Contradictory *Others* and the *Habitus* of Languages: Surveying the L2 Motivation Landscape in the United Kingdom

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<ABSTRACT>

Britain’s already poor record for language learning might be exacerbated by the Global English phenomenon, in that utilitarian reasons for learning languages other than English are increasingly undermined (Lanvers, 2014; Lo Bianco, 2014). This article offers a state-of-the-art review of UK research on second language (L2) learning motivation and attitude. The introduction is dedicated to a review of language education policy and numerical evidence on the decline in language learning. Part I reviews UK motivational literature under the headings *Primary school; Secondary school; University and beyond; Teachers, parents, milieu*. The evaluation of the literature reveals some striking lacunae, as well as a misfit between common explanations of the UK’s language learning crisis and the social divide between those who choose to learn languages and those who do not. A motivation-in-context understanding of UK language learning needs to account for the many contradictory *Other* influences impacting on learner motivation. Therefore, Part II presents a new motivational model, based on Higgins’s Self Discrepancy Theory, a model which includes multifaceted *Others* as well as *Own* selves, including that of *resistance/rebellion* against *Others*. <END OF ABSTRACT>

*Keywords*: language learner motivation; language policy; elitism in language learning; British insularism; resistance

“All education is fundamentally political” (Pennycook, 1989, p. 590)

The notion that Global English is threatening motivation for English speakers to learn other languages (Lanvers 2014; Lo Bianco 2014) is gaining empirical validation (for references, see Taylor & Marsden, 2014). Britain, perhaps more than any other Anglophone country, has a long-standing reputation of being ‘bad at languages.’ There is no shortage of reports on the detrimental effect to the UK economy (Foreman–Peck, 2007), diplomacy, security, and social cohesion (Cambridge Public Policy, 2016), nor of high profile calls to address the language crisis (House of Commons Briefing Paper, 2016; House of Commons Short Debate, 2010; TES, 2016). The UK’s reputation seems justified: Language competencies developed through school learning in the United Kingdom are the poorest of all EU countries (with the exception of, in some cases, Ireland; see British Council, 2013). International comparisons show that UK citizens have poorer motivation to learn languages than other EU citizens (Bartram, 2010; Eurostats, 2012), are less concerned than other Europeans that all should speak another language, and believe more than other Europeans that the EU should operate in one official language only (Eurostats, 2012, pp. 110–111). While the UK’s language learning record is undeniably poor, the purported lack of motivation to learn languages might be skewed by the fact, that across Europe, motivation for learning languages is strongest for *English* (Romanowski, 2016). Thus, because English native speakers cannot choose to study the most desirable language as a second language (L2), cross- national comparisons might do well to measure motivation for languages other than English only.

One frequently encountered rationale for the British disinterest in languages gained credibility on 23 June 2016, when Britain voted to leave the EU. The British are often described as Europhobic, insular, and inward-looking (Coleman, 2009; Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009; Norton & Gieve, 2010; Pachler, 2007). Their exaggerated perception of the global significance of English (Schultzke, 2014) may also contribute to a disinterest in language learning. Furthermore, the debate on the UK’s poor language skills (Graham & Santos, 2015; Lanvers & Coleman, 2013) may create a ‘climate of negativity’ (McPake et al., 1999) in public opinion and thus negatively affect the confidence of British language learners. Thus, common explanations of UK learners’ disinterest in languages refer to sociocultural factors; yet, UK-based studies on L2 motivation tend to measure individual differences, inviting individualistic rationalizations of L2 motivation. The conclusion returns to this tension, and proposes a Self Discrepancy Model, which offers a better account of the volatility that characterizes the current UK language learning landscape.

One way to promote language learning in the context of declining interest is via education policy; in this respect, recent fluctuations in language education policies are of particular interest. As UK education policy is devolved to its four nations (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), language education policies differ somewhat between nations (see Tinsley, 2013).

This article is organized in the following way: Part I briefly summarizes language policies in the four nations and then provides a state-of-the-art overview of the social divide in language learning in the UK, followed by empirical L2 motivation studies, organized by school sector and topic (primary; secondary; university and beyond; teachers, parents, and milieu), as well as by nation. The analysis of this literature reveals gaps between L2 motivational studies on the one hand and increasing numerical data on the social divide in language learning on the other hand. In Part II, this appraisal leads to a refined L2 motivation model, offering a better account of the many conflicting societal dimensions characterizing the UK language learning landscape.

<A>PART I: REVIEW

*<B>Language Education Policy*

In part, the policy differences between the four nations reflect their linguistic heritage. In Wales, for instance, Welsh is compulsory at lower secondary level, and a second modern language is encouraged. Wales’s five-year plan aims to achieve ‘Bilingualism + 1’ (Welsh Government, 2015), continuing the nation’s strong identification with Welsh. Scotland, more ambitious than other nations regarding modern languages (Johnstone, 2007), launched the 1+2 (EU target of mother tongue plus two modern languages) policy in 2011, and is currently half-way into implementing this policy. In Northern Ireland and Wales, the study of a foreign language is only compulsory at lower secondary level (age 11–14); in England and Scotland it is also compulsory at the upper primary level (age 7–11). Thus, one language is compulsory for ages 11–14 in all four nations. Individual schools may decide to make languages compulsory up to age 16, but only a minority do (no exact figures are available).

