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Future Selves, Motivation And Autonomy In Long-Term EFL

Learning Trajectories

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Introduction

One area of recent educational theorizing in which the concepts of identity, motivation and autonomy intersect is the study of future-oriented components of the self. The basic premise is that “the selves we strive to become focus motivational attention, guide behaviour, and are an important source of positive self-regard” (Oyserman, 2008: 269). In other words, the self-identity we wish for in the future can be a source of motivation to engage in self-regulated, or autonomous, learning which will help us achieve that identity. This configuration is of course only one ‘take’ on these much-studied concepts (there are many other possible sources of motivation besides ‘identity’, for example), but the tripartite relationship has inspired research in the fields of general education (e.g. Oyserman, *op. cit.*) and management (e.g. Boyatzis, 2006), and has begun to be applied to the field of language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). In this chapter I will present evidence from a longitudinal study of Indonesian adolescents which indicates the presence of future-oriented components of the self in their motivation to learn English, and is suggestive of a link between this and long-term autonomous learning of the language.

Literature review

Links between personal identity and L2 motivation have been studied for several decades, being salient in the work of social-psychologists such as Gardner and Lambert

(1972) and Giles and Byrne (1982). Based on Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory, these theories proposed that individuals' motivation to learn a particular L2 would be influenced by, for example, their own ethnic identity, how strongly they identified with the L2 community, and the perceived ethnolinguistic vitality of the L2 speaker group. In this body of work a person's identity was conceived as a stable trait, one shaped largely by birth and the structuring experiences of early life. The emphasis was on what a person had become, rather than on what they might become. It was the advent of poststructuralist views of identity during the 1990s which first introduced notions of future identities to the field of L2 motivation, for example in the work of McKay and Wong (1996) and Norton (2000). In this view "[i]dentities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future" (Block, 2007: 27); individuals are perceived to be agents in the construction of their own multiple, dynamic identities, and the futures they imagine for themselves are perceived to influence their behaviour. The evidence for this may often be found in the stories they tell; to take two recent examples, Murray (2008), recounts the experiences of a Japanese woman called 'Mable' who derived motivation to learn English from her love of western films and TV programmes and her imagined participation in the world portrayed on screen, while King (2008) attributes the strong investment in English of his Korean informants partly to their efforts to construct gay identities in expatriate communities.

These ethnographic and narrative-based studies have provided colourful portraits of individuals involved in 'identity work' while learning an L2, work which involves making imaginative projections to the future as well as making sense of past and present experiences of learning/using the language in their various communities. However, such studies do not make specific claims about the origins and effects of future-oriented language-related

components of the self. This is the aim of new lines of inquiry which have their basis in ‘self-psychology’, and in particular in the notions of ‘possible selves’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and ‘self-discrepancy’ (Higgins, 1987). Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self-System proposes that a major part of motivation to learn an L2 is derived from a person’s view of their own possible future self, especially where there is a discrepancy between a person’s current condition and an ‘Ideal L2 Self’. Dörnyei argues that the power of imagination is crucial in initiating and sustaining self-regulatory (autonomous) learning. By contrast, the ‘Ought-to L2 Self’ represents the future identity one feels one *should* have, but because it reflects other people’s motives rather than one’s own it is less likely to promote autonomous learning and may instead encourage a focus on avoiding failure. Early empirical work in diverse international settings (e.g. Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Yashima, 2009), as well as among different age-groups (Kormos & Csizér, 2008), is furnishing evidence that the ‘Ideal L2 Self’ is an important component of learners’ motivation to acquire an L2, and in global contexts where English is mainly conceived of as an international lingua franca rather than as an identity marker of particular Anglophone communities, a better predictor of motivated learning behaviour than the traditional concept of ‘integrativeness’.

The causal link to self-regulated learning behaviour is hypothesized, but is not yet established. Indeed, Dörnyei (2009) makes clear that several conditions need to be fulfilled for a strong ‘Ideal L2 Self’ to translate into effortful learning. The image of the future needs to be strong and vivid, and for a long-term endeavour like language-learning it has to be sustained through regular and often mundane activity. Referring to the even longer-term enterprise of becoming a British Wimbledon men’s champion, tennis player Andy Murray recently commented:

I've thought about serving for the title – but the closer you get to a grand slam the less you think about it. In the gym is the time I think about those things – to find a reason for putting in the hard work – and when you're going through it on the running track.

