Negotiating Identity tensions in multilingual learning in China: a situated perspective on language learning motivation and multilingual identity

Zi Wang, Troy McConachy & Ema Ushioda

Published online: 26 Apr 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1851

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 2 View citing articles

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Negotiating Identity tensions in multilingual learning in China: a situated perspective on language learning motivation and multilingual identity

Zi Wang, Troy McConachy and Ema Ushioda

Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

In accordance with the multilingual turn in SLA (May, S. 2014. Introducing the 'multilingual turn'. In *The Multilingual Turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and Bilingual Education*, ed. S. May, 1–6. New York, NY: Routledge), researchers are now directing more attention to the motivational dynamics associated with learning multiple languages, including the interrelationships between motivation and learners' sense of self. In contrast to research focused on language learners' psychological relationship to languages from the perspective of self-systems, this research instead takes a more identity-focused perspective that looks at motivation in light of learners' orientations towards ideological discourses associated with languages. It draws on longitudinal qualitative interviews and supplementary data from five Chinese university students in Shanghai who are majoring in Japanese while continuing to study English. The analysis highlights that the learners experienced a number of important identity-tensions as they attempted to reconcile ideological discourses on language with their own multi-layered identity positions and perspectives towards language learning. The discussion details the ways that learners mobilise their interpretive resources to evaluate instrumental and humanistic orientations towards language within macro-, meso- and micro- contexts and make agentive decisions that shape their motivational trajectories and multilingual identities.

Introduction

In accordance with the multilingual turn in SLA (May 2014), there is currently burgeoning interest in the interrelationships between multilingualism and identity within the field of foreign language learning, including in the literature on language learning motivation (e.g. Henry 2017; Thompson 2019; Ushioda and Dörnyei 2017). Notably, there have been calls for a holistic approach to conceptualising multilingualism and multilingual speakers (Cenoz 2013; Ushioda 2017) and adoption of an ecological perspective on motivation that emphasises learners' perceptions of their own and others' identities and situated experiences in contexts (Ushioda 2009, 2011). Researchers are now directing more attention to the complex intersections between individual cognition and macro ideological and social factors that influence how learners see the value of particular languages. This is clearly important when attempting to understand language learning motivation, as learners' motivations are inevitably influenced by how they perceive the individual characteristics and value of particular languages in connection to their own identities and future aspirations. This is particularly complex

CONTACT Zi Wang ✉ z.wang.52@warwick.ac.uk 🐦 @ziwang28

within the context of simultaneous learning of multiple languages due to the need to negotiate potentially conflicting social discourses and ideologies that pertain to different languages. This paper will argue that there is a close relationship between language learning motivation and multilingual identity, insofar as motivation shapes and is shaped by the ways that language learners interpret the social discourses and ideologies surrounding the languages they study, which naturally depends on learners' own social positioning.

Although there has been an emerging interest in researching language learning in the Chinese context and existing studies have shed light on the influence of contextual social factors (e.g. Wang and Zheng 2019), the complexity of simultaneous multilingual learning in China is under-researched and needs more detailed and focused investigation. This paper explores how students negotiate multiple language-related identities in the process of developing a nuanced understanding of language in multilingual learning, and contributes to current thinking concerning the relationship between multilingual identity and language learning motivation. It presents a qualitative analysis of interview and communication data drawn from a larger longitudinal dataset collected as part of the first author's doctoral research. The participants of the project are Chinese undergraduate students who are simultaneously learning Japanese and English, majoring in the former.

In the next section, we present a critical review of existing research on multilingual identity and multilingual learning motivation in order to contextualise the empirical focus of the paper.

Research background

The relationship between multilingualism and identity is attracting increasing attention in language learning motivation scholarship (Henry 2017; Thompson 2019; Ushioda 2017). Current approaches tend to adopt a self-systems perspective which involves a systemic view of motivation as a psychological construct and theoretical emphasis on the variations and interactions of multiple language selves within a language learner. Recent theorising has posited a psychological relationship between the learner and the languages in their repertoire in which self-systems corresponding to each language are integrated by a superordinate 'ideal multilingual self' (Henry 2017). Within such a theoretical perspective, however, the primary emphasis is on the nature of psychological systems rather than on the relationship between the learner and the contemporary social contexts they are situated in, thus leading to a decontextualised and abstract representation of motivation in relation to multilingual learning. In contrast, a person-in-context relational view of motivation engages the identities of language learners as persons (Ushioda 2009) rather than taking a systems-based approach.

