"This language still motivates me!" Advanced language students and their L2 motivation

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Abstract

The article focuses on written narratives of 51 Finnish university students who study German, Swedish or French as their major or one of their minors at an advanced level. The study aims to find what keeps these students motivated to study their L2. The data have been analyzed using *analysis of narratives* (Polkinghorne, 1995). Dörnyei's (2009a, 2009b, 2014) *L2 motivational self system* (L2MSS), built around the concepts of *ideal L2 self*, *ought-to L2 self* and *L2 learning experience*, is used as the theoretical framework. The results indicate that perceived social pressure (ought-to L2 self) may be important when the study decision is made, but its importance diminishes during the studies. Instead, a future L2-related vision (ideal L2 self) as well as peers, teachers, course contents, and learning atmosphere (L2 learning experience) become increasingly important during the studies. The role of the emotional dimension of possible selves seems to be central in developing and preserving study motivation.

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At the end of the article, some implications of the results for higher education programs of languages other than English (LOTEs) are presented.

Keywords: advanced university students; L2 motivation; L2 motivational self system; languages other than English

1. Introduction

This article focuses on study motivation of Finnish university students who chose to study a language other than English (LOTE) as their major or one of their minors, and have reached an advanced level in their studies. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 4) "motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, [and] *how hard* they are going to pursue it" (emphasis in original).

The study was initially motivated by the current language situation in Finland. The reality here and in several other countries in Europe is that many schoolchildren – and their parents – see learning LOTEs as less important than learning English (see Busse, 2017, pp. 568-569, 575). Also, as Henry (2015a) remarks, "English is now part of a basic social literacy and a medium of expression used extensively in day-to-day life, particularly among young people" (p. 319). As an important *lingua franca* (e.g., Mauranen, 2005), English is a language that more or less everyone is supposed to know (about the global situation, see Pennycook, 2017). For LOTEs the situation is very different.

Our research interest can be stated as follows: *What keeps advanced university students of languages other than English motivated to study their L2 (German, Swedish or French) as a major or a minor?* The topic is examined by answering the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do students describe their decision to start studying their L2?
RQ 2: How do students describe their L2 motivation during their studies?

In this study, a current theoretical framework, *the L2 motivational self system* (L2MSS), has been used, with the intention of giving new insights into understanding L2 motivation in this unique setting. As the study focuses on L2 motivation to study German, Swedish, and French, it contributes to the growing research field of LOTE motivation. The study fills a research gap concerning the population, the context of the study, as well as the target languages that are under-explored in this context.

2. Theoretical background

There has been a lot of research on L2 motivation during its 60-year history (Al-Hoorie, 2017), and the field has gone through several more or less distinct phases (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). At the beginning of this century, from 2005 to 2014, there was "an unprecedented surge in the number of publications" on L2 motivation (Boo et al., 2015, p. 145). As Boo et al. (2015) state, this period witnessed an increasing interest in East Asian L2 learners' motivation, the dominance of tertiary students as participants, an increase in innovative methodologies, and more interest in research on motivational dynamics. Whereas in most of the previous research on L2 motivation, the target language has been English (Boo et al., 2015, p. 151), lately several studies have been published on LOTE motivation (see Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017).

When studying L2 motivation, it is central to take into consideration that there may be major differences between motivation to learn English as a global language and motivation to learn LOTEs (Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 6), a matter that is receiving more and more attention in current L2 motivation research (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) have listed some characteristics that separate learning LOTEs from learning global English. Firstly, LOTEs are generally associated with a particular target language community; secondly, a learner's high command of a LOTE is often connected with specific individual motives; thirdly, LOTE learners may develop a multilingual self image (*ideal multilingual self*; see Henry, 2017) in addition to L2 specific self-guides; fourthly, LOTE learners may have a more varied pattern of conscious and unconscious motives; and fifthly, research on LOTE motivation also needs new kinds of methods. In addition, as stated by Duff (2017, p. 605), research on LOTE motivation would benefit from studies in different contexts, using various theoretical frameworks, and utilizing interdisciplinary insights.

While there is plenty of research on language learning motivation at tertiary level, the participants are often university students studying in other disciplines, not students who have a foreign language as their major or minor. In studies conducted in Finland, the study motivation of Finnish first-year university language students and student teachers has been examined (e.g., Kalaja, 2015; Kalaja, Alanen, & Dufva, 2008). Concerning LOTEs, the interest has often been on the initial decision to start studying a certain language at university. On the whole, advanced L2 university students' motivation for the study of LOTEs has not been examined to the same extent.

Presently, the most often used paradigm in L2 motivation research is the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 456). According to the L2MSS, there are three primary sources of motivation. The first two types,

the ideal L2 self and *the ought-to L2 self*, are associated with the two kinds of possible selves, which means imagined experiences, whereas the third one, *the L2 learning experience*, is based on past and present experiences as well as motives arising from the learning environment (Dörnyei, 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009, 2012).

