

The Role of the Self in Language Learning

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Edited by

Sehnaz Sahinkarakas and Jülide Inozu

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FOREWORD

The book *The Role of the Self in Language Learning* is a collection of research papers exploring the key role of the self in foreign-language learning. Over the past decade, language-learners' individuality and their interactions with contexts during the language-learning process has gained increasing recognition from researchers in the field. In an effort to further augment understanding of the concept of "self", this book aims to bring together a series of studies analysing the issue from various perspectives. The volume includes nine chapters focusing on self in a range of EFL settings. The introductory chapter is intended to lay the foundations by looking at how the self has been regarded in the past and the direction it is now moving towards within the field of teaching English as a foreign language.

In Chapter Two, Aycan Demir Ayaz and İsmail Hakkı Erten deal with the interactions between various aspects of self. Their analysis of the relationship between L2 motivation, perceptual learning styles, imagery capacity (vision), actual L2 self, and the ideal L2 self of EFL learners in Turkey has revealed that L2 motivation, actual L2 self and vision are the best predictors of ideal L2 self. The researchers argue that to create a clear ideal L2 self, learners should be trained to increase their imagery capacity and directed to have positive concepts of themselves as L2 learners.

In Chapter Three, Senem Zaimoğlu outlines the challenges facing language-learners speaking in a foreign language in an EFL context. Her study investigates the relationship between two affective factors (anxiety and self-efficacy) in speaking. She argues that students are reluctant to take part in oral production activities because of the fear that they will make mistakes due to their high anxiety and low self-efficacy levels.

In Chapter Four, Adnan Demir explores the essence of bilinguals' first- and second-language experiences, with the purpose of describing how bilinguals perceive themselves as they switch between different languages. The results of the author's phenomenological inquiry show that bilingual self and identity are influenced by the status of the first or second language in the country and the age at which the second language was acquired.

In Chapter Five, Aysun Dağtaş focuses on the issue of the willingness to communicate in L2 classes. Her research study investigates Turkish university students' perceptions of the environmental factors contributing to their willingness to use English for communication. Taking up the

construct of WTC as an aspect of the self, the author argues that both internal aspects of the self and external social environmental factors interact to form the learners' willingness to communicate.

In Chapter Six, Eda Kahyalar and Figen Yılmaz offer insights into affective factors in language-learning. The authors begin their chapter with an overview of the debate on corrective feedback in writing and they then share a case study to indicate how learners' awareness and motivations lead to an increased investment in the learning process. The authors conclude their paper with the argument that focusing on individual learners rather than looking at group performances provides teachers with more accurate and in-depth information which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of their classroom practices.

In Chapter Seven, Simla Course aims to build on the understanding of language-learners' motivational self-systems. Her study focuses on English-language teacher trainees' motivation for learning and studying English in an EFL context. The findings of the study suggest a dynamic and changing relationship between variables of motivational self-systems. The author argues that novel learning experiences increase learners' motivation, giving way to high self-efficacy perceptions, which play a key role in shaping future self-images.

In Chapter Eight, Mehmet Demirezen looks at the issue of pronunciation within the framework of self-concept. The main premise of the paper is that the most basic elements of speaking are deeply personal in relation to self and self-identity. The author presents the techniques for giving audio-visual feedback to non-native learners of English with the PRAAT computer software. This software can help foreign-language learners to develop their pronunciation skills and prosodic features of English.

In Chapter Nine, Deniz Elçin reflects on the cultural backgrounds, personal experiences and individual identities that students and their teachers take into the classrooms. The author discusses the importance of such perceptions, beliefs and feelings that are brought into the classroom by the two parties of the learning process, and underlines the important role of teachers as mediators in creating conditions that are conducive to learning.