(Mail Online, 2009)

Moreover, as Dörnyei (2009) explains, for an athlete “the coach and the training plan are just as much a part of the complete vision as the image [of winning]” 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” (p. 37), such as creating proximal subgoals and managing one's time effectively.

There is plenty of agreement, therefore, that the ‘future self’, ‘motivation’ and ‘autonomy’ of language learners are related in interesting and potentially important ways. But as Ushioda (2009) has pointed out, there are basic ontological differences in the approach taken by researchers to understanding and describing their relationship. On the one hand there are those, just described, who continue a positivist tradition of uncovering causal relations between key variables, in this case building upon findings in self-psychology to identify the key future-related components of the self-concept that contribute to the growth of motivation and, under specified conditions, to self-regulated learning behaviour (the preferred term to ‘autonomy’), with the ultimate aim of creating a predictive model of the processes involved. On the other hand there are those who eschew such ambitions, preferring instead to do justice to the complexity of relations of ‘person-in-context’ (ibid.) by producing holistic descriptions of individual learners over time, usually through analysis of their narrative accounts. For them the focus is more on ‘identity’ than the ‘self’, since the interest is in actual people “relating the self to the world...through cycles of perception, action and

interpretation” (Van Lier, 2007: 58), while motivation may be more appropriately conceived as ‘investment’ (Norton, 2000) or ‘agency’ (Sealey & Carter, 2004) to recognise its fluctuating and contingent nature.

The study I present here is in the spirit of the latter approach, in that my aim is to describe the way individual language learners talk about their futures at different points in time, and relate that to their apparent investment in English over the period. But I also use concepts from the former approach, such as ‘Ideal L2 Self’, on the understanding that their precise connotation is still being negotiated in the field and that therefore the study may inform the way the constructs are delineated, and their operating conditions hypothesized, in future research (Dörnyei, 2009; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2009).

Research Methodology

From 2002-4 I conducted a small-scale, mixed method study of young Indonesians’ motivation to learn English during their first 2 years of junior high school, from ages 11/12 to 13/14, in a Sumatran town I will call Ajeng, a provincial capital of 300,000 people with a rapidly developing local economy based on palm oil and logging industries. The study found high levels of motivation and autonomous learning behaviour among some pupils and I argued that the motivation “gained its strength and character from identification processes not with native-speakers of the language but with a future self whose competence in English provided access to academic and professional opportunities as well as to diverse forms of entertainment, to state-of-the-art technology and high status international social networks” (Lamb, 2007: 759). I also argued that for many learners with middle-class family backgrounds their state school English lessons appeared to be less significant in sustaining

their motivation and effecting progress in the language than private courses and other contextual supports.

In 2008 I returned to Indonesia to track down the same 12 learners who had formed the focal group in the above study. They were originally selected to represent a cross-section of motivational profiles, with 8 regarded as highly motivated and 4 as apparently unmotivated, based on their initial questionnaire responses and on teachers' comments about them. The learners were now aged 17/18 and either in their last year of school (9) or the first year of university (3). Once located I interviewed them in either Indonesian or English, according to their choice, about their current motivation to learn English, learning experiences in the intervening four years, and their hopes for the future. Many of the prompts were similar to those I had given in the three interviews I had conducted with them in the years 2002-4. I also asked each one to write a short 'language learning history' (LLH) which covered some of the same ground as the interview but asked them to comment specifically on:

- learning experiences in each institution they had attended
- positive and negative experiences in the learning of English
- resources, material or human, that had helped or hindered their learning
- their plans for future learning of English, if any
- where they would be in 10 years' time

All 12 learners were interviewed, and the recordings (average 27 minutes) fully transcribed. 10 of the learners completed language learning histories, written either in English or Indonesian (or a mixture), varying in length from one to four A4 pages.

The main method of data analysis was to compare responses to prompts *across learners*, and *across times for individual learners*. These responses were also compared to relevant sections in the written ‘histories’. While each individual’s learning trajectory was unique, distinct patterns emerged in the way that the two broad groups of learners – those originally identified as ‘more’ or ‘less’ motivated – talked about the role of the language in their present and future lives. To exemplify this pattern, while also conveying a sense of individuality, I will here present data from four of the learners, two (with pseudonyms Dico, male, and Marlina, female) from the ‘more motivated’ group and two (Krisna and Widya – both male) from the ‘less motivated’.

