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# L2 Identity and Motivational Considerations in a Global Context

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This paper sets out to examine language learner identity in a global context, by first analysing the dominant position of English in the world today and then in the light of this, revisiting the concepts which aim to describe how individuals are motivated to learn English.

**Methodology:** The paper is based on research findings as documented in numerous studies, for example Smit & Dafouz (2012) and Wächter & Maiworm (2014).

**Findings:** The findings emphasise the fact that the hegemony of English in the world today, where around 400 million people use English as a first language, shows no sign of diminishing. In fact, issues surrounding the consequences of globalisation make the place of English in the world ever more solidified, however the contexts and the purposes for which it used are changing.

**Value added:** By examining certain aspects of the powerful position of English today, this paper proposes the view that conceptions of specific motivational aspects of language learner identity are no longer as valid as they once were.

**Recommendations:** The paper recommends that a new theorizing of learner identity, with specific focus on L2 learner motivation, needs to be considered.

**Key words:** L2 learner identity, global English, motivational drivers, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), English as a lingua franca (ELF)

**JEL codes:** o350, O330

## Introduction

This paper, based on recent research into EMI at tertiary level and L2 learner motivation, sets out to examine language learner identity in a global context. First, it analyses the dominant position of English in the world today and then in the light of this, revisits notions of second language (L2) motivation in order to evaluate the applicability of these concepts to English language learning in a globalized world.

The hegemony of English in the world today is difficult to challenge: around 400 million people use English as a first language and around 750 million as a second or extra language. It is an officially recognised language in over 80 countries and is spoken widely in another 100 countries ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_languages\\_by\\_total\\_number\\_of\\_speakers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_languages_by_total_number_of_speakers)). It has been suggested that 1 billion people are learning English and according to a study published by Pearson this will grow to 2 billion by 2020 ('The 'Learning Curve', 2012). By examining three areas of English language use today this paper puts forward the view that the motivational aspects of L2 learner identity need to be revisited and a new theorizing of L2 learner identity, with specific focus on L2 learner motivation, needs to be considered. My approach to this phenomena is based on Gardner's model of the factors affecting learner outcomes (figure 1). Given the wide-ranging, complex, inter-connected and

dynamic nature of these four factors, for the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to focus on how specific global, socio-educational and socio-cultural aspects can affect L2 learner identity and L2 motivation and how these might impact on second language acquisition (SLA).

Figure 1. Gardner's model of the factors affecting learner outcomes



Source: adapted from Gardner, 2007, p. 9.

## Current state of knowledge

### Research into English as a medium of instruction

The hegemony of English can be linked to many historical, social, economic and technological factors and one such recent development is the place of English in educational institutions and academia worldwide. The Bologna Process of 1999 introduced a series of measures through which European universities were asked to recognise that they were an essential factor in an increasingly globalised world. And with the inception of the European Higher Education Area in 2010 (EHEA) came an increased harmonisation of degree structures, the promotion of teacher and student mobility and the increase

in partnerships within the EHEA (Knight, 2008, pp. 22–24). Consequently, this led to a marketisation of education as universities competed to attract overseas students (Räsänen & Fortanet-Gomez, 2008, pp. 14–18). In this competitive, global environment universities in non-English speaking countries have been compelled to provide courses in the global lingua-franca, English. According to Knight “[I]nternationalisation must be taken as one of the main reasons for using English as a medium of instruction across universities in Europe” (see Knight, 2008, p. 24). This has led to a restructuring of many university programmes and curricula, making English-medium instruction (EMI) a reality (see Smit & Dafouz, 2012). In their “The Institutional Survey 2014” Wächter & Maiworm looked at a total of 2,637 higher education institutions in 28 countries and estimated that English Taught Programmes (ETPs) had grown considerably from 2001.