In England, language learning was compulsory for all from age 11–16 from 1994 to 2004. The decision to make languages optional from age 14 on is thought to be a response to poor student motivation (Pachler, 2007) and led to a sharp reduction of language study beyond this age; today, numbers of students studying languages beyond age 14 vary greatly from school to school. Many schools select only higher academic achievers to study a language above the age of 14 (Filmer–Sankey, Marshall, & Sharp, 2010), contributing to the reputation that modern languages are ‘hard.’ The decision for schools to make languages compulsory up to age 16 incurs systemic disadvantages: Schools’ achievements are measured in ‘league tables,’ compiled from overall results of students’ General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams at age 16 (GCSE), and language exams are persistently marked one grade harder than other subjects (Joint Council for Qualification, 2014; Myers, 2006). Thus, making languages compulsory beyond age 14 has detrimental effects on a school’s performance measures, as head teachers are well aware (Lanvers, 2016b). Currently, 20% of all English secondary schools offer no language provision beyond the compulsory (Cambridge Public Policy, 2016, p. 27). In 2011, the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc),1 an additional performance measure for schools, was introduced. Students aiming to gain this qualification must pass a language exam at age 16, with good grades. However, hopes that the Ebacc would motivate many more to take a language as a GCSE subject have proven relatively unfounded (Board & Tinsley, 2015), most likely because other school performance measures continue to carry more weight than the Ebacc.

In 2006, languages for primary schools (age 7–11) were introduced in England, first as education ‘entitlement,’ then as a compulsory subject in 2014. The initiative, although facing teething problems (teacher shortfall, transition to secondary school, lack of teacher training, variation in quantity and quality of teaching; see DEECD in full, 2008), proved generally popular with students and parents (Tierney & Gallastegi, 2005). However, concerns remain regarding the purpose and value of teaching languages at primary level, especially concerning ultimate proficiency benefits at exit-point (school leavers) (Courtney, 2014).

The last two decades have seen a remarkable number of reports and investigations into the state of language learning in the United Kingdom. The *Languages Review* (Dearing & King, 2007), and *Nuffield Languages Inquiry* (Nuffield Foundation, 2000), launched to address language teaching in the United Kingdom, drew up recommendations (e.g., language champions, high profile campaigns to increase uptake, languages compulsory again up to age 16) that remain largely nonimplemented to date. The *Languages for the Future* report (British Council, 2013) concludes that the United Kingdom needs to offer a wider range of languages, which are to be learned to a higher competency level. More recently, annual reports on the UK language crisis (e.g., Board & Tinsley, 2014, 2015) highlighted the continual downward trends, with the partial exception of Spanish.

Thus, numerical evidence indicates that the crisis is growing, with detrimental effects on the UK economic and political vitality. Meanwhile, language policy in England has experienced two significant U-turns, in the form of making languages compulsory for all students up to the age of 16 (1998), only to reverse the policy shortly thereafter (2004). The primary languages initiative, although popular, does not seem set to address the increasing gap between the nations’ *needs* for language skills, and their *provision*. These changes (‘policy ping pong,’ Conversation, 2016) suggest an overall lack of political clarity regarding the place of modern languages in the curriculum. However, care must be taken not to overgeneralize trends in England to the United Kingdom overall, as policies differ across the four nations (see Introduction); we shall return to the effect (if any) of such policy differences on motivation.

The next section, presenting evidence on modern languages take-up beyond the compulsory phase in relation to socioeconomic variables, demonstrates how current education policies pan out on the United Kingdom’s socioeconomic landscape.

*<B>The Social Divide in Language Learning*

Schools in all four UK nations may determine their language policy beyond the compulsory phase. Therefore, language provision varies greatly between schools, with more academically successful schools (measured by schools’ average GCSE results) offering better language provisions. As the evidence of correlations between academic success and the socioeconomic background of a school’s intake (Board & Tinsley, 2015) stems mainly from England, the following section reports on such statistics from this nation.

The percentage of pupils entitled to a free school meal as a reliable indicator of the social mix of schools’ intake (Allen & Vignoles, 2007) illustrates this divide. English schools with above average provision of free school meals to pupils are 50% less likely to make modern languages compulsory beyond age 14, and schools with below average provision of free school meals to pupils are twice as likely to have at least half of their pupils studying a language beyond age 14 (Tinsley & Board, 2013, p. 84).

Schools that may control their own admissions (academies, free schools) have more students studying languages at age 14–16 than schools that may not select their students. The current conservative government strongly encourages devolution of powers to schools, increasing competition between schools (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Successful schools may thus ‘cream off’ the most able pupils (Goldring, 2005). The housing market is a contributing factor to social segregation in schools, as more affluent families can better afford to live in catchment areas with successful state schools (Allen & Vignoles, 2007; Burgess et al., 2014). Such catchment areas incur a disproportionate mark-up in house prices (Cheshire & Sheppard, 2004).

Furthermore, 86% of independent but only 44% of state schools in England make a language compulsory for *some* students aged 14–16, and 76% of private, compared to 18% of state schools make languages compulsory for all aged 14–16 (Board & Tinsley, 2015, p. 119). In 28% of state schools, most students are not given the opportunity to study a language above the age of 14. The largest between-school difference, however, can be found not between private and state schools but between schools that control admissions and those that do not: 90% of students studying a language at age 14–16 attend the former type, and 48% the latter. Socioeconomic factors interact with gender differences: Boys from poorer backgrounds, and in state schools with high provision of free school meals, are the least likely to study languages for GCSE or beyond. Girls from the independent sector, followed by girls from state schools with low provision of free school meals, are the most likely to study languages beyond the compulsory phase (Chowdry et al., 2013, pp. 14–15).