Results

First of all I present evidence concerning the proportion of English used in the interviews by the learners, and relate this to their self-reported autonomous learning of English over the four years since I had last seen them. I shall make the case that the gap between those originally identified as more or less motivated learners had in many ways widened during this period. This will be followed by a comparison of the way the two pairs talk about their future and the place of English within it.

Contrasting learning trajectories

At each of the four interviews, the learners were given the choice of using English or Indonesian with me. Considering they had been studying English for at least three hours a week throughout this time, it is not surprising that there was a trend in the interviews towards more use of English, but this was *only* among the eight learners previously identified as ‘motivated’. Figure 1 below shows the number of turns begun in English for the four

learners described in this paper. Dico and Marlina used more English in successive interviews, and by 2008 over 90% of their turns started in English, though about a quarter also included some code-switching back to Indonesian. The change for Marlina was the most dramatic and she also was able to sustain her turns in English with minimal code-switching. The upward trajectory of these learners is typical of those originally identified as ‘more motivated’. Meanwhile learners Widya and Krisna used no English in any of their interviews (beyond perfunctory greetings).

< *Insert FIGURE 1 near here* >

Admittedly counting turns in a single (and singular type of) interaction is a crude measure of L2 proficiency, but the divergence between the two groups is striking. Opportunities to use English with a foreigner in this context are rare, and the increased willingness and capacity of Marlina and Dico to take the opportunity could be seen as evidence of an emerging “English-mediated identity” (Block, 2007: 144). Conversely, for those who turned down such a rare opportunity it is perhaps even stronger evidence of a lack of such an identity.

Evidence of autonomous learning

From the more successful learners’ perspective, the development of their English has been and continues to be a personal struggle, demanding a high level of autonomy and access to relevant resources. Both of them talk with detachment about their learning of English in school, and express a degree of frustration with their experiences there. Fortunately they have been able to express their agency using learning resources outside of school.

Like several of the more motivated learners, Marlina compares her school English lessons unfavourably to her private school (LIA – *Lembaga Indonesia-Amerika*):

...because in LIA I have to speak but in school it just about grammar grammar grammar and grammar [M, 6].

In her younger days she was much more forthright in her criticism of her English teachers, as well as of her classmates who were poorly motivated and whose unruly behaviour in class disturbed her. In 2008 she appeared to have found a satisfying identity as a relatively expert English-user, one who was on good terms with her teacher and was a resource for her floundering classmates:

...in the final exam there is a listening section, I know that my friend cannot get it so when there was ‘try-out’ *kemarin* [yesterday] my friend is told me ‘M M M, help me I cannot hear what they said I don’t know anything’ so [I said] ‘yeah I will help you’ [M, 7].

Through all my interviews with her, she related the learning of English primarily to her private course, and she was proud to have now reached “Higher Intermediate 3” level. Moreover, she is aware of having access to many other resources outside of school, notably English-using, internationally-minded Indonesian relatives and friends, including the daughter of an Indonesian ambassador currently staying in her house “who very motivate me to learn English” [M, 11].

Dico was already in the first year of university in Jakarta when I met him in 2008, studying computer science, having been placed in an elite ‘acceleration’ class early in junior high school. In all his interviews over the six years he consistently presented himself as a ‘lazy’ language learner, taking pride in his progress but not deriving particular pleasure from the process. In 2008 he repeated “I think I’m lazy because when something hard to finish I become lazy but if that was simple I want to finish it.” [D, 6]. Despite his professed lethargy, he attended a private course twice a week almost uninterrupted from the age of 11 to 17, and wrote in his LLH “I felt the English I got in course better than in school, maybe because in school I prefer to play with my friend than study”. Now he said he learned English incidentally while studying, as he was having to process IT material in English on a daily basis – he disliked using Indonesian language software because “I feel it’s better in English” – and also while rehearsing for his amateur rock band who had decided to sing in English. Perhaps because he was already out of the school system he had an even more detached view of his school English classes than Marlina. He distinguished between the teachers who had motivated him and those who had not:

The teachers that ... didn’t use English outside class ... maybe they just think English is just a school subject, not for using, whereas maybe Miss R and Mr B for them English is really a means of communication for the future [D, 26, part translation].

