From integrative motivation to possible selves:

The baby, the bathwater, and the future of language learning motivation research.

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Abstract

Dörnyei (2005) introduced possible selves in his construction the Ideal L2 Self, part of a self-related motivational system for second language learning. This is reframing and reinterpreting of Gardner's (2001) concept of the integrative motive. After reviewing the theory underlying the integrative motive and possible selves, this chapter will focus on the potential gains and losses from a theoretical reformulation. The argument will be made that the concept of possible selves should not simply be a renaming of the integrative motive. Three specific gains and five potential pitfalls / cautions for future research will be offered.

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"…(Don't) throw the baby out with the bath water" [is…] an easily understandable metaphor: the only too human inclination towards extreme reactions. All of us, whether we like it or not, are from time to time guilty of the universally practiced act of throwing the baby out with the bath water…"

(Meider, 1995).

The entry of possible selves into the SLA literature, and in particular the field of language learning motivation, is most welcome and has the potential to open new avenues of study, providing new insights into the language learning process. However, there is much that has been gained already, over the past fifty years or so, from the study of integrative motivation in the context of the Socio-Educational (SE) Model. This paper outlines the position that the possible selves and integrative motivation perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and are instead complementary concepts that map much of the same phenomenological territory. Indeed, it will be argued that the two frameworks present complementary aspects..

The Socio-Educational (SE) Model.

The relevance of social psychology in the study of second language learning was demonstrated by Gardner and Lambert's (1959) seminal work in Montreal, Canada. Their study of high school students showed that motivation for language learning, defined as a combination of goal-directed effort and desire, predicted second language achievement at a level similar to the predictive value of language aptitude. Gardner & Lambert's (1959)

research was one of the first demonstrations of social psychology's importance to language learning, as well as one of the first uses of a methodology that could be used to study the psychology of motivation and intergroup processes. The seemingly simple idea that intergroup attitudes and motives *matter* in language learning, in addition to aptitude and the linguistic features of language, evolved into the socio-educational (SE) model of second language learning (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Broader still is the international interest in the social psychological study of second languages (Agnihotri, Khanna, & Sachdev, 1998; Taylor & Usborne, 2007). Gardner and Lambert's (1959) study opened the field of second language learning to a distinctly social psychological perspective, with a focus on attitudes, affect, intergroup relationships and motives.

The SE model features a set of 11 interrelated concepts (Gardner, 2001) that combine to form three major factors influencing language learning: integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation and motivation. Integrativeness is defined by attitudes reflecting a genuine desire to meet, communicate with, take on characteristics of, and possibly identify with another group (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Attitudes toward the learning situation assesses how much language students enjoy their teacher and course. Motivation is the engine that drives the system, and is defined by having a desire to learn the language, enjoyment of the task, and putting forward effort toward learning (Gardner, 1985). At the heart of the model, integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation combine to support motivation. In turn, motivation supports the behaviours necessary to learn a language. The relationship with members of another language group is the central theme of integrative motivation, that is, the underlying motive is to create "real bonds of communication with another people" (Gardner, 2001). Extensive research by Gardner and

his associates under the rubric of the SE model (reviewed by Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) has confirmed that this principle is sound. The importance of communicating with the target language group in SLA has been repeatedly confirmed as well in studies that adopt different theoretical orientations (Alalou, 2001; Allard & Landry, 1994; Clément, 1986; Clément & Gardner, 2001; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Noels, 2001; Spada, 1986; Ushioda, 2001; Yashima, 2002).

MacIntyre (2004) argued that the SE model can be considered unique, even ahead of its time in significant ways, especially as compared to motivation theories in the field of psychology. Through various phases of development, the SE model retained the core idea that the constellation of affective, cognitive and social factors defining the integrative motive for second language learning was predictive of success (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997). The SE model conceptualizes a uniquely human motive, one whose complex interactions of cognitive and affective processes could not be captured by a single conceptual frame in psychology. Even from the perspective of social psychology, the SE model represents a departure from standard conceptual and methodological techniques that focus on laboratory-oriented, experimental concepts.

In addition to the theoretical uniqueness of the SE model, the statistical techniques used to test it have been state of the art. The language learning processes studied (e.g., individual differences in motivation, anxiety, achievement, and contact) lend themselves to correlational procedures that describe the tendencies for those variables to rise and fall in regular patterns. Correlation, regression, and factor analysis underpin structural equation modeling procedures which are widely applied in research these days, but were highly

unusual when Gardner and associates introduced them to the study of motivation (Dörnyei, 2005).