At ages 16–18, fewer than 15% of students who did study a language up to GCSE continue with their language study to A-level2 (Gallagher–Brett, 2014); at university level, numbers of language students (as major) dropped 31% between 1996 and 2013 (Gallagher–Brett, 2014). The number of universities offering language degrees dropped by 40% between 1998 and 2013 (Guardian, 2013), with universities offering more ab initio as well as noncredit-bearing language courses (Lauridsen, 2013). Of all subjects studied at university, European languages attract the highest percentage of privately educated students (Hemsley–Brown, 2015). Language degree programs are concentrated in older, more elite universities (Coleman, 2004), a fact that reinforces social self-selection, as students not aiming for universities that tend to demand high A-level results, will not be able to consider languages as a degree option (Guardian, 2013). In short, in parallel with an overall decline in language learning, language study beyond the compulsory has become increasingly elitist: The social divide in language learning is now unrivalled by that in any other subject (Board & Tinsley, 2015). As a consequence, students attending institutions (schools or universities) with higher intakes from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds have fewer opportunities to study languages.

One possible explanation for the divide at university level might relate to career paths: Language degrees are considered to have less obvious follow-on career paths compared to some other degrees. Therefore, the correlation found between socioeconomic background and degree choice (“deprivation seems to be associated with choosing degree subjects with clear economic returns in the labour market,” Chowdry et al., 2013, p. 86) might partially account for this social divide. Students who, lacking parental support, heavily indebt themselves might seek a secure return on their educational investment.

To summarise, there is strong evidence from England that students from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds choose to study languages (beyond the compulsory phase) much more willingly than those from poorer backgrounds, suggesting that they are more easily enthused to study languages. The next section reviews the body of research on L2 motivation in all four nations, including empirical studies on L2 motivation in relation to socioeconomic factors. The systematic review gives a trajectory of L2 motivation through the stages of schooling, and reveals the main pedagogical, psychological, educational, and sociopolitical factors found to contribute L2 motivation among UK students.

*<B>Empirical Motivational Studies*

The following databases were used for this systematic review: *ERIC, Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts, PsychINFO, MLA International Bibliography*. The search strings were *UK and language learning motivation, UK and language learning attitude*, and the keywords were repeated using the four nations (*England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland*). The keywords could appear anywhere in the publication. Publication dates were set to the years 2000–2016, in order to capture studies before and after the significant policy change in England in 2004. Every effort was made to capture all peer-reviewed published empirical L2 motivation studies from the United Kingdom during the time span. The initial results (800+) were hand searched for suitability. Searches were stopped once saturation was reached (i.e., only yielding duplications). After reviewing the literature, the results were grouped into the following four sections:

* *Primary schools*
* *Secondary schools*
* *University and beyond*
* *Teachers, parents, milieu (factors beyond the school system)*

All four UK nations have their heritage languages. In Wales, Welsh has equal rights to English, and Welsh skills are advantageous in several career choices, leading to a range of motivations for learning this language (Baker et al., 2011). Generally, however, learning heritage languages is associated with motivation relating to personal enrichment rather than instrumental motivation (e.g., Cornish: Dunmore, 2011; Irish: Zenker, 2014; Welsh: Newcombe, 2007; Newcombe & Newcombe, 2001, Scots Gaelic: McEwan–Fujita, 2010) As these learner contexts differ considerably from the formal L2 education context of interest here, such studies are not included in the review.

Much of the research literature refers to the currently dominant L2 motivation model (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015), Dörnyei’s (2005) L2 Motivational Self System. It will therefore be explained briefly here; it is discussed in detail elsewhere (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The L2 Motivational Self System is based on Higgins’s (1987) and Markus and Nurius’s (1986) Self Discrepancy Theory, which stipulates that discrepancies between what we are (*Actual self*) and what we would like to be (*Possible selves*) provide a motivator for learning. Two possible selves are delineated, the *Ideal* (“what we very much would like to become” Dörnyei, 2009, p. 12), and the *Ought-to* (changed from Higgins’s ([1987] original *Ought*), described in Markus & Nurius (1986) as “image of self held by another” (p. 958). Furthermore, the dimension ‘L2 learner experience’ captures environmental factors such as the teacher, classroom, material, and so on. Unlike in the L2 Motivational Self System, Higgins also differentiates who is looking at the self: *Others* (in the widest possible sense, e.g.,3 parents, teachers, milieu, society) or the *Own* self*,* resulting in four possible selves. Briefly, *Own Ideal* describes who the learner him/herself would like to be; *Own Ought* describes the learner’s (sense of) obligations to develop and learn; *Other Ideal* describes goals and ambitions that others (parents teachers, wider milieu) might have for the learner; and *Other Ought* describes duties that others might hold over the learner.

