

Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self

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Edited by

Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda

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Chapter 1

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

EMA USHIODA and ZOLTÁN DÖRNYEI

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