

2 Psychology matters

2.1 Motivation and the vision of knowing a second language

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'Motivation' is one of the most important concepts in psychology as motivation theories attempt to explain nothing less than *why humans behave and think as they do*. The notion is also of great importance in language education as it is one of the most common terms teachers and students use to explain what causes success or failure in learning. Indeed, motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate second/foreign (L2) learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process. Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement.

In this paper I describe a new approach to conceptualising motivation that is centred around the learner's *vision*; this approach and how it has emerged in L2 motivation research is described in more detail in a recent anthology (Dornyei and Ushioda 2009; see especially Dornyei 2009). Here I provide a brief overview, focusing mainly on the practical aspects of the theory. I start with a brief summary of the 'L2 Motivational Self System', which provides the theoretical link between motivation and vision, within a historical background.

Three phases of L2 motivation research

L2 motivation research has been a thriving area within applied linguistics with several books and literally hundreds of articles published on the topic during the past four decades. It is useful to divide this period into three phases:

- * *The social psychological period* (1959–1990), which was characterised by the work of social psychologist Robert Gardner and his students and associates in Canada (e.g. Gardner 1985; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). The best-known concepts stemming from this period were integrative and instrumental orientation/motivation, the former referring to the desire to learn an L2 of a valued community so that one can communicate with members of the community and sometimes even become like them, the latter to the concrete benefits that language proficiency might bring about (e.g. career opportunities, increased salary).
- * *The cognitive-situated period* (during the 1990s), which was characterised by work that drew on cognitive theories imported from educational psychology, mainly conducted outside Canada. The best-known concepts associated with this period were intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, attributions, self-confidence/efficacy and situation-specific motives related to the learning environment, e.g. motives related to the L2 course, teachers, peers. (For overviews, see Dornyei 2001b; Williams and Burden 1997.)

- * *New approaches* (past decade), which have been characterised by an interest in motivational change and in the relationship between motivation and identity. The best-known concepts originating in this period have been the process-oriented conceptualisation of motivation (Dornyei 2000, 2001b), motivation as investment (Norton 2000) and the concepts of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves, which will be described in detail below.

Motivation and the self

In 2005, I proposed a new approach to the understanding of L2 motivation (Dornyei 2005), conceived within an 'L2 Motivational Self System', which attempts to integrate a number of influential L2 theories (e.g. by Gardner 2001; Noels 2003; Norton 2001; Ushioda 2001) with findings of 'selfresearch' in psychology. This initiative was rooted in an important trend in self psychology: over the past two decades self theorists have become increasingly interested in the active, dynamic nature of the self-system—the 'doing' side of personality—thus placing the self at the heart of motivation and action (Cantor 1990). This dynamic self concept has created an intriguing interface between personality and motivational psychology.

Within the dynamic approach of linking the human self with human action, the notion of 'possible selves' offers one of the most powerful, and at the same time the most versatile, motivational self-mechanism, representing the individuals' ideas of what they *might* become, what they *would like to* become, and what they are *afraid of* becoming (Markus and Nurius 1986). Thus, possible selves involve a person's specific image of his or her self in future states. It needs to be stressed that possible selves are more than mere long-term goals or future plans in that they involve tangible *images* and *senses*. Accordingly, imagery is a central element of possible selves theory—if we have a well-developed possible future self, we can imagine this self in vivid, realistic situations. A good example of this imagery aspect is how athletes regularly imagine themselves completing races or stepping onto the winning podium in order to increase their motivation. As Markus and Nurius (1986) emphasise, possible selves are represented in the same imaginary and semantic way as the here-and-now self, that is, they are a *reality for* the individual: people can 'see' and 'hear' a possible self. (See also Ruvolo and Markus 1992.) Thus, in many ways possible selves are similar to *dreams* and *visions* about oneself.