While identities are constructed on the basis of the self in its psychological sense, they emphasise how the situated self relates to surrounding social contexts (Mercer 2011). Thus, an identity approach to language learning motivation as a sociological construct can contribute to understanding how such motivation is linked to language learners' situated experiences in particular sociocultural environments (Norton 2013; Ushioda 2009, 2011). Norton's (2013) notion of investment is one such example at the intersection of motivation and identity research. There have been discussions of identities in multilingualism (e.g. Block 2006; Miller and Kubota 2013) that take social contexts into consideration, but most are based on studies of migrants and few have touched upon language learning motivation. Discussions of transition between secondary education and tertiary education are also scarce in the motivation literature (Oshima and Harvey 2017). As is shown in Oshima and Harvey's (2017) study, how individual language learners perceive language learning and its relevance to themselves as people can play an important role in language learning motivation, especially during the period of transition to tertiary education. Therefore, in this paper, we set out to explore language learners' experiences at the intersection of motivation and identity in the context of multilingual learning at university. The multilingual identity perspective is in line with the research task set by Norton and De Costa (2018) to consider multilingual identity in the

context of globalisation, and the suggestion given by Barakos and Selleck (2019) to more critically examine multilingual speakers as specific social actors. In this paper, we see identity as being multiple, fluid and situated (Miller and Kubota 2013) and define multilingual identity as the perceived relationship between people's socially situated sense of their current and future selves and the languages in their expanding linguistic repertoire, based on Block's (2006) definition of language identity.

Since identity and motivation are social constructs situated in different layers of contexts and influenced by ideological discourses (Miller and Kubota 2013; Ushioda 2017), we give a brief contextualisation of the study here. Despite some humanistic and ethical approaches towards foreign language learning in the field of SLA (e.g. Clarke and Hennig 2013; Ros i Solé 2016), the instrumentalist discourses of language learning seem to dominate in language learning and teaching (Ushioda 2017). This is indeed the case with foreign language education in China. English is the most extensively learned and used foreign language in China (Gil and Adamson 2011) and it is ascribed instrumental and pragmatic value in discourses at social and individual levels (Lam and Wang 2008; O'Sullivan 2016; Pan 2011). This instrumentalist approach is also prevalent in the expanding education in languages other than English (LOTEs) (Han, Gao and Xia 2019). Meanwhile, Japanese learning has been researched against the backdrop of rising nationalism in China with the historical and political contentions between China and Japan playing a part in such sentiments (e.g. Teo et al. 2019; Wang and Zheng 2019). Other issues of relevance in foreign language education in China include the unequal access to resources, especially between 'rich coastal provinces and poor inland provinces as well as urban and rural areas' (Gil and Adamson 2011: 39–40) and the dominant role of English as a gatekeeper for education and career progression and its influence on the learning of LOTEs (Gil and Adamson 2011; Wang and Zheng 2019).

Situated in the research background outlined above, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: How do language learners experience identity tensions in multilingual learning?
RQ2: How is their motivation influenced by their identity experiences in multilingual learning?

Methodology

This study draws on research data from a larger longitudinal dataset collected as part of the first author's doctoral research in progress. The doctoral research aims to investigate learners' personal perceptions or evaluations of languages (which can provide insights into identity, see Forbes et al. 2021 in this issue) and their motivational trajectories in their multilingual learning. The participants of the project are nineteen Chinese undergraduate students attending different universities in Shanghai who are simultaneously learning Japanese and English, majoring in the former. They were aged between 18 and 20 at the start of data collection in September 2018. The first author approached and recruited the participants as their teachers' acquaintance. She has not been involved in any teaching in the universities and has stayed in regular and friendly contact with the participants. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the project and signed a consent form. One limitation of the data collection is that the students volunteered to participate and there is some risk of self-selection bias in the data. Another is that the main data collection lasted for ten months and did not go beyond one year, which is one common constraint of doctoral studies (Lamb 2018).

In this paper, we selected five participants for the purpose of providing in-depth and varied insights into the research topic (Dörnyei 2007). The five participants' basic information is provided in the table below. Participants were invited to choose their own pseudonyms which are used in this paper to protect their privacy. It is noteworthy that all of the five participants, except Cheng Yuanyi, failed to enter their first choice degree programme and were then allocated to a programme lower on their list of choices.

A qualitative and interpretive research design was adopted to generate detailed first-person accounts of identity and language learning experiences (Duff 2017), and a person-in-context relational view of motivation (Ushioda 2009) was adopted in the research design to help elucidate the relationship between motivation and language learners' situated experiences (another important aspect of identity). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the main data collection method, accompanied with monthly online communication. In the interviews, the participants were asked to plot their motivational ups and downs on a blank graph and elaborate on their drawing. This 'motigraph' task has been found useful to elicit language learners' narratives in some previous studies (e.g. Henry 2015). Follow-up questions were asked when opportunities arose. In order to explore the experiences and perceptions of language learners as persons-in-contexts, the participants were also asked about their language choice, language learning experience, perceptions of languages and life plans (see the Appendix for the interview prompts).

Interviews were conducted in both the first author's and the participants' first language – Mandarin Chinese – audio – recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Table 1 for interview details). Transcripts were read several times for emerging themes with a focus on the contexts that the language learners were situated in, as is suggested by the person-in-context view (Ushioda 2009). The themes were compared and modified within each case and across cases; the preliminary themes were degree requirements, tests, extracurricular events, teachers, peers, cultural contact, family, language status and national allegiance. From analysis of the preliminary themes, three identity-related tensions emerged, which relate to participants' identities as university students in transition and majoring in Japanese, as non-locals in Shanghai, and as Chinese nationals. Selected representative extracts were carefully read through and discussed by us to negotiate and refine our interpretations. The extracts presented in this paper were translated by the first author and discussed with the second and third authors to ensure the reliability of the translation.