The ideal L2 self has to do with personal dreams and hopes, and it refers to L2-related characteristics that a person would like to possess; for example, it can be a vivid and pleasant vision of oneself as a competent L2 user in the future. This kind of a vision is a strong motivator to study and "learn the L2 because we would like to reduce the gap between our actual and ideal selves" (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 8). The ideal L2 self has a promotion focus, meaning that there is a strong internal desire to reach the goal. *The ought-to L2 self*, on the other hand, has a prevention focus (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Higgins, 1998). It stems from perceived social pressure from the environment, such as other people's opinions and expectations, and refers to characteristics that a person thinks s/he should possess in order to avoid potential unwanted outcomes (Dörnyei, 2009a, 2009b). It is important to remember, as Henry (2015b) remarked, that possible selves are not static constructs: even if they do not change easily, revisions may occur, for example as a result of positive learning experiences or engaging with the L2. The ideal L2 self is more resistant to change than the ought-to self, because of its greater level of internalization (Piniel & Csizér, 2015). Dörnyei (2009a, 2009b) mentions certain conditions for the capacity of a future vision of oneself (self-guide) to motivate action: for example, there needs to be a future self-image; that image has to be detailed and vivid; it has to be different enough from the actual self; and the self-guide needs to be seen as feasible and realistic (see also Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The third motivational component, *the L2 learning experience,* can stem from actual situation-specific learning experiences, like classroom dynamics, study success, peers, and teachers (Dörnyei, 2009b). As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 86) state, not all students are motivated by the self-guides, but get motivation "from successful engagement with the actual language learning process, for example because they discover that they are good at it." It is worth pointing out that L2 experiences can be past and present. Previous experiences are always remembered experiences, that is, memories and interpretations of what a person has done, felt and undergone in the past.

In the light of new LOTE research, there has been discussion on whether the L2MSS – as well as other theoretical frameworks based on studying global English – is suited for motivation research of LOTEs (Boo et al., 2015, p. 156). As Ushioda (2017, p. 478) states, SLA theories have traditionally had a "'native speaker' monolingual bias" (also Boo et al., 2017, p. 151). The position of global English as a more or less mandatory subject is very different from that of LOTEs. In addition,

researchers have started to question whether the individual focus of the L2MSS, as well as its discrete L2-specific self-guides can account for the complex, dynamic reality of plurilingual learners (Duff, 2017; Henry, 2017; Ushioda, 2017).

It may be necessary to adjust the framework to the current situation (see Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 457), but its fundamental ideas can be regarded as highly applicable concerning university language students of LOTEs, who study their L2 in order to become linguistic experts. Furthermore, examining L2-specific self-guides does not mean that the existence of *multilingual identities* (Henry, 2017) would be denied (also Ushioda, 2017, p. 478). Nor does the L2MSS presuppose stability and inflexibility. In accordance with Dörnyei (2009a, 2009b, 2014), motivation can be seen as a holistic, situated, and dynamic result of a complex interplay between personal dreams and hopes, perceived social pressure, learning experiences, and environmental factors. Some minor modifications of the framework are suggested in the section *Conclusions and implications*.

3. The present study

3.1. Context of the study

Much like in the rest of the world, also in Finland, LOTEs have lost much of their attraction among students in recent years (Kangasvieri, 2019; Vipunen, n.d.; also Duff, 2017, p. 604), despite the fact that they are needed in working life and business contacts (European Commission, 2015). Finnish students' English language proficiency at the end of basic education is usually very high; students see their language skills in a positive light, and they regard English, as well as studying it, as useful (Härmälä, Huhtanen, & Puukko, 2014). The majority of students in Finnish upper secondary schools study English as their Syllabus A (advanced) language (Vipunen, n.d.). The diminishing interest in LOTEs is visible also in many university language programs.

As Finnish students' proficiency level in English is high compared to that in LOTEs (Hildén et al., 2015), students at all levels often compare their LOTE skills with their English language skills. In that comparison, their LOTE skills can seem to develop too slowly and remain at a level that is too low. This may be experienced as frustrating and de-motivating by students (see also Henry, 2015a, pp. 328-329). The decision to study a LOTE is a "marked" choice, often "perceived by others to be difficult, uncommon, not useful etc." (Duff, 2017, p. 600). In this study, conducted at the University of Helsinki, the interest is on why students have chosen to study a LOTE, and particularly, what has kept them motivated in their studies.

3.2. Participants

The participants in this study were advanced university students who studied a LOTE as their major or one of their minors. The word "advanced" in this context has two meanings. Firstly, these students had studied the language before applying to the university, and had achieved the required result in the university entrance exam (CEFR-level A2-B1). Secondly, they had reached an advanced level in their university studies, as they were in at least their third study year at the time of the data collection. In the BA study programs, writing the BA thesis is scheduled to take place during the third year. Students who have come this far in their studies can be assumed to have the intention to get at least a bachelor's degree, and probably also their master's degree, based on the interpretation of the Bologna agreement in Finland.

Of the 51 participants, 9 studied Swedish, 20 studied French, and 22 studied German. Eleven participants were in their third year of university studies, 7 were in year four, 14 were in year five, 7 were in year six, and 12 were in their seventh year of study. In principle, seven years is the maximum study time permissible for a master's exam.