*<B>Primary Schools*

Studies undertaken in England report that at primary level, motivation and enjoyment of modern language classes are high (e.g., Cable et al., 2010; Courtney, 2014; Martin, 2012). If *Ought* motivation is present (it is debatable if children at this age can envision future L2 selves; see Zentner & Renaud, 2007), it appears mainly in the form of students feeling motivated by the teacher (e.g., ‘liking’ the teacher), but students mainly report intrinsic motivation during their learning activities, such as enjoyment of new sounds and curiosity (Courtney, 2014). Unlike at secondary level, students profess reasonable self-efficacy. There is conflicting evidence on the effect of transition to secondary school on motivation, with some reporting lower enjoyment and self-efficacy, and increased boredom, as well as students seeking more instrumental rationale for their learning (Courtney, 2014; Graham et al., 2016), while others report an improved sense of accomplishment shortly after transition to secondary school (‘learning properly’; Chambers, 2016). A recent study shows neither motivation nor attainment differences between students with and without primary language study, after only 1year of secondary language learning (Bolster, 2009). This underlines the uncertainty regarding the purpose of primary languages for ultimate proficiency gain.

A study from Scotland (Tierney & Gallastegi, 201) equally reports high motivation at primary level but adds that gender differences in attitudes toward modern languages, often reported at secondary level, and in many countries (e.g., Carr & Pauwels, 2006), are already present.

*<B>Secondary Schools*

Studies undertaken in England suggest that students are both poorly and dominantly instrumentally and *Ought* motivated, especially in the compulsory phase (age 11–14) (Coleman, Galaczi, & Astruc, 2007; Evans & Fisher, 2009, Graham, 2003, 2004, 2006; Lanvers 2016a, 2016b; Taylor & Marsden, 2014; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002), as students are mainly concerned with complying with parental and educational expectations. These studies also frequently report that languages are perceived as difficult and pointless. Students at all stages of compulsory secondary schooling tend to have lower self-efficacy in this subject than in other subjects (Graham, 2002, 2004, 2006; Graham, Macfadyen, & Richards, 2012), with boys enjoying the subjects even less than girls (e.g., Williams et al., 2002). Knowing that one may give up languages at age 14 (2004 policy change) has also impacted negatively on motivation for ages 11–14 (Evans & Fisher, 2009).

All L2 motivational dimensions at secondary school are generally described as having a downwards trajectory (decreasing enjoyment, decline in the sense of ownership over the learning process). This observation is often ascribed to assessment-focused, repetitive teaching (Evans & Fisher, 2009; Macaro, 2008), offering little intellectual stimulation and opportunity for spontaneous speech (Wingate, 2016). There is also evidence that students attribute their learner difficulties and low self-efficacy to the perceived intrinsic difficulties of the L2 (Erler & Macaro, 2011). Thus, regarding L2 motivation age 11–16, the research body from 2000 to date reports consistently on the same teaching-related issues leading to poor motivation. Lack of curriculum progression and poorly applied teaching methodologies are also thought to be central to this state (Mitchell, 2003).

Lack of enjoyment of the subject and low self-efficacy, in particular lack of understanding, are considered the main reasons for the low through-put of language study from the compulsory to the noncompulsory phase (Fisher, 2001), even among students with very good grades in modern languages. Language learning beyond the compulsory phase is considered for the ‘brainy’ (Graham, 2002), but even high-achieving students tend to profess low self-efficacy in L2 learning. Furthermore, students may avoid choosing a modern language for high stake exams (especially A-level) to avoid the perceived harsh marking compared to other subjects (Myers, 2007). Conversely, there are also notions that some ambitious students and/or parents favour a language qualification precisely because it might stand out as a kite mark of academic rigor, and that the rarity status of learning a language beyond the compulsory level might incur teaching advantages (small classes, dedicated teachers) (Lanvers, 2016b); but there is little empirical evidence to this effect.

Studies undertaken in Scotland echo the finding concerning both the overall poor motivation at secondary level (de Cecco & Shaw ,2008; Gallagher–Brett, 2014; Jones & Jones, 2002) and gender difference in attitudes toward languages (Jones & Jones, 2002). Gayton (2010, 2013) also provides evidence of a social divide in motivation and attitudes, with students and parents from more affluent backgrounds professing more positive attitudes toward languages.

In sum, all existing studies (from different nations) report that motivation at secondary school is low (or even nonexistent), and dominantly *Ought*, although a minority of students also report *Ideal-*types of motivation, such as showing respect to the L2 community, or not being embarrassed by the lack of language skills compared to other nations (Lanvers, 2016a).

*<B>University And Beyond*

Since Higher Education funding systems differ significantly across the four nations, and, what is more, all universities are largely self-governed, resulting in significant administrative and educational differences between them, the following section will restrict itself to discussion of the (few) studies that deal with learner motivation at university level across the whole of the United Kingdom.