ETPs	–	2001	–	725
ETPs	–	2007	–	2,389
ETPs	–	2014	–	8,089

(Wächter & Maiworm, 2014)

While fundamentally it would seem that economic issues are the main motivators in the rise of EMI and ETPs, there are other rationales behind universities adopting to implement them and these reasons differ depending on the national context, but include:

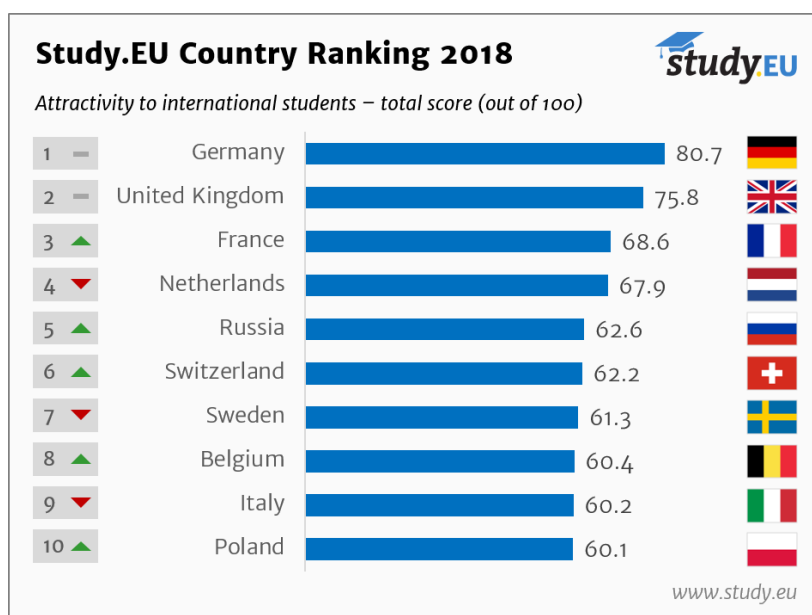
- to improve the institution’s position in global rankings, thereby gaining global visibility (Komori-Glatz, 2014; Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2012, p. xviii);
- to “attract international students [...] to make domestic students fit for the global or international market [...]” (Wilkinson, 2013, pp. 7–8);
- to boost income from fee-paying students (Fortanet-Gómez, 2013);
- to recruit international academic staff and students (see Wächter & Maiworm, 2014).

Whereas the reasons for not offering ETPs include:

- low levels of English language proficiency among teaching staff and a resulting reluctance to teach in English;
- low-level of English skills amongst domestic students (Costa, 2012).

Universities are therefore competing to attract non-domestic students and this is achieved mainly through the offer EMI programmes.

Figure 2. Study EU Country Ranking 2018



Source: <https://www.study.eu.org>.

As a case in point; Polish universities offering ETPs have exploded from just 12,000 to over 65,000 in the past ten years (<https://www.bachelorsportal.com/countries/20/poland.html>).

However, while governments, university administrations and subject specialists have embraced the new top-down internationalisation scenario and its possibilities for professional and academic development, the pedagogical concerns and language learning matters are often regarded as of

secondary importance (see Smit & Dafouz, 2012, p. 8). Other concerns over ETPs include; “how much language is being gained by such programs as well as how much academic content is being achieved” (Shohamy in Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2012, p. 203) and is it true that “students in any type of interdisciplinary or integrative curriculum do as well as, and often better than, students in compartmentalized program” (Pawan, 2008, p. 1450).

## The academic community

Another area in which the English language dominates is in its importance to the global scientific community. By the early 19th century, just three languages, French, English, and German accounted for the bulk of scientific communication and published research. And by the second half of the 20th century, only English remained dominant as the U.S. strengthened its influence in the global scientific community. English is now so prevalent that in some non-English speaking countries, like Germany, France, and Spain, English-language academic papers far outnumber publications in the country’s own language several times over. In the Netherlands, one of the more extreme examples, this ratio is an astonishing 40 to 1. This dominance is not an accidental phenomena, SCOPUS, the world’s largest database for peer-reviewed journals with 53 million records, 21,915 titles from 5,000 publishers, has a publishing policy that a journal published in a language other than English must at the very least include English abstracts. Van Weijen found that roughly 80% of all the journals indexed in Scopus are published in English (van Weijen, 2012). Scientists who want to produce influential, globally recognized work most likely need to publish in English, attend English-language conferences, read English-language papers, and have English-language discussions with their peers. This has led many academics to ask whether maintaining English as the gatekeeper to scientific discourse comes with “the great cost of losing their unique ways of communicating ideas”, or that academics might “gradually lose their own voice”, resulting in ‘domain loss’ (Lo Bianco, 2007).