The great majority of Finnish university language students of German, Swedish, and French are female. Therefore, for reasons of anonymity, participants' gender was not asked in the questionnaire. In this paper, "she" is used to represent all participants. The participating students also discuss private matters in their narratives, which is why no personal information about them is revealed, and the data have also otherwise been analyzed and reported on in a respectful way and observing ethical principles.

3.3. Research design and data collection

The data for this study were collected in the form of written narrative reflections. Autobiographical narratives can be seen as ways of constructing selves (Bruner, 1987); when telling their stories, students "are performing themselves; they are doing their identities" (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 399). The idea was to investigate how students themselves describe their experiences and how they reflect on themselves as language learners and users. Narratives were seen as an interesting possibility of studying "motivation-in-context" (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012, p. 402), in order to find out more about study motivation in this specific context and with this specific population. As Piniel and Csizér (2015, p. 185) state, "retrospective data can better account for overall change in time when students have the chance to reflect on their experience" (see also Riemer, 2016). However, it is important to remember that these stories are told from the present, and the selves that are

described in the narratives are remembered selves, constructed by the students as a response to the researchers' questions. This may have affected what they wanted to tell – or omit – and how they described their experiences. It is, of course, never possible to access past experiences directly; it is only ever possible to talk about past experiences from the perspective of here and now. However, this need not be seen as a problem, as the focus is on the students' own perspectives and interpretations of their past and present experiences.

To increase the validity and reliability of the study, the research design was tested during a pilot study at the beginning of 2015. The data were collected on paper, and students were asked to reflect on two topics. The first topic had the title *"Me as a student of German/Swedish/French. Why?"* Students were to mark on a timeline events, matters, and persons that had been important for them concerning their L2 studies. They were also invited to write about these factors in a more detailed way on a separate page, by describing information like why and when they had initially chosen to study this L2 as their major or one of their minors, and how they believed their relationship to the language had changed during the studies. The second topic was entitled "*Me as a language user.*" In that part, students could reflect on all the languages they knew, and describe how these languages were visible in their lives.

A careful evaluation of the pilot study led to the decision to collect the data in a different way. The two parts of the first topic (the timeline and the accompanying description) seemed to be overlapping, which is why the timeline was omitted in this study. In addition, in order to make data collection more practical, as well as to ensure the anonymity of participants, all data were collected by using an anonymous electronic form. The two main topics used in the pilot study worked well, however, and were also used in the current study. Data collection started in January 2016. In this article, we only concentrate on the first topic.

Participants were given quite a lot of freedom, concerning both the length and the contents of their narrative reflections. The aim was to give them an opportunity to express their "selves" freely and without too many limitations, but in a way which would provide sufficient information about factors connected to their L2 motivation. For this reason, a decision was made to collect the data using a semi-open questionnaire, in the students' L1, Finnish. Students were given some questions as suggestions for what they could write about (the ones that were tested in the pilot study), but the decision of what and how much to write was theirs. These instructions resulted in very different narratives of different lengths (between 114 and 871 words).

Narrative data of this kind are often collected in connection with compulsory courses, and they may even be evaluated as a part of those courses (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 34). In the present study, it was essential

for participation to be anonymous and completely voluntary, in order to let students express their opinions and describe their situation more freely. Students of German, Swedish, and French received information about the study via e-mail lists and in connection with their lessons. In both cases, students received a link to the electronic questionnaire and were encouraged to participate.

3.4. Data analysis

In analyzing the data, a qualitative content analysis of the written reflections was used, a method that Polkinghorne (1995) calls *analysis of narratives*. The method was chosen as it was seen as the most appropriate analysis method for these kinds of data, as it offered a possibility to examine how participants describe and construct their reality (Barkhuizen, 2011; Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2014, p. 204). According to Polkinghorne (1995), analysis of narratives "seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. . . . The researcher inspects the different stories to discover which notions appear across them" (p. 13).

Table 1 Example of data analysis

Text extract	Aspect	Theme	Category
"I experienced the teachers and other students as supportive . . . "	Support from teachers and peers		
"After the exchange, my studies in Finland seemed to proceed better, and I got more out of them . . . "	Successful study exchange	Perception of study context	
. . .	. . .		L2 learning experience
"At the moment, I participate in private lessons at [a language school] as a preparation for a [language] test . . . "	Participation in extra language courses	Engaging with L2-related activities	
"I used the language with local people . . ."	Communicating with people outside of the university		
. . .	. . .		
. . .	. . .	. . .	

The analysis started inductively. Each researcher read and coded the narratives individually, searching for motivation-related themes in the data (see also Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The research group met on a regular basis during the coding, in order to discuss the process and validate the themes emerging from the analysis. This entailed comparing the themes proposed by each researcher, and, in cases where the individual interpretations differed from each other, the cases were discussed until a shared understanding was reached. Through the coding process, several commonly occurring themes emerged which were seen as central to students' motivation. When a shared understanding was

reached concerning the themes, categories based on the theoretical framework, the L2MSS, were formed (see Table 1). In order to safeguard the reliability of the analysis, the original narratives were re-read and discussed by the researchers several times during the research process.