The next section will elaborate on and exemplify the students' process of negotiating their language-related identities in times of tension and its influence on their language learning motivation. It will then link the students' resolution of these identity tensions to their developing perceptions of languages and motivational trajectories.

Table 1. Summary of participant information[a].

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Place of permanent residence	University	First choice programme	Interview date DD/MM/YY	Interview length	Chinese character count (interview and communication data)
Xiao A	Female	Chongqing Municipality City	U1	English	09/09/2018 01/03/2019 04/06/2019	32 mins 54 mins 67 mins	29,825 characters
Island Owner	Female	Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province	U5	Chinese	23/09/2018 02/03/2019 14/06/2019	53 mins 54 mins 68 mins	73,608 characters
Cheng Yuanyi	Male	Shenyang, Liaoning Province	U2	Japanese	28/09/2018 22/03/2019 17/06/2019	65 mins 81 mins 80 mins	42,053 characters
QQ	Female	Ganzhou, Shanxi Province	U5	English	19/10/2018 08/03/2019 21/06/2019	65 mins 61 mins 62 mins	27,341 characters
Xiaotang	Female	Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province	U4	Chinese	20/10/2018 17/03/2019 07/07/2019	85 mins 59 mins 53 mins	34,298 characters

[a]There are regional differences in university application processes across China, but in general, high school graduates complete an ordered list of preferences of their intended universities and programmes. Whether they are accepted depends on their scores in the National College Entrance Exam.

Findings

We will present our findings in terms of the three identity-related tensions identified in the participants' multilingual learning experiences. As will be discussed below, multilingual learning has the potential to bring about identity tensions for learners when ideological discourses surrounding languages conflict with learners' individual orientations to language and language learning. Learners then attempt to resolve the tensions by adjusting their perceptions of and relations with languages. In the analysis that follows, we adopt the term 'orientation' to capture the interrelationship between learners' perceptions of the ideological discourses surrounding the languages they study and their own individual motivations to learn the language.

Negotiating identity tensions in multilingual learning

In the process of multilingual learning, students seem to experience language-related tensions in relation to different social identities and need to negotiate these tensions, which in turn influences how their motivation evolves.

Tensions between identities as a Chinese national and as a Japanese major

As mentioned previously, nationalism appears to be increasing in China (Teo et al. 2019). Situated in such a macro context, students sense potential tensions between their identities as Chinese nationals and as Japanese majors, influenced by the social and educational discourses to which they have been exposed in this context. Cheng Yuanyi gave a retrospective account of his attitudes towards Japan in junior high school: 'I received Communist education, grew up under the red flag and learned about the history of Japan's invasion and extremely loathed Japan' and 'I was a very patriotic person. In junior high, I didn't touch Japanese at all. Nor Japanese products or anime'. As discussed below, when he later developed an interest in Japanese and applied to major in it at university, he got comments like 'You have better options, why Japanese? You are betraying our country'. As is shown, learning Japanese – a language whose use is mainly limited to Japan which has ongoing disputes with China over history and territory – is perceived to be in conflict with identification as a Chinese national. Cheng Yuanyi previously avoided this identity tension by making a conscious choice not to learn Japanese, while some of his peers in junior high school were learning Japanese out of interest in Japanese anime. At that time, he assigned great importance to his identity as a patriotic Chinese national, did not consider becoming a learner of Japanese as an option and was thus not motivated to learn Japanese at all. In this way, nationalistic discourse vis-à-vis Japan militated against the emergence of motivation to study Japanese despite increasing popularity amongst peers (Teo et al. 2019). Such a phenomenon is not uncommon amongst learners in the wider dataset, especially at the beginning of their study.

Later, when he felt lonely in the new environment in senior high school, Cheng Yuanyi started watching Japanese anime such as *Akame ga Kill!* and *Yoguga no Sora*. From the 'horizon-broadening' anime, he gained more understanding of and developed some affinity towards Japan and its society: he got to know the 'Japanese way of thinking and creative writing', felt 'attracted and led' by the idea that Japan is 'a free and confident country' and wanted to live there some day. As his interest in Japanese anime and Japan as a whole increased, there came an increase in his motivation to learn Japanese, 'After my contact with anime, I started to be interested in it … Then I started to take the initiative to learn the language'. What happened in parallel with his increasing interest in Japanese was his decreasing sense of identity as a patriotic Chinese national. He indicated his dissatisfaction with the Chinese school system and society in general in senior high school:

(1) I was not happy with the school system. I was not happy with classes. I was not happy that I didn't have freedom … I was a cynic … I wanted to find a way of living that I looked forward to. (Cheng Yuanyi)

He wanted to leave China and Japan became his target country, as he was exposed to Japanese cultural products during that period. In accordance with such an attitudinal shift and increase in language learning motivation, the aforementioned identity tensions effectively dissipated. He even chose to become a Japanese major in his university application and later at university submitted a piece of writing on the relations between China and Japan to a Japanese composition contest. His main point in this piece of writing was that 'cultural resonance is more helpful than economy and technology in the development of China–Japan relations'. For Cheng Yuanyi, the previous nationalistic sentiments seemed to have been replaced by increasing empathy and a desire to promote intercultural understanding as his Japanese learning continued.