CONTRIBUTORS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| CF: | Corrective Feedback |
| EFL: | English as a Foreign Language |
| ELT: | English-Language Teaching |
| ESL: | English as a Second Language |
| ESP: | English for Specific Purposes |
| F0: | Fundamental Frequency |
| FL: | Foreign Language |
| FLCAS: | Foreign-Language Classroom Anxiety Scale |
| FLSAS: | Foreign-Language Speaking Anxiety Scale |
| L2: | Second Language |
| LREs: | Language-Related Episodes |
| PLSPI: | Perceptual Learning Style Preference Inventory |
| PLSPQ: | Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire |
| SEM: | Structural Equation Modelling |
| SLA: | Second Language Acquisition |
| SSES: | Speaking Self-Efficacy Scale |
| WCF: | Written Corrective Feedback |
| WIHIC: | What is Happening in This Classroom? |
| WTC: | Willingness to Communicate |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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The idea of the self has a long tradition in human thought going back to at least the works of Plato. The idea of the self is found in many philosophical traditions in ancient Greece (*Psyche*), India (*Atman*) and the Middle East (*Nafs*). Descartes, Locke, Hume and William James all explored this concept and brought it into the arena of scientific inquiry. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that modern thought begins with the self as Descartes discovered that the only thing that was beyond doubt was one's own existence.

James (1890/1948) introduced the multidimensional nature of the self, hypothesizing that there is a distinction between the self as knower and the self as known (Harter, 1999). The latter is understandable as a self-concept which James divided into the material, social and spiritual self. The material self is linked to the body while the social self refers to the role of a person in society. James (1890/1948) states that an individual could have as many social selves as the various perceptions of him in society. The spiritual self refers to internal feelings and thoughts. The rise of behaviourism in the mid-20th century, with its assertion that introspection was an invalid scientific method, led to a decline in scientific investigations of the self (Mischel & Morf, 2003). This decline was finally reversed with the cognitive revolution, which allowed explorations into thoughts and internal processes (Miller, 2003). The interest shown by cognitive psychologists in processing, encoding, organization and the

retrieval of information has led to exploring how self-concept contributes to such processes. This exploration has been expanded further into social cognition, which studies how individuals make sense of themselves and others (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

All of the above investigations play a role in understanding how self-concept contributes to communication. Taking into account earlier work on this subject, self-concept can be defined broadly not as the “facts” about an individual but as an individual’s beliefs about themselves. “It is a self-description judgement that includes an evaluation of competence and the feelings of self-worth associated with the judgement in question” (Pajares & Schunk, 2005, p.105). In such contexts, it is important to distinguish between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. These concepts may go back to before the evolution of hominids, as there is evidence that some primate species have abstract conceptualization mechanisms for monitoring intergroup communication. For example, female vervet monkeys can distinguish between the cries of their own and others’ offspring. While this might be construed as an instinctual response, the fact that they look at the relevant mothers when another offspring cries is suggestive of a conceptual understanding of interpersonal relationships other than ones’ own immediate kin (Cheney, Seyfarth, & Smuts, 1986). Such early mechanisms of abstraction may have contributed to greater genetic success in discriminating between varying degrees of kinship in early social groups. These mechanisms have evolved in hominids to include not only the intrapersonal (the self within the individual) and interpersonal (the self within society) but also the transpersonal (the self within the universe). The expansion of self-concept to entities other than oneself has further expanded in human beings to include one’s sense of self within the universe in a numinous sense.

Such distinctions sidestep current issues on whether the self actually exists as a mental entity. David Hume argued that the self is merely the collective set of perceptions of interrelated events that reflect the external environment. Metzinger (2003) agrees with this view and states that we develop “self-models” which we assume (due to our inability to experience inner neural processes) to have an underlying entity (the self). Whether the self is an entity independent of the material sense or a manifestation of our neural processes, we cannot deny its importance in understanding learning (and language-learning in particular) as they both involve intrapersonal introspection, interpersonal communication and assumptions, as well as transpersonal experiences and reflections.