The categorization process was not completely problem-free, as all the researchers saw a couple of themes as difficult to categorize. This matter is discussed in more detail in the section *Results and discussion*. As narrative researchers, we are well aware of the fact that the analyses we have made are our own interpretations. However, they are based on many thorough readings of the data, as well as discussions at regularly occurring data sessions and research meetings by the researchers in different phases of the process.

As the aim was not to compare students of the three languages, but to examine how students reflect on the LOTEs they are studying, a decision was made not to identify which language the students were studying as their L2. Also, as the analysis is qualitative, there is no intention to generalize the results in quantitative terms. Instead, the aim is to concentrate on the themes emerging from the data, and try to understand the phenomenon in all its variety and richness. As Levitt et al. (2018) note, "qualitative researchers do not aim to seek natural laws that extend across time, place, and culture, but to develop findings that are bound to their contexts" (p. 29). However, the findings add to the growing pool of knowledge about the study motivation for LOTEs.

4. Results and discussion

In their narrative reflections, students describe themselves as L2 learners and users, and reflect on their life situation as well as their present and previous study contexts. They also comment on different motivational factors that they see as relevant regarding their L2 studies. It is worth remembering that students look at their decisions and their past experiences from today's perspective. The past experiences that students describe are remembered experiences. Students' interpretations of what has happened in the past, as well as their present experiences, also affect how they see and describe their future.

In the following paragraphs, the results of the analysis are presented. Although the main focus is on students' L2 motivation during their studies, a brief account is given about students' (self-reported) L2 motivation at the onset of the studies. The findings are illustrated by presenting several text extracts from participants' narrative reflections.

4.1. The decision to start studying an L2 as a major or a minor (RQ 1)

In their narratives, language students commented on their previous positive L2 learning experiences. They often stressed their long-term interest in languages and/or in a particular language as a reason for their L2 study decision. In the following example, a student described her longstanding affection for languages and gave it as a motive for starting her studies at the university (ex. 1).

> (1) I have always liked studying languages a lot, right from elementary school. . . . My eagerness to study languages also led me to study them after upper secondary school, at university. (1_9, 13-15)[1]

Seeing oneself as a successful L2 learner (e.g., being "talented" or "gifted" in language studies) was given as a motivation for language studies (ex. 2). In these cases, students seemed to have a very positive perception of themselves as language learners.

> (2) I started to study [this language] as I love the language, and have always been talented in my language studies. (18_6-7)

Students sometimes mentioned that their L2 was the easiest way to get into university. This can be seen as natural as they already had the experience of being relatively skilled in their L2, and could expect to pass the entrance exam easily. There were also students, however, for whom their L2 was anything but the easiest pathway to university studies. On the contrary, they could write that they wanted to start studying the language because they needed more practice in it. One student described her dream about studying her favorite language at university, but knew she would not pass the entrance exam, as her L2 skills were not good enough. She then decided to study harder in order to pass the exam, and was finally accepted to study her L2 at three universities.

Different work-related aspects were also mentioned as influential factors (ex. 3). Very often, teaching is the profession that seems to motivate students to study languages.

> (3) The choice of [this language] as a major was not entirely clear from the beginning . . . – however, I realized I was language-oriented and knew I had a calling that drew me towards working as a teacher. (15_1-5)

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[1] When analyzing the data, the original Finnish texts were used. For this article, text extracts were translated from Finnish to English. A numerical code (1-51) was used as the identifier of each narrative, followed by line numbers from the narratives.

It seems that *the ideal L2 self* can have an impact from the time when the line of study is chosen. Seeing oneself as a competent language professional in the future can be a strong motivator for the studies. The central role of the ideal L2 self can be also seen in cases when students use a lot of time and energy in order to acquire the language skills necessary for passing the university entrance exam, and in cases when students choose to study a certain language because they feel they need more practice in it.

Earlier stays abroad were mentioned as a reason for the L2 study decision. Those who had been abroad felt that their language skills had improved during the stays or that their attitude towards the language had become more positive (ex. 4).

(4) The year before, I had a summer job [in an L2-speaking country]. After that, I got interested in the language again and decided to apply to the university to study that language. (20_10-11)

Staying abroad, and in that way getting acquainted with the L2 and the community of L2 speakers, can act as a motivator, even at the beginning of the studies. Dörnyei (2009b) points out that the ideal L2 self is tightly connected to the views on and attitudes towards L2 speakers, and remarks that "L2 speakers are the closest parallels to the idealized L2-speaking self" (p. 27). This is important concerning LOTE students for whom a connection to their specific L2 community may be essential (Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 7; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 465). Using the language with local L2 speakers can have an important impact on how LOTE students see themselves as language learners and users, and can also affect their attitudes toward learning when they come back (Irie & Ryan, 2015, p. 344).