Marlina and Dico’s descriptions were not dissimilar to the other six ‘motivated’ learners, who all gave a sense of trying to take personal control of their learning and exploiting the nexus of resources that were at their disposal, from variable quality school English classes through private courses to synchronous online chatting. Murphey and Carpenter (2008) point out in relation to their own use of language learning histories that “the

act of asking is itself a way of stimulating reflection and scaffolding agency” (p. 32), and on this fourth visit I became aware that participation in my research may have been one factor that contributed to this autonomy. As one learner put it in her LLH, “it’s really interesting when you came to SMP 7, it was my first experience, to see, meet, and speak with the native speaker of English.” On the other hand, my intervention did not seem to have the same beneficial effect on Krisna or Widya, neither of whom had reported much autonomous learning behaviour in my earlier interviews, and were not particularly active learners in their school classes. In 2008, they both quickly indicated a preference for speaking in Indonesian, and while similarly critical of some school practices, neither indicated that they had invested effort in learning English over this period beyond what they were compelled to do for school.

Widya shared the relatively prosperous background of Dico and Marlina and had well-educated parents. In the past he had studied at the premier private English institute in the town, but in 2008 he was unequivocal about his English:

I: So have your skills in English developed?

W: No, they’ve got worse [laughs]. No progress.

I: No progress?

W: The problem is, it’s all about school now. There are no private lessons outside.

[W, 1, transl.]

He says that his parents still encourage him to learn English and that if his school schedule was not so full, “maybe I’d be sent to a private English course” [W, 15, transl.]. Despite the fact that he is not developing his language skills, he finds school English lessons enjoyable, liking the teacher and materials, and he regards the exam result as “very, very important” for

his future. In his LLH he reported that “friends, girlfriend and family” were a source of motivation for him to learn English, but when questioned about this in his interview, he related it again to performance in class quizzes – “I don’t want to be below them, I want to get above them!” He offered no evidence of having tried to learn or use English outside of school.

Unlike Widya, Krisna is determined to project a *changed* identity, as somebody who had grown into a serious student of English compared to his younger self who, in his words, sat at the back of the class and “didn’t really concentrate”.

I’ve started to like English now because each time I hear it I can hear new words, words which are really er, in my opinion, English sounds... mature, I mean, when you use the words you sound like an adult even though you’re still young [K, 3, transl.].

Although he still only sits in the middle of the class – he is “not brave enough” to try sitting at the front, where he is much more likely to get nominated by the teacher – and his speaking skills have not developed as he would have wished, he does feel his grammar and vocabulary knowledge has increased, and he was striving to get a high enough score in the school-leaving examination (UAN) to gain entry to his desired university in West Sumatra. He attributes his change to a former girlfriend, who persuaded him of the importance of English and “always made an effort to push me, so I wasn’t afraid.” Nevertheless, apart from increased concentration in school, and occasional use of English in Karaoke parties, Krisna was not apparently making any other autonomous efforts to learn the language.

It is probably true that a conventional written test of English would have found a smaller gap in language proficiency between the two sets of learners than Figure 1 suggests. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown in this section how the stark contrast in their willingness to use the language in the interview is mirrored in their differing levels of investment in the language outside of school.

Future self-guides of more autonomous learners

I turn now to what the four learners say about their futures, in their interviews with me and in their LLH. The main evidence about their self-guides comes from those sections of the interview where I ask them where they think they will be in 10 years' time (also a prompt for the LLH); however, I also use data from other parts of the interview where they spontaneously talked about the future (e.g. in response to my question about how important they think English is). As I had used similar prompts in my 2003 and 2004 interviews, it was possible to make a direct comparison of their responses.

Throughout my interviews with her, Marlina consistently stressed the importance of English for her future life. However, there are interesting contrasts in the way she responded to my question about the importance of English, as seen in these extracts:

2003

What's clear is the most important thing is not to forget religion. After that, we have to know English, because according to my mum, who knows what's going to happen in 10 years time, maybe the international language will be English [M, 24, transl.].

2004

My mother says English is important language, if you cannot to speak English you cannot to live in the... *jaman yang akan datang* [future times] [M, 4].