Investigations into self-concept in an educational setting have often focused on different aspects of self-concept (such as self-esteem) and on

which of these aspects (if any) are dynamic (subject to modification over time). The application of such research is obvious: understanding the various aspects of self-concept and their susceptibility to modification would allow for interventionist programs for their improvement. Markus & Wurf (1987, p.302) have stated that “centrality or importance” is the most important difference between various forms of self-concepts. In other words, some beliefs are core self-conceptions while others are peripheral self-conceptions. In this framework, an individual’s overall sense of self is considered the core, while those beliefs that are less important in reinforcing this sense are peripheral. This idea of a continually changing array of modular experiences may indicate the contradictory findings of some researchers who have found that self-concept is both static and dynamic. Markus & Wurf (1987) imply that while the core self-concept may not change, the peripheral ideas of self-concept are in continuous flux.

Another perspective on the malleability of self-concept is from Harter, Waters, & Whitesell (1998), who suggest that aspects of self-concept (such as self-esteem) may vary according to the context of interpersonal relationships. This means that self-esteem changes according to whether one is by oneself (intrapersonal) or with one’s parent, friends or a stranger (interpersonal). Harter, et al. (1998) also admit that there might be some consistency in self-concept that does not change with the fluctuations resulting around this core. This is similar to James’s (1890/1948) idea of an average feeling of self. Demographic factors have also been found to influence self-concept. A meta-analysis by Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell (1999) found that females tend to report lower levels of global self-esteem than males throughout their lifespan. Self-concept was also found to be different across academic disciplines, with males being stronger in mathematics and sciences, and females being stronger in English (Sullivan, 2009). This trend of males showing a higher self-concept in mathematics and athletics while females show a higher self-concept in verbal subjects has been reported in a number of studies (Bolognini, Plancheral, Bettschart, & Halfon, 1996; Harter, 1999; Marsh, 1989; Marsh & Yeung, 1998; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2004; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Wilgenbusch & Merrill, 1999). This indicates that self-concept is influenced by gender stereotypes as well as by socialization patterns that fail to reinforce skills in areas that are not perceived to be specific to that gender.

These perspectives on self-concept emerged in the field of educational psychology by the end of the 1990s and profoundly influenced a reconsideration of the self within foreign-language learning and teaching contexts. Foreign-language learner self-concept is defined as an individual’s

self-descriptions of competence and evaluative feelings as a foreign-language (FL) learner (Mercer, 2011). According to Mercer (2012), self-concept is a powerful construct that lies at the centre of an individual's psychology, connecting various dimensions such as motivation, affective attitudes, goals and strategic behaviours. Within this framework, the conceptualization of the L2 self-concept is a complex system having both cognitive (belief system) and affective (emotional) dimensions which are, at the same time, dynamically interrelated with each other. In relation to this point, O'Mara, Marsh, Craven, & Debus (2006) say that learners' FL self-concepts are part of a complicated network of multidimensional self-beliefs and are formed through a mutual relation of interconnected factors, all of which may be processed differently depending on other psychological factors within the individual in particular settings. Therefore, the researchers further add that there is a need to attend to both cognitive and affective dimensions of self-concept, which are socially situated and ever changing. The need for recognition of the importance of context, social interactions and personal histories in understanding the complexity of foreign-language learners' self-concept has been pointed out by many other researchers in the field (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Henry, 2009; Du, 2012; Yoshida, 2013).

It is clear from the literature that self-concept and the psychological processes surrounding it are complex and have a large degree of variation across individual learners and social contexts, such as culture. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the self-concept of learners could be influenced in easily predictable ways (O'Mara, et al., 2006; Mercer, 2011). However, it is also evident that there are measurable benefits for learning from having a positive self-concept. Therefore, it is necessary for the educator to do as much as possible to encourage the development of a self-concept that is conducive to learning, while being aware of the limitations that are inherent in such attempts.