Ideal selves, ought-to selves and the L2 Motivational Self System

From the point of view of education, one type of possible self, the *ideal self*, appears to be a particularly useful concept, referring to the representation of the characteristics that someone would ideally like to possess—i.e. a representation of hopes, aspirations or wishes. (See Higgins 1987, 1998.) It requires little justification that if someone has a powerful ideal self—for example a student envisions him/herself as a successful businessman or scholar—this self image can act as a potent self-guide, with considerable motivational power. This is expressed in everyday speech when we talk about someone following or living up to their dreams.

A complementary self-guide that has educational relevance is the *ought-to self*, referring to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess—i.e. representation

of someone's sense of personal or social duties, obligations or responsibilities. (See Higgins 1987, 1998.) This self-image is particularly salient in some Asian countries where students are often motivated to perform well to fulfil some family obligation or to bring honour to the family's name.

Ever since I first came across the concept of possible selves, and in particular the ideal and the ought-to selves, I have been convinced that these concepts would be highly useful for understanding the motivation to learn a foreign language. Having considered the theoretical implications of these ideas from an L2 perspective and having conducted some relevant empirical research, in 2005 I proposed (Dornyei 2005) a tripartite construct of L2 motivation that was made up of the following three components:

- * *Ideal L2 Self* which concerns the L2-specific facet of one's *ideal self*: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because we would like to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves.
- * *Ought-to L2 Self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess to *avoid* possible negative outcomes, and which therefore may bear little resemblance to the person's own desires or wishes.
- a *L2 Learning Experience*, which concerns situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the positive impact of success or the enjoyable quality of a language course).

(For more details on the evolution of this model, see Dornyei 2009, in press.) Thus, the L2 Motivational Self System covers the internal desires of the learner, the social pressures exercised by significant or authoritative people in the learner's environment and the actual experience of being engaged in the learning process.

Conditions for the motivating capacity of the ideal and ought-to selves

While future self-guides such as the ideal and the ought-to selves provide incentive, direction and impetus for action in order to reduce the discrepancy between the desired selves and the actual self, past research has shown that the motivational capacity of these future self-guides is not automatic but depends on a number of conditions. Accordingly, the Ideal L2 Self is an effective motivator only if:

- * the learner *has* a desired future self-image;
- * which is *elaborate* and *vivid*;
- * which is perceived *plausible* and is in harmony—or at least does not clash—with the expectations of the learner's family, peers and other elements of the social environment;
- * which is *regularly activated* in his/her working self-concept;
- * which is accompanied by relevant and effective *procedural strategies* that act as a *roadmap* towards the goal;
- * which also contains *elaborate* information about the *negative consequences* of *not* achieving the desired end-state.

These conditions offer a useful framework for developing some practical implications of motivation theory: designing methods and strategies to realise these conditions in the language classroom can form the basis of an effective programme for introducing a motivational teaching practice.

Generating and enhancing a vision for language learning

Motivational strategies have received attention in applied linguistics for several decades and a comprehensive collection of practical motivating techniques has been offered by Dörnyei (2001a), covering a wide range of issues from classroom management and task presentation to student self-motivation. However, the approach discussed below opens up a whole new avenue for promoting student motivation by means of increasing the elaborateness and vividness of self-relevant imagery in the students. That is, the approach suggests that an effective way of motivating learners is to create in them an *attractive vision* of their ideal language self. This motivational programme consists of six components, which are described below.

Construction of the Ideal L2 Self: creating the vision

The (obvious) prerequisite for the motivational capacity of future self-guides is that they *need to exist*. Therefore, the first step in a motivational intervention that follows the self approach is to help learners to construct their Ideal L2 Self—that is, to *create an L2-related vision*. The term ‘constructing’ the Ideal L2 Self is, in fact, not entirely accurate because it is highly unlikely that any motivational intervention will lead a student to generate an ideal self out of nothing—the realistic process is more likely to involve *awareness raising* about and *guided selection* from the multiple aspirations, dreams, desires, etc. that the student has already entertained in the past. Thus, igniting the vision involves increasing the students' mindfulness about the significance of the ideal self in general and guiding them through a number of possible selves that they have entertained in their minds in the past, while also presenting some powerful role models to illustrate potential future selves.