While contact with Japanese culture and language helped mediate identity tensions in Cheng Yuanyi's case, Xiaotang held a negative view towards fans of Japanese anime and learners of Japanese even after she started learning Japanese as her major. She was uncomfortable with what she perceived as excessive attraction to the cultural other: 'Many people learn Japanese because they like Japanese anime. I think they are a bit xenocentric'. In view of broader social discourses centred on tensions between China and Japan, such investment in Japanese culture appeared to be irreconcilable with the maintenance of a firm identity as a Chinese national. She was involuntarily positioned as a Japanese major, as Japanese was not among her first choices on her university application. When faced with the seemingly contradictory positions as a Japanese major and as a Chinese national, she chose to stress her national identity and positioned herself in contradistinction to learners around her that appeared to experience an excessive affinity towards Japanese culture. Also, she appealed to discourses of language learning according to which learning Japanese is a way to serve the ideological purpose of 'construction of national self-interest' (Pan 2011). As advocated in foreign language education policies in China, she declared 'I am learning Japanese for China':

> (2) I don't like anime. Nor am I attracted by Japan. I just want to know its relations with China. My ultimate goal is to find out why it could surpass and invade China in such a short time. I kind of want to look into it and make our nation prosper. (Xiaotang)

Ideologically aligning herself in this way allowed her to resolve the tension between being a proud Chinese citizen and a Japanese major.

Meanwhile, due to the perceived linguistic affinity in that 'Japanese language is copied from China. Japanese writing comes from China', Xiaotang got a 'sense of familiarity and curiosity' which also helped facilitate the resolution of the tension. Later, as her Japanese learning progressed, her childhood dream to be able to speak multiple languages was evoked and she gained self-confidence and constructed a desirable self-image as a 'cool' multilingual speaker:

> (3) It (being a multilingual speaker) has enhanced my self-confidence. I used to think that I knew nothing and didn't know much, but now I can tell people that I speak Japanese and I think I am cool. I think my existence is meaningful and of value. About my future career development, I think it had provided me with more thoughts. (Xiaotang)

Thus, Xiaotang experienced a gradual internal shift as her desire to simply learn Japanese for the instrumental purpose of finding knowledge to strengthen China was partly attenuated by genuine curiosity about the properties of the language and realisation of the symbolic value of being seen as multilingual in the national context.

Tensions from identity as a non-local FL learner in metropolitan Shanghai

After commencing study in Shanghai, the students from provincial areas became acutely aware that they had been relatively disadvantaged in terms of access to resources for learning foreign languages compared to their Shanghainese peers. This brought about identity tensions for them as they sought to adjust to university life in Shanghai and integrate with local students. When asked if she was satisfied with her English proficiency at the beginning of her university life, QQ said that her level of English was not sufficient in Shanghai:

(4) Since I came to Shanghai, I've realised I am very bad at English, but what can I say, this is closely related to the locality and resources, because my home city is not as well developed and I don't have as much contact. (QQ)

As can be seen from the above extract, she attributed her relatively low level of English to her lack of contact with English. By 'contact', she meant 'opportunities to use English' and 'exposure to an English-speaking environment'. Perceptions of gaps are not limited to English only. Similarly, on the topic of Japanese, QQ commented that, 'My Shanghainese classmates know about Japan quite well and some are fans of Japanese idols, but I don't know anything'. Shanghainese students may also have a head start in learning Japanese at school, as mentioned by another student, Island Owner:

(5) I am from a 32nd-tier small city and live on an island. The island is quite remote and it is difficult for foreign cultures to get in. Just joking. Well, educational resources are less advanced. Probably some high schools in Shanghai offer Japanese as a course. (Island Owner)

With such perceptions of disparity in foreign language learning resources, the non-local students seemed to separate themselves from their Shanghainese counterparts and position themselves at a disadvantaged starting point in their foreign language learning journey. In this way, their perceptions reinforced their identity as non-Shanghai foreign language learners and caused some initial frustration. However, there was some ambivalence within the students' sense of identity as being non-local in metropolitan Shanghai. While negatively comparing themselves with their peers and feeling disadvantaged as foreign language learners in Shanghai, they generally held a positive attitude towards Shanghai and reinforced their agentive choice to pursue their degree in Shanghai: 'I am here for Shanghai the city, not for the university or for the major' and 'I want to live a life in a big city' (Island Owner); 'I wanted to come to Shanghai', as 'I've always liked Shanghai, because it is international' (QQ). The greater presence of foreign languages, English in particular, is one common feature of the metropolitan city that they aspired to live in. Xiaotang commented that 'Especially in such a big city as Shanghai, many people speak English when you go out'. Thus, their ambivalence was demonstrated by their wanting to be 'a part' of Shanghai while 'feeling apart' as non-local (Block 2007). They see Shanghai as a highly cosmopolitan place with abundant 'resources' for foreign language learning, while experiencing psychological distance from this notion of Shanghai.