To sum up, learners' self-concept has tremendous effects on their approaches, motivations and interest in foreign-language learning. Thus, understanding the self-concept of language learners is of great benefit to foreign-language learners. We believe research that aims to provide more comprehensive insights into the construct of FL self-concept is a promising field of enquiry.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFL LEARNERS' FUTURE L2 SELF-GUIDES, VISION, AND LANGUAGE-LEARNING MOTIVATION

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Introduction

In the last decade, a new line of research has emerged on L2 motivation and L2 motivational self-systems. Studies have mainly focused on the interactions between L2 motivation, perceptual learning style preferences, imagination (vision), and the learners' ideal L2 self-guide (Kim and Kim, 2011). In 2009, Al-Shehri investigated the relationship between language-learning motivation, visual learning style preference, vision, and ideal L2 self. Others (Dörnyei and Chan, 2013; Kim, 2009; Kim and Kim, 2011; Kim and Kim, 2014; Yang and Kim, 2011) have followed this up with adaptations for their own research contexts and purposes. As a result, these studies revealed that visual and auditory learners had a higher imagery capacity and therefore were better at creating vivid visions of the ideal L2 self, which might eventually lead to higher levels of motivation. Inspired by these findings, this study aimed to explore a possible interplay between these factors in the Turkish context.

Literature Review

Overview of Self-Discrepancy Theory

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Klein, and Strauman, 1985) assumes that individuals have various self-guides which are either desired or undesired. Any gap between the person's presently-functioning self and the desired self creates anxiety for them, because they need there to be a similarity or overlap between these two selves. There are three kinds of possible self-guides which are important in the self-discrepancy theory: ideal, ought-to, and feared selves. Ideal and ought-to selves are the desired self-guides, while the feared self is the undesirable one to be avoided. A gap between the perceived actual self and the ideal self leads to feelings of failure and grief (Carver, Lawrence, and Scheier, 1999). A large gap between the actual and ought-to self, results in feelings of social anxiety and guilt, since the person cannot manage to fulfil an obligation or responsibility and will be disapproved of by society (Carver et al., 1999). Therefore, the individual aims to reduce the gap in order to avoid the negative results of such a discrepancy. The feared self represents the set of qualities that the person does not want to become and is also afraid of becoming. The theory holds that if there is a sufficient gap between the actual self and feared self, there is no real reason to worry about its impendence, and the person can concentrate on their desired values to direct their behaviour in the future (Carver et al., 1999).

L2 Motivation and Future L2 Self-Guides

L2 motivation has always been an intriguing issue for SLA researchers. Since the 1950s, L2 motivation research has gradually evolved and has witnessed the introduction of different theoretical and terminological points of reference. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a full account of developments in the field here. However, it should suffice to say that our understanding of the concept of motivation has moved from social psychology (i.e. integrativeness, suggested by Gardner and Lambert in 1985) to a more cognitive description of motivation (e.g. intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan, 1985). It is now often pointed out that motivation involves a process, and is described as "a state of cognitive and emotional arousal which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals)" (Williams and Burden, 1997, p. 120). Motivation is also seen as a dynamic process subject to

fluctuations with unexpected ups and downs in one's desire to engage in an activity (Henry, Davydenko, and Dörnyei, 2015).