In the narratives, the role of students' own teachers was also described as important (also Busse, 2017, p. 574). In cases where students wrote about being uncertain about what to study, the influence of other people (mainly family members and friends) was depicted as important. One student wrote that she let her friends' and relatives' expectations affect her choice of what to study, and perhaps in that way wanted to show that she could become what "everyone" expects her to become (ex. 5).

(5) Besides, everyone in my nearest surroundings expected me to start studying languages, and for some reason I let it influence my decision very strongly. (13_4-6)

The role of friends and relatives in most young people's lives is important, also concerning their study decision. Here we could talk about *ought-to self*, a perceived social pressure from the environment. As social beings, people feel a pressure to adhere to group norms, which leads to some level of internalization of external motives (i.e., ought-to selves) (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 14, with reference to Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

When writing about reasons for their L2 study decision, students seldom mentioned only one reason. Instead, different combinations of motives were brought up in the individual narratives (for more information concerning students of German, see Kursiša, Huhtala, & Vesalainen, 2017).

4.2. L2 motivation during the studies (RQ 2)

During the studies, regardless of the L2 studied, motivation was connected to certain common themes that were visible in the narratives. These included perception of the study context, engaging with L2-related activities, existence or lack of an L2-related vision, focus of the studies, plans for completing the degree, and emotional involvement. On the basis of the analysis, these features appear interrelated. In this section, however, the above-mentioned themes are presented as themes within two categories: L2 learning experience and the ideal L2 self. The themes are illustrated through the aspects that were identified through the analysis (see Table 1). Also the third possible category (*ought-to self*) is discussed in relation to the data.

4.2.1. L2 learning experience

Perception of the study context. All students commented on their study context and study contents: they wrote about their teachers and peers, courses at the university, their own successes and failures, study exchange, as well as study atmosphere. Students repeatedly stressed the importance of their teachers and fellow students as sources of support; they also experienced a sense of community in their study context, and saw the atmosphere as agreeable (ex. 6).

> (6) I saw studies in [this language] as relevant and motivating right from the beginning. . . . I experienced the teachers and other students as supportive and the study context also otherwise as pleasant. (38_68-71)

Getting support from peers and teachers, as well as experiencing the study context and study contents as pleasant, were central to students' motivation. When the situation was seen as non-motivating, students started struggling with their studies. In the following text extract (ex. 7), we can see that the student's self-reported learning experiences did not meet her expectations.

> (7) At the beginning, the studies and the study context seemed dynamic and stimulating. I was inspired and had plans for furthering my studies. Gradually the situation changed. I am disappointed at the courses offered, as the range is not as diverse as I thought it would be. (26_5-9)

It is notable, however, that this student kept studying the language. She had not given up, which probably had to do with other aspects that affected the situation and acted as a counterbalance. The only thing that was missing from her L2 exam was the master's thesis, but she did not want to write her thesis in a hurry. As the study programs give students a lot of freedom in choosing what to include in their exam, she decided to study other subjects for a while, in order to get some positive variety, despite seeing herself as a student of her L2. The data show that students of the same language can experience the same course contents and learning contexts very differently, partly because of their different previous experiences, goals, and life situations.

Students wrote about cultural encounters, having contacts with other people, finding L2-speaking friends, and developing better L2 skills, as can be seen in the following text extract (ex. 8).

> (8) During my second study year I had my exchange period in [an L2-speaking country], and my language skills got much better. . . . My relationship to this language, as well as to L2-speaking countries and cultures has become more intimate, because I now have lots of L2-speaking friends and acquaintances both from [this L2 country] and from other countries. (7_17-22)

All students who had an exchange period abroad saw it as a powerful motivator for L2 learning. Staying abroad gave them a feeling of belonging to their L2 community (see Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 465). Students described the positive impact of study exchange on their self-confidence and study motivation. Even the decision to apply for study exchange seemed to increase the L2 motivation (ex. 9).

> (9) My study motivation disappeared during the second year of study, because studying did not meet my expectations . . . I got interested in studying again when I decided to apply for study exchange. (22_5-10)

Engaging with L2-related activities. Taking part in various L2-related activities was mentioned as an essential source of motivation (ex. 10).

> (10) My own activity towards this culture has been a strong motivation for keeping on with my studies. (24_10-11)

Engaging with L2-related activities seems to go hand in hand with better self-reported L2 skills, a higher level of self-confidence, and feelings of success. The experience of being a competent L2 user or learner can substantially increase students' self-confidence in using the L2 and motivate them to continue their studies (ex. 11; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 86).

> (11) During the studies, I got more and more interested in studying [this language], and I decided to continue my studies. . . . I do not really know what caused this change, but my language skills got better and I felt that my self-confidence as a language user got stronger. (48_6-11)

Students could describe exerting a lot of intra- and extra-curricular effort to organize opportunities for developing themselves in different ways, and wrote about feeling efficient, successful and competent. This supported them in developing a plausible L2-related vision. On the other hand, an opposite scenario was possible: when a student's trust in her own competence faltered, it could lead to a decreasing engagement and investment in the studies. The student kept studying, but the energy level was low (ex. 12).

