

Chapter 18

Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self: Future Research Directions

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Introduction

The two editors of this volume have known and respected each other for many years, yet this anthology constitutes our very first direct co-operation. This is no accident: although we have always found common points in our overall thinking of L2 motivation, our specific research approaches could not have been further apart. Drawing on the traditions of quantitative social psychology, the majority of Dörnyei's work has focused on presumed motivational universals aggregated from large sample groups, whereas Ushioda was attracted right from the beginning to a situated, qualitative, interpretive approach, viewing motivation as part of the individual learner's thought processes. This book owes its existence to the fact that in it we found a common denominator: *identity* and the *self*. In Chapters 1, 2 and 11 we described in some detail the rather different avenues that had led us to this shared platform, and we are pleased to see that our views have also resonated with several other scholars in the field, as attested to by their contributions to this volume. It seems that motivation conceived as part of the learner's identity/self is a workable concept from several perspectives – we were indeed heartened by the wide range of theoretical paradigms represented in this volume that successfully accommodated motivational self issues.

In this concluding chapter we would like to concentrate on two topics that lie at the heart of much of the research reported in this book as well as our own thinking: (a) motivation conceived in terms of future self guides, as in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, and (b) a situated, dynamic view of motivation as expressed in Ushioda's 'person-in-context relational view' of emergent motivation.

Future Self-Guides and the L2 Motivational Self System

The language facets of the learners' ideal and ought-to selves have been seen in this volume as a primary motivational force because of the

learners' desire to bridge the gap between the actual self and their projected goal states. This motivational capacity has been acknowledged by most contributors to this volume and all the studies that attempted to operationalize the self system in some empirical way produced results that supported the claim that future self-guides are potent motivators. The quantitative studies by Al-Shehri (this volume), Csizér and Kormos (this volume), MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 10), Ryan (this volume) and Taguchi *et al.* (this volume) generated statistical evidence that add up to a powerful cumulative validity argument, and the investigations by Kim (this volume), Kubanyiova (this volume), Lamb (this volume) and White and Ding (this volume) have successfully used the possible selves lens to interpret the diverse situations they examined in their qualitative studies. These positive takes on the topic and the fact that aspects of the L2 Motivational Self System have been applied to such a wide variety of contexts indicate that this line of research has a great deal of future mileage in it; as MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 3) put it, 'The potential strength of the L2 Self formulation lies in its ability to map out new conceptual linkages by taking the Self as the starting point'.

Although possible selves theory is undoubtedly a powerful paradigm, it also raises a number of questions that will need to be addressed by future research. MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume) list several areas where cautions are warranted, although they kindly add that these 'arise primarily from the complexity of studying the self, rather than specifically from Dörnyei's (2005) L2 self system'. We agree that the points they raise are important, and we would like to contribute to their critical analysis by discussing six issues below that are specifically related to the L2 Motivational Self System:

- (1) The first broad issue concerns the *uniqueness* of the self-guides. The key question in this respect is whether learners have several different desired possible self images of themselves (as Markus and Nurius, 1986, assume) or only one broad ideal self with various facets (as Higgins, 1987, proposes). In either case, only future research can tell the extent to which alternative selves/self facets compete with each other and the consequences of any potential conflict of this type. With regard to the ought-to self, it is likely that the projected views of different authority figures in one's life show some diversity, so the question as to whether a certain degree of 'self harmony' is necessary or desirable to motivate effective learning behaviour is even more acute in such cases.
- (2) A second uncharted area concerns the temporal *evolution/change/development* of the future self-guides: how stable are the ideal and ought-to selves? They appear to be, by definition, fairly robust since

they concern self-images that are built up over a period of time, but until we have a clearer understanding of how they come into being and then evolve, we cannot make any strong claims in this respect. We will also need to find out more about the sources of change that can cause any substantial self developments, an issue that has obvious practical implications for motivational teaching. Finally, a related question is how we can conceive the concept of 'demotivation' (i.e. negative change) in self terms?

- (3) A third broad area that awaits future investigation both in SLA and mainstream psychology is the relationship between *emotions* and future self-guides. As MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume) point out, 'The emotions experienced are critical to understanding the motivational properties of possible selves... Emotions are fundamentally important motivators. Without a strong tie to the learner's emotional system, possible selves exist as cold cognition, and therefore lack motivational potency'. We fully agree with this claim and would also add that the imagery component of possible selves offers an obvious link with emotions, as one of the key roles of the sensation generated by experiential images is exactly to evoke emotional responses.
- (4) A fourth issue concerns the *relationship* between the ideal and the ought-to L2 selves, a question addressed at least partially by several contributors in this volume (e.g. Kim; Kubanyiova; White & Ding). As Dörnyei (this volume) argues, at the heart of the issue lies the question of the internalisation of external influences, which is a key concern in Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, as discussed in Chapter 15 by Noels. Because humans are inherently social beings, all their self-perceptions are originally socially grounded (i.e. they emerge in a continuous interaction with the social environment). Given this significant social influence, at what point in the internalisation process can we claim with confidence that a desired possible self is 'ideal', that is, fully owned by the learner, rather than 'ought-to', that is, imposed on the learner by others? We suspect that one way of addressing this question will involve concentrating on the imagery element that needs to accompany a fully-fledged ideal L2 self.
- (5) A fifth issue is related to any *cross-cultural variation* in the impact and/or composition of the L2 Motivational Self System. As MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 3) point out, past research has shown that the self in general is subject to a great deal of cross-cultural variation, and talking more specifically about the L2 Motivational Self System, Segalowitz *et al.* (this volume) state that there is a need to understand whether the different facets of 'ethnolinguistic language identity and of the L2 Motivation Self

System are specific to a language-learning context or whether at least some of these facets may be “universal”, common to a variety of language teaching and learning situations’. An indication of the complexity of this issue is offered by Taguchi *et al.* (this volume), who compared three Asian foreign language learning contexts and found that although the broad structure of the L2 Motivational Self System construct applied to all three examined environments, there were some salient differences in the weights of the components. In addition, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) demonstrated that in the cases of learners who are simultaneously engaged in the study of more than one L2, the multiple L2-specific ideal self images show some interference.

