



## Research Project

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As highlighted by Dörnyei (2009a), research relating to the ‘acquisition, processing, and mental representation’ of a second language is ‘in a process of transition’. Drawing on ‘relevant psychological research’, the field is moving towards a ‘new disciplinary identity’ that links traditional applied linguistics to research of a psychological nature. Within the general field of psychology, individual difference research has formed a sub-discipline concerned with exploring the ‘uniqueness of the human mind’ through examining the ‘characteristics and traits in respect of which individuals may be shown to differ from one another’. (1).

One aspect of the individual difference construct that is particularly relevant to the field of second language research is that of motivation. Dörnyei (2005) purports that motivation can be seen as a key aspect to second language acquisition, providing the initial stimulus provoking the commencement of the learning process as well as the ‘driving force to sustain’ it (65). The history of L2 motivation research can be divided into three distinct periods - the social psychological from 1959 to 1990, the cognitive-situated of the 1990’s and the process-oriented period covering the last five years. Within a process-oriented approach, motivation is viewed as dynamic system displaying ‘continuous change’ and ‘fluctuation’ over time (Dörnyei 2009a: 210). In line with the field’s move to incorporate psychological research, the L2 Motivational Self System is a construct of motivation proposed by Dörnyei in 2005. The system ‘re-orient[s]’ L2 motivation ‘in relation to a theory of self and identity’, proposing ways in which motivation for second language acquisition is generated, sustained and changed over time (Dörnyei 2005: 93). Conceptualising the nature of L2 motivation, the system opens up ‘new avenue[s]’ for the promotion of ‘student motivation’ in language teaching and subsequent success in second language acquisition (116). This study aims, through the completion and analysis of an interview with a language learner, to demonstrate the L2 Motivational Self System in action and thus provide confirmation of the construct’s realistic validity to account for the dynamic nature of L2 motivation.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The L2 Motivational Self system was proposed by Dörnyei in 2005 in response to previous research in the L2 motivational and psychological fields. In 1985, Robert Gardner introduced a theory based on the concept of integrativeness. According to Gardner, integrativeness ‘reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community’. It ‘implies an openness to, and respect for other cultural groups and ways of life. [...] it might well involve integration within both communities’ (Gardner 2001: 5). However, since its initial proposal the theory has provoked numerous criticisms resulting in the need for the reconceptualisation of L2 motivation. Providing a detailed description of the L2 Motivational Self System in 2009, Dörnyei reiterates some of the problems associated with Gardner’s theory that stem from the notion of integrativeness itself and its seemingly ambiguous nature. The construct’s validity is acknowledged in countries

that offer multicultural environments but its meaning is questioned in settings where foreign languages are taught ‘without any direct contact’ with native speakers (Dörnyei 2009b: 24). Impetus for the self system’s construction was provided by a large scale survey in Hungary as, despite the fact few ‘ethnolinguistic’ minorities resided in Hungary, the results indicated that integrativeness was as a key concept of L2 motivation (Dörnyei and Csizer 2002: 423). Dörnyei points out however that the new model does not ‘conflict’ with Gardner’s original conception but provides a ‘broader frame of reference’ to account for the motivation of learners that do not have direct contact with speakers of the target language (453).

Motivation, as a high-order human attribute, has been deemed a ‘dynamic process fluctuat[ing] over time’ (Shoaib and Dörnyei 2004: 36) that involves a combination of diverse factors and variables. As a dynamic systems theory, the L2 Motivational Self System provides a way to conceptualise L2 motivation in this way. Dynamic systems theory attributes L2 motivation the capacity to perform ‘self-organisation’ – a notion referring to the system’s ability to form certain patterns of behaviour within an individual without ‘external direction or control’. Dynamic systems theory also asserts the existence of attractor sites. Attractor sites are ‘preferred’ and stable states towards which systems are attracted, in this case, L2 motivation (Dörnyei 2009a: 106). Stable phases in L2 motivation are guided by the presence of strong attractors and are in contrast to unstable phases characterised by ‘weak or changing attractors’ (107). Self organisation, as ‘the driver of change’, instigates these changes in the overall state of the system at any given time (105). Dörnyei (2005) asserts that the L2 Motivational Self System is composed of three elements - the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience and that each component acts as a ‘possible attractor basin’ (Dörnyei 2009a: 218).

The first two attractor states draw on previous self-research in psychology relating to possible selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) assert that there are three main types of possible selves – ‘ideal selves that we would very much like to become’, ‘selves that we could become’ and ‘selves we are afraid of becoming’. As the ‘cognitive components’ of an individual’s ‘hopes and fears, goals and threats’ (954), they provide ideas about what it ‘is possible for us to be’ (960).