> (12) I started to realize how many other things it would be possible to study, and how much energy and time studying even one single subject area would require. This observation made it more difficult for me to concentrate on my language studies, because I started thinking my capacities would not be sufficient for learning the language and using L2-related skills well enough in my work. (27_11-16)

During the studies, motivation seems to be affected by several, even opposite, forces, many of which seem to arise from *the L2 learning experience.* Good teachers, supportive fellow students, a successful study exchange or a positive study atmosphere appear to keep students motivated for their studies. Conversely, perception of the study context as disappointing can diminish study motivation. An important learning experience for LOTE students is time spent in an L2-speaking country. All students who had experienced a study exchange described it as a significant motivational factor. This period could be a positive "motivational transformation episode" (Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 97) or a "key transformational episode" (Waninge, Dörnyei, & De Bot, 2014, p. 708) that enhanced their study motivation and made their vision of themselves as L2 users stronger. The improved study motivation was also seen as increased emotional involvement in the studies. According to the data, LOTE students often have an attitude towards their L2 that can be called integrative: they want to be a part of their L2 community (see Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 7; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 465). For this reason, study exchange can increase motivation considerably.

4.2.2. Ideal L2 self

L2-related vision. A strong L2-related vision, together with intense activity and an effort to develop oneself, is one of the key factors in preserving L2 motivation during the studies, also in demanding situations. The vision can be there from

the beginning or develop during the studies. The different motivational features are not static and stable but changeable and interrelated.

A powerful and attractive L2-related professional vision, like wanting to become a teacher, drives students further in their studies (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 8). The future vision may also be more unfocussed, but nevertheless professionally L2-related, like wanting to use the L2 in one way or another at work (ex. 13).

(13) In five years' time, I wish to have a job in which I have the opportunity to use [this language], as well as the subjects I have studied as my minors, in many ways. (3_26-28)

Even at an advanced level, it is possible for students to keep searching for other L2-related opportunities. Sometimes they ponder about the alternatives in which their L2 could be seen as a plus, instead of wanting to work solely with their L2. An L2-related vision clearly exists, but is more general in nature.

Motivation connected to clear and vivid future L2-related plans may even provide compensation for missing motivation for the studies (ex. 14).

(14) Having a part-time job as a teacher of [this language] in two schools has motivated me to go on. Nowadays, I see myself more as a teacher than as a student. As a student, all my motivation has vanished, and studying feels like something that I am forced to do. I enjoy working as a teacher, and I know I have to finish my studies in order to keep on working. (13_11-17)

In this case, a strong L2-related vision has made the student continue her studies, despite her not seeing herself as a student anymore. Regarding this case, the three researchers reflected on the possibility of the *ought-to self* as a source of motivation, as the student seemed to feel "forced" to study in order to reach her goal. She had no real study motivation, but had no other alternative, as she needed a master's degree in order to work as a qualified L2 teacher. However, it could be said that there was a strong internal desire to become a teacher, and a wish to reduce the gap between the present situation (being a student) and the future self-image as a qualified teacher (see Dörnyei, 2014, p. 8).

On the other hand, students can become unmotivated if there is no clear L2-related vision, or if the vision is ineffective. A vision has to be detailed, vivid and realistic enough in order to motivate action (Dörnyei, 2009a, 2009b; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In the following text extract (ex. 15), a student described a situation she experienced as very challenging.

(15) Nowadays, I feel that I cannot become a good translator or teacher of [this language] because I do not keep up my language skills. . . . I experience the situation as problematic because, as it seems now, I will be graduating as a translator of [this

language], as some kind of an expert of [another language], and as a teacher of [two languages], but I do not know which of these would interest me the most, or if I could be competent enough in anything. (23_18-19, 22-25)

The situation concerning an L2-related vision can be interpreted in at least two ways. One option is that the student did not really have an L2-related vision of herself in the future. She knew that graduation would give her formal documentation of her skills but she could not visualize herself as an "owner" of that qualification. Another possibility is that she perhaps had a vague vision, but she did not see it as realistic or plausible (see Dörnyei, 2009b, 2014; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The student knew she would have a chance to work as a teacher or a translator after graduation, but she thought she could not be a good one. The final goal, being an L2 professional, seemed to be too far away for her ever to reach it. At that point, there appeared to be no driving force to give her energy in this demanding situation. According to the analysis, L2 students whose future vision was somehow too patchy or inconsistent had difficulties in finding strength to develop their L2 skills. The mental conflict they experienced seemed to be connected to inactivity and feelings of being unsuccessful.

Quite clearly, the existence of a strong ideal L2 self is essential in preserving a strong motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Having an L2-related vision gives the studies a purpose, a direction, and increases students' persistence in reaching the goal. It can even help in overcoming temporal unexpected problems and obstacles during the studies, like disappointing learning experiences. *Focus of the studies.* What students focus on in their studies has a lot to do with their L2-related vision. Those who have decided to study an L2 at university level also often have other L2-related interests beyond studying the language itself. They may be interested in communicating with L2 speakers, in travelling and staying in L2-speaking countries, and in various cultural aspects. Sometimes this wider cultural aspect is there from the beginning, sometimes it develops during the studies (ex. 16).