## The Internet community

Another factor behind the dominant position held by English today is the importance of the global reach of the Internet. Examining statistics about the Internet is one way of assessing how many people are 'using' English today and the numbers are impressive. From a world population of over 7.5 billion over half are Internet users, a 300% increase since 2005 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_Internet\\_usage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Internet_usage)).

**Figure 3. Internet statistics**

Worldwide Internet users			
	2005	2010	2017a
World population	6.5 billion	6.9 billion	7.4 billion
Users worldwide	16%	30%	48% of the world
Users in the developing world	8%	21%	41.3% of the developing world
Users in the developed world	51%	67%	81% of the developed world

Source: International Telecommunications Union, 2017.

Importantly, the English language is used in over half of the world's Internet sites.

The percentage of content as per language used:

1 English	52.3%
2 Russian	6.4%
3 Japanese	5.7%
4 German	5.4%
5 Spanish	5.0%
6 French	4.0%
7 Portuguese	2.6%

8 Italian	2.3%
9 Chinese	2.0%
10 Polish	1.7%

\*\*All other languages are used in less than 0.1% of websites.

*Adapted from: W3Techs – World Wide Web Technology Surveys. September, 2018.*

So it is perhaps reasonable to assume that as over half the world's population use the Internet in order to access entertainment and information and as over 50% of Internet content is presented in the English language, that the approximately 2 billion users, who want to be part of this global phenomenon, will be motivated to learn English.

However, more and more countries are enlarging their domestic Internet use and therefore presenting content in local languages. The largest increase is seen in Asia with over 2 billion users compared to Europe's 700 million. Poland has increased its Internet use from 2.8 million people online in 2000 (7.3% of the population) to 27.9 million in 2016 (72.4% of the population) ([www.InternetLiveStats.com](http://www.InternetLiveStats.com)).

**Figure 4. Growth of Internet sites using local languages: 2000-2018**

Arabic	8,500%
Russian	3,400%
Indonesian / Malaysian	2,900%
Chinese	2,400%
Portuguese	2,100%
Spanish	1,800%
French	1,000%
English	650%
German	234%
Japanese	152%

Source: <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>.

A main driver behind this explosion in the spread of Internet is the growing importance of social media in many areas of social, economic and political life. Facebook, since its creation in 2004, has grown into a worldwide network of over 2 billion users and is now available in over 100 languages. Twitter and Instagram have 336 million and 1 billion active users monthly respectively (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>). And while it is true that people are more likely to favour their native language when discussing local or personal issues or sharing with friends, it is still the case that when someone wants to share something with as large an audience as possible or to increase the chances of their content being shared or liked with other users around the world, English is still the default language. Learning English can therefore be seen as a tool which provides access to a global social network.

Despite the fact that the English language sites still account for over 50% of content as opposed to 80% in the 1990's, it is still the case that English is by far the most used language on the Internet as, when users need to access or reach a global audience as opposed to a local one, English is the lingua franca they turn to.

## A review of L2 motivation studies

Motivation has been a central research topic within second language acquisition (SLA) studies since the 1960s, as it became recognized as an important internal cause of variability in language learning success. However, as Dörnyei points out, a difficulty in discussing motivation is how to define and isolate it and what aspects to focus on and what aspects to background (Dörnyei, 2001a, p. 105). He comments that, "Although 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement, one can find in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of the concept" (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117). Dörnyei and Ushioda identify the following 4 main phases in the theorisation of motivation in SLA studies:

- The social-psychological period (1959–1990), characterized by the work of Robert Gardner and his associates in Canada;
- The cognitive-situated period (during the 1990s), characterized by work drawing on cognitive theories in educational psychology;
- The process-oriented period (turn of the century), characterized by a focus on motivational change;
- The socio-dynamic period (current), characterized by a concern with dynamic systems and contextual interactions (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 397).