The study purports possible selves act as ‘bridges between the present and the future’ indicating ‘how individuals may change from how they are now to what they will become’. Represented in the ‘same way as the here and now self’, possible selves use self-images to stimulate the motivation necessary to move an individual from their current self towards or away from their hoped for or feared selves (961). An important element pertaining to the motivational function of possible selves is highlighted by Dörnyei (2009a) – the idea that possible selves involve ‘tangible images and senses’ ensures they receive ‘phenomenological validity’ and are experienced by the individual as a ‘reality’ (213). Ideal selves exert a ‘guiding function in setting to-be reached standards’ and in this respect act as ‘future self-guides’ (214).

The types of possible selves included in Dörnyei’s construct are those introduced by Tory Higgins (1987). Higgins emphasises three domains of the self – the actual self, a representation of the attributes that you or another person believes you possess, the ideal self, a representation of the attributes that you or another person would ideally like you to possess, for example, hopes, wishes and aspirations and the ought-to self. This is a representation of the attributes that you or another believes you ought to possess - a duty, obligation or responsibility (320-21). In this conception, the ideal self could potentially refer to the attributes that another person would like an individual to possess. How this differs from the ought-to self subsequently becomes unclear thus the ideal-self in motivational literature commonly refers to the individual’s own vision of desired attributes (Dörnyei 2009b: 14). The motivational capacity of these self-guides is highlighted through Higgins’s Self-

Discrepancy theory - motivation is triggered by an individual's desire to reduce the discrepancy between their actual selves and their ideal or ought-to selves (Higgins 1987). Although both acting as 'desired end states', the ideal and ought-to selves provoke discrepancies to be reduced through the application of differing strategies (Higgins 1998:3). Ideal selves evoke self images that want to be approached and as such, the discrepancy reducing strategies employed are those with a promotion focus. Involving the presence of a positive outcome, the motivational force is concerned with moving the learner's idea of their actual self closer to that of their ideal self. In contrast, ought-to selves in their concern with an individual's idea of what they ought to become, stimulate motivation with a prevention focus that can be equated with the avoidance of negative outcomes (Higgins 1998).

In the L2 Motivational Self System, the ideal L2 self refers to 'the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self'. That is, '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' (Dörnyei 2005: 105). The imagery produced in relation to the ideal self provides incentive and impetus for action and initiates self-regulatory strategies to ensure the discrepancy between the actual non-L2 speaking self and the ideal L2 speaking self is reduced. The component encompasses Gardner's traditional concept of integrativeness. Similarly, if an individual feels that they should possess an L2, the self-image created as a result of the ought-to L2 self guide will act as a motivator to reduce the discrepancy between the actual and ought-to self in order to prevent negative outcomes such as parental disappointment. This dimension includes motivational reasons that can be classified as external and extrinsic to the learner such as contingency for obtaining a degree or job.

As part of a dynamic system, the presence of possible selves in a learner's consciousness does not determine a linear cause and effect action leading to L2 motivated behaviour. Instead, the motivational force exerted changes over time as a result of complex interaction with other variables. Change in one factor

Leads to changes in another and the motivating force exerted. This change subsequently causes a reaction in which the many factors involved in the system are changed, thus altering the outcome and action of possible self guides accordingly. In line with this notion, Oyserman et al. (2006) notes the regulatory action that possible selves exert is not always sustained. Drawing on past research, Dörnyei (2005) asserts that certain conditions can 'increase the motivational power of a possible self' (116). These conditions are as follows (Dörnyei 2009b):

- For possible selves to exert a motivational capacity they have to exist. Research has shown that individuals' ability to produce self-guides vary. Furthermore, Dörnyei emphasises the fact that even if an individual can generate an image, its vividness may not be strong enough to exert an effective motivational force.
- The future self guide also has to be deemed plausible by the individual. Hoyle and Sherrill (2006) purport that 'possible selves most likely to produce behaviour are those that suggest behaviours people feel confident they can perform and sustain' (1678). Possible selves are only effective when they are 'perceived as realistic within the person's individual circumstances' (Dörnyei 2009b: 19). Motivation is also claimed to be effected by the degree of likeliness with which the individual perceives the achievement of the possible self to be.
- If an individual's ideal and ought-to self guides exert forces that are in harmony with each other, the motivational capacity will be increased. As Oyserman et al. (2006) purport – 'A particular possible self may fail to sustain regulatory action because it conflicts with other parts of the self-concept' (118).

- The L2 possible self guide has to be activated. To provide impetus for behaviour, the ideal or ought-to self-guide has to be active in an individual's working memory. This can be achieved through reminders or the individual's response to certain situations.
- The possible self has to be accompanied by procedural strategies determining a plausible way of achieving the desired end-state. For the image to stimulate behaviour, a set of strategies needs to be in place to enable the ideal self to be approximated. Having a clear idea of how a possible self can be achieved is necessary to distinguish future goals from dreams and fantasies – dreams and fantasies being perceived as implausible, unreachable entities.
- If an ideal possible self is balanced by a feared possible self, it is claimed that the desired possible self will exert maximum motivational force. Oyserman and Markus (1990) purport 'a positive expected self will be a stronger motivational resource, and maximally effective, when it is linked with a representation of what could happen if the desired state is not realised' (113).

