

Chapter 2

The L2 Motivational Self System

ZOLTÁN DÖRNYEI

*The space of what might be is a uniquely human domain
that is still to be fully mapped. Some is roughly charted,
but much more remains to be surveyed.*

Markus, 2006

In 2005, I outlined the basis of a new approach to conceptualising second language (L2) learning motivation within a 'self' framework (Dörnyei, 2005), calling the new theory the 'L2 Motivational Self System'. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed theoretical description of this construct and to show its foundations and the ways by which I believe it broadens the scope of L2 motivation research. As part of an extended validity argument, I will refer to several empirical studies that tested some tenets of the theory, and I will also discuss how the model is compatible with other influential conceptualisations of motivation by Gardner (2001), Noels (2003) and Ushioda (2001). Finally, I will argue that the new theory has considerable practical implications as it opens up a novel avenue for motivating language learners.

The L2 Motivational Self System represents a major reformation of previous motivational thinking by its explicit utilisation of psychological theories of the self, yet its roots are firmly set in previous research in the L2 field. Indeed, L2 motivation researchers have always believed that a foreign language is more than a mere communication code that can be learnt similarly to other academic subjects, and have therefore typically adopted paradigms that linked the L2 to the individual's personal 'core,' forming an important part of one's identity. Thus, proposing a system that explicitly focuses on aspects of the individual's self is compatible with the whole-person perspective of past theorising.

The actual model has grown out of the combined effect of two significant theoretical developments, one taking place in the L2 field, the other in mainstream psychology. Looking at our own field first, we can conclude that for several decades L2 motivation research had been centred around the highly influential concept of *integrativeness/integrative motivation*, which was first introduced by Gardner and Lambert (1959). However, during the past 20 years there has been growing concern with the theoretical content of this concept, partly because it did not offer any obvious links with the new cognitive motivational concepts that had

been emerging in motivational psychology (such as goal theories or self-determination theory) and partly because the label 'integrative' was rather limiting and, quite frankly, did not make too much sense in many language learning environments. The second theoretical development that contributed to the genesis of the L2 Motivational Self System took place in psychological research on the self, leading to a convergence of self theory and motivation theory in mainstream psychology. I will start by describing this movement and the resulting conception of 'possible selves' and 'future self-guides', followed by discussing how these have informed L2 motivation research.

The Contribution of Psychology: Possible Selves and Future Self-Guides

MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 3) are right when they point out that the notion of 'self' is one of the most frequently – and most diversely – used concepts in psychology. A cursory scan of the PSYCHINFO database they conducted revealed more than 75,000 articles with 'self' in their titles and a very long list of self-related concepts used in the literature (e.g. self-esteem, self-concept, self-determination, etc.). Similarly, Higgins (1996: 1062) also concluded that 'Psychologists are fascinated with the "self". It headlines more psychological variables than any other concept.'

While there is indeed a confusing plethora of self-related issues, from a motivational point of view one area of self-research stands out with its relevance: the study of *possible selves* and *future self-guides*. The emergence of this subfield has been a direct consequence of the success of personality trait psychology in defining the major and stable dimensions of personality (e.g. the Big Five model; see Dörnyei, 2005). These advances, according to Cantor (1990), have paved the way for paying more attention to questions about how individual differences in personality are translated into behavioural characteristics, examining the "'doing" sides of personality' (Cantor, 1990: 735). Thus, over the past two decades self theorists have become increasingly interested in the active, dynamic nature of the self-system, gradually replacing the traditionally static concept of self-representations with a self-system that mediates and controls ongoing behaviour (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; for a recent review, see Leary, 2007). This move resulted in the introduction of a number of self-specific mechanisms that link the self with action (e.g. self-regulation), and thus an intriguing interface has been formed between personality psychology and motivational psychology.

Markus and Ruvolo (1989: 214) explain that although the interwoven nature of the self-system and motivated behaviour is seldom made explicit, 'yet the belief that the two *must be linked* can be inferred from the writing of a variety of personality and motivation theorists' (emphasis

mine). One of the most powerful mechanisms intended to make this link explicit and describe how the self regulates behaviour by setting goals and expectations was proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986) in their theory that centred around the concept of 'possible selves'. Due to its versatile character, the possible selves approach also lends itself to various educational applications and, as we will see later, has indeed been successfully applied to a variety of educational contexts.

Possible selves

A person's self-concept has traditionally been seen as the summary of the individual's self-knowledge related to how the person views him/herself at present. Carver *et al.* (1994) emphasise that *possible selves* – representing the individuals' ideas of what they *might* become, what they *would like* to become, and what they are *afraid of* becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986) – denote a unique self-dimension in that they refer to future rather than current self states. Furthermore, while the self-concept is usually assumed to concern information derived from the individual's past experiences, Markus and Nurius's notion of possible selves concerns how people conceptualise their as-yet unrealised potential, and as such, it also draws on hopes, wishes and fantasies. In this sense, possible selves act as 'future self-guides', reflecting a dynamic, forward-pointing conception that can explain how someone is moved from the present toward the future. At the heart of this movement is the complex interplay of current and imaginative self-identities and its impact on purposive behaviour (Yowell, 2002). Looking back on two decades of research on possible selves, Markus (2006) summarised this as follows:

Our excitement with the notion of possible selves had multiple sources. Focusing on possible selves gave us license to speculate about the remarkable power of imagination in human life. We also had room to think about the importance of the self-structure as a dynamic interpretive matrix for thought, feeling, and action, and to begin to theorize about the role of sociocultural contexts in behaviour. Finally, the concept wove together our mutual interests in social psychology, social work, and clinical psychology. (Markus, 2006: xi)

We should note that the third point Markus (2006) mentions in the above quote, the inclusion of clinical psychology, is related to the fantasy element of possible selves. As Segal (2006) explains, Markus and Nurius's (1986) conceptualisation meant that social psychology was taking on the subtleties of psychodynamic processes that are so prominent in psychoanalytic theory. His summary is enlightening:

For their contribution to our understanding of the self, Markus and Nurius essentially married a social-cognitive instrument with a

projective. Future possible selves are fantasy tempered by expectation (or expectations leavened by fantasy) and so, conceptually, eliciting them invokes two central actions of mental life: The social cognitive act of future planning with the equally human act of generating fantasy. (Segal, 2006: 82)

In their seminal paper, Markus and Nurius (1986: 954) distinguished between three main types of possible selves: (1) 'ideal selves that we would very much like to become', (2) 'selves that we could become', and (3) 'selves we are afraid of becoming'. The ideal or hoped-for selves might include 'the successful self, the creative self, the rich self, the thin self, or the loved and admired self', whereas the feared selves could be 'the alone self, the depressed self, the incompetent self, the alcoholic self, the unemployed self, or the bag lady self'. While these two extremes are easy to grasp and illustrate, what exactly are the selves of the third type, the 'selves that we could become'? In one sense, this description can be seen as merely a synonym of the generic term 'possible self' (because 'possible' is what 'we can become'), which was surely not the authors' intention. So, it is more likely that these selves refer to 'expected' or 'likely' selves (Carver *et al.*, 1994), that is, to the default option. Thus, the three main types of possible selves proposed by Markus and Nurius refer to the best case, the worst case and the default scenarios.

There are two important points to note about these self types. First, we should not forget that they all come under the label of *possible* selves, that is, even the ideal, hoped-for self is not completely detached from reality (i.e. it cannot be an utterly implausible fantasy). The second point is that Markus and Nurius (1986) clearly meant this list to provide a broad outline of the scope of possible selves rather than a specific taxonomy, because later in their article they mention hoped-for selves and ideal selves as two separate entries within a list (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 957). Interestingly, they also mention 'ought selves' in their paper (which we are going to look at in more detail later), defining it as 'an image of self held by another' (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 958). Thus, Markus and Nurius believed in multiple future-oriented possible selves and outlined in their paper the scope of these selves with a number of illustrations but without providing a finite taxonomy.

