

## Chapter 1

# **Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self: A Theoretical Overview**

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### **Introduction: Why a New Book on L2 Motivation Now?**

As Pit Corder famously put it some 40 years ago, '*given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data*' [italics original] (Corder, 1967: 164). Since then, of course, we have witnessed a vast amount of theoretical discussion and research examining the complex nature of language learning motivation and its role in the process of SLA. At the same time, during the latter decades of the 20th century and the first decade of this century, we have also witnessed the phenomena of globalisation, the fall of communism and European reconfiguration, widespread political and economic migration, increased mobility with the rise of budget airlines, ever-developing media technologies and electronic discourse communities – all contributing in one way or another to the inexorable spread of 'global English', the growth of World English varieties, and repercussions for the loss or maintenance of various national, local or heritage languages. In short, over the past decades the world traversed by the L2 learner has changed dramatically – it is now increasingly characterised by linguistic and sociocultural diversity and fluidity, where language use, ethnicity, identity and hybridity have become complex topical issues and the subject of significant attention in sociolinguistic research. Yet, surprisingly perhaps, it is only within the last few years that those of us working in the L2 motivation field have really begun to examine what this changing global reality might mean for how we theorise the motivation to learn another language, and how we theorise the motivation to learn Global English as target language for people aspiring to acquire global identity in particular. Put simply, L2 motivation is currently in the process of being radically reconceptualised and re-theorised in the context of contemporary notions of self and identity. This volume brings together the first comprehensive anthology of key conceptual and empirical papers that mark this important paradigmatic shift.

## **Re-theorising L2 Motivation in Relation to Self and Identity**

Without the critical detachment of historical analysis, it is not easy to pinpoint the root causes of this paradigmatic shift in thinking. Instead, the aim of this introductory chapter is to sketch some of the contributing factors and developments which have brought questions of self and identity to the core of L2 motivation theorising.

Within the L2 motivation field, the theoretical concept that has garnered most attention to date is, of course, integrative orientation, defined by Gardner and Lambert (1972: 132) as 'reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group'. As Gardner and Lambert explain (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 12), the integrative concept derived from a parallel they drew with processes of social identification underpinning first language acquisition, whereby the infant attempts to imitate the verbalisations of its caregivers for the reinforcing feedback which this imitation provides. They reason that a process similar to social identification 'extended to a whole ethnolinguistic community' may sustain the long-term motivation needed to master a second language. In short, notions of social identification and ethnolinguistic identity have always been implicit in the integrative concept. Moreover, such notions have been very much explicit in related social psychological research on second language communication and intergroup behaviour, and was used to explain motivation for developing and adopting particular linguistic codes and speech patterns among minority ethnic groups (Giles & Byrne, 1982). However, the basic premise underlying the integrative concept, namely that the L2 learner 'must be willing to identify with members of another ethnolinguistic group and take on very subtle aspects of their behaviour' (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 135), has provoked considerable debate. Through the 1980s, there was much discussion about strong (social identification and integration) versus weak (sense of affiliation and interest) versions of the integrative concept. McDonough (1981: 152), for example, speculated that the strong form would be unrealistic for many language learners, while Clément and Kruidenier (1983) put the strong form to the empirical test and found little evidence that a truly integrative orientation of this kind was common among language learners.

In recent years, the debate about the integrative concept has intensified and taken on a new turn, prompted by the burgeoning discussions within applied linguistics and at large about the global spread of English. A basic question we have begun to ask is whether we can apply the concept of integrative orientation when there is no specific target reference group of speakers. Does it make sense to talk about integrative attitudes when ownership of English does not necessarily rest

with a specific community of speakers, whether native speakers of British or American English varieties or speakers of World English varieties? Moreover, does the notion of integrative motivation for learning English have any real meaning, given the increasing curricular reframing of English as a universal basic skill to be taught from primary level alongside literacy and numeracy, and given the predicted decline in numbers of English (as a foreign language) learners by the end this decade (Graddol, 2006)?