One of the biggest influences on motivational studies was the work of Gardner and Lambert whose theory of motivation proposed two types of motivation, instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental orientation refers to the tangible, reward-orientated reasons an individual might have to learn a language, such as for work or study, while integrative motivation is a learner's disposition to learn a language, but also his/her desire to learn about the L2 culture and its community. For Gardner and Lambert this social dimension of their conceptualisation of L2 learner motivation reflects "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" and their work gave rise to an increased focus on the social context of second language acquisition (SLA) (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 132).

For Gardner integrativeness was the more powerful of the two motivational sources, he claimed that L2 motivation "always has an integrativeness component" and even when motivation is instrumental "this has associated with it some level of willingness to interact with other communities" (Gardner, 1985, p. 168). Motivation then was seen as also being the result of an interaction with the L2 culture and the target language, thereby bringing to the fore of motivation studies aspects of social context and attitudes towards the L2 and L2 communities (see Gardner, 2010). This notion of motivation had been proposed by Clément et al. who in studying linguistic self-confidence stated that being part of a multilingual community might serve as a motivational driver for second language learners (Clément et al., 1994). Earlier still Schumann had developed his acculturation model, which was based on social

and psychological factors which are believed to be important in the process of SLA in natural contexts. Schumann argued that the degree of language acquisition correlates with the degree of the learner's proximity to the target group (1978, 1990). His focus on the importance of the social distance between the second language learner and the target language group led him to analyse the effects social distance can have on SLA in terms of; the power relationship between the L1/the learner's culture (C1) and L2/ target language culture (C2), learner's attitude to the target community, shared beliefs and institutions, similarity between C1 and C2 and the duration of contact between L1/C1 and L2/C2 (see Schumann, 1978).

The cognitive-situated period of the 1990's had its investigative focus on the psychological aspect of motivation and the mental processes involved. It was also rooted in analysing L2 motivation in learning contexts and the needs of the students and teachers in the classroom were considered more significant than the community and the social context.

The Process-Oriented Period focussed on the dynamic nature of motivation as it is affected by aspects of the learning environment, such as; the learner's wishes and intentions, previous learning experiences, temporary and long-term motivations and differences in motivation during different stages of the learning process (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The socio-dynamic period focuses on the changing nature of both the individual and the context and the fluid interaction between the two, and recognises the place of English as an international lingua franca (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Dörnyei and Ushioda recognise three dominant notions with regards to L2 motivation and SLA today;

- Person-in-context; where the second language learner is seen as a dynamic, unique individual, whose social and personal aspects need to be considered (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).
- The L2 learner's motivational self; which considers the learner on three different levels: (1) *ideal L2 self* (the L2 competence one would like to achieve), (2) *ought-to L2 self* (the L2 competences the learner thinks external *others*

expect him/her to achieve), and (3) *L2 learning experience* "related to the environment and learning conditions" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 86).

- The complex and dynamic nature of L2 motivation, which takes into account the presence of two or more variables, which are conceived of as being interlinked and constantly changing over time. These include motivational, cognitive and affect variables, which in their interactions render an individual's behaviour complex and unpredictable to foresee (adapted from Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

What this paper is arguing is that today, these complex and dynamic interactions are taking place in global, socio-economic contexts which require reconceptualisations of L2 motivation. Globalisation and the social changes it has brought offer individuals the opportunity to have interactions with a wide and diverse range of individuals and communities and I argue that these opportunities have an influence on the individual's motivation towards acquiring English. Therefore, as Dörnyei and Ushioda point out, "given that the focus is across evolving systems of interacting internal and contextual factors shaping engagement in SLA, and given the need to consider the processes of human agency and intentionality that are fundamental to the interactions between individual and context [...] a key challenge will be to develop workable research designs and analytical tools to investigate such systems in a coherent way" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 400).