This chapter is concerned chiefly with how people visualize themselves within the act of learning, with specific reference to Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system. Based on the "possible selves" theory by Markus and Nurius (1986, 1987), Dörnyei's self-system identifies three dimensions of motivation. These are: *ideal L2 self*, *ought-to L2 self*, and *L2 learning experience*. Ideal L2 self is a "representation of all the attributes that a person would like to possess (such as hopes, aspirations, desires)" (Csizer and Dörnyei, 2005, p. 616). Csizer and Dörnyei (2005) describe the ideal L2 self as the promotion-focused self, which includes a favourable future aim such as learning English in order to improve professionally and feel successful. While this is, according to Carver et al. (1999), intrinsically desired, Kim (2009) defines it as a "more-internalized" set of instrumental reasons for L2 learning, stating that "more-internalized instrumentality is closely associated with the ideal L2 self because if the learner genuinely wishes to learn English, he or she can imagine a prosperous ideal English self and thus create promotion-based instrumentality (such as being offered a decent job, gaining promotion)" (Kim, 2009, p. 49). For learners with the ideal L2 self, learning English holds emotional significance. They personalize its value which, in turn, helps them internalize their reasons for learning the language. In Kim's (2009) study of four Korean students who intended to go to Canada to improve their English, one of the participants, Woo, was found to have consistent and clear reasons for learning the L2 and was observed to have internalized his purposes, which had a strong effect on his ideal L2 self. In another study, Kim (2011) suggests that the ideal L2 self functions at both cognitive and affective levels, as it is internalized by the learner, such as in Woo's case. Magid (2013) identifies the ideal L2 self as an academic self-guide which helps the learner regulate their behaviour in order to learn the language, while Sung (2013) sees it as an integration with the ideal L2 self, or, in other words, the learner's desire to advance in L2 as part of their ideal self-image. Also, according to Csizer and Dörnyei (2005, p. 616), "If one's ideal self is associated with the mastery of an L2, that is, if the person that we would like to become is proficient in the L2, s/he can be described—using Gardner's (1985) terminology— as having an 'integrative disposition.'" Therefore, if the language has a personal value for the learner, it becomes a part of the ideal L2 self (Kim, 2009).

The second main dimension in Dörnyei's system is the *ought-to L2 self*. Csizer and Dörnyei define it as "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess (such as various duties, obligations or responsibilities)"

(2005, p. 617). There are several different definitions of the ought-to L2 self. Azarnoosh and Birjandi (2012) adhere to Dörnyei's original definition, and refer to the obligations and responsibilities imposed on the individual. According to Carver et al. (1999), contrary to the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self is not intrinsically desired but is an instrumental drive with a prevention-focus, as in the example of studying a language only in order to pass exams and finish school (Csizer and Dörnyei, 2005). Kim (2009) asserts that the ought-to self can turn into the ideal L2 self if the learner manages to internalize it. Following the internalization stage, the ought-to L2 self can also function as a means of increasing levels of motivation and thus L2 success. However, above all, the learner first needs to see the benefits of acquiring L2 proficiency and realize the future self-image as a competent L2 user. Kim (2011) adds that, if not internalized, the ought-to self is an external dimension and only functions at a cognitive level. Kim (2009) also suggests that it is not proper to relate all instrumentality issues to the ought-to L2 self and integrativeness or intrinsic issues to the ideal L2 self. According to Kim, the criteria should be the distinction between promotion-focus and prevention-focus, since it is possible for an instrumental reason to be internalized by the learner, in order to serve the ideal L2 self, as in the case of the Korean university student, Woo, reported by Kim (2009).

The third component of the L2 motivational self- system of Dörnyei (2005), is the L2 learning experience. This refers to "the situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Csizer and Dörnyei, 2005, p. 617). Contrary to the ideal and ought-to L2 self-guides, the L2 learning experience is not related to self-guides, and is also not generalizable, as it includes situation-specific factors influencing L2 motivation (Azarnoosh and Birjandi, 2012).

Perceptual Learning Styles

Perceptual learning styles, also called sensory preferences, are one of the best-known dimensions in L2 learning. A perceptual learning style indicates an individual's preference for the senses they use most of the time and feel most comfortable with (e.g. sight, sound, and touch, Barbe, Swassing, and Milone, 1979) to receive input and process the content of the language (Reid, 1998). Thus, our sensory preferences are often regarded as the style (personal method/approach) most related to language-learning (Brown, 1994; Oxford, 2001).