There are long-standing concerns over the decline in the number of students choosing to study modern languages at university. The reasons why students with a modern language school-leaver qualification choose not to study a modern language at university are familiar: a climate of negativity regarding students’ language skills (Watts, 2003), lack of interest in target language country and culture, lack of practice opportunities, negative school experience and uncertainty about career paths with a modern languages degrees. The problem of low self-efficacy continues (Busse, 2013a), and recent dissertations on the subject provide us with evidence of the urgent need to provide mastery experiences to counter this (Busse, 2010; Stolte, 2015). Nonetheless, UK university and adult L2 learners are reported to be much more highly motivated than school students. *Ideal-*related motivations are mentioned frequently, such as valuing the activity of learning for its own sake (Coleman & Furnborough, 2010; Lanvers, 2012, 2016a, 2017) and enjoying a sense of making progress in one’s learning (Campbell & Storch, 2011). *Ought* motivations such as career prospects and parental influences also play an important role (e.g., Busse 2010, 2013a, 2013b). Both Stolte (2015) and Busse and Williams (2010) emphasise the importance of a (self-reported) positive learner history and mastery experiences leading to a sense of accomplishment. Oakes (2013) and Busse and Williams (2010) found the desire for language proficiency to be the highest motivator, followed by *Ought* orientations. These findings underline the continuing importance of instrumental orientation for languages other than English in voluntary learners. In other words, despite Global English luring Anglophones easily into the belief that ‘English is enough,’ university language students tend to be motivated by the prospect of instrumental benefits of their language skills. These two studies also found intrinsic motivation to be largely overlapping with *Ideal self*, an orientation found more important for language majors than for students studying a language as optional extra (Oakes, 2013), a noteworthy consideration given that this group of students is likely to increase while that of ‘language majors’ shrinks further.

Stolte (2015) found that the fact of doing something that not many do (*Exotenmotiv*), and that furthermore has the reputation of being difficult, is a motivator in itself for students of German. Somewhat akin to the *Exotenmotiv*, Lanvers (2012) and Oakes (2013) describe university students rejecting the image of the British in general (i.e., not them) as having a ‘monoglot attitude’ (Oakes, 2013, p. 189), and instead embracing an international outlook, which these learners viewed as more important still than integrative motivations with a specific L2 culture or community. Pickett (2009) reports the same stance in adult voluntary learners. Thus, for these learners, choosing to study a language became a means of distancing themselves from their nonelective British in-group (‘rebelliously’ rejecting their assigned in-group identity; Lanvers 2016a), and instead aligning themselves with an (imagined) global community. In other words, these learners displayed *International Posture*, although they were not studying English, more commonly associated with International Posture. International Posture is defined as an “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partners, and [. . . ] openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures” (Yashima, 2002, p. 57).

Given the suggestion that perceptions of the importance of Global English relate to L2 motivation in learners with English as their first language (Lo Bianco, 2014), Lanvers (2017) explored correlations between these factors, and found none. The language studied, however, significantly related to Global English perceptions in that the smaller the target language, the more threatening the learners perceived Global English to be. Lanvers’ (2017) empirical study on Global English and L2 motivation among Anglophones (the only one to date) tentatively suggests that perceptions of Global English have either no, or even a positive correlation with L2 motivation in adult learners: positive in that motivated learners, presumably with International Posture, do not view their English skills as (near) native speakers in an increasingly ‘Anglicized’ world as entirely positive. Instead, the findings suggest that these learners may be aware of possible disadvantages of English monolingualism, such as not knowing ‘International English’ (“Having grown up in an increasingly united Europe that encourages individual mobility, the UK-born participants are perhaps especially aware of the disadvantages of English monolingualism”; Busse, 2010, p. 185).

In sum, although instrumental and *Ought* motivations are present among university students and beyond, university students also demonstrate more intrinsic motivations, including some that have not been much described in other L2 learners: a ‘rebellious profile’ is more commonly associated with learners rejecting an imposed self, such as teenagers rejecting compulsory L2 learning in school settings (Taylor, 2013). Here, learners are driven *toward* L2 learning as they reject the (felt) imposed self of the British as poor linguists, an image frequently reinforced in public media.

*<B>Teachers, Parents, Milieu (Factors Beyond the School System)*

There are few studies investigating the influence of parental attitudes on L2 student motivation, but those that do exist report a strong influence, even at university level (Busse & Williams, 2010). British parents tend to be less supportive toward modern languages than Dutch and German parents (Bartram, 2006a), although we must bear in mind the evidence that parental support for the learning of English will always be higher than for other languages. Given that both the strength of support and the way that parents rationalize the purpose of the child’s language study are linked to parental language knowledge (which is poorer than in other European countries) (Bartram 2006a, 2006b; Gayton, 2010, 2016), it is little surprise that UK parents seem less supportive of language study than parents in other countries.

Gayton’s studies from Scotland (2010, 2016) show links between socioeconomic background and student attitude toward modern languages: Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and with fewer opportunities to travel have more negative attitudes toward languages and envision few opportunities to use language skills in later life. Gayton’s studies provide a rare link between the motivational literature and the manifest evidence of elitist trends of language.

Furthermore, teachers shape student motivation not just in their teaching quality and style but also through their personal language learning beliefs (e.g., Cowie & Sakui, 2011). Teachers’ views on the purpose of language learning may reinforce the social divide in language take-up (Gayton, 2016), in that they expect students from lower socioeconomic background to be less interested in languages. Student motivation is also influenced by the attitude of the school leadership toward languages (Coleman et al., 2007). Lanvers (2016b) found that the school leadership, even more than language teachers, explain the purpose of language study with reference to socioeconomic criteria: The more disadvantaged the socioeconomic mix of a school’s intake the lesser the perceived value of modern languages for students in that school. Beyond this, however, the impact of school leadership and teacher attitude on student motivation has been little explored, despite increasing powers of schools to determine their own language policies. It is a pity that individual difference motivational studies tend not to include socioeconomic status as a background variable.