The tension from the ambivalence in their non-Shanghai identity did not play a demotivating role in the students' foreign language learning; instead, the students resolved the identity tension and were motivated to work harder. In Island Owner's case, she perceived the gaps to be 'a realistic constraint' and 'the objective situation makes me aware of my deficiency', so she wanted 'to work harder to narrow the gaps'. QQ also realised that 'the gaps can be gradually narrowed', after coming to notice that 'some Shanghainese classmates are not as good at English' as she had expected and she thought that the one advantage that her local peers did have was that they had had earlier contact with Japanese.

The non-local students had been prepared to experience such gaps in foreign language learning when they moved to Shanghai, which may partly explain why they were able to overcome any struggles quite quickly. The resources previously perceived accessible only to local students then became affordances in the eyes of the non-local students. QQ stated: 'I want to have access to more resources' and 'make use of as many resources as I can here'. Meanwhile, as they pursued their language learning in Shanghai, the students were constantly recalibrating their perceptions of the gaps according to their own observations. They came to realise that the actual gap between themselves and the Shanghai students was less dramatic than earlier thought, which led to the conviction that the remaining distance could be conquered. This refinement in perception was accompanied by an increasing sense of self-belief and agency, thus reducing the psychological distance between them and the students from Shanghai. The learners dealt with their initial sense of inferiority by reflecting on the consequentiality of their own choices and making efforts to agentively exploit the newly available resources in the environment to narrow the gap. In this sense, their self-

identification as non-metropolitans and initial sense of alienation from Shanghai students served to enhance their awareness of the affordances for development as a language learner and cosmopolitan citizen within their new context and worked as a source of motivation (Simon 2004).

Tensions arising from identity as a university student of languages in transition

Starting university can be a stressful period for first-year students, especially for those moving to another city to start their study (Oshima and Harvey 2017), because the changes in their social and educational environment may bring challenges to how they see their current and future selves (Mercer 2011). At a fundamental level, the students saw university as a transition that prepares them for their future. It was when they began their studies that potentially conflicting discourses on the purpose of language learning came to prominence within learners' consciousness, leading to identity tensions as students attempted to reconcile these conflicting discourses.

In the dataset, participants indicated clear awareness of instrumentalist discourses of language learning in which the pursuit of linguistic capital is motivated by the potential for material gain or general advancement in life (Pan 2011; Ushioda 2017). The students perceived that they, as language learners at university, were socially expected to use the language for instrumental purposes associated with their future career and education. For example, Island Owner commented that, 'people tend to think that if you master the language well, it will be easier for you to find a good job'. Similarly, Xiaotang commented on the potential implications of not achieving good results in learning Japanese:

> (6) If I don't learn Japanese well, there will be many undesirable consequences. My GPA will be low; I won't get a scholarship; it won't be easy for me to get a good job or get into a postgraduate programme. Everything will be undesirable. (Xiaotang)

Although learning Japanese was their major task at university, no less importance was attached to English by the students and their social milieu: 'English is a compulsory competence for people in the twenty-first century … it is a must-have' (Xiaotang) and 'people around me all think learning English well is a prerequisite to establish yourself in the society' (Xiao A). The students were aware that English works as a gatekeeper in their future education and career (Gil and Adamson 2011). It is important to point out that students' recognition of instrumentalist goals of language learning here is not within the context of their own personal motivations per se, but is more closely tied to their perception of the need to meet the expectations of society. In other words, students felt that it was part of their social role obligation as university students (Huang, Hsu and Chen 2015) to work hard on foreign language learning and get a good job or pursue further education afterwards.

However, such instrumentalist discourses of language learning brought about strong identity tensions for some students. Upon matriculation into university, Xiao A had a difficult time adapting to university life and finding her place and had low motivation to learn. After attending a few talks at university, she learned about her university's strong 'humanistic and idealistic atmosphere'. She adopted a more humanistic view of higher education, taking the position that 'undergraduate education should aim to cultivate a whole person', while some of her student peers were, in her words, learning 'a language for its instrumentality'. She extended her humanistic understanding of education to language learning. She believed that 'a language provides a different perspective' and associated language learning with literature reading:

> (7) I just feel that I am different from others in how I look at the world. I am not too instrumental a person. I think literature makes you a more profound person. That's the benefit of learning languages and reading literature. (Xiao A)

In Xiao A's view, she was offered two seemingly opposing views of learning at the social and institutional levels – the instrumentalist and the humanistic views – and she decided that she identified more with the latter. Pursuing self-development and self-understanding made her feel distinctive from her peers and her initial sense of confusion and loss as a newcomer at university was gone.

With current exposure to intensive Japanese study, she looked forward to the day when she could 'get into the world of Japanese literature' and 'appreciate Japanese literary works', although she felt most comfortable reading Chinese literature for the time being. As 'the change of my state of mind influences the change of my motivation a lot', she was more motivated to learn English and Japanese after she made up her mind and her motivations remained relatively stable.

