which concretize the way goal-orientedness can be translated into the classroom context. Subsequent to these motivational strategies, a short summary of Dörnyei and Kubanyiova’s (2014) *visionary training approach* offers new insights into a well-structured pathway for making use of one’s vision to the fullest extent to promote motivation.

In Chapter 4, “The Launch of a DMC: Shifting into ‘Hyperdrive’”, Dörnyei et al. draw the reader’s attention to the initiation of the DMC process and the essential conditions for the launch of a DMC. The authors underline the two fundamental factors required for the efficaciousness of the launch of a DMC: the co-existence of the essential *conditions* in concert, and the provision of the *triggering stimulus*. Of these two important factors, the former involves the conditions related to having well-defined *goals* or *vision*, undertaking the *ownership* of the DMC process and the results, keeping a good balance between the *challenges* to be faced within the DMC process and one’s own *skills*, and a sense of *openness* developed by the individual towards the DMC experience. Apart from the aforementioned conditions provided at the individual level, the authors also suggest some motivational conditions for the classroom context. As for the triggering stimuli, the second key factor necessary for an effective launch of a DMC, the authors note that the process might be initiated by a

wide variety of triggers ranging from a positive case reflecting an opportunity an individual would want to attain to a negative occasion resulting in an effort of protecting self-worth. The authors then describe how a DMC is launched by a certain trigger and constantly recharged by recurrent activations. In this respect, while using the metaphor “hyperdrive” for the case when the DMC reaches a substantial level with a great amount of energy, Dörnyei et al. also emphasize that this process is actually *intermittent* and therefore that the current that is interrupted for some reason at times needs to be reactivated. They also add that the re-triggering of the motivational disposition is realized by means of the vision formed by the individuals and their well-established goals in turn since the automatic access to these salient goals keeps the person focused on what s/he wants to achieve in the long run. The authors point out the aforementioned characteristic of a DMC as a distinctive feature when compared to a flow resulting mainly from the joy felt by an individual engaged in a specific activity.

The fifth chapter entitled “The Unique Structure of a DMC: Utilizing ‘Renewable Energy’” informs the reader about the distinctive structure of the current that provides the opportunity for not only initiating the motivated action by making use of the produced energy but also bringing forth further motivation and preserving the flow of the current in turn. In this sense, this very structure is actively in charge of the whole motivational process with the use of *renewable energy*. In this chapter, Dörnyei et al. discuss the three important constituents of the structure operating under the current, namely *automatized routines, subgoals and progress checks*, and *affirmative feedback*. The authors argue that due to their profound commitment to the ultimate goal or vision, the individuals caught up in a directed motivational current exhibit automatized behavioral routines which show up without their conscious control in a kind of “autopilot” process. Within the unique structure of a DMC, the subgoals possessed by these individuals provide them with the opportunity to check their progress with shorter-term purposes that act as important criteria for self-evaluation and result in a sense of contentment and further commitment. Hence, the affirmative feedback or *positive progress feedback* dominantly offered in a DMC experience functions as a rigorous progress check and facilitates the flow of the current by revealing the attainability of the objectives within the path. The description of these three key elements in a DMC construct strengthens the reader’s understanding of the distinctive self-renewing structure of a DMC.

In Chapter 6, “Positive Emotional Loading: Eudaimonic Well-Being and Authenticity”, Dörnyei et al. discuss the nature of the remarkably positive emotional state constantly exhibited by the individuals caught up in a directed motivational current. The authors express this state of mind as a highly profound sense of satisfaction or pleasure resulting from making efforts and taking steps towards the identified ultimate objective or vision with the perception of approaching this target in the course of time. As in the other parts of the book, the authors successfully strengthen the theoretical bases and explanations of the aforementioned positive emotional loading with extracts from interviews with people expressing their DMC experiences in order to promote the comprehensibility of this emotional construct. The chapter highlights the value of *connectedness* developed between the activities carried out for achieving the ultimate goal and the individual’s own identity for the realization of this kind of a deep contentment. This sensation is the product of the

interaction between *eudaimonic well-being* and *authenticity*, as two elements that develop in parallel. While eudaimonic well-being represents an intense pleasure arising from an endeavor for *self-realization* and *personal fulfillment*, authenticity is experienced when an individual takes actions in accordance with his or her *self-conceptions*, namely the personal values, attitudes in life, beliefs, and so on. Special attention is drawn to the fact that the salient joy pertaining to the DMC experience is disseminated all over the path towards the ultimate goal regardless of the specific characteristics of the activities carried out within the process. In this sense, as an implication for L2 classrooms, Dörnyei et al. point out that it is of critical value for L2 learners to have the chance to reflect their own conceptions and real identities in the L2 classroom context in order for these learners to exhibit motivation for learning an additional language in the long run.