Our perceptual learning style includes four different dimensions: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, and tactile learning styles (Reid, 1998;

Sprenger, 2008). Visual learners prefer receiving new information with their eyes and they learn much better by reading and looking at objects, charts, maps, and pictures. Learners preferring the auditory style benefit significantly from lectures, conversations, and oral instructions. They learn by listening to the information and by speaking about it. Kinaesthetic and tactile learners both generally use their sense of touch but, there is a difference between these two styles: kinaesthetic learners need whole body movement (as in role play), while tactile learners prefer hands-on activities such as building models and making collages (Dörnyei, 2005), since they like feeling the materials while studying (Erten, 1998). Studies often report that the visual learning style appears to be the most preferred one, followed by the auditory style and then the kinaesthetic and tactile learning styles (Kırkgöz and Doğanay, 2003; Kim and Kim, 2011; Tabatabaiea and Mashayekhib, 2013). It has also been argued that the learner who can make use of multiple channels can process language input more efficiently (Kinsella, 1995).

Vision/Imagery Capacity

Within the SLA context, based on the “possible selves” theory (Dörnyei and Chan, 2013), vision can be described as “the mental representation of the sensory experience of a future goal state” (Muir and Dörnyei, 2013, p. 357). Vision has been argued to be one of the strongest determiners of L2 motivation in that it can assure long-term effort by the learner (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Muir and Dörnyei (2013, p. 358) state that it causes “emotional reactions” in learners and, as they have already experienced and tasted success in their vision, the urge to make it real does not allow the learners to give up on their efforts. The link between visualization and L2 motivation has now been acknowledged among scholars in that visualization helps learners to construct a stronger and clearer ideal L2 self which, in turn, may increase their L2 motivation (Dörnyei and Chan, 2013; Murray, 2013). This is probably because learners who enjoy success in their imagination are often inclined to increase their efforts to reduce the discrepancy between their current state and the imagined one, which promotes their motivated behaviour (Ueki and Takeuchi, 2013).

Relationship between Vision, Ideal L2 Self, Perceptual Learning Styles, and L2 Motivation

The theoretical relationship between vision, ideal L2 self, perceptual learning styles and L2 motivation is a relatively new phenomenon. Pioneering work was initiated by Al-Shehri's (2009) seminal study. Al-Shehri investigated the interactions between the visual learning style, vision, the ideal L2 self, and motivated learning behaviour. The hypothesis was that learners with visual preferences are better at creating a vivid vision of their ideal L2 self than learners with capabilities that are less visual. The results of the study confirmed this hypothesis and revealed strong interactions between the visual learning style, the creation of a lucid vision of the ideal L2 self, and motivated learning behaviour. Concordantly, regarding the association between imagery, ideal L2 self and L2 motivation, it has been suggested that if learners manage to create an inspiring future image of themselves as proficient L2 users, they will put more effort into learning, in order to achieve the imagined self (Dörnyei, 2009a). Dörnyei emphasizes the value of the ideal L2 self and nominates it as "a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves" (2009b, p. 29).

Inspired by Al-Shehri's work in Saudi Arabia, Kim (2009) worked on the interactions between perceptual learning styles, vision, ideal self, and L2 motivation in the Korean context. The previous research was expanded upon by adding auditory and kinaesthetic learning style preferences as significant variables. The results of this study also confirmed the relationship between visual learning style, imagery, ideal L2 self, and L2 motivation. Positive correlation coefficients between the auditory learning style and other variables were also found. However, the kinaesthetic learning style was negatively correlated with motivation. As for the relationship between imagery, ideal L2 self, L2 motivation, and visual and auditory learning styles, some studies have suggested from a neurological point of view that the brain area responsible for creating imagery is similar to the visual area (Kosslyn, Cacioppo, and Davidson, 2002; Modell, 2003). This signifies that learners with visual preferences may be more successful in creating and visualizing their ideal L2 self. There are also theories that suggest a connection between the auditory learning style and vision. As Dörnyei and Chan (2013) assert, visualization does not have to be without auditory aids: learners can imagine having a real conversation with a proficient person and hear their own words and the interlocutor's responses, each of which will considerably increase their motivation.