Island Owner's experience of identity tension resolution as a university student followed a more fluctuating trajectory. She shared her apprehension at the start of her university studies, which stemmed from unfavourable attitudes towards foreign language learning in her social milieu back home:

> (8) People around me don't think learning a foreign language as a major is a good idea. They think a language is something to minor in. It is just a tool. If you specialise in it and want to find a job, it is not highly instrumental. I didn't know much about this, so I was a bit discouraged in the beginning. (Island Owner)

She reinforced this view, saying 'one common bias among the public against majoring in a foreign language is that it is not of high instrumentality and that it only works as a tool'. Learning a foreign language as a major was not seen as a desirable option for university students by Island Owner's family and friends and, thus, she felt uneasy before she started university. Her uneasiness was relieved by a departmental talk where faculty members and alumni were invited to give talks about the curriculum design and career prospects: 'I learned that if I am interested in business, for instance, if I learn Business Japanese well and get a related certificate, then in the future I can seek employment in this direction', and 'the alumnus from Japanese department is working in an advertisement company … He said he works with many Japanese brands and promotes them in China … It seems that he has great benefits and his company is nice'. Her department's emphasis on the instrumental value of Japanese in the future workplace helped her cope with the less favour- able outside comments on her identity as a Japanese major at university. Apart from the tension between the institutional stress on the instrumental value of Japanese and the public criticism of its lack of such value, Island Owner was also faced with another tension between her personal emphasis on intrinsic motivation and the institutional and societal instrumentalist focus. While 'people tend to think the instrumental function of language is more important than the spiritual and idealistic gains from learning', she believed that 'the ideal state is to do what you are interested in and be motivated to do it'. For her, learning and speaking multiple languages helps learners 'get out of your comfort zone' and makes them 'willing to learn and know about the world' and become 'less biased and more tolerant'. As she did not get into the degree programme of her first choice, she still struggled as a Japanese major and compared her being in the programme to being forced into an 'arranged marriage' with obligations that she had to fulfil. At first, she wanted to transfer to study Chinese, her original first choice. During her preparation, she worked hard on English as a part of the transfer exam and avoided Japanese as much as she could, so that she could pursue her desired future self with 'cultural interests'. At this time point, her comment on herself being a multilingual speaker was as follows:

> (9) The first thing for sure is the contact with different cultures. The second is that it is absolutely convenient to travel around and read literature. I am more advantaged than others. Also, I feel that it is my asset. (Island Owner)

After her failed attempt to transfer, she shifted from the more humanistic view to a more instrumen- talist view by adapting to the institutional discourse which was in alignment with the broader picture: 'I have new motivation to learn Japanese now – the pay is good'. Some time later in follow-up communication, she seemed to have developed a more balanced stance: 'I think my motivation is a combination of my internal power and external motivation, but I think the former is more important than the latter'. Island Owner's oscillation between instrumentalist and humanistic views of language learning is an important part of her motivational trajectory, resonating with Gan's (2009) insights regarding the potentially powerful influence of institutional and social discourses on students' attitudes and motivations.

Discussion

The previous section has revealed some of the complex ways in which language learners' multilingual identity interacts with language learning motivation. As defined previously in this paper, multilingual identity is an overarching concept that revolves around the learners' socially situated sense of self in relation to their expanding linguistic repertoire as a whole. The process of multilingual learning raises key questions for language learners in terms of how they see the significance of language learning in relation to their existing and emerging identities. Learners' motivations to learn individual languages are highly dependent on their perceptions of the individual characteristics and relative value of particular languages, which are interpreted with reference to ideological discourses within the macro (national), meso (institutional), and micro context (group), as well as learners' own sense of identity positioning within these contexts. In line with existing understandings of the situated nature of language learning motivation and the importance of understanding the learner as a whole person (e.g. Ushioda 2009), learners' accounts foreground the dynamic nature of language-related identity tensions that surface for participants during multilingual learning and the ways learners mobilise their interpretive resources to make agentive decisions about their language learning and individual identities.

At a fundamental level, the language learning motivation of the participants in this study is calibrated according to two main orientations: an instrumental orientation and a humanistic orientation. The instrumental orientation is essentially associated with the pursuit of goals vis-à-vis the outside world, though we will highlight some important distinctions. On the one hand, an instrumental orientation can be seen as a reflection of the mainstream ideological discourses within the national context that stress the value of a foreign language for securing better educational and career prospects (Ushioda 2017). This is also in line with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) original conception of instrumental motivation as 'a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language' (Gardner and Lambert 1972: 14). This applies to both English and LOTEs (Han et al. 2019; Pan 2011) in different ways due to the different status of languages in the macro context of the nation and the global linguistic marketplace. English is considered as an essential skill in today's globalised world. In the context of this study, Japanese is seen as a skill to be acquired in the degree programme and to gain a competitive edge in the market and the participants were exposed to such a language discourse due to their identities as Japanese majors at university. Thus, the instrumental orientation manifests in terms of learners' perception of these languages as potentially constituting linguistic capital at two different sociolinguistic scales: the global and the regional (Blommaert 2012).