A final point that needs to be emphasised about Markus and Nurius's (1986) proposal is central to the conception of possible selves yet it tends to be curiously ignored or overlooked in most work on the subject. It concerns the fact that possible selves involve tangible *images* and *senses*; as Markus and Nurius 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', 'hear' and 'smell' a possible self (although I am not that sure about the benefits of the latter).

Markus and Ruvolo (1989) argue that it is a major advantage to frame future goals in this way because this representation seems to capture some elements of what people actually experience when they are engaged in goal-directed behaviour. As the authors state, by focusing on possible selves we are 'phenomenologically very close to the actual thoughts and feelings that individuals experience as they are in the process of motivated behaviour and instrumental action' (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989: 217). This is a crucial point that I will come back to later.

Future self-guides: Ideal and ought selves

Possible selves are often referred to as 'future self-guides', but strictly speaking, not every type of possible self has this guiding function. As mentioned earlier, the expected, 'could-become' self refers to the default situation and therefore it does not so much guide as predict the likely future scenario. In contrast, the ideal self has a definite guiding function in setting to-be-reached standards and, in a negative way, the feared self also regulates behaviour by guiding the individual *away* from something. It does not need much justification that from the point of view of acting as academic self-guides the learner's ideal self is particularly important, which is an area that has been the subject of a great deal of research by Tory Higgins and his associates (e.g. Higgins, 1987, 1998; Higgins *et al.*, 1985; Higgins *et al.*, 1994). It is important to know that Higgins's work on selves precedes that of Markus and Nurius (1986), with the latter authors acknowledging Higgins's contribution (by citing, for example, not only Higgins *et al.*, 1985, but also an unpublished manuscript by him from 1983).

The two key components of Higgins's (1987; Higgins *et al.*, 1985) self theory are the *ideal self* and the *ought self*. As we have seen above, Markus and Nurius (1986) also mention these concepts, but Higgins used them as precisely defined technical terms in his more general theory of motivation and self-regulation. The *ideal self* refers to the representation of the attributes that one would ideally like to possess (i.e. representation of hopes, aspirations, or wishes), while the *ought self* refers to the representation of attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. representation of someone else's sense of duties, obligations or moral responsibilities) and which therefore may bear little resemblance to one's own desires or wishes. In his 1987 paper Higgins points out that both the ideal and the ought selves can derive from either the individual's own or someone else's views, which means that the ideal self might represent attributes that another person would like the individual to possess in an ideal case. However, because it is not clear how this meaning would be different from an ought self, it has typically not been included in subsequent uses of the term, and the ideal sense has been usually

interpreted in the literature as the individual's own vision for him/herself, while the ought self as someone else's vision for the individual.

An important difference between Higgins's and Markus and Nurius's conceptualisations of the future-oriented self dimensions is that while the latter authors talk about multiple possible selves, including, for example, more than one ideal self, Higgins talks about a single ideal and a single ought self for each individual, viewing these as composite self-guides that sum up all the relevant attributes. However, he also accepts (e.g. Higgins, 1987, 1996) that there are several other types of self-representations beyond the ideal or ought self concepts.

Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) highlight a potential source of confusion in the distinction between the ideal and the ought selves concerning the level of internalisation of the ought self. They argue that because various reference groups (to which every individual belongs) affect the individual by anticipatory socialisation or value induction, it is not always straightforward to decide at times of social pressure whether an ideal-like self state represents one's genuine dreams or whether it has been compromised by the desire for role conformity. Indeed, group norms, as their name suggests, impose a normative function on group members and because humans are social beings, most of us adhere to some extent to these norms (see Dörnyei, 2007). This means that there is a pressure to internalise our ought selves to some extent, resulting in various degrees of integration.

The graded internalisation of external motives has been well described in Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, which offers an internalisation continuum of extrinsic regulation, identifying four stages of the process: (1) *external regulation*, which refers to the least self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, coming entirely from external sources such as rewards or threats (e.g. teacher's praise or parental confrontation); (2) *introjected regulation*, which involves externally imposed rules that the individual accepts as norms he/she should follow in order not to feel guilty (e.g. some laws of a country); (3) *identified regulation*, which occurs when people engage in an activity because they highly value and identify with the behaviour, and see its usefulness (e.g. learning a language which is necessary to pursue one's hobbies or interests); and (4) *integrated regulation*, which is the most developmentally advanced form of extrinsic motivation, involving choiceful behaviour that is fully assimilated with the individual's other values, needs and identity (e.g. learning English because proficiency in this language is part of an educated cosmopolitan culture one has adopted). At first sight, (1) and (2) appear to be linked to the ought self and (3) and (4) to the ideal self, but where exactly is the boundary? We will come back to this question below when we look at the development of the two self dimensions.

Finally, the ought self raises one more issue. In Higgins's (1987; Higgins *et al.*, 1985) original conceptualisation it referred to a positive reference point (i.e. the person whom I believe I ought to be), but Higgins (1996) suggests that this meaning may be extended to include a negative reference point (i.e. the person I don't want to be), similar to Markus and Nurius's (1986) feared self. This is an important point that I will recall when we look at the motivational capacity of the future self-guides below.

Future self-guides versus future goals

Human action is caused by purpose, and this purpose has often been operationalised in terms of *goals* both in professional and everyday discourse. Thus, goals refer to desired future end-states and this definition is rather close to the definition of future-oriented self-guides. So, are the ideal/ought dimensions merely a subset of goals? The answer is a definite no, and being aware of the difference is a prerequisite to understanding the essence of possible selves. In psychology there is a multitude of cognitive constructs that serve as future-oriented motives, ranging from self-actualisation needs to the different types of goals and orientations in various goal theories. The proponents of each construct present intellectually convincing arguments, which makes it difficult to choose from the wide variety of available constructs. The main attraction of possible self theory for me has been that it goes beyond logical, intellectual arguments when justifying the validity of the various future-oriented self types. As mentioned earlier, possible selves involve images and senses, approximating what people actually experience when they are engaged in motivated or goal-directed behaviour. This is why Markus keeps emphasising that possible selves involve self-relevant imagery (e.g. Markus, 2006; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Thus, possible selves can be seen, according to Markus and Ruvolo (1989: 217), as the result of the various motivational factors (e.g. expectancies, attributions, value beliefs) 'that is psychologically experienced and that is a durable aspect of consciousness'.

Reading the possible selves literature I have found it remarkable how most authors seem to ignore this crucial distinction between goals and future self-guides in spite of the prominent emphasis on it in Markus's writings. Pizzolato (2006), for example, is quite right when she states that 'Unlike goal theory, possible selves are explicitly related to a long-term developmental goal involving goal setting, volition (via adherence to associated schemas), and goal achievement, but are larger than any one or combination of these constructs' (p. 58), but she could have gone one step further to state that it is the experiential element that makes possible selves 'larger' than any combinations of goal-related constructs. Similarly, Miller and Brickman (2004: 14) state that possible selves are

examples of long-term, future goals and define these as 'self-relevant, self-defining goals that provide incentive for action', regulating behaviour 'through self-identification with the goals or the integration of the goals into the system of self-determined goals'. Yet, they seem to overlook the key element, namely that possible selves are 'self states' that people experience as reality.

The role of imagination and imagery

Having argued for a prominent place of imagery in possible selves theory, let us examine the notion of imagery/imagination and its motivational impact more closely. Imagination has been known to be related to motivation since the ancient Greeks. Aristotle, for example, defined imagination as 'sensation without matter' and claimed that 'There's no desiring without imagination' (Modell, 2003: 108). As McMahon (1973) explains, Aristotle defined the image in the soul as the prime motivating force in human action; he believed that when an image of something to be pursued or avoided was present in imagination, the soul was moved in the same manner as if the objects of desire were materially present.