The last attractor state incorporated in the L2 Motivational Self System is conceptualised as the L2 Learning Experience. This component accounts for motivation arising from the 'immediate learning environment and experience' (Dörnyei 2005: 106). Research conducted during the situated-period highlighted that some language learners' motivation resulted from direct engagement with the learning process rather than the generation of self-images. Such factors are summarised by Dörnyei (1994) and include course-specific motivational components such as the syllabus, teaching method and materials, teacher-specific components relating to personality and style and group-specific components relating to the dynamics of the learner group.

To summarise, the L2 Motivational Self System thus offers three attractor basins - the ideal self based on the internal desires of the learner, the ought-to self based on the 'motivational regulations of social pressures' in the learner's environment and the L2 learning experience based on the actual engagement with the learning process. It is purported that the existence of one of these attractor basins is enough to exert influence on the direction, persistence and intensity of behaviour. However, if all three systems work in concert, the motivational influence will be heightened (Dörnyei 2009a: 218). Changes in the system's overall state are instigated by its self-organising capacity. This study analyses a language learner's L2 motivational levels in relation to this theory, demonstrating the interconnection of various factors and their subsequent influence on each other and the L2 motivational system as a whole.

The L2 Motivational Self System has been empirically tested and the results provide conformation of the construct's validity. These include those from studies conducted in countries offering vastly different language contexts, for example, Japan, China and Iran (Taguchi et al. 2009). This being the case, the system as a whole can be used to explain and conceptualise the motivational dynamics behind second language acquisition, thus offering language teachers exciting opportunities to increase student motivation and successful rates of L2 acquisition.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **PARTICIPANT**

The language learner taking part in the research project was a twenty-one year old female undergraduate in the school of English at the University of Nottingham. As a British national, the participant was a third year student studying for a single honours degree in English Studies with a first language of English and a second of German which is the L2 to

be discussed in this paper. The learner used the term 'semi-fluent' to describe her level of L2 proficiency.

This particular participant was chosen to take part in the research project for several reasons. Firstly, the learner had been actively participating in instructed language learning experiences for the past ten years, suggesting a level of motivation high enough to sustain prolonged commitment to the language learning process. After studying German at school, the participant chose to continue the process at university through completion of German subsidiary modules alongside the statutory modules of her English degree, a notion reinforcing a sense of high motivation. Secondly, despite having previously displayed a high level of motivation for mastering the German language, this year the participant stopped instructed second language acquisition, a notion providing an interesting dimension to the study. Conceptualising this language learner's motivation in relation to the L2 Motivational Self System thus demonstrates the ability of dynamic systems theory to account for and explain the fluctuating nature of the learner's L2 motivation.

The fact that the method of research for this project involved an interview was also a consideration when choosing a participant. In this respect, a learner that was capable of providing intelligent, articulate responses was required and as a final year degree student, it was expected that this participant would prove suitable.

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

In order that the interview provide meaningful information, it was imperative that the questions asked produced relevant answers pertaining the nature of the participant's language learning motivation. For suitable questions to be posed, background research was conducted on both the L2 Motivational Self System and the theories of self and identity it embodies. An insight into the general research direction of L2 motivation that inspired the need for and production of the system was also obtained through the reading of relevant articles and studies.

The actual questions posed result from this research and were selected with the aim of illuminating how the L2 Motivational Self System was at work in the participant's language learning history and to guard against 'yes' and 'no' type answers. It was also attempted to steer clear of leading questions that would provide responses perceived as 'correct' but not necessarily true. However, in hindsight some questions, such as that relating to the participant's imagery, could have been posed in a more direct manner to elicit more definitive answers.

#### PROCEDURE

Initial contact with the participant was made through the university e-mail system; a relatively easy task as the learner was known to me previously. After explaining the nature of the project and requesting assistance, a telephone call followed up the initial e-mail and was used to determine the time and place that the interview was to take place. A time was arranged that was convenient to both parties at the participant's house. This was to ensure the quiet conditions necessary to conduct a recorded interview. Prior to the recording session details of the interview's approximate duration were given to the participant, along with a copy of the questions that were to be posed. This provided adequate time for the learner to think about possible answers, thus increasing the chances of rich and meaningful data being elicited from the process. It was also made clear that the process would be recorded and how the information would be used.

The interview itself was recorded on a digital voice recorder and ran smoothly. It was completed without any significant problems. The participant provided thorough answers showing considerable thought and consideration and as such, required minimal prompting.

Upon termination of the interview, the participant recalled additional information she felt relevant to a previous question and although the recording was re-started, the dialogue that ensued has been inserted in the transcript at the appropriate point to maximise cohesion. However, upon reflection, it has become apparent that it would have proven useful if at certain points during the interview some areas had been elaborated upon further. This is due to the fact that some areas of the interview, when analysed, provide information that requires clarification. In hindsight, this is a problem associated with interview technique and is therefore an aspect of this project that could have been improved.