Among L2 motivation researchers, questions of this kind about the special status of English as target language have prompted the rethinking of the integrative concept. For example, Yashima (2002; see also this volume) expands the notion of integrativeness to refer to a generalised international outlook or 'international posture' which she defines with reference to Japanese learners of English as 'interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and [...] openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures' (Yashima, 2002: 57). The concept of international posture thus considerably broadens the external reference group from a specific geographic and ethnolinguistic community to a non-specific global community of English language users. As Ushioda (2006: 150) points out, however, precisely because it is a global community, is it meaningful to conceptualise it as an 'external' reference group, or as part of one's internal representation of oneself as a *de facto* member of that global community? It is this theoretical shift of focus to the internal domain of self and identity that marks the most radical rethinking of the integrative concept.

An ambitious research project that has pushed forward this rethinking was a large-scale longitudinal survey of Hungarian students' attitudes to learning foreign languages spanning the period from 1993 to 2004 (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006). Commenting on the salience and multifaceted composition of an integrative motivation factor in their data, Dörnyei and Csizér (2002: 453) speculated that the process of identification theorised to underpin integrativeness might be better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group. Dörnyei (2005) developed this speculation further by drawing on the psychological theory of 'possible selves'. According to this theory, possible selves represent individuals' ideas of 'what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming', and so 'provide a conceptual link between the self-concept and motivation' (Markus & Nurius, 1987: 157). Dörnyei (2005; see also this volume) builds on this theory of possible selves to develop a new conceptualisation of L2 motivation, the 'L2 Motivational Self System'. Its central concept is the *ideal self*, which refers to the representation of the

attributes that someone would ideally like to possess (i.e. a representation of personal hopes, aspirations or wishes). A complementary self-guide is the *ought-to self*, referring to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. a representation of someone else's sense of duty, obligations or responsibilities). A basic hypothesis is that if proficiency in the target language is part and parcel of one's *ideal* or *ought-to self*, this will serve as a powerful motivator to learn the language because of our psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between our current and possible future selves.

While Dörnyei has drawn on developments in self research in psychology to reframe L2 motivation, other scholars have looked to contemporary discussions of identity in the globalising and postmodern world (e.g. Giddens, 1991) to rethink the nature of L2 motivation and integrative orientation. For example, Lamb (2004; see also this volume) draws on self-report data from junior high school students in Indonesia and speculates that their motivation to learn English may partly be shaped by the pursuit of a bicultural identity – that is, a global or world citizen identity on the one hand, and a sense of local or national identity as an Indonesian on the other. Such students may thus aspire to 'a vision of an English-speaking globally-involved but nationally responsible future self' (Lamb, 2004: 16). Lamb further speculates that changes in motivation to learn English may partly be explained with reference to changing perceptions and the reconstruction of identities, especially during the formative years of adolescence.

In relation to L2 motivation and identity, the push for new thinking has also come from much stronger voices of dissent among those working in the area of language and identity in sociolinguistics. Several scholars have openly criticised traditional social psychological notions of identity inherent in much L2 motivation research to date. For example, Norton (2000: 4) argues that SLA theorists have not developed a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context. She uses the term identity to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. She also develops the motivational concept of 'investment' to capture the 'socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it' (Norton, 2000: 10). When learners invest in a language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will enhance their cultural capital, their identity and their desires for the future. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in the learner's own identity. However, Norton questions the assumption that language learners can be unproblematically characterised as

motivated or unmotivated, with clear-cut target identities, since motivation and identity are socially constructed, often in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in the individual.

This poststructuralist perspective on identity (and motivation) as being multiple, complex and a site of struggle is similarly developed by Pavlenko (2002) in her critique of social psychological approaches to L2 motivation. Pavlenko also draws attention to what she calls 'the monolingual and monocultural bias' in these approaches which implies a view of the world in terms of 'homogeneous and monolingual cultures, or in-groups and out-groups, and of individuals who move from one group to another' (Pavlenko, 2002: 279). As she argues, such a view does not reflect the complexity of the modern globalised multilingual world where more than half the inhabitants are not only bilingual or multilingual but also members of multiple ethnic, social and cultural communities. Very recently, a similar argument has been put forward by Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006) in her incisive critique of the concept of integrativeness in relation to learners and speakers of World English. In particular, she exposes what she calls its 'simplex' view of identity which presupposes that learning a second language somehow results in loss of the first language and the establishment of a new 'simple' identity as monolingual speaker of the target language. As she argues, such a simplex view seriously misrepresents the complex sociolinguistic realities of language learning, language use and cultural identity in postcolonial World English contexts, where multidimensional identities and pluralism (rather than integration) are the norm. She concludes her paper with a strong statement urging critical re-examination of the integrative concept which she regards as untenable in such World English contexts.