(16) I am still equally interested in this language, but nowadays the interest is not only in the language but also in other elements: how the language reflects the culture, etc. This is why I am still studying [this language]. (19_8-11)

Having the language as the only focus of the studies was visible in different ways in the narratives. On the one hand, students' involvement with the language could be very deep: there were students who were fascinated, for example, about general linguistics or the linguistics of a particular L2 (ex. 17).

(17) During this journey, above all I have become more conscious as a language user: I have gained a lot from the versatility of the subject. . . . Didactic applications interest me, but also stylistics, semantics and linguistics. I feel I have found my own place in this subject. (15_14-17, 24-27)

The previous text extract shows that the L2 had already become a central part of the student's identity. The gap between the actual self and the future self-image had therefore become narrower, as there was a strong concentration on and fascination towards the L2 and everything connected to it.

On the other hand, it was possible for students to be interested only in "the language itself". This was perhaps the most striking element in the narrative of a student who seemed to have isolated her L2 from its cultural and social contexts (ex. 18).

(18) Especially practicing [this language] in my free time feels demanding, because I do not know any speakers of [this language] in Finland, I cannot travel when I want to, and to be honest, I am not interested in L1 speakers of [this language]. (23_25-29)

This student appeared to have no real interest in native L2 speakers, L2 culture(s) or staying in L2-speaking countries, and overall, seemed to be weighed down by the idea of having to get involved with L2-related activities. Here it would even be possible to talk about amotivation, a term that Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 140, with reference to Deci & Ryan, 1985) describe as "a *lack* of motivation caused by the realisation that '*there is no point...*' or '*it's beyond me*'" (emphasis in original). The student described her studies as something completely overwhelming.

Plans for completing the degree. Completing the degree is unmistakably an important motivational factor for L2 students. Even though it was not mentioned explicitly in the questionnaire, students wrote about it and even emphasized it in their narratives.

Most often, completing the degree was a natural part of studying an L2 as a major (ex. 19).

(19) [During my pedagogical studies] I clearly started developing a teacher identity, and started seeing my studies in relation to this goal (working as a teacher). . . . So, I will complete my studies in my major, [this language]. (38_87-97)

The previous text extract illustrates the obvious connection between spatial and temporal aspects. In these kinds of cases, it was possible to see development in the self-perception of the students, a growing insight into how they saw themselves as persons and what they wanted to do in the future.

However, completing the degree could also be experienced as a necessity. The perceived necessity could be caused, for example, by not wanting to "waste" several years of study, or by the insight that having a master's degree was important for getting the job they wanted. Here the researchers discussed the possibility of ought-to self, but came to the conclusion that there seemed to be a strong internal need to reach the goal; these students wanted to complete the degree because of an inner aspiration, not as a reaction to external pressure (ex. 20; see also ex. 14).

> (20) I had to finish only a few more courses to complete my BA degree, so I could not let myself give up. I have now determinedly decided to fight my way out of this degree, so that these three years of work would not be wasted. (20_38-41)

The degree could also have the main function of opening a door to working life in the future. This especially concerned those who planned to become teachers in the future.

Also those students who had experienced some kind of social pressure from the environment when making their study decision could see their studies as worthwhile and useful. In their narratives, there was sometimes a reflection of an attitude that could be described as endurance or perseverance; even students who did not know what they wanted to do in the future were prepared to go on and get a degree (ex. 21).

> (21) However, I don't feel that I have wasted time during these studies, because language skills are always useful! I have the same attitude I had in upper secondary school: once begun, it has to be done. (8_28-30)

The wish to get a degree is not at all necessarily connected to the L2 as such. Instead, students may see university education as a way of getting a valued degree. As one student stated, she wanted to complete her studies in order to achieve "a fine title" (14_16-17). She envisaged her future self as someone successful, someone who has a university degree, a prospect that she apparently valued more than the contents of the studies. To become the person she saw herself to be in her future vision, she had decided to get a degree.

Emotional dimension of possible selves. The emotional dimension came up as a central and highly visible theme in the analysis. This can be seen as natural, as motivation is inherently emotional. The emotional bond to the L2 may be there from the beginning, it may come through a significant L2 learning experience, or it may develop gradually during the studies. In their narratives, students expressed many kinds of emotions. Some narratives were predominantly positive, expressing joy or pride, for example (ex. 22).

> (22) I am proud to be a student of this language. (49_28-29)

One student described her relationship to the L2 as love and talked about having an "addiction" to it (44_14, 18-19). However, there were also narratives that expressed frustration, anxiety or sadness (ex. 23). Negative emotions connected to the future L2 self can decrease motivation substantially, especially if they are not counterbalanced by more positive emotions (see MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017).

> (23) Oral presentations caused anxiety, and I experienced many moments of desperation . . . . (20_37-39)

When there was a strong emotional bond to the L2, the language seemed to have the most prominent place in the students' ideal L2 self. This often had to do with their long stays and exchange periods in L2-speaking countries (ex. 24).

