Self, regulation and motivation: A socio-cultural exploration

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Aim

- To situate language learners motivation within the self/identity
- To recognise motivation & self/identity as socially constructed
- At times validated and constrained by social forces

Background to classroom-based study
- Connect & explore key concepts – self-concepts, regulation and motivation
- Case study - Luc
Background to classroom-based study

- Entered new professional context
  - New Zealand university
  - Bachelor of Global Studies (BGS)
  - Academic English, Level 1 (AE1)

- Making sense of curriculum goals
  - “Students develop as independent, reflective, self-directed, motivated and curious learners”

- Critical reflective
  - Professional conversations with teaching peers
  - Reflecting on experiences and beliefs
  - Review current literature
Learner development & self

- focus on learner development
  - emerged from recognition of the centrality of the learner to the teaching & learning process (Wenden, 2002)
  - reflected in studies in learner autonomy, learning strategies etc

- central to learner development is the self or identity
  - how learners engage not only depends on how they feel about the LL activity, but how they think/feel about themselves (Mercer, 2011)
  - time needed in curriculum to raise learners’ awareness of themselves as language learners and users (Sheerin, 1997; Cotterall, 2000)
Language learners’ self-concepts

- beliefs learners hold about themselves in different domains (e.g. academic, school, family, social domains)
- influence the choices they make, the ways they behave, how they interpret past and present experiences, and the goals and challenges they set for themselves (Mercer, 2011)
- formed through their interactions with others in learning and social environments, and through reflection
- a relatively new talking point in SLL & most studies of self-concepts in SLL examined them as psychological constructs
Possible selves

- a type of self-concept
- who they might become, their feelings, hopes, wishes or desires in regards to their future
- act as self-guides, motivating and regulating their behaviour (Markus & Nurius, 1986)
- imagined selves – imagined communities; extending identity beyond immediate social or learning contexts (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Murphey, Jin & Li-Chi, 2004)
- individual’s motivation to participate (or not) could be explained by his/her level of investment in particular imagined communities and through his/her access (or lack of access) to those communities (Norton, 2001)
Self regulation/agency

- **Self-regulation**
  - mediated by interactions between learners & others, as well as physical elements (books, technology)
  - learners become more agentive & motivated as these relationships become more meaningful (Oxford, 2003)

- **Agency**
  - contexts afford and constrain possibilities for individual and social action in them (Toohey & Norton, 2003)
  - autonomy as agency → motivation & investment
    - learners are motivated to invest in TL to the extent that they will acquire symbolic & material resources thereby enhancing their conceptions of themselves & further their desires for the future (Norton, 2000)
Language learners’ motivations

- SLL long been dominated by social-psychological models of motivation
  - concept of integrativeness
  - learners’ motivations stem from their identification with target language communities and culture (Lambert & Gardner, 1972)
  - learners are motivated to learn a given target language to the extent to which they identify and desire to integrate with specific linguistic and cultural communities.
Recent insights in LL motivation

- does the concept of integrative orientation hold up, particularly when there is no specific target language group? (see Ushioda, 2006)
  - increasingly globalized world
  - individuals have ease of access multiple communities, cultures and languages (both physically and virtually)
- the concept integrativeness seems to have lost some of its explanatory power
Recent insights in LL motivation

- Yashima (2002) - international posturing
  - interests in international affairs and their willingness to study or work abroad, for example, were not connected to one geographic, linguistic or cultural community

  - individuals are motivated to invest in LL to acquire symbolic & material resources, thereby enhancing their conceptions of themselves & further their desires for the future

- Dörnyei (2009) – L2 Motivational Self System
  - integrativeness is akin to the ideal L2 self and the dimension of instrumentality with both ideal L2 self and ought-to self
Research design

Questions:
- What is the relationship between learners’ self-concepts and their motivated behaviour?
- How did the learners negotiate their selves along their learning trajectories?

Approach:
- Multiple case study, qualitative, longitudinal (1 year)

9 participants
- 8 female, 1 male
- Japanese, Thai, New Caledonian, Tahitian
- 19-22 years old
Data collection

- AE, Level 1 class
- Artefacts of 7 LDAs throughout 14 week course (semester 1)
- Weekly learning journals (semester 1)
- 3 follow up interviews (2 in 1st semester; 1 at end of 2nd semester)
Learner Development Activities - (LDAs)

- Pedagogical response to curriculum goals & learner development
- Series of activities where students visually represented their:
  - language learning experiences
  - goals & motivations
  - beliefs about how they learn language
  - strengths & weaknesses as language learners & users
  - opportunities & threats
  - metaphors for language teacher and language learner
  - now and then
  - i.e. their visual narratives
Introducing Luc

- 20 years old
- New Caledonia
- Budding musician
Self as a student in New Caledonia

I can criticise everything in the French system [11-59]
Goals & motivation

Self as a traveller

I felt free for once without pressure of French’s system [LDA1]
Now English is my own life and I read, learn, write, speak and think in English. I like it and I saw more and more that this skill could help me find a good job, but also to learn more about people & myself [J1]
Goals & motivations

- **Self as a heavy metal drummer**
  - I really want to go to a professional music school to work as a drummer [LDA2]

After my studies, I really want to go to a professional music school to work as a drummer; it is one of my dreams. If I could join a band, it will be fabulous and I could travel around Europe or maybe the world. But before that, I have to practice hard and finish my studies.
Language learning process

Self as an international student
I am lion!!! YEAH!

Self as English & French
I want to feel English, not French ... Maybe I can keep my French accent [11-14]
I consider myself French, because I speak French [11-63]
Then & now

Self and family

*I think my big advantage is that I have fabulous parents.* [4]
Luc’s motivation as a language learner did not reside in his identification with ‘others’

It resided in who he was, he is and he wants to be

- His imagined future self sat within a broader context to which he brought his own social, historical and cultural knowledge and experiences

- His motivation in LL can be explained by his investment – his desire to acquire friendships, travel, education

- Luc’s self-concepts can be seen as part of his trajectories of self, as he moves along his learning journey
Discussion

- Self/identity, autonomy & motivation are interrelated & socially situated and at times constrained

- It is important for learner development to:
  - be situated in the various contexts in which the learners participate (past, present and future)
  - recognise the possible social or situational constraints within those contexts
  - assist learners with skills and strategies to negotiate these contexts and constraints as they move along their trajectories of self
Where is he now?

- Living in France
- Married to high school sweetheart
- Working part time in a toy store
- Playing and recording with heavy metal group
  - Released a CD in 2013
References