Following the discussions on the make-up of DMCs, their directed nature, launch and transformation into a ‘hyperdrive’, their distinctive structure that both makes use of and amplifies the produced motivational energy and lastly the emergent positive emotional state characterizing the currents, the seventh chapter entitled “When the Current Begins to Wane: The Nature of Effort and the Longer-Term Sustainability of DMCs” elaborates on the phase pertaining to the ebbing and cessation of a current. The chapter initially underscores the inescapably finite structure of DMCs even if they do preserve their vigorous flow for a long time. Dörnyei et al. inform the reader about various ways DMCs may come to an end and argue that DMCs may cease to exist all of a sudden at some point or gradually decrease in magnitude within a smoother trajectory. An important factor that may signal this final state of a current may be the loss of the *protective shield of visionary single-mindedness*. As the guiding role of the vision in terms of the actions related to the ultimate goal disappears due to this loss, the attention of the person caught up in a DMC starts to be drawn to other alternatives in life. The authors, therefore, assert that the goal-related actions that are previously taken without volitional control while moving through the dynamic flow of the current start to necessitate conscious efforts of these individuals. They also offer insights into the mixed feelings of the individuals at the final stage of their DMCs. Reminding the reader of the longitudinal process of L2 learning taking up even whole lives, the authors also highlight that teachers need to manage and guide this phase of L2 learning DMCs effectively in order for the students in their final stages of DMCs to have a smooth transition from the rapid flow of the currents to the normal process of L2 learning. In this vein, the recommendations provided for L2 teachers to boost student motivation in the long run appear to deserve further attention.

Subsequent to the elaborate insights into individual motivational currents till the last two chapters of the book, the eighth chapter entitled “Introducing ‘Group-DMCs’” portrays the formation and execution of collective DMCs at the group level. In this chapter, the initial questioning as to whether it is possible to ensure collective currents in groups of people similar to the ones experienced at the individual level helps the reader to contemplate on group-level DMCs in an effective manner. Acknowledging that such robust currents also hold true at the group level through research evidence and extracts from different examples of group-DMCs, the authors shed light on the characteristics of group-DMCs in comparison to individual currents. They point out the value of *intensive group projects* as the major source of group-

DMCs in a classroom context. While explicating the main requirements of these kinds of group projects, they highlight the key role of a real, clear and engaging goal that is relevant to the group of students and appeal to their interests, the existence of appropriate motivational conditions for the formation of a collective current, a well-defined structure comprising subgoals with regard to not only L2 skills but also the specific project to be implemented, progress checks, and the systematic provision of feedback during the course of the project. It is also asserted in the chapter that similar to the satisfaction and joy felt within individual DMCs including *self-concordant goals*, group-DMCs generate positive emotions arising specifically from *social well-being* due to the recognition of group achievement through harmonious work aimed at attaining the identified goal and effective cooperation. The chapter pays special attention to final stages of the group-DMCs as done with individual DMCs, and underscores teachers' prominent role in raising awareness of what is achieved within the route of the current, offering insights into how the acquired abilities can be benefitted from in further studies and helping the students to preserve the positive emotional state stemming from the success of the group project. Following the elaboration on different aspects of group-DMCs, the final part pertaining to the depiction of a well-organized group project with its key features successfully helps the reader to visualize a good group project and comprehend those characteristics better through real examples. Moreover, the tips in relation to the generation of *group flow* provided at the end of the chapter appear to be quite thought-provoking for L2 teachers. In essence, this chapter helps the reader to gain insights into how to include individual motivational currents in the L2 classroom context and generate collective DMCs at the group level.