Although the SE model influenced international conceptualizations of motivation for second language learning for decades, particularly among pedagogues, the model has its detractors. It has been suggested that the SE model, and particularly the notion of the integrativeness, dominated to the extent that no other approaches to the issue were seriously considered for a long period of time (Crooks & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994). Moreover, because motivational processes were hypothesized to be based on intergroup processes that generally took place outside the language classroom, it was unspecified how teachers could foster language learning motivation in their students and thereby facilitate language learning. Picking up this gauntlet, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) conducted a study of L2 attitudes and motivation in post communist Hungary, among students of English who had had very little direct contact with native English speakers. Surprisingly, and detracting from Crook and Schmidt's allegation, it was found that attitudes and motivations of the type proposed under the integrative motive were related to classroom dynamics (cohesion and cooperation) as perceived by both the students and the teachers. The argument has been made that an expanded, less socio-politically oriented, more education-relevant framework would re-open the motivation research agenda (Crooks & Schmidt, 1991), thereby increasing the applied value of theorizing and research for teachers, program developers, and other language professionals. It would seem, however, that such a framework ought to include elements of the integrative motive.

More generally, the call for an expanded study of motivation in second language learning appears to be returning the field to a pre-paradigmatic state. The various approaches

being developed span neurological investigations of brain-based motives (Schumann, 200) to rich qualitative descriptions of learners' interpretations of experience (Norton, 2001; Ushioda, 2003). The avenue under consideration in the present chapter, exploring possible selves as a source of language learning motivation, has the potential to organize many of the current approaches; there is much new conceptual ground to be explored using possible selves as a theoretical framework. However, if the social psychological and political dimensions of language are drained away as the bathwater, we must not be careful not to lose the conceptual baby, which is the relevance of those individual differences in the motivations to communicate with people who speak the target language. These motives affect the learning process, whether we frame them in terms of the SE model, other models of motivation, or in terms of possible selves.

Possible Selves

The conceptualization of the self has come a long way over the years. As Markus & Wurf (1987) note: "What began as an apparently singular, static lump-like entity has become a multidimensional, multifaceted dynamic structure that is systematically implicated in all aspects of social information processing." (pg 301).There is an understanding that the self is constantly changing and evolving as goals, attitudes and potentials for the future change (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). Moreover, research has shown that a person may have many different selves – including academic, physical and social selves – which may not necessarily be closely related to one another (Marsh & Craven, 1997).

The possible selves literature became firmly established in mainstream psychology with Markus and Nurius' (1986) original work. They described possible selves as a form of

future-oriented self-knowledge that can be divided into three distinct parts: the expected self, the hoped-for self and the feared self, each with varying impacts on motivation and self-regulation. The expected self is a future self that a person feels he or she can realistically achieve, and it may be positive or negative in valence. The hoped-for self represents a highly desired possible future, which is often not fully grounded in reality. A feared self is what a person is afraid of becoming in the future, despite wanting to avoid that future. It is important to note that these differentiated possible selves can, and typically do occur concurrently. For example, a French Immersion student might hope to become bilingual, expect to develop fluency in French, and fear getting lost during a trip to Québec because he is unable to speak French, all of which provide reasons for language study. In this example, all three aspects of the self motivate and support learning; they are all pushing or pulling in the same direction.

Possible selves are important because they function as incentives of future behaviour and provide an interpretive context for the current view of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are motivating because they are future-oriented; they provide an end-state for potential behaviour, as well as providing potential incentives to perform or avoid certain behaviours (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Individuals are motivated to act in order to reaffirm their sense of identity with their present sense of self, or as a potential goal in the case of possible selves. So, under this conceptualization, motivation is the conscious striving to approach or avoid possible selves in order to achieve one's inner-most potential (Carver et al., 1994; Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Possible selves also provide an individualized, interpretive context for current behaviour. Consider the different interpretations of achieving

a grade of B-minus in a language class by a student with a clear bilingual possible self compared to a student who does not see the language as part of his or her future self.

One year after Markus & Nurius' (1986) study, Higgins (1987) presented a similar conceptual scheme called Self-Discrepancy Theory. Though there are some important differences between the conceptualizations of the self, both Higgins' approach and that of Markus and Nurius espouse a similar central thesis: future, as-yet-unrealized selves have the potential to be powerful motivational influences on behaviour. Higgins suggests that there are two types of idealized future selves that influence behaviour. The *ideal self* is what people hope or wish they could become. The *ought-to-self* is what a person feels obliged or duty-bound to become. Moreover, Higgins makes the distinction between selves that are based on self-perceptions (i.e. "I should be fluent in French") versus the perceptions of others (i.e. "My mother thinks I should be fluent in French). In general, ideal selves have a promotion focus, where the concern is on growth, achievement, and goal-reaching. Conversely, ought-to selves have a prevention focus, and are concerned with regulation of behaviour in order to stay responsible and safe (Higgins, 1998).