The interview transcript is provided as an appendix to this study and all quotations from the interview included in the analysis below are taken from this source.

## ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The language learning history of the learner began when entering the secondary education system at the age of eleven. That the participant ‘had’ to learn a second language removes her as an agent in this event. That the L2 learnt was German is also a fact that cannot be attributed to the individual choice of the learner as this was determined by the school’s decision to place her in the ‘German group’. Initial impetus for learning the L2 is thus seen to have arisen not from any motive internal to the learner but from sources of external pressure. Ceasing at the age of twenty-one during the final year of a degree course, the language learning history does however highlight three distinct times when the decision to continue German was taken by the individual herself – at school when deciding to continue with German instead of French, to study German at A-Level and to study German at university as a subsidiary module.

The data obtained from the interview process suggests the existence of all three attractor basins once the language learning process had begun. When the participant was asked if she could imagine herself being fluent in German one day, the response was delivered in an extremely enthusiastic manner – ‘I would absolutely love to be fluent [...]’. Although the question could have been posed in a manner more directly related to the ideal self component, for example, ‘does the person you wish to become in the future speak fluent German, can you visualise this?’, the response is suggestive of the idea that, in an ideal world, the participant would speak an L2 fluently. However, at the time of interview, the participant had ceased learning German and the response suggested not so much a desire to be fluent in German, but a desire to be able to speak any language – ‘German, or French or any language really’. The participant’s wish to speak an L2 is consistent with the ideal self component of the self system in that it has a promotion focus. The learner described the process of being able to communicate in another language ‘lovely’ and the feeling it gave her as a ‘real buzz’. The sense of achievement gained by the participant in response to this can be viewed as a positive outcome of the language learning process and an aspect of a possible self that was wanting to be approached.

Integrative motives for wanting to become fluent were also made apparent. The aim of language learning, according to the participant, is to enable ‘communication with other people’ and provide the means to be able to function and live properly within a foreign culture. Dörnyei’s component of the ideal self corresponds to the integrative element of Noels’s (2003) conceptualisation of L2 motivation. In a study regarding learners of Spanish as a second language, Noels describes integrative orientation for language learning as ‘relating to positive contact with the language group and perhaps eventual identification with that group’ (99). That the participant disliked the fact that, when visiting Germany for the first time, she was spoken back to in English suggests the idea that she desired to integrate in to the German culture and way of life and not be considered English. This is reinforced

through the learner's comment that she 'was really chuffed' when German natives thought she was from the Netherlands and not England as she knew her 'German accent was improving'. Being able to communicate for integrative reasons thus also accords with motives that are promotional rather than preventative in nature.

Other reasons why the participant desired to continue learning German are those extrinsic in nature (Noels 2003) and classified under Dörnyei's ought-to L2 self. Learning German was considered to be consistent with her long term plans – getting into the school she wanted to study A-Levels at and for securing herself a job in the future. These motives can be associated with avoiding the negative outcomes of having to stay at her current school and the possibility of not securing a good job. Parental encouragement also played a part in the participant's motivation to continue learning German. The learner stated that her 'dad has always said that its important' and that he 'pushed' her to 'keep up with languages'. Stating her father's belief that the ability to speak an L2 is 'an asset' reinforces the idea of parental influence – that parental influence was included in the factors referred to as 'pressures' confirms a sense of obligation on the learner's behalf to learn an L2. It was also claimed her father was disappointed when she was unable to fit German lessons into her final year timetable at university. This suggests that had she been able to, she may have continued to learn German to prevent this negative outcome.

The ought-to component of the self system can also be said to have acted as an attractor basin in relation to peer pressure felt by the learner. The participant's motivation to do well at A-Level can be partly attributed to the fact that she feared being 'bottom of the class' and did not want to be the only one in the group not to achieve an 'A' grade, a possible self to be avoided. The motivation to do well is stated to have had an aspect of 'keeping up with the Jones's' to it, a notion suggesting a social duty. In the participant's view, the other learners were deemed to be high academic achievers destined to take up prestigious university places at Oxford and Cambridge and being grouped with them in a learning environment may have exerted a pressure in the sense that the learner felt the need to justify her place in the class – to take part, she *ought-to* be as good as them at German.

For this learner, the L2 learning experience can be said to have acted as a strong attractor basin. When going to university, learning German was a process the participant said she 'enjoyed'. Teacher-specific components influenced the learner's decision to continue German tuition and stop French whilst still at secondary school - the teacher's 'style' is stated as a specific reason why French tuition was discontinued. In contrast to this, when studying at A-Level, the learner's German teacher had a style that the learner liked and 'adapted to'. The rote learning style described worked well for her and enabled her to note an improvement in her L2 abilities. This in turn gave her 'confidence' and may have contributed to the fact that she chose to pursue German tuition after A-Level at university. Group dynamics affected motivation within this attractor basin also through the idea of 'healthy' competition within the class itself, a notion reiterated through the need to keep 'up with the Jones's'. Positive encouragement by the teaching staff can also be seen to have played a part in the learner's motivation. Upon return from a German exchange, despite not noticing a marked improvement in her L2 abilities, the fact that improvement was commented upon by school teachers 'improved' her 'confidence', which in turn can be seen to increase the plausibility and thus motivational strength of her ideal L2 possible self.