Meanwhile, an instrumental orientation surfaces in a noticeably distinct way within the context of students' consideration of the individual-social nexus of identity relations. Here, the study of particular foreign languages can constitute a resource for bolstering one's sense of identity as a Chinese national, as long as the emotional investment in the language remains oriented towards pursuit of the national interest. However, as was the case with Xiaotang, when a learner begins to feel affinity for the language itself, this gives birth to an identity tension that requires conscious attention to resolve. For other students, recognition of the instrumentalist discourses of language learning in the broader social sphere is important not only within the context of their own personal motivations per se, but also in terms of the importance they ascribe to meeting societal expectations. In other words, students felt that it was part of their social role obligation as university students (Huang et al. 2015) to work hard on foreign language learning and get a good job or pursue further education afterwards, even when Japanese was not their preferred subject for their degree. In this sense, instrumental motivation is situated within a nexus of human relations strongly influenced by Confucian ethics, insofar as success in society has a symbolic function in relation to one's family and wider relational networks. The learners' significant others work as mediators between their individual values and attitudes and the macro social discourses.

While looking outward at their positions in the society, the language learners also look inward at their self-development and personal growth. In other words, the learners' language learning motivation has a humanistic orientation influenced by the following perception of language: they see a language as a means to access different cultures and perspectives, and as an opportunity to get out of one's comfort zone, and see language learning as possibilities for and a means to self-cultivation and self-transformation particularly with regard to personal moral and ethical aspects (Clarke and Hennig 2013; Ros i Solé 2016). Within the humanistic orientation, language learners value the 'cultural function' (Lam and Wang 2008) and 'identity potential' (Ros i Solé 2016) of languages. This humanistic orientation in language learning emerges in their formal or informal multilingual learning experiences, where there is exposure to popular cultural products, literature and other cultural and linguistic knowledge and where identity tensions are involved.

In his contact with Japanese anime and later Japanese language, Cheng Yuanyi was engaged in challenging his partial perceptions of and developing a more comprehensive view of Japan and then showed his intercultural understanding. This indicates the importance of language learning in enhancing intercultural understanding especially in times of conflicts (Teo et al. 2019). Xiao A started to see literature in different languages, including foreign languages, as a means to enhance self-understanding and ethical awareness (O'Sullivan 2016). Xiaotang demonstrated her awareness of her boosted self-confidence in the process of Japanese learning and commented on becoming a multilingual speaker as 'cool' – similar to some participants in Wang and Zheng's (2019) study. The positive horizon-broadening, perspective-gaining and self-transforming experiences perceived by language learners help them understand themselves better and become, in their own words, 'willing to learn and know about the world' and 'less biased and more tolerant'. For learners in this study, the humanistic value of language learning is a feature that comes to their attention and has the potential to enrich their motivation.

Language learners develop their motivational orientations as persons with multiple identities under the influence of ideological discourses and agentively regulate their motivation, especially when they experience demotivation due to tensions within an identity or between identities. The humanistic orientation may be perceived by some learners to be in conflict with the instrumental orientation. The perceived conflictual relationship between the two orientations gives rise to identity tensions. For example, Island Owner used to feel, as a university student majoring in Japanese, the tension between her own humanistic orientation and the institutional and societal instrumentalist and pragmatic focus. However, the two motivational orientations are not always in opposition or mutually exclusive as can be seen in Island Owner's oscillation between the two. The orientations can develop and co-exist in harmony as the learners negotiate their identity tensions. Xiaotang and Island Owner's descriptions of their multilingual identity in extracts (3) and (9) respectively showcase the incorporation of both instrumental and humanistic orientations. Language learners come to construct favourable and abstract images of themselves as multilinguals that are motivating. Also, such images are not always language-specific; rather, they can involve all or some of the languages in their expanding linguistic repertoire. In this sense, the identity images share some overlap with interpretations of the multilingual self by Ushioda (2017) and Henry (2017). However, such images are formed and/or developed in learners' multilingual learning under the influence of different ideological language discourses, which has not received significant attention in previous interpretations.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to bring attention to the intersection of identity and motivation in multilingualism. By presenting learners' experience of their multilingual identities and identity tensions as they engage in multilingual learning, we have demonstrated the importance of considering the influence of ideological discourses present in layers of social contexts on language learning motivation. Meanwhile, our discussion of how learners develop a personalised view of language learning and a personalised image of themselves as multilinguals has implications for future research on

multilingualism and motivation. It suggests adopting an integrative understanding of language learning that regards motivation as a psychological as well as a sociological construct and that considers instrumental as well as humanistic orientations in learners' motivation. The participants' data from this study are also able to provide insights into the language learning experiences of students in transition from school to university and students who cannot opt out of language learning, and thus call for more research on these less studied populations. Finally, as acknowledged earlier, this study only tracked the participants' identity negotiations and motivational trajectories in their language learning for ten months due to time constraints, and hence a longer-term design would contribute more to research on the dynamics of multilingual identity and language learning motivation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Zi Wang http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3314-1099
Troy Mcconachy http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0556-6786
Ema Ushioda http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9240-6208

References

Barakos, E. and C. Selleck. 2019. Elite multilingualism: discourses, practices, and debates. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 40, no. 5: 361–374. DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2018.1543691.

Blommaert, J. 2012. *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Block, D. 2006. *Multilingual Identities in a Global City: London Stories*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Block, D. 2007. The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal* 91: 863–876.

Cenoz, J. 2013. Defining multilingualism. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33: 3–18. DOI: 10.1017/S026719051300007X.