Interestingly, contemporary definitions of mental imagery are very similar to that of Aristotle. Kosslyn *et al.* (2002), for example, define it as 'the ability to represent perceptual states in the absence of the appropriate sensory input' and they also confirm the assumption that humans respond to mental images similarly to visual ones. They report on neuroimaging studies that indicate that visual mental imagery and visual perception activate about two thirds of the same brain areas (for a recent summary of relevant research, see Kosslyn *et al.*, 2006). These results provide a neuropsychological basis for Markus and Ruvolo's (1989) claim that 'imaging one's own actions through the construction of elaborated possible selves achieving the desired goal may thus directly facilitate the translation of goals into intentions and instrumental actions' (p. 213) and a similar idea has been expressed by Wenger (1998) when he described the concept of 'imagination':

My use of the concept of imagination refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree. It is playing scales on a piano, and envisioning a concert hall. (Wenger, 1998: 176)

The motivating power of mental imagery has been well documented in the field of sport psychology as well. Inspired by Paivio's (1985) influential model of cognitive functions of imagery in human performance, hundreds of studies have examined the relationship between

mental imagery and sport performance, and as Gregg and Hall (2006) summarise, it has been generally concluded that imagery is an effective performance enhancement technique (see also Cumming & Ste-Marie, 2001, for a similar conclusion). As a result, virtually every successful athlete in the world applies some sort of imagery enhancement technique during training.

Thus, Markus and Nurius's (1986) possible selves concept has opened up a channel to harness the powerful motivational function of imagination (see Taylor *et al.*, 1998), which explains why Markus (2006) emphasised this aspect first in her retrospective summary cited earlier. In the same overview, she added the following:

We were impressed by the fact that people spend an enormous amount of time envisioning their futures. We now know that this imaginative work has powerful consequences. Possible selves can work to energize actions and to buffer the current self from everyday dragons and many less overt indignities as well. . . . In the U.S., it is both a birthright and a moral imperative to tailor one's personal version of the American Dream. The notion that one should 'dream on,' 'keep the dream alive,' and that 'if you dream it, you can become it' is a critical element in the world's cultural imagination about the U.S. . . . People across a wide array of contexts are capable and willing to generate possible selves. (Markus, 2006: xii)

In summary, let me reiterate that the inclusion of imagery is a central element of possible selves theory. As Segal (2006) emphasises, it is the integration of fantasy with the self-concept construct that marks Markus and Nurius's (1986) work as truly innovative. This is certainly the aspect that grasped my own attention when I first encountered this work, and this is, I believe, what makes the concept of future self-guides such as the ideal and the ought selves suitable to be the lynchpins of a broad theory of L2 motivation. In their analysis of the ideal self, Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) share Markus's (2006) conclusion that the dream or image of a desired future is the core content of the ideal self. And, as the following quote shows, they also believe that imagination has played a key role in the whole history of the human race:

Throughout history of mankind, humans are driven by their imagination and their ability to see images of the desired future. Leaders, poets, writers, composers, artists, dreamers, athletes have been able to be inspired, stay inspired and inspire others through such images. These images, once shared, have the power to become a force, and in that sense an inspiration for social development and growth, for intentional change at many levels of social organization, not just for the individual. (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006: 633)

The motivational function of future self-guides: Self-discrepancy theory

We saw in the previous section that the imagery component of future self-guides is a powerful motivational tool. Let us examine how this tool fits into a broader theory of the motivational function of the ideal and ought selves. In this respect the most coherent framework has been offered by Higgins's (1987, 1996) *self-discrepancy theory*, which postulates that people are motivated to reach a condition where their self-concept matches their personally relevant self-guides. In other words, motivation in this sense involves the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one's actual self and the projected behavioural standards of the ideal/ought selves. Thus, future self-guides provide incentive, direction and impetus for action, and sufficient discrepancy between these and the actual self initiates distinctive self-regulatory strategies with the aim to reduce the discrepancy – future self-guides represent points of comparison to be reconciled through behaviour (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006).

An important point to note is that although the ideal and ought selves are similar to each other in that they are both related to the attainment of a desired end-state, Higgins (1998) emphasises that the predilections associated with the two different types of future selves are motivationally distinct from each other: ideal self-guides have a *promotion* focus, concerned with hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth and accomplishments; whereas ought self-guides have a *prevention* focus, regulating the absence or presence of negative outcomes associated with failing to live up to various responsibilities and obligations. As Higgins adds, this distinction is in line with the age-old motivational principle that people approach pleasure and avoid pain.

Conditions for the motivating capacity of the ideal and ought selves

Although the above description of possible selves theory has pointed to the conclusion that future self-guides motivate action by triggering the execution of self-regulatory mechanisms, several studies have found that this does not always happen automatically (e.g. Oyserman *et al.*, 2006; Yowell, 2002). Past research suggests that there are certain conditions that can enhance or hinder the motivational impact of the ideal and ought selves, the most important of which are the following ones: (1) availability of an elaborate and vivid future self image, (2) perceived plausibility, (3) harmony between the ideal and ought selves, (4) necessary activation/priming, (5) accompanying procedural strategies, and (6) the offsetting impact of a feared self.

Availability of an elaborate and vivid future self image

The primary and obvious prerequisite for the motivational capacity of future self-guides is that they *need to exist*. It has been observed that people differ in how easily they can generate a successful possible self (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992) and, therefore not everyone is expected to possess a developed ideal or ought self guide (Higgins, 1987, 1996). This can explain the absence of sufficient motivation in many people. Furthermore, even if the self image does exist, it may not have a sufficient degree of elaborateness and vividness to be effective. It has been found that the more elaborate the possible self in terms of imaginative, visual and other content elements, the more motivational power it is expected to have. People display significant individual differences in the vividness of their mental imagery (Richardson, 1994), and a possible self with insufficient specificity and detail may not be able to stir up the necessary motivational response.

Perceived plausibility

Ruvolo and Markus (1992: 96) argue that it is the individual's 'specific representations of what is possible for the self that embody and give rise to generalised feelings of efficacy, competence, control, or optimism, and that provide the means by which these global constructs have their powerful impact on behaviour'. In other words, possible selves are only effective insofar as the individual does indeed perceive them as *possible*, that is, realistic within the person's individual circumstances. The significance of the subjective appraisal of future self-guides has been echoed by others as well; for example, Segal (2006: 91) points out that 'It is well established that the degree to which participants expect their feared or wished for possible selves to come true affects their self-esteem, current mood, and optimism', and MacIntyre *et al.* (this volume, Chapter 10: 197) also conclude that 'it is also important to find out how *likely* participants consider a possible self to be; a highly unlikely possible self probably will have little relation to motivation'.

Norman and Aron (2003) make an important point when they emphasise the relevance of the individual's perceived control in the context of possible selves. 'Perceived behavioural control' was introduced as a key component in Ajzen's (1988) theory of planned behaviour, referring to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour (e.g. perceptions of required resources and potential impediments or obstacles). With regard to possible selves, Norman and Aron argue that perceived control is the degree to which individuals believe their behaviours can influence the attainment, or avoidance, of a possible self. 'If individuals believe they have control over attaining or avoiding a possible self, they will be more inclined to take the necessary steps to do

so' (p. 501). Interestingly, Carver *et al.* (1994) see the main difference between pessimists and optimists exactly in their ability to translate hoped-for possible selves into realistic expectations. As they conclude, because pessimists' hopes 'fail to evolve into expected selves, these hopes may thus be less likely to engage the motivational control systems that cause their realization in behaviour' (p. 139).

Harmony between the ideal and ought selves

We have seen earlier that the ought self is closely related to peer group norms and other normative pressures (e.g. ethnic community expectations). Thus, learners' (and especially adolescents') ought self may contain certain peer-induced views about academic attainment (e.g. low-achieving expectations that are often called the 'norm of mediocrity') that are in conflict with the individual's ideal self. Put in another way, there can be a clash between a learner's personal and social identity. Oyserman *et al.* (2006) found that among school children negative group images are often highly accessible, making social group membership feel like it conflicts with academic self-guides, and in such cases teenagers tend to regulate their behaviours to fit in with their peers (Pizzolato, 2006). Thus, an important condition for effective desired possible selves is that they should feel congruent with important social identities, that is, that the ideal and the ought selves should be in harmony.