The participant also finds the process of learning a language enjoyable because it is difficult, challenging and offers a sense of achievement when it starts 'coming more naturally'. Corresponding to Noels's (2003) intrinsic category, whereby the learning process provides L2 motivation because it is deemed 'fun, engaging, challenging or competence enhancing', these reasons can also be included under Dörnyei's L2 Learning Experience component (98).

At the time the interview was conducted, the learner's participation in language learning tuition had ceased and her motivation to learn German had declined. This is implied through the response given when asked if she could see herself taking up German in the future – instead of German, French was given as a possible L2. Analysing the participant's language learning history in relation to the L2 Motivational Self System demonstrates the way in which possible self guides can exert increased motivational power if other conditions are met. This highlights the L2 motivational system as a dynamic one affected by various factors each exerting forces that interact with each other causing changes in the overall state of the system.

Whilst at secondary school, the image pertaining the successful acquisition of German was deemed plausible. Visiting Germany on an exchange visit appears to have enhanced the learner's sense of mastering German as a realistic goal as upon returning to England, she was told she had improved. Communicating with the natives highlighted the 'aim' of classroom tuition and the idea that what had been learnt previously had been employed successfully can be seen to have contributed to the learner's sense that she could master the language. Having a positive experience in the native country where she was able to put use to her language skills, for example, making 'transactions', having 'conversations' and getting 'things done' injected her L2 possible self guide with a plausibility enhancing its motivational function. Visiting Germany enabled the learner to 'see some sort of end' to her 'efforts'. This suggests that the 'end', - L2 mastery, was regarded as plausible, a notion reinforced through the fact that the experience is specifically stated as having had great effect on her motivation – 'it does have a great influence' [...] 'it does spur you on'.

Throughout her time at school, the participant's ideal L2 self worked in harmony with her ought-to self, thus increasing the motivational effect of each in their promotion of the same L2 self end-state. As stated by Dörnyei (2009b), 'teenagers tend to regulate their behaviour to fit with their peers' (20). Pizzolato (2006) found that the achievement of personal aspirations 'came through re-negotiation of familial, peer and community relationships such that students were able to maintain and balance these important relationships with their personal aspirations' (67). The participant's ideal L2 self, including motives pertaining to the ability to communicate and function in the L2 community, are seen to promote motivation to learn the L2. The participant's ought-to L2 self, including motivational reasons for L2 acquisition relating to peer and familial pressure also promote the need to master the L2 and the two work in concert to increase the desire to learn and master the language. Had peer pressure acted to hinder her achievement, for example, the need to fit in with an underachieving social group, the ought-to L2 possible self would have exerted antagonistic influence, decreasing the motivational effect of the ideal L2 possible self.

During this period the both the ideal and ought-to L2 self images were also primed, another factor relating to the motivational impact of possible selves. Visits to Germany can be seen to have played a large part in priming the participant's ideal L2 self, providing first hand experience of what it would mean to be able to speak German. Speaking to natives in their own environment reiterated the reason why she was taking German lessons – to be able to communicate with other people. The thought of being able to do this can be said to have placed the ideal L2 self actively within her 'working memory', thus stimulating behaviour aimed at reducing the discrepancy between her actual non- L2 speaking self and her ideal L2 speaking self (Dörnyei 2009b: 20). Whilst at school the participant's ought-to L2 self was primed through parental pressures. At an age when it is expected that most people live with their parents or guardians, it can be suggested that the influence exerted by the learner's father acted as a trigger keeping the ought-to L2 self image in her working memory. Furthermore, if language learning had ceased or been deemed unsuccessful at this time, the



learner would have had to face the negative consequence of parental disappointment more directly than if she was living away from home.

Another reason as to how and why the learner's possible self guides proved powerful enough to stimulate motivational behaviour is because, whilst at school, the ideal L2 possible self was balanced by a feared L2 possible self. The decision to take German at A-Level was stimulated by the desire to obtain a place at a different school. In this respect, obtaining a good enough grade at GCSE facilitated the avoidance of failing to secure a place at that school, a negative self to be avoided. This feared possible self was indeed avoided as the participant went on to study German at A-Level. At this stage the learner's ideal L2 self was also balanced by a feared possible self – the possibility of being the only one in the group that did not achieve an 'A' grade. Motivation in this sense was also reinforced through the fear induced by her teacher's opinion that she would obtain a 'C'. That this was a strongly feared possible self is highlighted through the learner's comment on her emotional response to the suggestion – 'I was absolutely furious'. Fear of the teacher being proven correct was also a factor – 'that really spurred me on – to show her that I could do a lot better than a C'. The parental pressure exerted on the learner increasing the capacity of the ought-to L2 self can also be deemed relevant to this category through the idea that by failing to learn the L2 she would be disappointing her father. The parental belief that to get a good job a language is a 'good asset' appears to have been internalised as one reason why the participant claims to have continued learning German is the fact that it would 'look very good on a C.V', a notion suggesting it is seen as a means to securing a good job. Thus fear of not achieving a good job may also have contributed to the learner's L2 motivation.