Clarke, M. and B. Hennig. 2013. Motivation as ethical self-formation. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45, no. 1: 77–90.

Dörnyei, Z. 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duff, P.A. 2017. Commentary: motivation for learning languages other than English in an English-dominant world. *Modern Language Journal* 101, no. 3: 597–607.

Forbes, K., M. Evans, L. Fisher, A. Gayton, Y. Liu and D. Rutgers. 2021. Developing a multilingual identity in the languages classroom: the influence of an identity-based pedagogical intervention. *The Language Learning Journal* https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1906733.

Gan, Z. 2009. 'Asian leaners' re-examined: an empirical study of language learning attitudes, strategies and motivation among mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 30, no. 1: 41–58.

Gardner, R.C. and W.E. Lambert. 1972. *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Gil, J. and B. Adamson. 2011. The English language in mainland China: a sociolinguistic profile. In *English Language Education Across Greater China*, ed. A. Feng, 23–45. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Han, Y., X. Gao and J. Xia. 2019. Problematising recent developments in non-English foreign education in Chinese universities. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2019.157.1072.

Henry, A. 2015. The dynamics of L3 motivation: an interview/observation based study. In *Motivational Dynamics in Language Learning*, ed. Z. Dörnyei, P.D. MacIntyre and A. Henry, 315–342. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Henry, A. 2017. L2 motivation and multilingual identities. *Modern Language Journal* 101, no. 3: 548–565.

Huang, H-T., C-C. Hsu and S-W. Chen. 2015. Identification with social role obligations, possible selves and L2 motivation in foreign language learning. *System* 51: 28–38.

Lam, A.S. and W. Wang. 2008. Negotiating language value in multilingual China. In *Language as Commodity: Global Structures, Local Marketplaces*, ed. P.K.W. Tan and R. Rubdy, 146–170. London: Continuum.

Lamb, M. 2018. When motivation research motivates: issues in long-term empirical investigations. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching* 12, no. 4: 357–370.

May, S. 2014. Introducing the 'multilingual turn'. In *The Multilingual Turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and Bilingual Education*, ed. S. May, 1–6. New York, NY: Routledge.

Mercer, S. 2011. *Towards an Understanding of Language Learner Self-concept*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Miller, E.R. and R. Kubota. 2013. Second language identity construction. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, ed. J. Herschensohn and M. Young-Scholten, 230–250. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139051729.015.

Norton, B. 2013. *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Norton, B. and P.I. de Costa. 2018. Research tasks on identity in language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching* 51, no. 1: 90–112. DOI: 10.1017/S0261444817000325.

Oshima, R. and S. Harvey. 2017. The concept of learning Japanese: explaining why successful students of Japanese discontinue Japanese studies at the transition to tertiary education. *The Language Learning Journal* 45, no. 2: 153–170.

O'Sullivan, M. 2016. English literature education in Hong Kong, mainland China and Japan: student reception, utility and its place in a moral education. In *The Future of English in Asia: Perspectives on Language and Literature*, ed. M. O'Sullivan, D. Huddart and C. Lee, 240–257. Oxford: Routledge.

Pan, L. 2011. English language ideologies in the Chinese foreign language education policies: a world-system perspective. *Language Policy* 10: 245–263.

Ros i Solé, C. 2016. *The Personal World of the Language Learner*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Simon, B. 2004. *Identity in Modern Society: A Social Psychological Perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Teo, T, C.K.W. Hoi, X. Gao and L. Lv. 2019. What motivates Chinese university students to learn Japanese? Understanding their motivation in terms of 'posture'. *Modern Language Journal*. DOI: 10.1111/modl.12546.

Thompson, A.S. 2019. Motivation for formal learning of multiple languages. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Motivation for Language Learning*, ed. M. Lamb, K. Csizér, A. Henry and R. Stephen, 641–660. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ushioda, E. 2009. A person-in-context relational view of emergent motivation, self and identity. In *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*, ed. Z. Dörnyei and E. Ushioda, 215–228. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Ushioda, E. 2011. Language learning motivation, self and identity: current theoretical perspectives. *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 24, no. 3: 199–210. DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2010.538701.

Ushioda, E. 2017. The impact of global English on motivation to learn other languages: toward an ideal multilingual self. *Modern Language Journal* 101, no. 3: 469–482.

Ushioda, E. and Z. Dörnyei. 2017. Beyond global English: motivation to learn languages in a multicultural world: introduction to the special issue. *Modern Language Journal* 101, no. 3: 451–454.

Wang, Z. and Y. Zheng. 2019. Chinese university students' multilingual learning motivation under contextual influences: a multi-case study of Japanese majors. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2019.1628241.

Appendix. Interview prompts

1. Why did you choose Japanese as your major? (in the first interview)
2. How is your language learning going at university? (in all three interviews)
3. What do you think of the languages you speak/learn? (in all three interviews)
4. What do you think of your current language proficiencies? (in all three interviews)
5. What influence does being able to speak multiple languages have on you? (in all three interviews)
6. What are your plans for and after university? (in three interviews)
7. What do you think of your participation in the research? (in the last interview)