> (24) My relationship to the language has of course changed a lot, because I now have a quite different emotional bond to the language than earlier – the language and the culture have become a wonderful part of my everyday life, and that is why studying has become even more interesting, enriching and beautiful. (18_21-26)

The emotional bond to the L2 could also be thinner and more detached, which was visible in the narratives where the L2 was described in a more distant and remote way. However, even in those cases there was often some development during the studies, as students got more involved emotionally in their L2 and the L2 community. Even when the L2 was not the preferred choice from the beginning, the development of L2 skills, a better self-confidence, and an attitude of curiosity made these students continue their studies.

The results of the study show clearly that positive L2 learning experiences and a realistic, powerful L2-related vision become more and more important for sustained motivation during the process of studying, and show a connection to a strong emotional involvement in the studies. Ushioda and Dörnyei (2012, p. 406) refer to "the dynamic relationship between language, learner, and the environment on the one hand, and motivation, emotion, and cognition on the other" (also Dörnyei, 2010, pp. 261-262). MacIntyre, Mackinnon, and Clément (2009) also stress the emotional aspect of possible selves; if there is not a strong connection between possible selves and the learner's emotional system, "possible selves exist as cold cognition, and therefore lack motivational potency" (p. 47).

Studying an L2 at the university is a long and dynamic process, and the journey may be difficult. However, what the narratives have shown is that most of the advanced students are still motivated in their studies. In addition, the more time and energy they have invested in their L2, the less likely they are to give up on it. Even in cases when negative experiences and problems during the study process were mentioned, students described their determination to get a degree.

Interestingly, the ought-to self (i.e., perceived social pressure) appears to be important for some students at the beginning of their studies, but not so much later. There is apparently a connection between the significance of the ought-to self and the lack of a future vision: the weaker the future vision, the more important the ought-to self. The data reveal that external motives change or their importance diminishes during the studies, as students become emotionally more involved in their studies and start developing a more detailed and realistic future vision of themselves. As Piniel and Csizér (2015, p. 185) state, the ought-to self is less internalized than the ideal L2 self, and may therefore change more easily.

Motivation emerges from the dynamic connection between a learner and her various spatial and temporal contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 32). Students experience their studies in their own unique ways, but these experiences take place in relation to the special settings relating to where they live and study, the people they interact with, and their own life history. What they have experienced in their lives and what kinds of memories they have of their experiences, affect how they see and describe themselves in the present and how they imagine the future. It is important to see language students as whole persons, not only as learners (Ryan & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 91), and not to separate L2 motivation from the students' individual learning context (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 32; Waninge et al, 2014, p. 704). Even for language students, university studies and their future profession are only one aspect of their lives: family, friends, fellow students, hobbies, etc., are often equally important for them. Studies cannot be separated from the rest of their lives.

5. Conclusions and implications

During our research, we have seen the L2MSS as a useful tool for analyzing language students' motivation to study LOTEs at the university. On the basis of our study, however, we would like to suggest more emphasis on the emotional aspects of motivation in this theoretical framework (see also Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 4; MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017). We also see a need for more research on the role of the ought-to self/selves (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 461) during the studies, especially at university level. Our study indicated that the impact of the ought-to L2 self diminished during the studies in our special context, but more research, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed.

As motivation is essential for LOTE studies, it is important to support it also at program level. Therefore, on the basis of the current study, some recommendations concerning higher education programs of LOTEs can be made.

Study exchange in an L2-speaking country is central for study motivation, in that students can be active participants in the everyday life of the L2 community.

That is why students should be encouraged to travel abroad and use their L2 in natural surroundings, also in programs where study exchange is not obligatory. English as a *lingua franca* is seen, heard and used almost everywhere, whereas using a LOTE requires own activity on the part of the student.

Naturally, even if the L2 itself and related cultural aspects are significant reasons for studying the language, they are not enough for preserving students' study motivation. It was seen in the data that students inevitably start thinking about their future at some point of their studies, often in terms of professional dreams and aspirations. It is at this point, at the latest, that a strong and detailed vision of the self, the ideal L2 self, becomes central. It would be important for LOTE students to be able to discuss their goals and dreams both with each other and with their teachers, as a part of their ordinary study planning sessions. The point is to support students in their identity construction, without putting pressure on them.

Another way of supporting identity formation would be portfolio work as a tool for reflection. Being able to write about matters connected to L2 studies, right from the beginning, would hopefully give students new insights and more self-confidence, as well as help them to deal with all the emotional aspects connected to their L2 studies. This would also give them a chance to reflect on their *multilingual selves* (Henry, 2017), and to see all their languages as valuable parts of their plurilingual repertoire.

As mentioned earlier, the emotional aspect of L2 motivation is vital. Would it perhaps contribute to successful learning if students were invited to discuss their L2-related emotions during supervision meetings, in order to reduce negative emotions (see Piniel & Albert, 2018, p. 143)? Due to the dominance of global English, these kinds of discussions would be especially relevant in LOTE contexts, where students sometimes feel compelled to explain their choice of L2 not only to other people, but also to themselves.

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