Similarly, there are few studies investigating peer influences on L2 motivation. Bartram (2006a) found that peer perceptions of a subject can influence subject enjoyment and even the choice to (dis)continue a language, as students wish to remain in the same class as peers. Finally, the limited choice of languages at school may be a demotivating factor (Bartram, 2006a). Widening the choice of languages to include other world languages such as Chinese might increase motivation (Hua & Li Wei, 2014), but there is only tentative evidence to this effect (Gayton, 2016). There is also some evidence of students preferring certain languages over others (Williams et al., 2002); however, overall, we lack studies investigating attitudes toward different languages, including lesser-studied languages, and differences in such attitudes across ages.

Finally, space precludes a discussion of the many Government-supported initiatives and reports to survey and foster language take-up and motivation (see, e.g., British Academy, 2013; Lanvers, 2011). A prominent initaitive, funded twice by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), is *Routes into Languages* (https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/). Although *Routes into Languages* has successfully delivered a range of activities (e.g., competitions, games) in UK schools to promote language take-up at school and university, its funding ended in July 2016—a further indication of the uncertainty at policy level regarding the purpose and future of modern languages in the education system.

*<B>Summary*

The emerging L2 motivation picture is complex, with many variables (gender, target language, peers, teacher, socioeconomic background) influencing motivation, but age or year of study emerges as the most important variable. Broadly speaking, evidence suggests that motivation and self-efficacy are reasonably high at primary level, only to decline steadily at secondary level; whether immediately after transition or after a year’s delay remains a moot point. Even for students who opt to study a language beyond the compulsory phase (i.e., at age 14–16 in most schools, or 16–18), motivation, enjoyment, and self-efficacy remain low, and lower than for other subjects. Systemic teaching difficulties at secondary level seem to be a large contributor to these problems (Wingate, 2016). The high-stakes exams at ages 16 and 18 lead to a focus on teaching to exams.

At university and beyond, students report better overall enjoyment and motivation, and a range of instrumental and intrinsic motivations, including the ‘rebellious profile or notion of ‘going against the grain’ of the (negatively perceived) British culture. Intriguingly, some university language students also report *enjoying* languages at school, indicating that some students manage to have reasonably good school experiences nonetheless. Department for Education (DfE) statistics indicate that these are very likely to be privately educated or from selective state schools.

<A>PART II: CONCEPTUALIZING L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELVES IN CONTEXT

The review points to significant lacunae in the UK research literature. First, despite numerical evidence of an increasing elitism in language learning, there are very few studies linking L2 motivation and socioeconomic background variables, whether at the level of the individual or the institution (exceptions are Gayton 2010, 2016; Lanvers 2016b). Undertaking such research at the level of the *individual* student differences may not suffice to explain the *systemic* differences observed, whereby opportunities for language study improve with the socioeconomic mix of the institution’s intake—be it a school or university.

Recently, the L2 Motivational Self System studies have turned their attention to the notion of ‘L2 visions’ (e.g., Dörnyei & Chan, 2013), exploring students’ notions of future L2 users. Thus, in terms of ‘L2 visions’, the social divide in language learning suggests that students from more disadvantaged backgrounds tend to see less purpose and future in language study than those from advantaged backgrounds. However, we know too little about the causes for this: There are very few studies exploring learner demotivation in relation to social factors or attitudes and beliefs relating to Global English or xenophobia (exceptions are Gayton, 2016; Lanvers, 2017).

A further lacuna concerns studies from nations other than England. However, the few studies we have from Scotland suggest that all patterns observed in England (overall poor motivation compared to other subjects, gradual decline in motivation and lesson enjoyment, gender and social divide) also apply to Scotland. This finding may be highly relevant for policy improvement: It suggests that whatever the precise policy at the time any particular study was undertaken (both Scotland and England experienced recent policy changes), these policy differences were not significant enough to have a bearing on learner motivation.

The preceding review suggests that stakeholder influences at *all* levels (e.g., policy makers, Higher Education providers, head teachers, teachers, parents) play *some* part in creating the social divide in L2 motivation, and subsequent modern languages take-up, and that opportunities for, and encouragement of, language study relate to socioeconomic factors. At national policy level, tensions emerge mainly regarding the issue of what level of language skills are needed, and by whom; tensions which, as Graham and Santos (2015) demonstrated recently, are currently favouring elitist rationales (‘high standards’ for an ‘educated person’; National Curriculum, 2014). This emphasis is echoed in a recent review of the crisis by the British Council (2013, p. 3: “[better language education] in order to reap the economic and cultural benefits available to *those who have these skills*”(author’s emphasis). The current neo-liberalism (Lanvers, 2016b) in UK education policy provides a conceptual rationalization for an increasing elitism in language learning.

Opinion is divided on whether making languages compulsory for all up to age 16 might offer a solution to the crisis. Some (Busse, 2010; Macaro, 2007) warn that more compulsory learning could lead to more demotivated students. On the other hand, there is evidence that students can gradually internalize externally imposed motivational orientations imposed by others (Stolte, 2015). The little we know about these processes in British learners so far suggests that students from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more capable of such internalization, even at school age, and that International Posture and a somewhat critical stance to Global English (i.e., not viewing native English as automatic advantage) may facilitate or accompany the process of internalization. Thus, L2 motivation as a process, among school students in the United Kingdom, must be understood as a complex interaction of psychological, social, and political elements. This notion is compatible with the meta-theory of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), which stipulates that both internal (e.g., cognitive, psychological) and external (e.g., social milieu, language policy) resources should facilitate growth in order to ensure successful learning, and that concomitant sub-systems may settle into an ‘attractor state’ facilitating learning. Conversely, ‘repellor states’ may result if factors conflate (De Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007). According to this account, then, the absence of one key felicitous condition might trigger a flip from attractor to repellor state. The stark evidence of an ever-increasing social divide in language learning suggests that (some) students from advantaged backgrounds are able to draw on cultural values (e.g., International Posture, cosmopolitan outlook) to help the internalization process of *Other*-mediated motivations.