- (6) The sixth and final issue we would like to address is one that was also highlighted by MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 10): the question of operationalising the self system in *measurement* terms. This is clearly a key concern, because we can only use constructs in mainstream SLA research if we have reliable empirical measures of them. The particular significance of developing possible self indices has been stated by Markus & Ruvolo (1989) as follows:

To the extent that we can develop methods for measuring the degree of elaboration of a possible self, we should be able to predict performance more precisely than measures of level of aspiration or achievement motivation, which assess only one aspect of the individual’s orientation to the goal. (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989: 236)

As several studies in this volume (along with the attached instruments they used) prove, the various components of the L2 Motivational Self System lend themselves to self-report assessment. Scales of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves as well as the L2 learning experience have been administered to thousands of language learners of various ages, academic status and proficiency levels, and the results displayed good internal consistency reliability (as measured by Cronbach alphas). Thus, it is fair to conclude that the way the components of the L2 Motivational Self System have been operationalised and assessed meets the standards of scientific measurement in motivation research in general.

Having said that, we must also realise that there exist alternative ways of assessing future self-guides and at this point we cannot be certain as to which type of measure captures the essence of one’s future goal-oriented vision best. Talking about possible selves in psychology, Hoyle and Sherrill (2006: 1691) emphasised that ‘Unfortunately, operational definitions of the possible selves construct have not kept stride with the conceptual definition. There is neither a standard measure of possible selves, nor a standard index that is extracted from possible-selves

measures'. Indeed, in the studies reported in the literature we find a variety of indices of future self-guides; for example, some participants have been asked to simply list the possible selves relevant to them, while others rated or rank-ordered lists of possible selves they were given. Interestingly, closed-ended items of possible selves like the quantitative measures presented in this book have hardly ever been reported in the psychology literature, possibly because such items can only work with very specific target domains such as the language self. Furthermore, we cannot recall a single study which measured the imagery aspect of possible selves, and therefore Al-Shehri's (this volume) investigation is pioneering in this respect.

Motivation as a Situated, Dynamic and 'Person-in-Context Relational' Concept

As mentioned earlier, placing the self at the centre of our motivational thinking opens up a wide range of novel research directions. However, proposing a tripartite construct such as the L2 Motivational Self System runs the risk of ending up with a rather static category system that does not take into account sufficiently the process-oriented nature of motivation or the dynamic interaction between motivation and the social environment. This is in contrast with the central tendency in recent individual difference (ID) research in SLA, described by Dörnyei (2005) as follows:

The most striking aspect of nearly all the recent ID literature is the emerging theme of *context*: It appears that cutting-edge research in all these diverse areas has been addressing the same issue, that is, the situated nature of the ID factors in question. Scholars have come to reject the notion that the various traits are context-independent and absolute, and are now increasingly proposing new dynamic conceptualizations in which ID factors enter into some interaction with the situational parameters rather than cutting across tasks and environments. (Dörnyei, 2005: 218)

This is the point where the second main strand in this volume, the situated and dynamic conception of motivation at the level of the individual learner comes into its own. Ushioda (this volume) labelled this approach the 'person-in-context relational view' of motivation to outline a perspective that focuses on the intentional agency of real people embedded in an intricate and fluid web of social relations and multiple micro- and macro-contexts. She highlighted the complexity of the system and the non-linear relationships of the multiple contextual elements from which motivation emerges organically. Within this approach there are no clear-cut and predictable cause-effect relations because the emphasis is

on the complexity and idiosyncrasy of a person's motivational response to particular events and experiences in their life.

This individual-centred social approach offers a viable alternative to the group-based methodology that has traditionally dominated L2 motivation research and it is also in harmony with the broader 'social turn' in SLA research, which has been discussed extensively in a recent Focus Issue of *The Modern Language Journal* (Lafford, 2007). The intriguing question from our point of view, however, is whether there is a way of going beyond the somewhat 'schizophrenic' situation prevailing both in SLA and L2 motivation research, characterised by a range of contrasting dichotomies such as positivist-interpretive, quantitative-qualitative or cognitive-sociocultural. In other words, can we form bridges between the existing 'two parallel SLA worlds' (Zuengler & Miller, 2006) at least at the level of motivation research?

A real possibility for achieving such a convergence has been recently offered by the interrelated theoretical paradigms of dynamic systems theory, complexity theory and emergentism. These approaches concern the behaviour of complex systems that contain multiple interconnected components, and due to the manifold interacting influences, any development in such systems is characterised by a non-linear growth curve, displaying a contextually sensitive, moment-to-moment trajectory of change (for recent discussions within SLA, see for example, de Bot, 2008; de Bot *et al.*, 2007; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Hawkins, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; for a recent overview, see Dörnyei, *in press*). It does not require much justification that this description is in accordance with Ushioda's 'person-in-context relational view', and in a recent reconceptualisation of individual differences in dynamic system terms, Dörnyei (*in press*) has proposed that future self-guides can be seen as broad attractors with attractor basins that overlap cognitive, emotional and motivational domains. Thus, reframing language learning within a dynamic systems framework might potentially integrate the two strands of motivational thinking that underlie the material in this book. Moreover, such integration would further consolidate the growing synergy between our field of inquiry and mainstream SLA (see Chapter 1) by ensuring that L2 motivation research continues to keep pace with and contribute to new theoretical developments in SLA.

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