Necessary activation/priming

Even if the learner does have a well-developed and plausible ideal/ought self image, this may not always be active in the working memory. Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) argue that possible selves become relevant for behaviour only when they are recruited into the working self-concept and for this to happen they need to be activated. This priming of the self image can be triggered by various reminders and self-relevant events, and they can also be deliberately invoked by the individual in response to an event or situation. Ruvolo and Markus (1992), for example, maintain that simulating a desired end-state can activate the future self-guide and they provide empirical evidence that imagery manipulations (in their case, asking participants to imagine themselves as successful or unsuccessful before a task) increased the accessibility of possible selves, as evidenced by the subjects' performance. I come back to the question of the enhancement of self-representations at the end of this chapter when discussing the practical implications of the theory.

Accompanying procedural strategies

Let us consider a learner who is energised by an attractive future ideal self-guide. In order to translate the aroused motivational potential into

action, he/she needs to have a roadmap of tasks and strategies to follow in order to approximate the ideal self. For example, it is obviously not enough for an Olympic athlete merely to imagine herself walking into the Olympic stadium or stepping onto the podium if she has no coach or training plan. For this reason, along with many others, Oyserman *et al.* (2006) argue that future self-guides are only effective if they are accompanied by a set of specific predeveloped and plausible action plans, which are cued automatically by the image. Thus, effective future self-guides need to come as part of a 'package', consisting of an imagery component and a repertoire of appropriate plans, scripts and self-regulatory strategies. This idea of a rich, closely networked package of information about how to achieve their hoped-for possible selves is expressed very clearly by Cross and Markus (1994):

A possible self may serve as a node in an associative network of experiences, strategies, and self-knowledge. In this way, the possible self may link effective steps and strategies . . . with beliefs about one's ability and competence in the domain. (Cross & Markus, 1994: 434)

A study by Pizzolato (2006) of American minority students provided clear empirical confirmation that without procedural schemas for achieving their educational aspirations the participants could not make specific plans, which jeopardised the achievement of their ideal selves. Miller and Brickman (2004) also emphasise that because future self-guides specify distant goals, people have to create proximal guides themselves, setting concrete courses of action that lead to distal attainments, which is of course a central tenet in goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990). As Miller and Brickman (2004) argue, it is this system of specific proximal subgoals, or goal-focused strategies, that distinguishes reality-based future goals from empty dreams and fantasies. In their view, the absence of an appropriate system of meaningful paths to pursue the desired selves can be caused by two factors: a lack of sufficient knowledge or experience (e.g. no relevant role models or knowledgeable significant others) and ineffective cognitive skills for planning and problem-solving. On the other hand, if the possible self is accompanied by the necessary procedural knowledge, it will turn from a hoped-for into an expected self (Yowell, 2002).

Offset by feared self

The last condition to be mentioned with regard to the motivational capacity of possible selves concerns an interesting proposal made by Oyserman and Markus (1990). They argued that a desired possible self will have maximal motivational effectiveness when it is offset or balanced by a counteracting feared possible self in the same domain. Indeed, focusing on what would happen if the original intention failed

has often been seen in motivational psychology as a powerful source of energy to keep us going (see Dörnyei, 2001a) – in academia, for example, it is often not the imagined success of a paper that makes us get down to writing it but rather the fear of missing the deadline. Thus, according to Oyserman and Markus (1990), for best effect the negative consequences of not achieving a desired end-state need to be elaborated and be cognitively available to individuals.

In an educational intervention study, Oyserman *et al.* (2006) demonstrated that positive self-guides and their negative counterparts are not simply inverse factors but have distinct impacts on the students' self-regulatory behaviour: learners with academically focused desired future selves spent more time doing homework and were less disruptive and more engaged in classroom activities, whereas feared possible selves resulted in fewer school absences. This suggests that the most effective condition for future self-guides is a balanced combination of pairs of countervailing selves; in Higgins's paradigm this would suggest a balanced combination of the ideal and the ought selves, which is related to the question of the harmony between the selves mentioned above. Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) argue similarly, stating that the motivation conferred by balanced possible selves is additive, involving both approach and avoid tendencies, and is therefore greater than the motivation conferred by the hoped-for or feared self alone.

The Contribution of L2 Motivation Research: Growing Dissatisfaction with the Integrative Motive

Having described the theoretical advances in psychology that acted as one of the two main sources of inspiration for proposing the L2 Motivational Self System, let us now turn to the second source, which is rooted in developments within L2 motivation research. It concerns a growing dissatisfaction with the concept of integrativeness/integrative motivation, which, as I stated in the introduction of this chapter, has been at the centre of L2 motivation research for almost five decades (for reviews, see Dörnyei, 2001b; Gardner, 2001; MacIntyre, 2002; MacIntyre *et al.*, this volume, Chapter 3).

Integrativeness refers 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. Gardner (2001) characterised the concept as follows:

Integrativeness reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community. At one level, this implies an openness to, and respect for other cultural groups and ways of life. In the extreme, this might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even

withdrawal from one's original group), but more commonly it might well involve integration within both communities. (Gardner, 2001: 5)

Integrative motivation is a more complex, multi-componential construct, consisting of three main constituents: 'integrativeness', 'attitudes towards the learning situation' and 'motivation' (see Figure 2.1). The latter is seen as the driving force of motivated behaviour, subsuming effort, desire and affect (Gardner, 2001); that is, it is concerns a central motivational engine that needs to be ignited by some specific learning goal such as an integrative orientation.

As I pointed out in my 2005 review (Dörnyei, 2005), a closer look at the L2 motivation literature reveals a certain amount of ambivalence about integrativeness/integrative motivation, amounting sometimes to a kind of 'love-hate' relationship amongst researchers outside Gardner's Canadian circle. The concept is certainly an enigma. It has been without any doubt the most researched and most talked about notion in L2 motivation studies and yet it has no obvious equivalent in any other theories in mainstream motivational and educational psychology. In addition, the label 'integrative' is ambiguous because it is not quite clear what the target of the integration is, and in many language learning environments it simply does not make much sense. In a multicultural

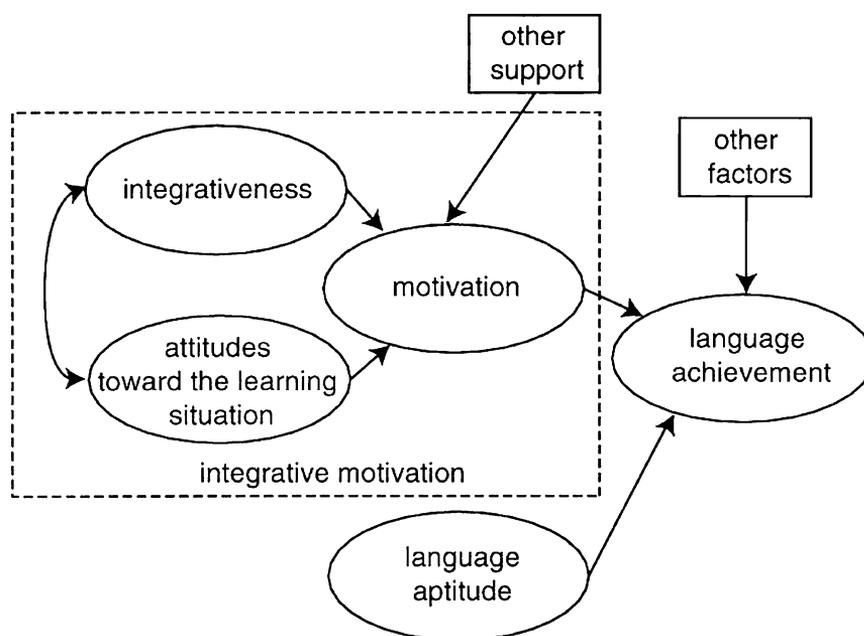


Figure 2.1 The integrative motive within Gardner's 'Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition' (Gardner, 2001: 4)

setting such as Montreal, where Gardner first developed his theory, we can talk about potential 'integration', but in learning situations where a foreign language is taught as a school subject without any direct contact with its speakers (e.g. teaching English or French in Hungary, China, Japan or other typical 'foreign language learning' contexts) the 'integrative' metaphor does not have any obvious meaning. Partly for these reasons and partly because the actual empirical findings did not always fit Gardner's original interpretation of the notion, several scholars in the past have questioned the validity and relevance of integrativeness (e.g. Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006; Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006; Irie, 2003; Lamb, 2004; Ushioda, 2006; Warden & Lin, 2000; Yashima, 2000; for a review, see Dörnyei, 2005). Interestingly, this even happened amongst Canadian scholars close to Gardner, as the following quotation shows:

Although it was originally suggested that the desire for contact and identification with members of the L2 group [i.e. integrative orientation] would be critical for L2 acquisition, it would now appear that it is not fundamental to the motivational process, but has relevance only in specific sociocultural contexts. Rather, four other orientations may be seen to sustain motivation. (Noels *et al.*, 2000: 60)

The four orientations – or learning goals – the researchers were advocating are *travel, friendship, knowledge, and instrumental orientation*, which echoes the findings of Clément and Kruidenier's (1983) seminal paper in the early 1980s that was the first 'insider challenge' to the integrative construct proposed by Gardner.

The problematic nature of integrativeness has been amplified by the worldwide globalisation process and the growing dominance of Global/World English as an international language (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006). In the new globalised world order, as Arnett (2002) argues, the pressure for most people is to develop a *bicultural identity*, in which part of their identity is rooted in their local culture while another part is associated with a global identity that links them to the international mainstream. The language of this global identity is English, and from this perspective it is not at all clear who EFL (English as a foreign language) learners believe the 'owner' of their L2 is. This lack of a specific target L2 community, in turn, undermines Gardner's theoretical concept of integrativeness: in Gardner's (2001) definition cited above, for example, what exactly would be – to quote Gardner (2001) – 'the other language community' that the learner would want to 'get closer to'?

As a result of these and other concerns – particularly the under-theorised nature of the concept of integrativeness from a cognitive psychological point of view (see Ushioda, 2007) – integrative motivation has played a rapidly diminishing role in L2 motivation research during the past decade, to the extent that currently few active motivation

researchers include the concept in their research paradigms. In a recent article specifically devoted to this issue with regard to the learning of World English, Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006) came to the following summary:

In conclusion, I want to return to the question posed in the title of this paper: is the notion of integrativeness untenable for world Englishes speakers? Findings from a review of theoretical criticism as well as empirical projects suggest that the answer is: Yes, the notion of integrativeness is untenable for second-language learners in world Englishes contexts. Researchers who use the construct should at least interrogate its use within the context in which the second language is learnt and the extent of multidimensionality of the learner's identity. (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006: 447)

The Formation of the 'L2 Motivational Self System'

In accordance with the above considerations, at the beginning of the new millennium I was ready to move beyond integrativeness, and possible selves theory seemed to offer the most promising way forward. Consequently, in an article describing the results of a large-scale investigation in Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002), we called for a general rethinking of the concept of integrativeness:

...the term may not so much be related to any actual, or metaphorical, *integration* into an L2 community as to some more basic *identification process* within the individual's *self-concept*. Although further research is needed to justify any alternative interpretation, we believe that rather than viewing 'integrativeness' as a classic and therefore 'untouchable' concept, scholars need to seek potential new conceptualizations and interpretations that extend or elaborate on the meaning of the term without contradicting the large body of relevant empirical data accumulated during the past four decades. (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002: 456)

As already mentioned briefly, the main personal attraction of possible selves theory for me lay in its imagery component. Language learning is a sustained and often tedious process with lots of temporary ups and downs, and I felt that the secret of successful learners was their possession of a superordinate vision that kept them on track. Indeed, language learning can be compared in many ways to the training of professional athletes, and the literature is very clear about the fact that a successful sports career is often motivated by imagery and vision. The point when this line of thinking went beyond mere speculation was during the re-analysis of our Hungarian motivation data using structural equation modelling (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005), when I realised that the

results supported the possible reinterpretation of integrativeness as the 'Ideal L2 Self'. Let us look at these results in more detail.

Empirical findings pointing to the need to reinterpret integrativeness

Over the past 15 years I have been heading a research team in Hungary with the objective of carrying out a longitudinal survey amongst teenage language learners by administering an attitude/motivation questionnaire at regular intervals so that we can gauge the changes in the population's international orientation. So far three successive waves of data collections have been completed (in 1993, 1999 and 2004) involving over 13,000 learners (for a detailed summary, see Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006). The survey questionnaire targeted attitudes towards five target languages: English, German, French, Italian and Russian. It was originally developed in collaboration with one of Robert Gardner's closest associates, Richard Clément, and therefore integrativeness had a prominent place in it, but we also measured several other attitudinal/motivational dimensions, such as *Instrumentality* (i.e. the pragmatic utility of learning the L2); *Direct contact with L2 speakers* (i.e. attitudes towards actually meeting L2 speakers and travelling to their country); *Cultural interest* (i.e. the appreciation of cultural products associated with the particular L2 and conveyed by the media; e.g. films, TV programs, magazines and pop music); *Vitality of L2 community* (i.e. the perceived importance and wealth of the L2 communities in question); *Milieu* (i.e. the general perception of the importance of foreign languages in the learners' school context and in friends' and parents' views); and finally *Linguistic self-confidence* (i.e. a confident, anxiety-free belief that the mastery of an L2 is well within the learner's means).

We submitted the data from all three waves of the survey to structural equation modelling, treating each language and each year separately (so we computed separate models for, say, German in 1993 and French in 2004) and found that the structure underlying the examined variables was remarkably stable across time and languages: The multiple models we obtained produced the same overall result with only minor variations. Figure 2.2 presents the schematic representation of the final construct, which had excellent goodness of fit indices for all the versions (for details, see Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006).

The most important aspect of the model in Figure 2.2 is, from our perspective, that *Integrativeness* was found to play a key role in L2 motivation, mediating the effects of all the other attitudinal/motivational variables on the two criterion measures *Language choice* and *Intended effort to study the L2*. The immediate antecedents of *Integrativeness* were *Attitudes toward L2 speakers/community* and *Instrumentality*, which indicated that the

