

***Lifelong Motivation and Foreign Language Learning: Perspectives from Later Life.*****Bérénice Darnault. Multilingual Matters, 2025. 272pp.****Reviewed by Amanda Gillis-Furutaka  
Professor Emerita, Kyoto Sangyo University**

I was glad to review this book because, being someone who is retired but still teaching and learning, it closely matches my personal and professional interests. It provides insights both into my current experiences of teaching a group of retired university professors and my own efforts to keep up and improve foreign languages I have learned throughout my life. Aside from those in similar situations to myself, the intended audience includes those researching motivation in language learning, gerontology, and positive psychology. For the benefit of readers of this journal, it should be pointed out that Darnault researched male and female subjects, but she does not address issues related to gender in language learning. Her focus is more centered on fluctuations in levels of motivation throughout a learner's lifespan and the factors that induce both high and low levels of focus and satisfaction, together with the influence of language learning practice on feelings of well-being in later adulthood.

This is a timely book for several reasons. Never have so many people enjoyed such long, healthy, and socially active lives. In fact, the world population of people over 65 now outnumbers the under 15 age group (World Health Organization, 2023, as cited on p. 1). Accordingly, there has been a change in research orientation in the fields of social sciences and second language acquisition (SLA) from a focus on vulnerabilities in old age and cognitive decline to the assets of advanced years, such as increased knowledge and cumulative experience (pp. 13–14). The author reflects this new direction by eschewing agist terms like 'senior', 'elderly', 'the aged', and using 'older learners', 'older adults', or 'individuals in later life' instead, while redressing the gap in SLA research into learners who belong to this category.

This book is an adapted PhD thesis and therefore not always relaxing to read. Most of it is very scholarly, but if you persevere, you can gain insights into Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, Directed Motivational Currents, and the role of positive psychology findings, all of which directly impacted me by improving my understanding of my students' and my own motivation to continue studying foreign languages. The focus of this study are Patricia (67), Georges (73), and Josette (81), three friends who participate in an English-language discussion group that meets monthly. They are French and have learned English throughout their lives. The goal of the study was to uncover the choices, strategies, and responses to challenges that have enabled them to achieve a high, stable level

of English, and to find the connections between their language learning practices and their feelings of well-being in later life. From a research perspective, this study shows how narrative data can provide information about motivation in language learning through the various factors that continuously interact and evolve. The author introduces concepts such as ‘motivational ecology’ and highlights the interconnectedness of individual behaviors, social influences, and environmental contexts which maintain long-term motivation and one’s emotional quality of life and wellness beyond retirement.

The book consists of five sections: Parts 1 & 2 – theoretical framework and literature review (comprehensive and informative); Part 3 – background to the field of narrative studies in Second Language Acquisition (of interest to qualitative researchers); Part 4 – the real-life stories of Darnault’s three research participants and an in-depth analysis (unsatisfactory – see below); Part 5 – overall interpretation and discussion of the stories and potential directions for future research (essential reading for a quick overview or to review). The author tells us that we can read the sections in any order, but recommends a chronological approach. However, burning with curiosity about the three exemplary older English language learners, I went straight from the Foreword to Part 4 where we are told with disappointing brevity the life story of each research subject. More details emerge when the author discusses data from the interviews she carried out with all three learners, but there seem to be gaps, especially in the stories of the two female subjects (who did Josette get engaged to and who was Patricia’s husband-to-be?) These were the first of my frustrations with this book.

The figures, graphs and diagrams are poorly reproduced from the original PhD thesis and very difficult to read. Thus, the reader often cannot check the information under discussion. For example, on pages 156 and 157, the print is too small or too faint to read easily and the figure on page 155 is totally illegible (i.e., it looks blank). This is true of the figures, graphs, and diagrams in the appendices as well as all those integrated into the text.

Another annoyance was a clear and confusing contradiction that I am astonished was not corrected. This occurs when the author provides a transcript from Georges’s explanation of the dual roots in his family history with an inventor on his mother’s side and a sportsman on his father’s side (p. 118). It directly follows an analysis of data Darnault generated with Georges (provided in a graphic in which the vital relevant words are illegible). She writes: “...while the father’s side of his family stimulated his intellectual curiosity, the mother’s side nurtured his appetite for physical training, strength and both mental and physical resilience” (p. 117). This may seem a trivial editing glitch, but

for me, such a mistake coupled with the fact that we cannot read the data provided undermines the credibility of the analysis.

A further frustration was with the large number of abbreviations used in the detailed discussions. I realized that I should have followed the author's recommendation of working my way through the book chronologically so that I would be familiar with the meanings of the abbreviations and the concepts being discussed. I made myself a crib list (cheat sheet) to refer to as I read this section, but in retrospect, I strongly recommend working one's way chronologically through the background literature and underlying theories that form the framework of this research project.

To sum up, this book is not an easy armchair read. I had to read a small section a day for several weeks, and make notes as I went, to recall the vast amount of information it contains. I will store these notes carefully for future reference! The takeaway is that language learning during later life, especially when carried out in a pleasurable social context, contributes to one's overall sense of well-being. This book is worthy of a place on a university library bookshelf because it contributes to filling the large gap in research into older adult learners and the different learning processes that operate at later stages of life. The author also answered a question that I am sure has occurred to us all: Why does time seem to pass more quickly as we grow older? There is an answer to this from findings in neuroscience, which I encourage you to investigate for yourselves through reading the original article by Adrian Bejan from the reference section. Please do read this fascinating article!

### ***References***

Bejan, A. (2019). Why the days seem shorter as we get older. *European Review*, 27(2), 187–194.  
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**Amanda Gillis-Furutaka** has a BA in French with German, an MA in TESOL, and a PhD in Music, and speaks five languages. She is a co-founder and the current President of Counterpoint, a social support network for long-term, non-Japanese residents in Japan. Since retiring from Kyoto Sangyo University in 2025, she volunteers on campus and teaches private classes.