2008

For me English is the most powerful language in the world because with English we can go there, everywhere that we want and we can get a lot of information because, in internet for example all the information is in English so to get it we have to know about English and ... English is a must for me [M, 1].

In her earlier interviews she frequently invokes her parents' (usually her mother's) support for her views; in the later interview, they are presented as her own views. Moreover in the earlier interviews the emphasis seems to be on having to prepare oneself for a threatening future, and an awareness of disadvantage if English is not mastered, whereas in 2008 she speaks of what English can enable her to do. Possibly this signals a diminution of the 'Ought-to L2 Self' and a strengthening of the 'Ideal L2 Self'. Her own visions of the future have become much sharper over this period. In 2004 she was quite vague and again cited her mother – "I'd like to go to university abroad but my Mum don't like it" – whereas in 2008 she spoke of her plans at length; they involved studying in the Communication Faculty at a specific university in Bandung ("[Ajeng] is not qualified to progress my education") then going on to do a Master's Degree abroad, thereafter earning enough money to pay for her parents to take the Hajj.

Studying at a university in Jakarta, Dico has already made good his 2004 prediction that he would leave Ajeng to further his studies. Like Marlina, he was extremely vague about his future in earlier interviews, but by the age of 17 he seemed to have a much sharper vision of the future and the place of English:

With what I'm studying now, my kind of job will be in the manufacturing and the use of computers, and even for that, if we buy or sell products, we take a risk, we need English because we buy them abroad.....What I mean is, to get the precise thing we need, we usually make inquiries about the price with people from overseas, or search on the internet, they use English, rarely Indonesian [D, 18, part transl.].

In his earlier interviews, as part of his 'lazy boy' persona, he had downplayed the importance of English, whereas in 2008 he is matter-of-fact about its value:

[I]n my life now, many tasks I do using English. For the example, now I'm a college student, the subject book of the lesson, almost use English, beside that, using technological tools, usually it manuals books use English too (like computer parts). That's some of English uses in my life... I can't guess how useful English in my future, but I swear it is very useful... I think English still be useful in my life now and next day [D, LLH].

Even more than for Marlina, English is already entwined in the daily life of Dico, and he literally cannot imagine a future without it.

Future self-guides of less autonomous learners

Widya's family background (his father is a Professor of Education) may help explain his early awareness of the value of English to his future. In my very first interview with him, aged 11, I asked him if he had any ambitions and he replied:

To be good at English, because in the future, according to my parents, globalization is going to happen, western people are going to come to Indonesia and will get involved in every country [W, 14, transl.].

Six years later, he reiterates the importance of English in almost the same words: “English is really needed in this globalization era” [W, LLH, transl.]. The tense has changed – globalization has arrived – but he does not elaborate, and as indicated above he equates success in English to scoring good marks in school exams. His immediate ambitions are modest,

My plan is just to stay in [Ajeng], studying.....and if I can, to take a course at the same time, computer course, English course, to advance my career [W, 21, transl.].

though at the very end of his interview he adds that he would like one day to do postgraduate study abroad “if I can... like my dad did”. He does not say what or where he might study, nor does he ask me if I can procure him a scholarship, like two of the other learners did (half-jokingly). It seems that this is a rather blurry future image, one that owes more to parental advice than his own imagination, and the repeated use of phrases like ‘if I can’ makes it sound very tentative. Interestingly he becomes animated about the future when discussing a vision for alternative education. In his LLH he wrote,

If I become a success I have a dream to build a home school for poor or special needs children, and what’s most important is that the curriculum will use a foreign language, mainly English [transl.].

and he elaborated on the notion of ‘home schooling’, which he had heard about on Indonesian TV and read in magazines. His L2 ideals appear to be related to the next generation, rather than to his own future self.

As we have seen, Krisna was eager to assert a change in his orientation to English since I had last met him in 2004, thanks largely to the influence of a former girlfriend. In his 2008 interview he emphasised the importance of English thus:

Maybe in the future I’ll keep studying English because English has a really important role in many areas especially work and also communication. Because now every job has a connection with computers and English. So if I don’t master English well then maybe I’ll have difficulty doing my job, and also problems in accessing computers [K, LLH, transl.].