The relevant accompanying strategies were also seen to have been in place whilst the learner was at school, providing a 'roadmap of tasks' to facilitate the achievement of the ideal L2 possible self (Dörnyei 2009b: 21). Taking part in language learning classes can be seen to have provided the necessary procedural strategies for the learner at this time, indicated by the fact that she was motivated by a sense of improvement noted by the teachers upon return from Germany. Knowledge that this strategy was adequate to enhance acquisition of the L2 can thus be suggested to have provided impetus for further study at degree level.

As noted previously, the participant's motivation to learn German at the time of interview had declined and this can also be analysed and conceptualised in accordance with the L2 Motivational Self System. As part of the dynamic systems approach, the decrease in motivation can be aligned with a decline in the motivational power of the possible self guides – a notion that weakens the strength of both the ideal and ought-to L2 selves as attractor basins due to a change in the conditions. Whilst at school, the learner's participation in language classes enhanced the ideal self image through provision of strategies deemed adequate to achieve the desired level of L2 skill. However, changes in the teaching style occurred once tuition was undertaken at degree level. The participant found that the strict discipline and high level of language input and practice of the A-Level classroom gave way to a less disciplined style with an emphasis on self learning. It was subsequently deemed a 'lot harder to learn new words and take on new vocabulary'. When asked if she could ever see herself becoming fluent in German, at the time of interview the participant only perceived this as possible if she secured a job in Germany. This suggests that fluency in the L2 is now only deemed plausible if time is spent living in the country. That this is not a realistic possibility is suggested by the idea that she 'did not feel very confident' and had a 'fear' about spending a year living in Germany when considering a degree in German. The idea that mastery of an L2 is only possible for this learner if significant time is spent in the relevant country is reinforced by the notion that at this point in time she is considering taking up French due to the fact that family friends live there. Changes related to the L2 Learning Experience attractor can be seen to have impacted upon the plausibility of the L2 possible

self, thus reducing the strength of the ideal L2 self as an attractor basin and reducing the effective motivational dynamics of the system as a whole.

It could also be suggested that the ideal possible L2 self image is no longer active in the learner's working memory. As noted previously, visits to Germany and parental pressure ensured the possible L2 self image remained pertinent. At the time of interview, the country had not been visited by the participant for four years meaning the sense of purpose gained from using the language within its realistic context has declined and is not working to keep the ideal L2 self image within the learner's active memory. The fact that the learner is now living away from home whilst at university also means parental pressure may not be acting in such a direct way to keep the ought-to L2 possible self within working memory, thus reducing the motivational strength of the ought-to L2 self as an attractor basin.

The ideal L2 possible self was also no longer so equally balanced with the possible feared self as factors contributing to the production of a strong feared possible self had been removed or significantly reduced. Fear arising from the group dynamic of her A-Level class and the possibility of achieving the lowest grade in the class is no longer present as she has ceased instructed language learning in that particular environment. Absence of the group dynamics activating the L2 Learning Experience as an attractor basin can be seen to have weakened the ought-to L2 self by removing the sense of competition to do well in the examination. This in turn has removed the sense of fear associated with failure, subsequently altering the previous balance between the participant's ideal and feared L2 possible selves to negative motivational effect. Parental pressure implicated in the production of a feared possible self by way of disappointment had also been reduced by the fact that the learner no longer lives at home and does not have to be reminded of this disappointment on a daily basis. These factors again contribute to a reduction in strength of the ought-to L2 self as an attractor basin. Fear of not being able to secure such a good job as somebody that speaks a foreign language is still present, although over ruled by the fear that living abroad that would necessarily accompany fluent L2 acquisition for this learner.

The conditions described thus combine to decrease the overall motivational effect of the ideal and ought-to L2 possible selves. Desire to reduce the discrepancy between her actual self and her ideal and ought-to L2 possible selves has subsequently been decreased, the effect of which is apparent in the learner's present lack of motivation to continue mastering the German language. Motivation has not diminished completely however as the learner still employs strategies to 'maintain' the level of German already acquired through communicating with other German speakers and reading German books. This notion suggests that, should a change in conditions occur in the future, the ideal L2 possible self may produce sufficient motivational force to push the system from its current state, re-organising itself in an act facilitating the eventual mastery of the German language.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of this learner's language history reveals a combination of factors that have contributed to the overall motivation to master German. When motivation was high, all three attractor basins were present and strong producing a state of stability working to maintain the learner's persistence of L2 acquisition. However, when changes in the learner's environment occurred over time, for example the ceasing of formal L2 tuition and moving out of home, these factors were altered causing chain reactions resulting in the weakening of all three attractor sites. The learner's high motivation was pushed from its self-organised settled pattern, re-establishing itself as a system producing reduced levels of L2 motivated behaviour.