Imagery enhancement: strengthening the vision

Even if a desired self image exists, it may not have a sufficient degree of elaborateness and vividness to be an effective motivator. Methods of imagery enhancement have been explored in several areas of psychological, educational and sport research in the past, and the techniques of *creative* or *guided imagery* can be utilised to promote ideal L2 self images and thus to *strengthen the students' vision*. (For reviews and resources, see for example, Berkovits 2005; Fezler 1989; Gould *et al.* 2002; Hall *et al.* 2006; Horowitz 1983; Leuner *et al.* 1983; Singer 2006; Taylor *et al.* 1998). Undoubtedly, further research is needed in applied linguistics to review the imagery enhancement techniques utilised in other fields with regard to their potential applicability to promoting L2 motivation and the vision to master a foreign language. The details of an effective ‘language imagery programme’ are still to be worked out, but let there be no doubt about it: ‘Our capacity for imagery and fantasy can indeed give us a kind of control over possible futures!’ (Singer 2006: 128).

Making the Ideal L2 Self plausible: substantiating the vision

Possible selves are only effective inasmuch as the learner perceives them as *possible*, that is, conceivable within the person's particular circumstances. Thus, in order for ideal self images to engender sustained behaviour, they must be anchored in a sense of realistic expectations—they need to be *substantiated*, resulting in the curious mixed aura of imagination and reality that effective images share. This process requires honest and down-to-earth reality checks as well as considering any potential obstacles and difficulties that might stand in the way of realising the ideal self. Inviting successful role models to class can send the powerful message to students that, although everybody faces certain hurdles in reaching their ideal selves, it can be, and has been, done.

Developing an action plan: operationalising the vision

Future self-guides are only effective if they are accompanied by a set of concrete *action plans*. Therefore, the ideal self needs to come as part of a 'package' consisting of an imagery component *and* a repertoire of appropriate plans, scripts and self-regulatory strategies. Even the most galvanizing self image might fall flat without ways of *operationalising the vision*, that is, without any concrete learning pathways into which to channel the individual's energy. This is clearly an area where L2 motivation research and language teaching methodology overlap: an effective action plan will contain a goal-setting component (which is a motivational issue) as well as individualised study plans and instructional avenues (which are methodological in nature).

Activating the Ideal L2 Self: keeping the vision alive

Very little is said in the literature about activating and re-activating the ideal self, but this is an area where language teachers have, perhaps unknowingly, a great deal of experience. Classroom activities such as warmers and icebreakers as well as various communicative tasks can all be turned into effective ways of *keeping the vision alive*, and playing films and music, or engaging in cultural activities such as French cheese parties or 'Cook your wicked western burger' evenings can all serve as potent ideal-self reminders. Indeed, good teachers in any subject matter seem to have an instinctive talent to provide an engaging framework that keeps the enthusiasts going and the less-than-enthusiasts thinking.

Considering failure: counterbalancing the vision

For maximum effectiveness, the desired self should be *offset by the feared self*: we do something because we want to do it *and also* because not doing it would lead to undesired results. In language teaching terms this process of *counterbalancing the vision* would involve regular reminders of the limitations of not knowing foreign languages as well as regularly priming the learners' ought-to L2 self to highlight the duties and obligations they have committed themselves to.

Conclusion

The L2 Motivational Self System suggests that there are three primary sources of the motivation to learn a foreign/second language: (a) the learner's vision of him/herself as

an effective L2 speaker, (b) the social pressure coming from the learner's environment, and (c) positive learning experiences. This paper elaborated on the first of these sources. I firmly believe that it is possible for teachers to consciously generate L2-learning vision in learners and I would like to encourage colleagues to develop a repertoire of techniques to ignite and enhance this vision. The six main areas of relevant motivational strategies presented in this talk are intended to offer a framework for future language teaching methodological developments along this line. Good luck!

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