What is interesting to note here is, firstly, the hedging of his intention to ‘keep studying English’, and secondly, the way he focuses on the dangers of *not* mastering English rather than emphasising the opportunities it brings, as Marlina and Dico do. He does have dreams of his own, but English does not appear to be strongly implicated in them, and he evinces great uncertainty about the future (e.g. repeated uses of ‘maybe/perhaps’) and a lack of agency (e.g. ‘if it’s up to me’). In the same rather sad way as Widya, he projects his dreams about English onto the next generation:

I don’t really know yet [what I want to do] but if it’s up to me, my desire is to become a computer expert in a company, and maybe also, in 10 years time, because perhaps I’ll already have children, maybe I’ll give some basic lessons in English, so that my

children will understand English from the beginning of school, because now it's already the beginning of the global era [K, 16, transl.].

Discussion and implications

I will begin the discussion by briefly summarizing my findings. On meeting my 12 focal learners again, I found that the gap in their oral proficiency – or at the very least their willingness to demonstrate their proficiency in authentic communication – had widened. The learners originally designated as ‘motivated’ were all able to sustain extended conversations in English now, whereas those originally designated as ‘less motivated’ still rejected the opportunity to demonstrate any competence. Although no conclusions can be drawn about how they have developed this proficiency, Dico and Marlina were typical of their motivated peers in continuing to ascribe a subordinate role to their school learning of English, though individual teachers *are* cited as inspirations, and they credited their growing ability to use English to various activities outside of school, in which they engaged autonomously (in the sense of having chosen them themselves) and persistently. The learners who declined to speak in English acknowledge the potential importance of English in their lives but did not claim to have engaged in any sustained effort to learn outside school.

Turning to evidence of the learners’ future self-guides, there are noteworthy differences in those of the two groups. For Dico and Marlina, their imagined futures are very different but each *assumes* competence in English. Both learners’ vision of the future have become sharper, as would be expected by their late teens. In Marlina’s case, she appears to have taken greater ownership over her imagined future, perhaps signalling a strengthening of her ‘ideal’ as against her ‘ought-to’ L2 self. But there is also evidence of consistency in their

visions over the six year period – Marlina’s wish to study abroad, and Dico’s need to move to Jakarta to continue his education. Apart from English, another element that features in the imagined futures of *all* the motivated learners is a move away from Sumatra, towards the metropolitan cities of Java or beyond. By contrast, the future visions of Widya and Krisna remain vague and tentative. A common feature of their talk about the future is frequent hedging, indicating feelings of uncertainty about what will happen and a lack of personal agency in securing favourable outcomes. Widya and Krisna both now view English as more important than they did in their early teens, and intend to study the language again in the future – but there is still a sense of obligation in their statements as if they are motivated more by fear of failure than a true vision of a future English-speaking self. Indeed they seem to transfer their own aspirations for English from themselves to the next generation.

Among one pair of learners, then, we seem to have an association between high initial motivation, autonomous learning of the language, and increasingly sharp and confident visions of a future English-using self. This association is made more visible through comparison to the other pair of learners in the same context, who showed lower initial motivation to learn the language, a virtual absence of autonomous learning, and much less obvious visions of a future English-using self (this pattern of difference is apparent in other individuals in the study too, though space does not allow me to exemplify it here). In this sense the study offers encouragement to the current research initiatives exploring the links between the self, language identity and motivation to learn an L2 (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). In particular, the study presents individualized descriptions of strong ideal L2 selves in learners who have invested considerable effort in learning English over their teenage years, “operationalising the vision” (Dörnyei, 2009: 37) through various pathways of autonomous learning. The ideal L2 selves described are very much active users of the language, and

because of its negative washback on school English classes the school-leaving examination does not function as a useful proximal subgoal but instead is regarded more as a frustrating, if necessary, diversion.

As also predicted by the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009), the ‘Ought-to L2 Selves’ exhibited by the other learners appear to have much weaker motivational power over the long-term and there is no apparent link with autonomous learning. In fact they are each more satisfied with state school provision, and place great emphasis on the school-leaving exam. It is also clear from the way they talk about the future that although the less successful learners view mastery of English as a valuable goal, they also view it as less likely to be achieved; and this in turn may make it less likely to promote self-regulated learning (MacIntyre et al., 2009).