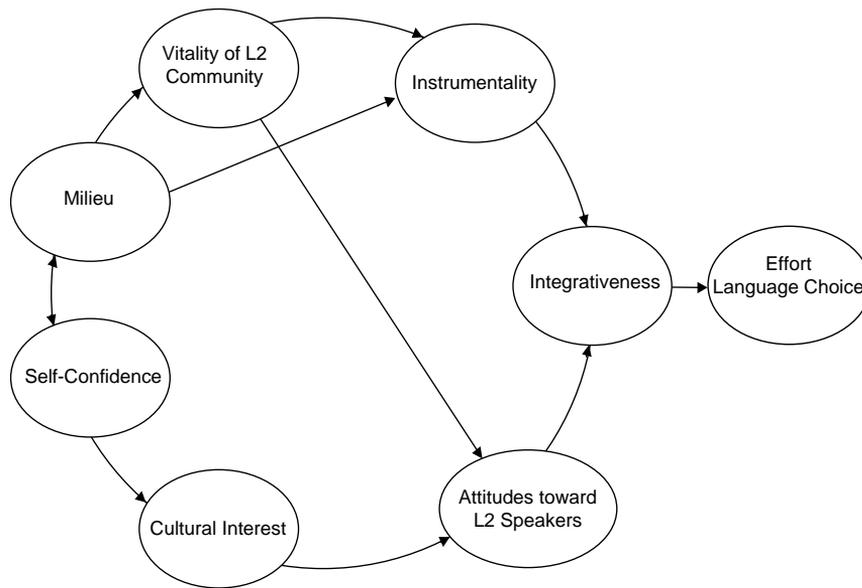


Figure 2.2 Schematic representation of the structural equation model in Dörnyei *et al.*'s (2006) study

central component in the motivation paradigm was defined by two very different variables, faceless pragmatic incentives and personal attitudes toward members of the L2 community. The question was how we could explain these consistent but theoretically far-from-straightforward findings. After some consideration I came to the conclusion that the possible selves approach described earlier offered a good account of the data. Looking at 'integrativeness' from the self perspective, the concept can be conceived of as the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self: if our ideal self is associated with the mastery of an L2, that is, if the person that we would like to become is proficient in the L2, we can be described in Gardner's (1985) terminology as having an integrative disposition. Thus, the central theme of the emerging new theory was the equation of the motivational dimension that has traditionally been interpreted as 'integrativeness/integrative motivation' with the *Ideal L2 Self*.

Does the self account explain the two antecedents of integrativeness in Figure 2.2, 'attitudes toward members of the L2 community' and 'instrumentality'? I believe it does, and does it very well:

- (1) *Attitudes toward members of the L2 community*: There is no doubt that L2 speakers are the closest parallels to the idealised L2-speaking self. This suggests that our attitudes towards members of the L2 community must be related to our ideal language self image. I would

suggest that the more positive our disposition toward these L2 speakers, the more attractive our idealised L2 self; or, to turn this equation around, it is difficult to imagine that we can have a vivid and attractive ideal L2 self if the L2 is spoken by a community that we despise. Therefore, the self interpretation of integrativeness is fully compatible with the direct correlation of the concept with 'attitudes toward members of the L2 community'. We find confirmation for this link in the psychological literature. Herbst *et al.*'s own research and the studies they cite confirm that 'people are attracted to others who emulate the person they want to be rather than the person they actually are' (Herbst *et al.*, 2003: 1206), and, more specifically, 'similarity to the ideal self drives the similarity–attraction association' (p. 1207). Therefore, the correlation in Figure 2.2 not only makes sense but actually validates the reinterpretation of integrativeness as the ideal L2 self.

- (2) *Instrumentality*: In our idealised image of ourselves we naturally want to be professionally successful and therefore instrumental motives that are related to career enhancement are logically linked to the ideal L2 self. We should note here, however, that from a self perspective the term 'instrumentality' can be divided into two distinct types. Recall that Higgins (1987, 1998) highlighted a contrasting *approach/avoid* tendency in our future self-guides: ideal self-guides have a *promotion* focus, concerned with hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth and accomplishments (i.e. approaching a desired end-state); whereas ought-to self-guides have a *prevention* focus, regulating the absence or presence of negative outcomes, concerned with safety, responsibilities and obligations (i.e. avoidance of a feared end-state). Looking at it from this perspective, traditionally conceived 'instrumentality/instrumental motivation' mixes up these two aspects: when our idealised image is associated with being professionally successful, instrumental motives with a promotion focus – for example, to learn English for the sake of professional/career advancement – are related to the ideal self; in contrast, instrumental motives with a prevention focus – for example, to study in order not to fail an exam or not to disappoint one's parents – are part of the ought self. Interestingly, a study by Kyriacou and Benmansour (1997) proposed a data-based five-factor construct that seems to reflect this duality well as it comprises a component labelled 'long-term instrumental motivation,' focusing on acquiring the L2 to enhance one's future professional career, and also a 'short-term instrumental motivation' factor, focusing on getting good grades.

The L2 Motivational Self System

So far this chapter has described how both empirical findings and theoretical considerations led me to a reconceptualisation of L2 motivation as part of the learner's self system. The good fit between the new theoretical approach and the Hungarian data convinced me that future self-guides – more specifically, the ideal and the ought selves – are central components of this system. However, I also felt that we needed to add a third major constituent, which is associated with the direct impact of the students' learning environment. After all, one of the main achievements of the new wave of motivational studies in the 1990s was to recognise the motivational impact of the main components of the classroom learning situation, such as the teacher, the curriculum and the learner group (for reviews, see Dörnyei, 1994a, 2001b; Ushioda, 2003). For some language learners the initial motivation to learn a language does not come from internally or externally generated self images but rather from successful engagement with the actual language learning process (e.g. because they discover that they are good at it). Thus, in 2005 I proposed that the 'L2 Motivational Self System' was made up of the following three components:

- (1) *Ideal L2 Self*, which is 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 of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Traditional integrative and internalised instrumental motives would typically belong to this component.
- (2) *Ought-to L2 Self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess to meet expectations and to *avoid* possible negative outcomes. This dimension corresponds to Higgins's ought self and thus to the more extrinsic (i.e. less internalised) types of instrumental motives.
- (3) *L2 Learning Experience*, which concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success). This component is conceptualised at a different level from the two self-guides and future research will hopefully elaborate on the self aspects of this bottom-up process.

Parallels with other conceptualisations of L2 motivation

Although future self-guides may seem rather different in nature from integrativeness, the two theories are not at all incompatible. They both grew out of a social psychological approach to understanding the foundations of action, and both paradigms are centred around identity

and identification. With the self system this aspect is obvious, but a closer look at integrativeness also reveals that its core aspect is some sort of a psychological and emotional identification with the L2 community (Gardner, 2001). Indeed, we find several similarities with the L2 Motivational Self System in Gardner's theory. For example, a model put forward by Tremblay and Gardner (1995) as an extension of Gardner's traditional construct includes a broad composite 'Language attitudes' factor at its base, which bears a close resemblance to the proposed concept of Ideal L2 Self in that it subsumes integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, and L2-speaker-related attitudes.

More importantly, Gardner's (2001) socio-educational model described in Figure 2.1 is also compatible with the proposed motivational self system if we consider (1) that the 'motivation' subcomponent in Gardner's construct is, in effect, a measure of motivated behaviour, as indicated by the items that measure it in Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (see Dörnyei, 1994b); and (2) that Gardner (2001) attached a possible instrumental motivational link to the Motivation subcomponent in his construct (as the key element of the 'other support' box in Figure 2.1). After these changes, Gardner's motivation construct suggests, in effect, that motivated behaviour is determined by three major motivational dimensions, Integrativeness, Instrumentality, and Attitudes toward the learning situation, which corresponds closely with the proposed L2 Motivational Self System.

Looking at parallels with more recent influential conceptualisations, the proposed self perspective also corresponds with the motivation constructs suggested by Noels (2003) and Ushioda (2001). Noels conceived L2 motivation as being made up of three interrelated orientations: (1) intrinsic reasons inherent in the language learning process, (2) extrinsic reasons for language learning, and (3) integrative reasons. These three components are a close match to the L2 Learning Experience, the Ought-to L2 Self and the Ideal L2 Self, respectively.

Using qualitative rather than quantitative methods, Ushioda identified a more complex motivation construct which, however, is conceptually related both to the one offered by Noels and the L2 Motivation Self System. Her findings pointed to eight motivational dimensions, which in turn can be grouped into three broad clusters: (1) *actual learning process* (subsuming 'Language-related enjoyment/liking', 'Positive learning history' and 'Personal satisfaction'); (2) *external pressures/incentives*; and (3) *integrative disposition* (subsuming 'Personal goals'; 'Desired levels of L2 competence', which consists of language-intrinsic goals; 'Academic interest', which had the greatest contribution from interest in French literature; and 'Feelings about French-speaking countries or people'). Here again the parallels with the L2 Motivational Self System are obvious.