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) postulates that these selves are motivating because discrepancies between one's current sense of self and these future selves causes discomfort, which in turn motivates a person to increase congruence between the two selves in order to reduce that feeling of discomfort. Higgins acknowledges, however, that this process is not always conscious: "…one's self-discrepancies can be used to assign meaning to events without one's being aware of either the discrepancies or their impact on processing." (Higgins, 1987, p. 324).For example, a woman might experience tension if she envisions working at a bilingual job over the summer (an ideal self) but cannot currently speak the

language fluently (current self), so to reduce that feeling of discomfort, she decides to enroll in an advanced language course. The emotions experienced are critical to understanding the motivational properties of possible selves.

Emotions are fundamentally important motivators (Brehm & Brummett, 1998; Lazarus, 1991; Izard, 1977). Without a strong tie to the learner's emotional system, possible selves exist as cold cognition, and therefore lack motivational potency. When emotion is a prominent feature of a possible self, including a strong sense of fear, hope, or even obligation, a clear path exists by which to influence motivation and action (see Higgins, 1987). In the Appendix we present an "Interview with Linda" that demonstrates the powerful motivational potential of possible selves as well as the emotional investment they create. Linda describes her experience learning conversational phrases in Russian. Her story shows that a clear image of a future possible self can sustain motivation for language learning. The emotional tone of the story centers on expected feelings of pride and accomplishment; we suggest that without this emotional component, the motivational implications of the possible self vision would be all but absent.

Linda's story also demonstrates a second key process; as her learning progressed the imagined conversations grew more interpersonally satisfying. Even in this brief passage, the motivational potential of possible self imagery becomes clear. Linda describes imagined conversations with the Russian speaking mother of a colleague for whom she was learning conversational phrases. She says, *"As I had more phrases to say, my imagined conversations with her grew longer and her approval greater. My motivation to learn became more intense. In fact, I studied harder."* This clearly shows a developmental process by which present learning alters the vision of the future self and with it language learning motivation.

This sort of narrative corresponds with the experience of many language learners, and is one of the main reasons for the introduction of possible selves in the SLA literature.

Based on the above literature review, it becomes clear that possible selves have links to motivated behaviour generally, and to motivation for language learning in particular. The relevance of possible selves to language learning motivation has been discussed in detail by Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivation Self System.

Dörnyei's Reconceptualization of the Integrative Motive

In his book *The Psychology of the Language Learner*, Dörnyei (2005) proposes a new, broad construct of L2 learning called the *L2 Motivational Self System*. This construct is composed of three dimensions: The Ideal L2 self, the Ought-to Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. The Ideal L2 Self houses the vision of oneself in the future. Ushioda's (2001) study of Irish learners of French and their visions of traveling to France, speaking the French language with people they hope to meet. Norton's (2001) work describes the imagined community that the leaner anticipates joining. This visioning of a future time in which one will be able to use the language in situ can sustain motivation during difficult times. Ushioda (2001) notes that even students who were not experiencing success, still felt motivated by what Dörnyei (2005) would later call the ideal L2 self. The Ought-to self is focused on duties and obligations imposed by external authorities, drawing upon various types of extrinsic (Noels, 2001) and instrumental (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991) motives that have been discussed in the SLA literature. The Ought-to self also might be linked to the imperatives of maintaining the linguistic dimension of ethnic identity, as when a heritage language is under threat, forming a potentially potent conceptual integration. The third

dimension, L2 Learning experience, is related to the motivation inspired by prior experience interacting with the present learning environment. The tendency for prior success to promote future success is a basic tent of motivation theory generally (Reeve, 2005), and is explicitly captured by this dimension of the L2 Self System (see Ushioda, 2001).

Dörnyei (2005) described possible selves in the construction of his Ideal L2 Self, and in the process, brought into play a vast body of research on the self. As we argue below, the vastness of the literature is a double edged sword. Whereas there is a great deal of prior research on the self, there also are conceptual complications.

Dörnyei (2005) presents his concept of the L2 Motivation Self System as a reframing of Gardner's (2001) concept of the integrative motive. Much of Dörnyei's (2005) initial empirical support for this reconceptualization comes from a large (N = 8,593) study of Hungarian language learners conducted by Dornyei and Csizer (2005). Using structural equation modeling (SEM), they found that Integrativeness subsumes all other factors in Gardner's model, even instrumentality. Based on these results, Dörnyei and Csizer suggest that Integrativeness represents a broader construct than Gardner's (2001) definition would suggest[1]. Dörnyei (2005; Dörnyei & Csizer, 2002; 2005) goes on to propose that Integrativeness can be interpreted as an idealized view of the L2 self, as presented in the L2 Motivational Self System.

We can draw out three principal reasons – of many – that Dörnyei suggests this reconceptualization is necessary (see Dörnyei & Csizer, 2005, p. 28-30; Dörnyei, 2005, p. 65-119):

(1) as English spreads throughout the globe, it has become less and less associated with any particular culture, and as a result, a possible selves framework – uncoupled

from any particular culture – could have more explanatory power for language

learners;

(2) a self perspective can look at different motivational vectors, such as the

convergence of both motivating and demotivating factors; and

(3) the terminology in Gardner's model is unnecessarily confusing and sometimes

vague, leading to conceptual difficulties in the literature (see also Dörnyei, 1994).