As stated previously one difficulty in researching motivation in SLA is how to define and isolate it and what aspects to focus on and what aspects to background. Therefore this paper has focused on three areas of L2 use; English taught programmes, the academic community and the Internet community. In each of these contexts previous notions about L2 motivation will be more relevant than others, although as always, all aspects are always present. If we turn once more to Dörnyei and Ushioda's notion of the 4 stages of L2 motivation research, namely; the social-psychological period, the cognitive-situated period, the process-oriented period and the socio-dynamic period (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 397), we can conceive of

how previous theories of motivation, which are often presented as having being superseded by later notions, might indeed be more relevant in certain global contexts today. What follows then are indications for further research into the conceptualisation of L2 motivation in the areas under consideration.

## A reconceptualisation of learner identity and L2 motivation

### Education

There have been a number of studies over the last decades into the place of EMI at various levels of education and specifically at higher education level which Smit called “a prototypical ELF (English as a lingua franca) scenario” (*my parenthesis*, Smit, 2018, p. 387). These studies have been in response to an exponential rise in ETPs; for example, 55 first degree courses were offered in English on continental Europe in 2009 which grew to 2,900 in 2017 (Bothwell, 2017). Worldwide, in 2016, this was estimated to be around 8,000 (Mitchell, 2016). Although this paper will draw on Europe for most of its considerations, ETPs are on the rise globally, specifically in China, Japan, Malaysia and South Korea (see Jenkins, 2014). Viewing L2 motivation in academic contexts from a process orientated perspective helps us to foreground external, institutional factors, such as; the immediate educational context, the expectations of society and the institution, the quality of the learning programmes, the interest, enthusiasm, and skills of the teacher and the appropriacy of the curriculum. For example a number of classroom motivational studies have underlined that teachers are an important influence on learners’ motivation (see Dörnyei, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). In fact Dörnyei has argued consistently that in an EFL context, instrumental orientation would have a greater impact on the motivation of second language learners (see Dörnyei, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001a, 2001b).

One area of EMI that is being debated today is the ‘E’ in the EMI (Walkinshaw et al., 2017, p. 7). What kind of English is being used in these contexts, is it

native English or native-like English, or is it English as a lingua franca (ELF)? Connected to this point is whether the dominance of non-native English speakers (NNESs) over native English speakers (NESs), in terms of both student body and teaching staff, has any effect on L2 learning outcomes. The English used in non-Anglophone educational contexts is increasingly being seen as a multilingual/multicultural phenomenon, where English is available to all as a default language, but individuals may choose other languages depending on the immediate communicative need (see Jenkins, 2014; Baker & Hüttner, 2016). This reality has given rise to questions about what English is being used in ETPs and the belief that 'standard English' is an ideological construct which is unrepresentative of the over 400 million users of English as a first language worldwide. For Mauranen the context of English in higher education is "not a realm where nationality or national standards and practices take first priority" (Mauranen, 2010, p. 68). However, the belief in a 'standard English' is so entrenched that some commentators still ask whether the "richness of the language" might not be "reduced when proficiency levels in English, on the part of both teachers and students, are not particularly high?" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 38). Coupled with this is the common view that content and the quality of teaching is compromised on ETPs and whether, as a result of internationalization, curricular harmonization might not lead to content harmonization and a loss of intellectual and academic diversity, in both linguistic, methodological and disciplinary perspectives (Smit & Dafouz, 2012, p. 8).

However, taking a macro-view of English in education and academia, it is still true to say that English proficiency is increasingly being seen as a requirement in order to participate in education and academia and universities are increasingly turning to international certificates, such as TOEFL and Cambridge to allow access to their institution. For example, IELTS is recognised by more than 10,000 universities, schools and employers and in 2016 over 3 million IELTS tests were taken (<https://www.ielts.org/news/2017/ielts-numbers-rise-to-three-million-a-year>, access: 27.03.2019). These external requirements are not only aimed at the student body, the



university of Copenhagen introduced a certification for EMI programme teachers and the university of Delft requires C2 level for the content specialists on EMI programmes.