Thus, we can conclude that a number of different L2 motivation theories appear to converge in a common tripartite construct, which is fully compatible with the L2 Motivational Self System. This provides theoretical validation for the new model. Let us examine now whether empirical data also confirm the proposed assumptions.

Empirical validation of the L2 Motivational Self System

Over the last three years several quantitative studies have been conducted to specifically test and validate the L2 Motivational Self System, and the most important of these are included in this volume (Al-Shehri; Csizér & Kormos; Ryan; Taguchi *et al.*). These investigations took place in five different countries (China, Hungary, Iran, Japan and Saudi Arabia) and involved over 6000 participants in four different sample types: secondary pupils, English-major and non-English-major university students and adult learners. Without wanting to reiterate the findings reported in the specific papers, let me draw five general conclusions:

- (1) All these studies found solid confirmation for the proposed self system.
- (2) The studies which specifically tested the relationship between Integrativeness and the Ideal L2 Self produced an average correlation of .54 between the two variables across the various subsamples, leaving no doubt that the two concepts are closely related.
- (3) The Ideal L2 Self was consistently found to correlate highly with the criterion measure (Intended effort), explaining 42% of the variance, which is an exceptionally high figure in motivation studies. In the studies where it was measured, Integrativeness also did a good job at explaining variance in the criterion measure, but the amount of variance it accounted for was considerably less, only 32%.
- (4) When instrumentality was divided into two types in accordance with Higgins's (1987, 1998) promotion/prevention distinction, all the studies found – in line with the theory – higher correlations of the *Ideal L2 Self* with *Instrumentality-promotion* than with *Instrumentality-prevention*, while *Ought-to L2 Self* displayed the reverse pattern. Furthermore, the promotion and the prevention aspects were largely independent from each other, with even the highest correlations between the two types of instrumental factors explaining less than 12% of shared variance. Thus, these figures prove that traditionally conceived 'instrumental motivation' can indeed be divided into two distinct types, one relating to the Ideal L2 Self, the other to the Ought-to L2 Self.
- (5) Structural equation models including the full L2 Motivational Self System displayed fine goodness of fit with the data.

Besides these studies that were specifically conducted for validation purposes, several other empirical investigations reported in this anthology considered some aspect of the validity of the L2 Motivational Self System. We will summarise these in the final chapter in more detail, but as a preliminary it is fair to say that the proposed model came out of these studies in a favourable light. Thus, we can conclude that there exists robust theoretical and empirical confirmation of the soundness of the proposed self-based approach.

Practical Implications of the Self-based Approach to Motivation

One benefit of reinterpreting L2 motivation within the L2 Motivational Self System is that it offers new avenues for motivating language learners. The novel area of motivational strategies concerns the promotion of the first component of the system, the Ideal L2 Self, through generating a language learning vision and through imagery enhancement. Because the source of the second component of the system, the Ought-to L2 Self, is external to the learner (as it concerns the duties and obligations imposed by friends, parents and other authoritative figures), this future self-guide does not lend itself to obvious motivational practices. The third component of the system, the L2 Learning Experience, is associated with a wide range of techniques that can promote motivation, but because these have been described well in past discussions of traditional motivational strategies, I will not focus on them here (for a review, see Dörnyei, 2001a). The new set of motivational techniques associated with the Ideal L2 Self complements these known strategies.

In the first part of this Chapter I summarised the conditions that are necessary for future self-guides to exert their motivational power. Accordingly, the Ideal L2 Self is an effective motivator if (1) the learner has a desired future self-image, (2) which is elaborate and vivid, (3) which is perceived as 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, (4) which is regularly activated in the learner's working self-concept, (5) which is accompanied by relevant and effective procedural strategies that act as a roadmap towards the goal, and finally (6) which also contains elaborate information about the negative consequences of not achieving the desired end-state. Of this list, points (1–4) are specific to the self approach, whereas the final two points involve more general motivational and instructional strategies that have been, in one way or another, part of the traditional conception of motivational teaching practice: point (4) concerns the generation of a realistic and situated action plan while point (5) involves the general idea

that we can be both pulled and pushed towards the same goal and the most effective way is to coordinate these forces. Let us look at the strategic implications of these six points.

Construction of the Ideal L2 Self: Creating the vision

We saw earlier that the (obvious) prerequisite for the motivational capacity of future self-guides is that they *need to exist*. It was also mentioned that people differ in how easily they can generate a successful possible self, which means that a major source of any absence of L2 motivation is likely to be the lack of a developed ideal self in general or an Ideal L2 Self component of it in particular. Therefore, the first step in a motivational intervention following the self approach is to help learners to construct their Ideal L2 Self, that is, to *create their vision*.

Strictly speaking, the term ‘constructing’ the Ideal L2 Self is not really 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 and guided selection from the multiple aspirations, dreams, desires, etc. that the students have already entertained in the past. Dunkel *et al.* (2006) explain that during the formation of their identities, adolescents produce a wide variety of possible selves as potential identity alternatives to explore and ‘try on’ without full commitment. The origins of these tentative possible selves go back to views held by others, most notably to the ideals that parents hold for themselves and for their children (Zentner & Renaud, 2007). Alternatively, they can also stem from the students’ peer groups, which act as powerful reference groups exerting social pressure (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006), and a third common route is related to the impact of role models that the students have seen in films, on TV or in real life.

Thus, igniting the vision involves, in effect, increasing the students’ mindfulness about the significance of ideal selves, guiding them through a number of possible selves that they have entertained in their minds in the past, and presenting powerful role models. Oyserman *et al.* (2002) also emphasise the importance of helping students to synthesise the potential hypothetical images with what they know about themselves, their own traits and abilities, as well as their past successes and failures in order to capitalise on existing strengths and avoid weaknesses. In a successful intervention programme with American low-income, minority teenagers, for example, Oyserman *et al.* (2006) asked students to introduce each other in terms of the skills or ability they possessed, and in the second session participants picked photographs that fitted their adult ‘visions’. A different approach was taken in Sheldon and Lyubomirsky’s (2006) ‘Best Possible Selves’ writing project, in which

students were directed to outline their 'ideal future life' in as much detail as they could.

In another programme developed by Hock *et al.* (2006) for demotivated elementary to post-secondary students in the US, the first phase included a series of activities designed to help students identify areas in which they have interest and skills and feel good about themselves. This was followed by a semi-structured interview with a teacher or counsellor, either individually or as part of a group, in which the students were asked to identify words or phrases that described them in targeted areas (as a learner, a person, a worker, and in a strength area), and to define their hopes, expectations and fears for the future in each area. The interviews were recorded and students were also encouraged to write down the answers to each question. As a follow-up, in the third phase of the programme they were asked to draw a 'Possible Selves Tree' with branches and other elements (e.g. lightning, termites) representing both their desired and feared possible selves. Interestingly, they were instructed to use the exact words they recorded in the interview to add branches and roots to the tree and the dangers around it.

So far no research has been directed at specifically developing an ideal language self. However, it seems to me that in an era when international holidays are becoming increasingly accessible and cross-cultural communication is a standard part of our existence in the 'global village', it is possible to devise creative ideal-self-generating activities drawing on past adventures, on the exotic nature of encounters with a foreign culture, and on role models of successful L2 learning achievers.