There is potentially much to be learned by taking this reconceptualization seriously.

However, we must be cautious not to adopt new theoretical and methodological problems in

our haste to respond to the criticism of Gardner's SE model by throwing the baby out with the

bathwater. Thus, in the sections that follow we will discuss the potential advantages and

cautions involved in reconceptualizing integrativeness using a possible selves framework.

Future Conceptual Development

Currently, the research into the L2 Motivation Self System is still in its infancy, and

there are many questions to be explored. If we are to use possible selves as a framework to

understand L2 motivation, research is needed to clearly define what is appropriately

conceptualized as a possible L2 self. Moreover, it will be necessary to study the

relationships between the L2 self and L1 self, as has been done with research into identity. If

we were to contemplate the nature of the L2 possible self, it seems likely that it would

involve: images of interactions with the speakers of the target language, skillful action using

the target language, feelings of accomplishment of communicative goals, traveling to

experience the target language in its cultural context, fears of being embarrassed in the L2,

worries about self-presentation when speaking to members of the language community, and

so on. That is, we are going to be talking about the target language community, expressed in terms related to changes in the self rather then attitudes or interests, but mapping much of the same experiential territory.

Dörnyei (2005, p. 107) notes that Gardner's integrative motive "corresponds closely" with the proposed L2 self system. We agree. The story of Linda learning Russian (see Appendix) could be accounted for by a Possible Selves approach, as we have attempted, or by using the SE model. In an SE model account, positive attitudes toward learning the language coupled with effort and enjoyment sustain the specific behaviors undertaken to learn the target language. The overlap between Possible Selves and the SE model can be noted clearly when one avoids the often-made mistake of building integrativeness into a straw man that simply means assimilation into the target language group.

The potential strength of the L2 Self formulation lies in its ability to map out new conceptual linkages by taking the Self as the starting point. New types of research questions can be generated. For example, in Linda's story, motivation derived from imagined conversations is foregrounded. The specificity of these future conversations is remarkable, but how common is the experience? How many different imagined persons do learners create and can object relations theory (e.g., Kohut, 1977), and its conceptual offspring attachment theory (e.g., Ainsworth, 1989), be applied to language learning?

Whereas it is difficult to predict the future development of possible selves in the area of language learning motivation, contributions to the present volume show that the topic will be taken seriously in future research (insert references from the present Dörnyei & Ushioda volume). Studies that examine the role of possible selves will be successful to the extent that they build on the existing literature, using new questions as a starting point. Gardner (2005)

warns that simply translating integrative motivation into a possible selves framework might prove problematic, suggesting that equating his concept of integrativeness with Dörnyei & Csizer's (2005) Ideal L2 Self "…might confuse things considerably; it certainly will make communication about integrativeness difficult." (Gardner 2005, p. 8). As the field moves forward, it is worthwhile to consider that which is gained and lost by using a possible selves approach. In the space remaining, we will outline three benefits and six cautions that we identify with respect to possible selves. These arguments might serve as a starting point for discussion of the concept, they are not intended to be exhaustive.

Benefits of the Possible Selves Approach

Benefit 1: An Educator-Friendly Approach

One of the earliest criticisms of Gardner's SE model suggests that a more educator-friendly approach to L2 learning is crucial (Crooks & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1995). Using a possible selves framework does that; in fact, much of the research conducted on possible selves has focused on increasing motivation in numerous educational areas (Leondari et al., 1998; Oyserman, & Markus, 1990; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, 2006; Yowell, 2002). Though research on possible selves in second language learning is just beginning, the existing body of research on possible selves combined with the theoretical model proposed by Dörnyei (2005) suggests that the approach has utility. In comparison with the SE model, possible selves shift the focus from desirable attributes of the target language group, which are largely fixed, to the changing personal attributes of the learner. The process by which the individual language learners change their view of self would be an interesting theoretical avenue to

explore, and techniques for changing possible selves could be of practical use to educators, addressing the concerns of some researchers (Crooks & Schmidt, 1991; but see Clément et al, 1994).

Benefit 2: Addressing Language Contexts Outside Canada

The first of Dörnyei's (2005) arguments described earlier in this paper suggests that taking a possible selves perspective is beneficial when addressing language contexts outside of Canada's unique sociocultural milieu. One of the prominent criticisms of Gardner's model is that much of the research has been conducted in Canada, and might not generalize to language learning situations in other cultures (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 94). In the case of a rapidly spreading World English, there is no clear, discrete cultural-linguistic identity that unifies L2 speakers in the potential learner's mind. In this case, using possible selves escapes the complications of defining a specific linguistic group model by focusing on the hopes, aspirations and fears of the L2 learner instead of their integration into an existing L2 community (c.f., Norton's (2001) concept of imagined communities). It might not be the personal or collective attributes of a local group of L2 speakers that drive possible selves but rather the actions that an L2 speaker can take and the goals they can accomplish as they acquire a new language.