More than anything, the review shows how learners in Britain at all levels are subject to many conflicting *Other* pressures. Conflicting forces operate at different contextual levels (macro, meso, micro), not only concomitantly facilitating and encumbering L2 learning but also subject to constant change. For instance, at the macro level, there are currently concerns that Brexit might entail a further disinterest in European languages, render study abroad more difficult, and generally further weaken language learning in the United Kingdom. By way of summary, Table 1 reviews the many supportive (***bold italic***) and unsupportive (underlined) *Other* influences upon the UK language learner, using Higgins’s (1987) differentiation of *Other Ought* and *Other Ideal*.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

TABLE 1

*Other* Influences on the UK Language Learner

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Other*** | ***Other Ought***  language learning opportunities and obligations (systemic coercion) | ***Other Ideal***  language learning incentives and disincentives (mediated coercion) |
| Habitus: parents, social milieu |  | ***language learning supported in milieu where travel, language skills, international posture & professional mobility are normalized*,** i.e., higher SES; negative press re UK language skills |
| peers |  | image of MFL as difficult, nerdy, brainy, for girls; dropping languages to remain in class with peers |
| Schools: policy & teachers | schools select few/most able to maximize league table results; schools align MFL offers to SES intakes of their school | ***teachers advocate benefits of LL*** |
| promotional initiatives |  | ***benefits of MFL advertised (esp. instrumental),*** most attractive to those from advantaged SES background; Governmental disinvestment in promotional initiatives |
| National (ping pong) Policy | 2004 policy: MFL optional ages 14–16  ***2006 policy: Primary languages***  ***2014 policy: new performance measure Ebacc includes a MFL*** but other performance measures outweigh the importance of Ebacc; National Curriculum emphasizes skills & accuracy over comprehensive MFL education | severe marking leading to tactical dropping of MFL; exam-focused and unstimulating curriculum; ***‘prestige’ value of MFL qualification*** |
| UK mentality | Brexit: possibly impeding travel and study abroad | Europhobia, greater alignment with Anglophone countries |
| Global English | ubiquity of English in media, low exposure to other languages | perceived low utilitarian benefits of languages; reduced speaking & practice opportunities for Anglophone learners |

What, then, is the learner to make of such conflicting messages? Or, using the terminology of Self Discrepancy Theory, what *Own Selves* (*Ideal* and *Ought*) can the learner develop? Clearly, large numbers become demotivated, as evidenced in the continual decline in language learning in the United Kingdom. Higgins’s (2014) recent elaboration of Self Discrepancy Theory may help us to understand the UK learner conundrum better. Higgins distinguishes between a *promotion-*focused orientation, typically found in students who are interested in self growth, advancement and accomplishment, and a *prevention-*focused orientation, typically found in students who seek security, and who are keen to comply with external demands and prevent negative outcomes. Both *promotion* and *prevention* motivational forces are available to all individuals, but individuals may differ as to the strength of both. *Own Ideal* selves are associated with *promotion* concerns, and *Own Ought* selves with *prevention* concerns.

In the conflicting context of the United Kingdom, then, a more *prevention*-focused learner faces the dilemma that there is no way of complying with all external demands: Complying with one means ignoring or neglecting others. For instance, the demotivated learner declaring that language learning is pointless because of Global English (‘everyone speaks English’; see Lanvers, 2016a, p. 13) will somehow have to tolerate conflicting—in this case supportive—influences in the language classroom.

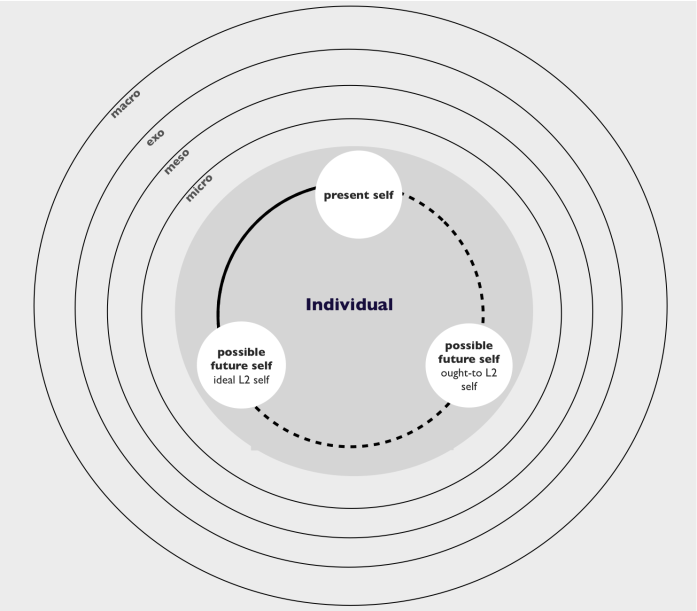
By contrast, a more *promotion*-focused learner in the United Kingdom, more independent from *Other* influences, has better starting conditions for dealing with the conflicting UK context, but will need a strong *Own* in order to ignore or even actively counter negative *Other* influences. The latter, an outspoken rejection of negative *Other* influences, has been described in relation to some Anglophone learners (Lanvers, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; Taylor, 2013): Some highly motivated learners reject the British image of insularism and Europhobia and are keen to project a self-image that is different. In this manner, *rebellion* or *resistance*, rather than alignment with *Other* influences, becomes a new type of motivation for language learners operating in challenging contexts.