The consistency of the learners’ future visions over the six years of contact is also encouraging, in that it argues for an element of coherence even during a period of life known for its experimentation with different identities (Harklau, 2007), and in an academic era when poststructuralist theorizing on learner identity emphasizes its hybrid and transitory nature (Pavlenko, 2002). What I have observed here among the more successful learners is a sharpening of their visions of themselves as future English users, which in the L2 motivational self-system model would be predicted to enhance motivation, as “the more elaborate the possible self in terms of imaginative, visual and other content elements, the more motivational power it is expected to have” (Dörnyei, 2009: 19). Nevertheless, I must concede that I only have insight into learners’ identities as *represented* to me in their interviews and LLH – while this is reasonably consistent over the six years, there may well

have been fluctuations to which I was not party, and whole other identities to which I had no access and which could conceivably have influenced their learning of English.

The evidence is less clear-cut about when ideal L2 selves may develop and influence motivation. Dörnyei (2009) cites Zentner and Renaud (2007) as claiming that stable ideal-self representations do not emerge before adolescence, and that therefore “the self approach may not be appropriate for pre-secondary students” (p. 38), and Kormos and Csizér (2008) found that Hungarian university students’ ideal L2 selves were stronger than secondary school students’, whose motivation to learn English was more dependent on their language learning experience. The case of Marlina would seem to support this view. In her earlier interviews at age 11-13 her constant references to her mother indicate she was more guided by an Ought-to L2 Self, and she was also much more affected by what was going on in her school (and private course) classrooms. By the age of 17 her talk indicates that she has internalized her parents’ ideals for her and she talks in a more animated way about opportunities to use English in her private life than about specific learning experiences. On the other hand, Dico appears to have developed an ideal L2 self at an earlier age and no such change is evident here. Clearly there is a need for larger-scale investigations of the L2 motivational self-system as it operates in early adolescence i.e. near the beginning of secondary school.

Finally, this study highlights the potential importance of context, and especially immediate family context, in ‘developing’ and then ‘priming’ possible selves (Dörnyei, 2009). The learners who appear to have developed ideal L2 selves are from ‘middle-class’ backgrounds, in that their parents are educated and their families are relatively prosperous; they also have links with the world beyond Sumatra – for instance, Marlina’s parents both got

Master's degrees abroad while Dico's father worked in Jakarta and an older brother was at boarding school in Java. Frequent and early parental encouragement, available models of successful Indonesian learners, access to attractive multimedia English texts, and paid-for supplementary learning in private courses (with other similarly minded young Indonesians) were all probably instrumental in helping these learners confidently imagine themselves as future users of English; and the denial of these opportunities to learners like Krisna must help explain why they could not so imagine themselves. The case of Widya perhaps warns us against simple deterministic explanations though, for he apparently shared some of the favourable background characteristics of Dico and Marlina. Meanwhile, there are suggestions in the data that I myself may have had a role in 'priming' the ideal L2 self, by giving them these rare opportunities to enact their emergent identities as English speakers. An awkward instance of researcher interference, perhaps, but also a reminder that one of the local school teachers' biggest challenges in such contexts is to supplement their learners' regular diet of L2 knowledge accumulation with activities that "simulate a desired end-state" (Dörnyei, 2009: 20) i.e. authenticate their possible English-speaking selves through in-class and out-of-class communication. Motivating learners like Krisna, who probably form the vast local majority, may be an even greater challenge though, for it involves generating the very possibility of being a competent, active user of English.

Conclusion

Motivation, autonomy and identity are all important concepts in the study of second language learning and teaching, and their potential interconnections have often been discussed (see Introduction, this volume). However, there have been surprisingly few attempts to address directly their possible relationships, and one of the reasons for this is that each has its own tradition of inquiry, with its own research methods and distinct ontological

perspectives. In this chapter I have explored the ‘future selves’ of four Indonesian teenage learners of English, in qualitative data generated over a six year period, and found links between the growing strength and clarity of these future selves, the emergent L2 identities of the individual learners, their expressed motivation to learn the L2, and their actual level of autonomous learning. In so doing I hope to have provided some encouragement both to ongoing quantitative research into the relationship between future-oriented components of the self and motivated learning behaviour, and also to complementary qualitative studies which analyse how they play out in actual human beings in specific contexts of learning.

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