Benefit 3: Multiple Motivations

Dörnyei's (2005) second point discussed above suggests that language learning motivation, with respect to possible selves, must expand the focus on language to include the other kinds of motives a learner will experience. Motivation is multiply determined, with any single action involving a variety of competing motivational forces (MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément, in press; Reeve, 2005). For example, an adolescent learner might simultaneously

experience both a desire to learn French and support from parents / teachers AND a fear of ridicule from peers as a "geek", "nerd," or "teacher's pet". To add further complications to this example, adolescent language learners are typically experiencing numerous developmental milestones such as developing a sense of personal competence and autonomy, negotiating new identities, and nourishing close friendships, all of which may or may not impact on a student's motivation to learn at any given moment (Manning, 1988). As Dornyei (2005) notes, "… hardly any research has been done to examine how people deal with multiple actions and goals, how they prioritize between them, and how the hierarchies of superordinate and subordinate goals are structured …" (p. 87).

Language learning is integrated with all of the other activities in which a learner occupies his or her time, and we can enhance our understanding of the learner by asking about the relative importance of various motives, language-related and otherwise. This is an area that can and should be explored, and seems easily approached from a possible selves perspective. The self, like motivation, is multifaceted and constantly changing (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987) and the open-ended format typically utilized in possible selves research (for an example, see Oyserman, 2004) allows researchers to examine a wide variety of motivational and identity-based qualities. Such an approach may best be seen as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, the more domain specific analysis provided by the integrative motive. Never-the-less, research into the various competing motives experience by a language learner, expressed as various possible selves that guide action, would be a significant advance for SLA research.

Cautions for Future Research

The possible selves framework represents an important avenue for studying language learning motivation. Using a possible selves framework is not without important limitations. There are several areas in which caution is warranted. These cautions arise primarily from the complexity of studying the self, rather than specifically from Dörnyei's (2005) L2 self system.

Caution 1: Measurement of Possible Selves.

The measurement of possible selves is going to be a serious issue in the future. One of the strengths of the SE model is its link to a high quality measurement tool, the Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB, Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). The use of a possible selves approach brings diverse and inconsistent measurement methods. Typically, the research on possible selves takes a distinct qualitative bent, often asking participants to spontaneously generate possible selves in open-ended surveys (Carver & Sakina, 1994; Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998; Norman & Aron, 2003). As with much qualitative research, both the data collection and analysis methods vary greatly from one study to the next. Though Oyserman and colleagues have developed a well-established, replicable coding scheme in their research program (Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002; Oyserman, Bybee & Terry, 2006) this has been inconsistently used in the possible selves literature. In contrast, the majority of research on the SE model uses consistent, quantitative methods of measurement which have been utilized in dozens of studies (see Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). To the extent that measurement is inconsistent from one study to the next, there is a concern that reconceptualizing integrative motivation using a possible selves framework might actually make research into second language motivation

more difficult to interpret. Elsewhere in this volume (MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément, this volume) we offer a new scale designed to assess possible selves.

A source of concern related to measurement and interpretation of possible selves is the questionable veracity and impartiality in representations of the self. A variety of errors, biases, and defense mechanisms (Cramer, 2006) have the powerful effect of protecting the self from negativity. "People have a need to view themselves positively. This is easily the most common and consensually endorsed assumption in research on the self" (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999, p. 766). It is possible that a switch from established methodologies and instruments that measure language-related attitudes (such as the AMTB) to methodologies that measure possible future selves might exacerbate the influence of self-serving biases on data provided by research participants. Alternatively, the need to view one's self positively may still provide a basis for motivation even if biases are operating to make the self-view unrealistic or unattainable.

Caution 2: The naming problem.

In addition to potential problems with measurement, tapping into the literature on the self might turn out to be a double edged sword. Dörnyei (1994) identified a problem with the multiple uses of the term 'integrative' within in the SE model (integrative orientation, integrativeness, and integrative motivation) eventually proposing his L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005) as a way of overcoming both the terminology problem and potential theoretical inconsistencies in Gardner's (2005) model. Unfortunately, the terminology problem faced by Gardner's model might not be improved by adopting the terminology of possible selves; the multitude of overlapping concepts in the literature on the self is more confusing than integrativeness ever could be. With such an enormous base of literature at the

researcher's disposal, tying together a coherent theoretical explanation for the role of the self in language learning may prove daunting and even frustrating at times. There are so many self-related concepts (a cursory scan of the PSYCHINFO database reveals more than 75,000 articles with "self" in their title and a very long list of "self" related concepts used in the literature[2]) that differentiating one from another can be a formidable task. The variations in approach to possible selves shown in Higgins' and Markus' work should be kept in mind as the concept of possible selves is studied in the language learning domain. These two approaches have interesting conceptual differences, but one risks losing sight of the big picture of language learning if one becomes too engrossed in the nuances of conceptualizing the details of the self-system.