Finally, the last chapter of the book entitled "Generating DMCs in the Language Classroom" specifically stresses the practical features of yielding motivational currents within an L2 classroom setting. Departing from the subtitle of the book, 'Frameworks for Focused Interventions', the chapter initially reminds that teachers can facilitate the generation of entire group-level motivational currents in L2 classrooms through the structuring of the right conditions. The authors then highlight the prominent role of a *project-based mindset* in these kinds of circumstances. In this vein, they review the key principles of having a project-based mindset, and particularly point out the importance of the development towards a more inquiry-oriented learning in which teachers take a coordinating role by acting as a mentor, coach and a facilitator in particular while students gain greater autonomy in time. The chapter also underscores the three key elements absolutely required for the production of successful group projects: (1) *appropriate classroom dynamics*, (2) *adequate support structures and facilities*, and (3) *a clear and engaging project goal with a tangible outcome*. Subsequent to the discussions on the necessary conditions for the realization of highly-productive group projects, Dörnyei et al. provide the reader with seven effective frameworks as good examples of project structures with a potential to generate DMCs in L2 classrooms. Of these seven frameworks, each has all the necessary elements of an effective group-project, but particularly emphasizes a signature characteristic such as having a clear ultimate goal that can maintain the motivational energy throughout the path or students' building a robust form of connectedness among themselves and with the project. In this respect, these

frameworks both facilitate the understanding of the elaborate structure of DMCs in L2 classrooms and offer more insights into practical aspects of the execution of motivational currents within the classroom settings through the provision of related examples.

To conclude, Dörnyei et al.'s book provides the field of language learning motivation with a brand new perspective by introducing a novel concept called DMCs, which empower individuals to a great extent with its self-renewing structure and help them to obtain exceptional rates of success due to being fully absorbed in a current. To do this, the book initially accounts for the theoretical underpinnings of the relevant construct by referring to various theories and concepts in psychology and applied linguistics, and paves the way for more practical aspects. Adopting a comparative perspective, it also focuses on similarities and differences between the concept of DMC and other motivational constructs. Following the theoretical accounts of the DMC construct at the individual-level in the first seven chapters, the authors then elaborate on the group-level DMCs and focus on how the DMC concept can be translated into L2 classroom context in the last two chapters respectively.

The effectiveness of the book particularly lies in the fact that throughout the book, the theoretical discussions on the DMC concept are successfully accompanied with a wide range of qualitative data involving extracts from life stories with DMC experiences in different contexts that are not limited with L2 learning settings, but include other experiences as well such as weight loss DMCs, success stories in sports, other educational contexts, and so on. The systematic sequence of the chapters starting with theoretical accounts and proceeding towards more practical aspects make the book accessible and appropriate for all kinds of readers from L2 motivation researchers to practitioners in the field. The distinctive style of the book involving boxes for key information in each chapter, summaries emphasizing the essential information at the end of the sections and most importantly implications and concluding remarks in relation to the foci of the chapters absolutely builds on the value of the book. Hence, "Motivational currents in language learning: Frameworks for focused interventions" is undoubtedly a must-book for everyone interested in learner motivation and aiming at gaining a deeper understanding of long-term language learning motivation within the field of L2 education including pre-service and in-service language teachers, teacher educators and researchers.

References

- Boo, Z., Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). L2 motivation research 2005-2014: Understanding a publication surge and a changing landscape. *System*, 55, 145-157. <http://doi.org/bfft>
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1988). Introduction. In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness* (pp. 3-14). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dörnyei, Z., Ibrahim, Z., & Muir, C. (2015). 'Directed Motivational Currents': Regulating complex dynamic systems through motivational surges. In Z. Dörnyei, P. MacIntyre, & A. Henry (Eds.), *Motivational dynamics in language learning* (pp. 95-105). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Kubanyiova, M. (2014). *Motivating learners, motivating teachers: Building vision in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z., Muir, C., & Ibrahim, Z. (2014). Directed motivational currents: Energising language learning through creating intense motivational pathways. In D. Lasagabaster, A. Doiz, & J. M. Sierra (Eds.), *Motivation and foreign language learning: From theory to practice* (pp. 9-29). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Harlow: Longman.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Henry, A., Davydenko, S., & Dörnyei, Z. (2015). The anatomy of Directed Motivational Currents: Exploring intense and enduring periods of L2 motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 99(2), 329-345. <http://doi.org/bffs>
- Muir, C., & Dörnyei, Z. (2013). Directed motivational currents: Using vision to create effective motivational pathways. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 3(3), 357-375.
-

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).