Imagery enhancement: Strengthening the vision

I argued earlier that even if a desired self image exists, it may not have a sufficient degree of elaborateness and vividness in some learners to be effective. The good news is that 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). The impact of imagery training is evident from an Olympic champion springboard diver's account:

It took me a long time to control my images and perfect my imagery, maybe a year, doing it every day. At first I couldn't see myself, I always saw everyone else, or I would see my dives wrong all the time. I would get an image of hurting myself, or tripping on the board, or I would 'see' something done really bad. As I continued to

work at it, I got to the point where I could feel myself doing a perfect dive and hear the crowd yelling at the Olympics. But it took me a long time. (Gould *et al.*, 2002: 70)

As Gould *et al.* (2002) describe, imagery training for athletes is designed to enhance the vividness and controllability of an athlete's imagery. These can involve a variety of exercises, starting from very simple ones (e.g. imagining one's bedroom and gradually adding details) to complex ones that include controlling and manipulating the content of elaborate image sequences. However, the authors stress that, regardless of which area an athlete is working on, 'imagery is a skill like any other, requiring consistent effort to attain a high level of proficiency' (Gould *et al.*, 2002: 70). In psychotherapy, too, there is a number of different approaches, from the 'positive imagery approach' (which involves the use of highly pleasurable, relaxing images to counteract anxiety), to behaviourists' systematic desensitisation or to guided imagery in the treatment of conditions as diverse as anorexia or childhood phobias (see Leuner *et al.*, 1983; Singer, 2006).

Guided imagery is also utilised in medical practice. According to Roffe *et al.* (2005), it has been identified as one of the 10 most frequently recommended complementary cancer therapies on the internet, and Fezler (1989) reports on using imagery successfully even on skin disorders such as acne. Finally, imagery has definite educational potential. Taylor *et al.* (1998), for example, present evidence that mental simulation was beneficial for university students preparing for an exam, and Berkovits (2005) argues passionately that imagery is the ideal way to work with children:

When a child uses imagery to find solutions to problems in her current life or from the past, she obtains a sense of autonomy and confidence in her ability to resolve situations she may have felt controlled her. These situations run the gamut of the child's experience, pertaining to her relationship with herself, her peers, her parents, siblings, teachers, authority figures, and learning situations in school, to name a few. Using imagination to find solutions to these situations has the added advantage of improving the child's verbal ability, because the images are clear and precise, and they lend themselves to clarity and precision of expression. (Berkovits, 2005: xvii)

Thus, there is a considerable body of literature on the conscious use of imagery to good effect in varied disciplines. What would be needed in applied linguistics now is a systematic review of the techniques utilised with a view of their potential applicability to promoting L2 motivation and the vision to master a foreign language. An intriguing recent

publication by Arnold *et al.* (2007) has taken the important first step towards introducing mental imagery in the L2 classroom, and although the details of an effective 'language vision programme' are still to be worked out, 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

We saw earlier that possible selves are only effective inasmuch as the individual perceives them as possible, that is, realistic within the person's particular circumstances. It is a central tenet in expectancy-value theories of motivation that the greater the perceived likelihood of goal-attainment, the higher the degree of the individual's positive motivation. Indeed, it is obvious that if people are convinced that they cannot succeed no matter how hard they try, they are unlikely to invest effort in the particular task (see Dörnyei, 2001b). This principle also applies to ideal self-images: in order for them to energise sustained behaviour, they must be anchored in a sense of realistic expectations. In other words, they need to be *substantiated*, resulting in the curious mixed aura of imagination and reality that effective images share. As Pizzolato (2006: 59) puts it, 'The relation between what students want to become and what students actually become may be mediated by what students feel they are able to become (i.e. expected possible selves).'

In the self-oriented training programme by Oyserman *et al.* (2006: 191) mentioned above, the reality component was added to the desired self image by asking students to draw role models and negative forces, implying the metamessage that 'everyone faces obstacles and difficulties; this does not make the PSs [possible selves] less part of the "true" self'. Then, in the following session students drew timelines into the future, including forks in the road and obstacles, thus reinforcing this message. In the 'Possible Selves Tree' programme described briefly earlier, Hock *et al.* (2006) also included a reality check component called 'Reflecting', which encouraged students to evaluate the condition of their Possible Selves Tree and to realise the need for the conscious nurturing of the tree. The authors argued that once students had examined their possible selves, they were more inclined to believe that they could do well in school and in life:

In effect, they begin to view learning as a pathway to their hopes and expectations and as a way to prevent feared possible selves from materializing. Thus, learning becomes more relevant, and students increase their willingness to put forth effort and commit to learning. (Hock *et al.*, 2006: 214)

Activating the Ideal L2 Self: Keeping the vision alive

Very little is said in the literature about 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 (see for example, Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003) can all be turned into effective ways of *keeping the vision alive*, and inviting role models to class, playing films and music, and 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 the instinctive talent to provide an engaging framework that keeps the enthusiasts going and the less-than-enthusiasts thinking.

Developing an action plan: Operationalising the vision

It was argued earlier, and virtually all the researchers in the area of possible/ideal selves point out in one way or another, that 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. 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, but it will also include individualised study plans and instructional avenues, which are methodological in nature. For an Olympic athlete the coach and the training plan are just as much a part of the complete vision as the image of stepping onto the top of the podium. Thus, in many ways, several of the components underpinning the ideal self package are not strictly speaking self-specific and have in fact been addressed in detail in the past. The important lesson from our point of view is that these methodological aspects must not be overlooked because even the most galvanising vision might fall flat without any concrete pathways into which to channel the individual's energy. For this reason, in Hock *et al.*'s (2006: 214) training programme the final component involves a thorough check-up phase, in which 'task completion is reviewed, goals and action plans are modified, goal attainment is celebrated, new goals are added, and hopes, expectations, and fears are continually examined'.

Considering failure: Counterbalancing the vision

Oyserman and Markus (1990) proposed that for maximum effectiveness, the desired self should be offset by the feared self. That is, future self-guides are most potent if they utilise the cumulative impact of both approach and avoid tendencies – we do something because we want to

do it but also because not doing it would lead to undesired results. Indeed, the perceived consequences of action abandonment have been known to have great energising potential (Dörnyei, 2001b), but a common human tendency is to focus on the positive goals and turn to considering the dire alternatives only when everything else fails. Oyserman and Markus's proposal intends to change this practice by making awareness of the two sides of the coin more balanced; it can be seen, therefore, as a call for the regular activation of the dreaded self. In language teaching terms this would involve regular reminders of the limitations of not knowing languages as well as recurrently priming the learners' Ought-to L2 Self by highlighting the duties and obligations the learners have committed themselves to.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed a major theoretical shift in L2 motivation research, describing how a new paradigm has emerged from both theoretical considerations and research results, and then presenting the main components of the newly proposed 'L2 Motivational Self System'. I would not like to draw detailed conclusions here because this will be done in the final chapter of this volume, which also outlines future research directions. Let me only make here three concluding points:

- (1) Reframing L2 motivation in a 'possible/ideal-self' perspective does not invalidate the results accumulated in the field of L2 motivation research in the past. On the contrary: I believe that these results will come to life and receive a new meaningfulness within the self framework.
- (2) Zentner and Renaud (2007) claim that stable ideal-self representations do not emerge before adolescence, and neither can younger children consider multiple perspectives on the self, most notably the ought self projected by significant others. Therefore, the self approach may not be appropriate for pre-secondary students.
- (3) In everyday parlance 'vision' and 'visionary' are highly loaded words, having life-changing connotations. For me this transformational potential is a real attraction of the ideal self, and therefore it has been reassuring to read Oyserman *et al.*'s (2006) summary:

Our results demonstrate the real-world power of a social psychological conceptualization of the self as a motivational resource... we developed a process model that, when operationalized, produced lasting change on PSs [possible selves], self-regulation, academic outcomes, and depression. (Oyserman *et al.*, 2006: 201)

So, the self approach allows us to think BIG, and this is exactly what Markus (2006) did in the conclusion of her retrospective overview:

The realm of what I might be has come under empirical and theoretical scrutiny and has yielded more than we might have imagined some twenty years ago. . . . I hope the volume succeeds in convincing other researchers not to be faint-hearted about the imaginative capacities of the human mind and our abilities to invent ourselves and our worlds. As humans our great evolutionary advantage is our capacity for self-making and world making. . . . In fact, our futures may rest with our shared willingness to experiment with possible selves and possible worlds, and to redesign ourselves and our worlds so that there is room for all of us. (Markus, 2006: xiv)

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