Caution 3: Cultural variation in the concept of Self.

Another potential complication is the impact of culture on a person's self-concept. It is especially important in the SLA literature that we be conscious of the differing cross-cultural meanings of self. Dörnyei (2005) argues that the ubiquitous nature of World English severs the ties to specific cultural groups (especially British and American as exemplars of speakers of English) making possible selves more portable across cultures. As we consider the implications of this idea, we must acknowledge the various culture-bound definitions of self that may impact on the motivational properties of possible selves.

In Markus & Kitayama's (1991) article, they suggest that Eastern and Western cultures construe the self in very different ways: Western cultures are more likely to view the self as independent, distinct and separate from others while Eastern cultures view the self as interdependent, deeply intertwined with others. Unemori, Omoregie & Markus (2004) found that English-American participants tend to report intrapersonal (e.g. anxious, happy, etc.)

themes in their possible selves while Japanese participants tend to focus more on professional and/or academic accomplishment. Numerous other studies also reveal differences in self-conception between Eastern and Western cultures; East-Asians report lower self-esteem than North Americans (Heine et al., 1999), are more likely to portray their behaviour as constrained by context (Kanagawa, Cross & Markus, 2001; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990) and are less likely to engage in attributional biases such as the fundamental attribution error (Jaspars & Hewstone, 1982).

Li, Zhang, Bhatt, & Yum (2006) caution that the pen-and-paper nature of many cross-cultural studies on self construal can depend heavily on language "[b]ecause words or sentences that are equivalent in meaning and form in two or more languages are sometimes very difficult or impossible to find, […] participants in different language or cultural groups may interpret the questionnaires differently…" (p. 592). Bilingual speakers (Chinese – English) have been shown to endorse more Chinese values when responding in Chinese than when speaking in English (Bond, 1983). Ross, Xun & Wilson (2001) suggest that Eastern and Western identities are stored in separate knowledge structures in bicultural individuals, and those differing ethnic identities may be activated by speaking in the corresponding language. The self appears to be a highly variable concept, not only cross culturally but also intra-individually, as research with bicultural individuals shows. It is clear then, that future research in the areas of SLA must take into account the varied effects of culture on the construction of the self when using possible selves as a framework for interpreting L2 motivation.

Caution 4: Possible selves as Goals.

Possible selves capture a set of interrelated goals for language learning by envisioning the future. This implicates two processes, goal setting and time judgments, both of which carry their own cautions for researchers new to the area. A major problem with goal-setting and motivation is that humans often fail to translate goals into appropriate behaviour. Merely setting a goal does not necessarily affect performance. Kuhl (1994) has identified numerous individual factors which can mediate the translation from motivation to actual performance in his theory of Action Control. The theory describes individual differences in the ability to initiate and maintain behaviour (action orientation) and in the tendency to become preoccupied and hesitant to the point of non-action (state orientation), which can explain seemingly paradoxical behaviour such as why a person might choose to ruminate on an unpleasant past event rather than engaging in a pleasant or otherwise productive activity.

Moreover, goals that exert influence on motivation tend to show certain qualities. Only specific, moderately difficult goals are likely to provide strong motivational support (Locke, Shaw, Saari & Latham, 1981) and even then, the support appears to be limited to tasks that are routine or boring. Oyserman and colleagues have shown that possible selves – which can be loosely interpreted as future-oriented self goals – do not necessarily provide motivation or influence performance. They argue that possible selves must involve both specific plans for self-regulation and a countervailing feared self in the same domain to truly motivate behaviour (Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). Though plans for goal achievement may be included in a possible self, future research would do well to look at how clear the implementation intentions are (e.g., a willingness to communicate when the opportunity arises, see MacIntyre, in press) and whether or not the

plans allow for recovery of motivational processes when language learning is delayed or the learner experiences a setback.

Caution 5: Possible selves change over time.

In addressing the debate over the proper theoretical approach to take regarding L2 motivation, Dörnyei (2003) commented:

> *I have now come to believe that many of the controversies and disagreements in L2 motivation research go back to an insufficient **temporal** awareness… that different or even contradictory theories do not exclude one another, but may simply be related to different **phases** of the motivated behavioral process." (p. 18)*

The phenomenological quality of the possible selves seems likely to change significantly as milestone dates approach. Linda's story (see Appendix) shows a strengthening of self-related imagery as language learning progressed. It might also be possible for elements of the possible self vision to become unrealistic or impossible as time goes by (Pizzolato, 2007). For this reason, possible selves might work better as long term goals than as short term ones. For example, the final exams at the end of a four-year degree program may be seen as more of an obstacle or a nuisance than an opportunity for performance feedback. Research corroborates this notion. Smith (2004) found that academic motivation can sharply decrease, self-handicapping strategies and fear of demonstrating a lack of ability to others (i.e. "looking stupid" in front of peers) increase, as students approach completion of high school.