To date, the challenging conditions of UK learners (also described in Busse, 2010; Coleman et al., 2007; Gayton, 2016; Pickett, 2009) have been conceptualized as concentric circles *surrounding* the L2 motivational self system (Busse, 2010; Gayton, 2016), as shown in Figure 1. This model allows for supportive and unsupportive influences to act concomitantly at all levels, thus illustrating the United Kingdom’s conflictual relationship with language learning well. Both Busse and Gayton also conceptualize the *Ought* and *Ideal* selves as a continuum with fluid boundaries, accommodating the notion that *Ought* motivations may gradually become internalized. The remaining issue, then, is to understand and conceptualize how *Own* self concepts may develop in relation to *Other* influences. We recall that in Higgins’s (1987; 2014) Self Discrepancy Theory, *Other* standpoints are *part of* the self system, and *Other* influences may gradually shape *Own* selves. The *Other Ought* dimension may coerce learners directly into learning (e.g., via policy), while more subtle *Other-Ideal* factors (e.g., media, peers, milieu) may influence the learner more indirectly. As these influences work concomitantly, the *Other* standpoint is best conceived as a continuum rather than a dichotomy (*Ought* to *Ideal)*. For instance, boys from disadvantaged backgrounds may yield to negative peer pressures to conform with the expectation that language learning is not for them, akin to social (Lefkowitz & Hedgcock, 2002) and racial (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006) in-group expectations described in other educational contexts. Furthermore, the *Own* selves are also best conceived along a continuum, from extrinsic to intrinsic, as learners may gradually internalize and identify with external demands. In the UK context in particular, strongly *Own Ideal* motivated learners may also want to counter negative *Other* influences, leading to *rejection* or *rebellion* (see earlier discussion). Such stances may emerge not just in Anglophones but in learners who wish to dissociate themselves from influences that they perceive as hindering their learning and development.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

FIGURE 1

Busse’s Expanded L2 Motivation System (Busse, 2010, p.269)



The *Other* and *Own* standpoints, and their multifaceted complex dynamic interactions, are best described as shown in Figure 2. In this model, the *Other* selves areall influences, at all levels (macro to micro), supportive or unsupportive. Discrepancies may arise between the *Actual* self and *Other* influences as well as *Own* selves. The model also situates *resistance* or *rebellion* in students with a highly developed *Own Ideal*, whose visions of themselves clash with that of some *Other* influences*.* In light of UK Europhobia (as manifested by the Brexit vote), lack of policy direction (in most nations, with the exception of Scotland), and a habitus of language learning rather persistently associated with the privileged classes, UK learners from all walks of life could do with more, not less *resistance*.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>

FIGURE 2:

The Self Discrepancy Model for Language Learners

OTHER IDEAL

supportive & unsupportive

OTHER OUGHT

supportive & unsupportive

Actual Self

OWN OUGHT

prevention-focus

extrinsic

OWN IDEAL

promotion-focus; intrinsic  
rebellion/resistance most likely

Actual Self

Finally, the review has shown that neither the ‘cultural difference’ nor the ‘individual differences’ rationalizations of the United Kingdom’s poor language learning *alone* can fully account for the—by now institutionalized—social divide. The ‘cultural difference’ argument is in danger of essentializing all Britishlearners with respect to their beliefs and attitudes (for instance, as insularly ‘Brexiters’), at least tendentially, and thus does not provide explanations for the social divide in language learning. Likewise, an ‘individual differences’ approach is ill-equipped to explain social patterns.

Coffey (2016), asking English students about their choices (to continue language learning or not), interprets his data within a Bourdieuian (1986) framework, in particular the notion of social capital. Students who value languages as cultural capital rather than instrumental skill are more motivated, and more likely to continue their language study. More generally, the Bourdieuian framework allows us to conceptualize the stark social divide in language learning in the United Kingdom: Students are enculturated into a habitus (in the Bourdieuian sense) of International Posture in their home environment, and in this manner, acquire social practices (e.g., parental language skills, travel, international professional mobility) that demark a habitus which becomes shared and mutually recognized by others. Educational institutions, for their part, may then treat this social capital as symbolic capital, offering language policy chosen in line with the sociodemographic of their intake, and thus most likely to echo the habitus of their parental cohort. In this manner, schools may attract parents who wish to bestow a similar habitus onto their children (e.g., instilling International Posture, or not). Thus, a Bourdieuian framework offers a good fit for the evidence on the social divide in language learning in the United Kingdom.

NOTES

1. English Baccalaureate. The five core subjects are mathematics, English, a modern language, a science, a humanity subject.
2. Advanced level, university entry qualification in England, Wales, Northern Ireland.

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