Based on the evidence and analysis provided, this study can subsequently be said to support the validity of the L2 Motivational Self system in its ability to account for and conceptualise L2 motivation within a dynamic systems theory framework, a notion creating exciting opportunities for language teaching as well as the future advancement of L2 motivation research.

## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

The interviewee was a twenty-one year old British female undergraduate student in the school of English at the University of Nottingham. Her target language was German.

**Interviewer:**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview regarding the psychology of second language acquisition. To start with, can you please confirm your first language, your second language and how long you have been learning the second language for.

**Interviewee:**

My first language is English, my second language is German and I have been learning German since I was about eleven years old.

**Interviewer:**

Thank you. Ok, and why did you choose to learn a foreign language initially and why German in particular?

**Interviewee:**

When I went to secondary school we had to learn a second language. Half of the year group had to learn German and half of the year group had to learn French and I was in the German group.

**Interviewer:**

Ok.

**Interviewee:**

After that, if you'd shown that you were getting on ok with it you could take on French as well so I did that as well but the teaching style of the French teacher I didn't get on with very well so I decided to continue on with German to GCSE and leave the French behind.

**Interviewer:**

Right.

**Interviewee:**

I then chose to do it at A-Level for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I was enjoying learning German and I had done quite well in it at GCSE so I wanted to continue it but secondly it also would have given me a better chance of getting into a school that I wanted to go to because they were a specialist language college and it went in my favour that I wanted to learn German because I couldn't do that at my previous secondary school – they didn't do languages at A-Level so that was another reason to continue learning German. And then when I got to university I decided to continue learning German because I actually enjoyed it and it was something that I wanted to do.

**Interviewer:**

Yes.

**Interviewee:**

Also, I thought it would look very good on a C.V when it came to jobs and things if I had continued to learn German at degree level despite the fact I wasn't actually getting a degree in German. Another reason is that my dad has always said that its important, he's always said that, pushed me to keep up with languages because he thinks its important. He works in a job where he travels a lot and meets with many foreign people and different languages and things and so he realises that to get on in business and international business then having a language is a good asset - so I think he has encouraged me as well.

**Interviewer:**

Ok. Thank you very much. Is that everything for that question?

**Interviewee:**

I think so.

**Interviewer:**

Thank you. Do you imagine yourself as being fluent in German one day and if so, how do you think it would make you feel?

**Interviewee:**

I would absolutely love to be fluent in German or French or any language really because I just think its so lovely to be able to understand and communicate in another language and I get a real buzz out of making myself understood in another language and learning new words - and when you read something in another language and you understand it, you get a real sense of achievement and, I don't know, it's a different feeling to other types of learning so I would love to be fluent. I don't know if I'll ever achieve that, I suppose if I ever got a job in Germany or in a German speaking country that might be more possible but, I mean, you can't see in the future so I really don't know but, yes, it is definitely desirable.

**Interviewer:**

Right. Ok, thank you. Do you have any strategies in place to help you achieve fluency or your desired level of proficiency and if so, what are they?

**Interviewee:**

As I said, when I came to university I continued to study it – I wanted to keep up what I'd learnt at A-Level so that was one of my motivations for studying German here. I try and read a bit of German now and then and listen to German on holiday, listen to other people's conversations just to keep it ticking over in my mind and also, I've got a friend who studies German and we talk German, things like that so, I wouldn't say I'm trying to achieve a level at the moment, I would rather say I am trying to maintain what I've learnt already.

**Interviewer:**

If you didn't achieve your desired level, how do you think it would make you feel and how would it impact on your life?

**Interviewee:**

I do feel, I do regret not doing a degree in German. I do think it would have – I would have enjoyed it. The reason I didn't was because I was put off by having to do a year abroad because I just didn't feel very confident in doing that. I do regret not taking my learning to the next level and actually going to Germany and becoming more fluent so in a sense it – I'm a bit sad about it and also I do think that it might impact on my future career because

although I've got a level of German I'm not such a strong candidate as someone who has got a degree so I think in that sense I've let myself down a little bit not pursuing it because I could have done it and it was just my fears that have got in the way of that really.

**Interviewer:**

Is it something that you can see yourself taking up again in the future or is it something that you are now just interested in maintaining?

**Interviewee:**

I don't know if I'd take German up again – at the moment I'm considering taking up French and starting doing that again because I perhaps see that as being more useful because we've got family friends in France and being able to speak French there perhaps would be more useful to me at the moment, but I would never rule out not learning German again.

**Interviewer:**

With regards to the actual learning process, do you enjoy the process particularly and if so, can you elaborate – either way, what it is you particularly like or dislike about the learning process?