In summary, from both within the L2 motivation field and beyond it, there have been a number of parallel developments pushing for change in how we theorise L2 motivation, and pushing for contemporary notions of self and identity to be brought to the core of this re-theorising. Such a paradigmatic shift in L2 motivation theory not only serves to advance our thinking and understanding about issues of language learning motivation in the modern globalised multilingual world. It also brings L2 motivation theory firmly in line with current and highly topical analyses of language and identity in multilingual contexts, and serves to illuminate fundamental underlying processes of motivation in these analyses. In short, there is now very real potential for much greater synergy between L2 motivation theory and mainstream SLA and sociolinguistics than in the past, where we motivation researchers have traditionally rather ploughed our own furrow. It is hoped that this current collection of papers will help set the agenda for such synergy.

## A Brief Overview of This Book

This anthology brings together a diverse range of conceptual and empirical perspectives on motivation, identity and the L2 self. Following this introductory chapter, the anthology begins with Dörnyei's most up-to-date and detailed theoretical elaboration of the L2 Motivational Self System (Chapter 2), which provides key background for the remaining chapters. Three chapters by Taguchi, Magid and Papi (Chapter 4), Csizér and Kormos (Chapter 5) and Ryan (Chapter 6) report on extensive empirical investigations of the L2 Motivational Self System, focusing on learners of English from a range of countries (Japan, China, Iran, Hungary) and levels of education (secondary school, university and adult education). Three chapters develop particular theoretical or empirical perspectives relating to Dörnyei's model: MacIntyre, Mackinnon and Clément (Chapter 10) discuss the development of a measurement scale to assess possible selves; Al-Shehri (Chapter 8) explores the role of imaginative capacity and visual learning style in fashioning *ideal* selves; Segalowitz, Gatbonton and Trofimovich (Chapter 9) consider how aspects of ethnolinguistic affiliation and identity are psychologically realised through the L2 Motivational Self System, affecting selective engagement in L2 use which, in turn, impacts on cognitive-perceptual processing and ultimately L2 proficiency.

Two chapters offer critical or alternative perspectives: MacIntyre, Mackinnon and Clément (Chapter 3) express caution about re-theorising L2 motivation from a self perspective and urge us not to throw out the baby with the bathwater, suggesting instead that possible selves and integrative motivation be viewed as complementary rather than competing frameworks; Ushioda (Chapter 11) problematises ontological assumptions in linear models of motivation in general and presents an alternative relational view of motivation and identity emergent through interaction.

Two chapters develop connections between Dörnyei's self approach and other major theoretical frameworks: Kim (Chapter 14) draws on sociocultural *activity theory* to examine the interface between the *ideal* and *ought-to* self, while Noels (Chapter 15) critically explores *self-determination* and *autonomy* theory and finds connections with the motivational self system. Three chapters integrate discussion of possible selves with related theoretical constructs: Yashima (Chapter 7) relates *ideal* self to the notion of *international posture* in the Japanese EFL context; Lamb (Chapter 12) integrates concepts of *ideal* and *ought to* selves with concepts of *identity* and *Bourdieuian habitus* in his qualitative analysis of Indonesian learners of English, as does Lyons (Chapter 13) in his analysis of the unique language learning setting of the French Foreign Legion.

Finally, two chapters extend the self approach to the analysis of language teacher motivation and teacher development: Kubanyiova (Chapter 16) applies the self approach to examine conceptual change (and lack of change) among EFL teachers in Slovakia during in-service training, while White and Ding (Chapter 17) use the *ideal* and *ought-to* self perspectives to illuminate understanding of how teachers engage with the new practice of e-language teaching.

The anthology concludes with a discussion of future research directions. First we raise several specific issues concerning the 'self' approach to L2 motivation and then we examine briefly how the two main theoretical strands underlying the material in this book – the motivational relevance of future self guides and a situated, dynamic view of motivation – might potentially be integrated by adopting a dynamic systems perspective.

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