Therefore, non-Anglophone learners, academics and ETP instructors are in an environment where the institutional and social pressures to learn and use English are many and powerful and I argue that their desire to learn English is more likely to be motivated by these external requirements than by cognitive or affective factors. Required Motivation theory proposes that L2 learners can be motivated to learn a L2 in order to meet social expectations and this variable has been identified in a number of L2 motivational studies. (see Warden & Lin, 2000, Chen et al., 2005). A longitudinal study by Dörnyei & Csizér also found that although an integrative factor was consistent in their study it was underpinned by practical instrumental motivation (Dörnyei & Csizér 2002, Dörnyei et al., 2006). In this context then, there is the need to shift the research focus away from the integrative nature of L2 learner motivation and to view motivation as being created, driven and sustained by external factors, which in turn will lead to a focus on the internal domain of the learner and his/her immediate learning situation (see Ushioda, 2005, p. 54; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 453). In fact one area of the internal domain that needs to be focused upon in this context is how the L2 learner's identity is affected. The L2 learner/user's academic identity, be it as a student or as a member of the academia, involves his/her self-perception of L2 competence and his/her evaluative judgments in the academic domain (Mercer, 2011, p. 14). In learning and using a L2 this self-concept can be vulnerable as L2 learning/using is much more "ego-involving" than other activities (see Horwitz & Young, 1991; Arnold, 1999, 2011).

Self-confidence is composed of perceived competence and a lack of anxiety (see Clément et al., 1994, 2003) and when there is an absence of confidence learners can be anxious about the L2 learning process and L2 use. In foreign and second language learning, anxiety (in addition to attitudes and motivation) has been shown by various researchers to be an important

affective variable which influences foreign language achievement (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) studies have been carried out in classroom environments and are therefore specific to what Horwitz et al term "situation-specific anxiety" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Another affective variable in 2LA closely related to self-confidence and anxiety is the learner's Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which has been defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998 p. 547). MacIntyre et al. conceptualized L2 WTC in a theoretical model which included learner personality, the climate, attitude and motivation of the intergroup, L2 self-confidence and communicative competence, all of which they argue are interrelated to influence L2 WTC and L2 learning and use (Clément, et al., 1998, p. 546). This communication apprehension is defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78) and is linked to learners' self-perceived communicative competence (Matsuoka, 2006, 2009). Stephen Krashen argued that learners with high motivation, high self-confidence and a low level of anxiety regarding the target language have better conditions to learn a second language. On the other hand, if motivation and self-confidence are low and the learner is more anxious, it will aggravate the process as, what Krashen termed as, an affective filter is raised, creating an obstacle to learning (Krashen, 1985). I am suggesting that the context of English as an academic lingua franca is a pressured one and that we need to study L2 motivation in this context from the perspective of the motivational concepts of FLA, WTC and learner self-confidence.

## The digital construct of an L2 identity

My final global context of English use is that of the Internet and one area of Internet use which is growing exponentially is social media. 1.52 billion people on average log onto Facebook daily and with more than 2 billion users in all,

Facebook heads the chart in the social media world. Other platforms are:

- YouTube: 1.8 billion
- WhatsApp: 1.5 billion
- Facebook Messenger: 1.3 billion
- Instagram: 1 billion
- LinkedIn: 562 million
- Tumblr: 550 million
- Twitter: 336 million
- Pinterest: 200 million
- Snapchat: 191 million (*www.cheatsheet.com / numbers as of July 2018*).

As of December 2017, English was the most popular language online representing 25.4 percent of worldwide Internet users, which constitute 56% of the world population of 7.8 billion (*www.Internetworldstats.com*), with Chinese ranked second (19.3%). The top ten languages accounted for 77.2 percent of global Internet users. So, roughly 1 billion people are using English to access the Internet. As Dörnyei *et al* state, the fact of the global position of English means that “more and more learners do not make a motivated choice to learn English, English has become a self-evident component of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Dörnyei *et al.*, 2006, p. 89). In other words the target reference group has become a global and not geographically specific reference group. Unlike perhaps the context of English in academia and international business, an individual who learns English in order to participate in this global community is demonstrating agency, “a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions”. And as with the previous three contexts, in order to investigate SLA motivation we need “to integrate the individual and context in the analysis” (see Ushioda, 2009, p. 220). In this way, we can conceive of integrativeness as “an orientation towards the global community rather than an assimilation with native speakers” (McClelland, 2000, p. 109).