**Interviewee:**

I do really enjoy learning languages. It is hard work and you do have to put a lot of time and effort in but I particularly like seeing the similarities between German and English and words that have transferred from the languages. I also like, sort of, I like learning Grammar because its challenging, its so difficult but at the same time you see a pattern or you find something logical in it that just clicks, then it's a really, it's a real, I don't know, it just, it all fits together and it feels so good and when things start coming more naturally to you then its really, I don't know, you just get a good sense of achievement and – one teacher I had, my A-Level teacher, he was a firm believer in rote learning – we had to recite things, we had to learn things by rote and people might say that's old fashioned or whatever but it really did work. You do have to repeat things over and over again and be familiar with them, he also used to make us stand up in front of the class and do little presentations every week which at first was just horrendous because it was so daunting if you didn't have much confidence in your German ability, but you built on that and that really worked for me, it built up your confidence and you do feel like you can stand there and really speak German, so I really adapted to his German learning strategies. When I came to university and you were much more left on your own and there wasn't that discipline there, I found it a lot harder to learn new words and take on new vocabulary because you are not repeating it all the time so I would say that that learning strategy definitely works for me.

**Interviewer:**

Ok. And have you ever visited Germany?

**Interviewee:**

Yes. I've been twice. The first time I went I was about sixteen and we went on a school trip and I tried speaking German and asking for things in German and got really frustrated because they kept answering me back in English – I thought it was so rude and it really knocks your confidence. The second time we went it was an exchange so I stayed with a family in Germany and that was when I was about seventeen so I was part way through AS level then. That was much better, you know, we got on a lot better there speaking German and it really did – you didn't feel like you'd made a big improvement but when we got back

the teachers all commented that our German had improved – it improves your confidence because when you speak – when you are just learning a language in a classroom environment it doesn't have much – it's not really in any context so it can feel a bit pointless sometimes, whereas when you actually go to the country and you speak to native speakers and making yourself understood you realise what the aim is and the point and you realise that you have actually made a lot of progress – that you can get along, have conversations, get things done, make transactions and I was really chuffed when they thought we were all from the Netherlands and not from England because I knew my German accent was improving then!

**Interviewer:**

So you found that had quite a positive effect on your attitude then?

**Interviewee:**

Oh yes, definitely, I think it does have a great influence – it spurs you on, you see some sort of end to your efforts and you know, that's what learning languages is all about – there's no point in keeping it to yourself, it is for communication with other people so when you actually go over there you get that – it does spur you on.

**Interviewer:**

Ok. The last question – I think you have probably covered this in some of your answers anyway but do you feel under any pressure to learn German – any external pressure – other than what you may put yourself under to learn it? I know you mentioned about your dad, is there anything else – can you expand or elaborate on that?

**Interviewee:**

There has been various pressures throughout the time that I've been learning German. Like I said, there was the school that I really wanted to go to and my dad saying you should keep it up and he was disappointed this year when I couldn't fit in into my timetable to do any more German but, at the end of the day, I'm really glad that those pressures were there that pushed me on to do it – perhaps by myself I would have given up or decided it wasn't worth it but – so I am really pleased that they did because it is really something that I've enjoyed and got a lot from over the years.

[Immediately after recording finished, the interviewee recalled further information she wished to add in relation to this question – for continuity, the information is included at this point of the transcription].

I remember hearing one of my German teachers at AS level saying to someone else who'd asked, I think it was her partner, it was an informal situation – he asked her whether I was any good at German and she said she'll get a C if she tries hard. Well, I have never got a C in anything in my life so I was absolutely furious – she'll get a C if she tries hard! So that really spurred me on – to show her that I could do a lot better than a C if I tried hard so that was one thing that really motivated me – to show this teacher that I was better than she thought I was. Another thing was that we started off as a group of ten originally – a lot of people dropped out because as I said earlier, the teacher expected a lot of us and it was a lot of work and it was hard – it was hard and I could have dropped out. Anyway, it ended up just being four of us in the end and the other three girls were really clever, they were all on track for four A's and you know, Oxford and Cambridge places and whatever, so I think that we sort of – they were all really supportive and we all supported each other but at the same time there was a sort of 'keeping up with the Jones's' aspect to it. But I think that was healthy, I think that

was good for us all because you didn't want to be the one that was, sort of, bottom of the class so, I mean, everybody tried hard at that school, it was a good school and people enjoyed what they were being taught and things so it wasn't unusual but they were – they were all very clever girls and I think part of your motivation for doing well was not to be the one that didn't get an A sort of thing, so that's another couple of instances.

**Interviewer:**

Lovely, ok, well, thank you very much. That is the end of my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add or is that everything?

**Interviewee:**

No, I don't think so. Is there anything else you want to ask me?

**Interviewer:**

No, that's everything. You have been very helpful thank you very much. The information will be used in a project for my degree exploring the psychology behind second language acquisition. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of my final project when completed. Ok, thank you very much.



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