The quality of motivation can vary greatly depending on the timeframe of the goal and the level of interest in the task. Generally speaking, short term (or 'proximal') goals increase motivation for uninteresting tasks (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), while long-term (or 'distal') goals tend to increase motivation and performance for interesting tasks. Short-term

goals provide more chance for feedback and competence building (Latham & Seijts, 1999).

Bolstering self-confidence has a positive effect on academic motivation and performance.

However, on the one hand, for tasks that people find interesting, a multitude of short-term

goals are seen as more intrusive than fewer, more distal goals (Reeve, 2005, p. 211). On the

other hand, for long-term goals to increase motivation, a person must be relatively free to

both set and pursue those goals in their own particular fashion (Manderlink & Harackiewicz,

1984).

Caution 6: Possible selves and identity

The desire to integrate numerous explanatory concepts defining the individual in

interaction with her or his context is not new in social psychology. 'Identity', and particularly

'social identity' have attracted considerable attention as explanatory constructs of

interpersonal and intergroup relations (e.g. Hogg, 2003; Turner & Reynolds, 2001).

Fundamental to the identification process is the problem of categorization-- that is how one

construes oneself and 'others' in a given context. This process, resulting in one's identity, has

been shown to have emotional, cognitive, affective and behavioural correlates and to vary in

salience as a function of specific aspects of the situation (see Ashmore, Deaux &

McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004); characteristics also attributed to the self. Furthermore, social

identity theory has been used to explain a plethora of language-related phenomena, including

all forms of intergroup communication (e.g. Noels, Giles & Le Poire, 2003) and, specifically,

L2 learning motivation (Giles & Byrne, 1982).

The process of categorization through which we identify self and non-self features is

also basic to the integrative motive and the production of subtractive and additive forms of

bilingualism (Lambert, 1978). Furthermore, following the work by Higgins (1987) and

Markus and Nurius (1986) as well as that of cross-cultural psychologists (e.g. Weinreich, 1996), the contrasts between actual, desired and reflected (that which is assigned to you by others) identities has been shown to be related to experiencing discrimination and second language confidence (Clément, Noels & Deneault, 2001).

Progress made within the identity framework linking L2 language and communication to both theoretical and applied issues, can be brought to bear on the L2 self system as a motivational paradigm. That is, the theoretical strength of discussing the Self does not lay in reiterating processes of identity formation and change. However, given that social identity is that aspect of the self-concept derived from group membership, there may be other aspects of identity that are not represented through the social identity paradigm. More importantly, social identity theory does not provide a description of how identities become meshed to ensure temporal and spatial continuity of the self (Abrams 1996; Learey & Tangney, 2003). Given their relevance to intergroup interaction, a L2 motivational self paradigm must account for identity processes. In particular, a specific contribution of the L2 self system could be to provide a functional structure accounting for the integration of identity processes.

Conclusion.

The notion of possible selves is an interesting approach and deserves serious study in SLA. The expansive literature on integrative motivation can be a solid basis on which to build the literature on L2 motivational self system, knowing that some key questions already have been answered. As a conceptual scheme, the L2 Motivation Self System (Dörnyei, 2005) including the concept of possible selves, holds a great deal of promise. The strength of

the concept of possible selves lies in its focus on the learner as applicable to education research contexts, its focus on who individuals plan to use language apart from a specific cultural group, and its ability to integrate multiple, sometimes conflicting motives. SLA researchers should be aware of, and as far as possible avoid several potential pitfalls, such as the measurement of possible selves, the proliferation of self-related concepts (the naming problem), cultural variations in the concept of self, conditions that affect the relevance of goals as motives, changes in the selves over time and the junction with identity. It will be necessary to be cautious as we move forward to ensure that we advance our understanding rather than merely rephrasing it. If we avoid the temptation to throw out the baby with the bathwater, the future of language learning motivation research looks very interesting indeed.

Endnotes

[1] A comment is necessary on the false dichotomy of integrative and instrumental motives (see Reuda & Chen, 2005). The notion that integrative and instrumental reasons for language learning are opposing forces simply is not consistent with Gardner's position (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994). Indeed, there is no theoretical reason to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive. The data show a strong tendency for integrative and instrumental orientations to be positively correlated, and this occurs in samples with various degrees of contact (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; MacIntyre, MacMaster & Baker, 2001). There simply is no good reason to believe that a person who sees the value of the target language as a means of communication and social interaction would not also see the value of the language in instrumental terms, and the empirical results support that idea, whether from scholars critical of the SE model or from Gardner's own data.