However, previous studies saw motivation as being the result of an interaction with the L2 culture and the target language, thereby bringing to the

fore of motivation studies aspects of social context and attitudes towards the L2 and L2 communities (see Gardner, 2010). As mentioned above Schumann argued that the degree of language acquisition correlates with the degree of the learner's proximity to the target group and he focused on the importance of the social distance between the second language learner and the target language group and the effects these factors have on SLA (Schumann, 1978, 1990). The Internet and social media is not a geographical or mono-cultural context. There are no people and there is no culture to have proximity with and the target language is also not geographically or culturally located. In the light of this, recent research has looked for alternative ways of considering motivation in 2LA. Yashima, for example, suggests reconceptualising the notion of integrative motivation to a generalized global perspective, an *international posture* (Yashima, 2002). Ushioda poses the question, that if the target community is a global community, can it be considered as an "external reference group, or as part of one's internal representation of oneself as a de facto member of that global community?" (Ushioda, 2006, p. 150).

Cultural contact has been traditionally regarded as a key factor in promoting positive L2 attitudes and motivations and the notion of the *contact hypothesis* was put forward by Uribe et al who claim that contact with the L2 target culture and the L2 target community motivates L2 learning behaviour, leading to improved L2 achievement levels (see Uribe et al., 2011, p. 10). Dörnyei et al. pointed out "Past research on intercultural/intergroup contact has shown convincingly that contact has significant bearings on a host of issues, including affecting people's interethnic attitudes and L2 motivation" (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). But today what is the nature of the contact between the target language and culture?

Perhaps it is useful to view these external reference groups, i.e. Internet and social media domains as unreal communities, somewhat like Anderson's imagined communities, "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion

(Anderson, 1991, p. 6). For Anderson groups are connected through the power of the imagination, which, I argue, can be reconceptualised to describe this virtual global community? For Norton and McKinney “an imagined community assumes an imagined identity and investment in target language practices can be understood within this context” (Norton & McKinney, 2010, p. 76).

## Final remarks

The Internet and social media offer the individual the possibility to engage with an array of external reference groups, which are multilingual, multicultural groups but have mutual interests and objectives. We therefore need to consider individual L2 motivation not in terms of its relation to such external groups, but to the internal domain of the learner and his/her conceptions of self and identity. Dörnyei and Csizér suggest that the main motivational driver is attributable to internal processes and in particular an individual learner’s self-concept (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 453). Dörnyei went on to expand this notion by developing Markus and Nurius’s (1986) theory of *possible selves* and proposed the notion of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b), which is concerned with an individual’s vision of themselves in the future. As stated above, this notion of self is subdivided into, *ideal self*, the skills and attributes one would like to possess and the *ought-to-self*, the skills and attributes an individual thinks the external world thinks she/he should possess. The virtual world offered by the Internet and social media would seem to be a fertile location for individual’s to develop their notion of identity, including their concept of self as an English language user. Researching L2 motivation in such a context will need to take into account not only aspects of the L2 Motivational Self System, but will also need to encompass other aspects of the learner’s identity, such as gender, social and professional position and other biographical aspects (see Norton, 2000).

The challenge to future research in this context will be to adopt a dynamic perspective that allows for the consideration of the “simultaneously the

ongoing multiple influences between environmental and learner factors in all their componential complexity" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 251). In fact Dörnyei asks whether such a dynamic systems perspective might render the notion of discrete individual difference variables, including motivation, rather meaningless as such factors and the context in which they occur change and cause change, so that the system as a whole constantly restructures, adapts, and evolves. (Dörnyei, 2009). Therefore it would seem that today's challenge in analysing L2 motivation in today's globalised world appears to be to find a research methodology capable of analysing the dynamic complexity of context, "more qualitative methods of inquiry [...] in an effort to address the dynamic and situated complexity of L2 motivation" (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 402). Ushioda and Dörnyei suggest analysing what they term as "valid "stories of motivation" which are powerful enough to resonate in the audiences and to offer concrete suggestions for application; which are backed by sufficient empirical evidence, [...] and which are comprehensive rather than reductionist" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013, p. 406).

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