[2] The list of self-related concepts retrieved from the PSYCHINFO database on July 4, 2007 includes the following 50 items: self-actualization, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consciousness, self-concept, self-identity, self-extension, self-image, ought-to-self, self perception, real self, ideal self, academic self, physical self, social self, emotional self, hoped-for-self, expected self, feared self, looking-glass self, self-worth, self-acceptance, self-regard, self-evaluation, self-respect, self-regulation, self as subject ("I"), self as object ("me"), material me, social me, spiritual me, good-me, bad-me, not-me, self-affirmation theory, self-determination theory, self-monitoring theory, self-verification theory, self-

completion theory, dialogical self, interpersonal self, individual self, collective self, selfhood,

selfness, self-awareness, self-respect, self-confidence, and self-perception theory.

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Appendix

Linda* is an experienced language learner. Her native language is one of five major regional languages in the Philippines and her second language is English. She speaks fluently in Pilipino and is functional in French and Spanish. She has lived in North America for 35 years and has a faculty position in a large university. English is her main language of communication both at home and at work. Dmitri, a close friend and colleague of Linda's, was due to host his mother on a visit from Russia. Linda became intrigued by the idea of conversing with Dmitri's mother during her visit and began to learn Russian. Linda has provided the following reflections on her learning experience and the motivational role played by possible selves.

1. When you first thought about learning Russian, what sort of language use did you envision, what did you see yourself doing? Did you find this vision motivating?

My friend told me a lot about his mother and I sort of envisioned a very interesting person who would be worth getting to know very well. So when Dmitri told me that his mother was coming, I actually really got excited. I remember one day thinking: Wouldn't it be nice to be able to converse with her in Russian? My husband could speak Russian and I felt I could ask him to teach me a few useful phrases. I could also learn from Dmitri, of course. I have already started to ask him how to say a few useful phrases in Russian (How are you? I like cookies, etc.).

I formulated a plan to learn English so that when Dmitri's mom came I would be able to talk to her. I already had visions of myself talking to her, asking her numerous questions about herself and about Dmitri because part of my motivation to learn Russian at that time was to be able to ask questions about how he grew up and what it was like raising children in her part of the world.

I have had a lot of occasions in the past to try to converse with people who spoke very little English and found this to be a very enriching experience. One person I remember most was a woman from Brazil, wife of a Brazilian visiting professor who came to dinner at my house. She did not speak English and I did not speak Portuguese. I knew a bit of Spanish so I tried out a few Spanish phrases, learning from her the equivalent Portuguese phrases. At the end of the evening we had exchanged quite a bit of information about ourselves and our family. The other was a Serbo-Croatian mother of my daughter's violin teacher whom he brought one day to visit. I spoke to her in combination of a few useful phrases in Serbian that I had learned earlier from her son and wife and phrases in English and we also had a successful exchange of information.

As I learned to say a few phrases in Russian, I had one of these women in my mind. More often it was the Serbo-Croatian lady because, for some reason, I imagined Dmitri's mom to be like her. When I thought of her, especially at the beginning, I had a picture of her arriving at the airport and my husband and I picking her up. I would be greeting her and saying phrases rehearsed for that purpose. (How are you? How was the trip? Are you

tired?). Later I imagined her sitting in our house and I asking her questions (Do you work? Where do you work? How is your husband? Does he speak English?)

Always in my mind I would be facing her so that I could see her reaction and I would be using a phrase, usually one I had rehearsed a lot. I would be gesturing a lot to get my meaning across. I would be watching her face intently, wondering if I had said the phrase well enough so that she could recognize it. I imagined that if I succeeded she would be laughing, pleased that I was trying to use her language. I imagined her giving me a response that I could barely understand but I would ask more questions and with gestures and miming I would be able to figure out what to say and so on. And, of course, part of the scenario would be Dmitri pleased and proud of my efforts to speak the language, and my husband also beaming with pride that I am delivering the phrases he had helped me learn.

2. As the time of the visit drew close (within weeks or days of the visit), did this vision of yourself speaking Russian change? Did your motivation for learning Russian change?

My vision of myself talking to my friend's mom, with both Dmitri and my husband watching, was always there. As I had more phrases to say, my imagined conversations with her grew longer and her approval greater. My motivation to learn became more intense. In fact, I studied harder and I asked my husband to teach me more phrases and how to write them down so I would remember. I practiced them over and over again, saying the phrases in my imagined conversation with her.

The funny thing is that when she actually appeared at the airport and I could finally say all the appropriate phrases I had rehearsed for welcoming her, I opened my mouth to say something and the first words were frozen in mid air!

Nevertheless, things went well. As I expected, she was very receptive to my efforts to learn. She spoke slowly for my benefit and taught me many new phrases. In the weeks she was here we spent many hours talking, and my Russian, broken at first, found mending as we began to know more about each other.

*the names have been changed.