

# THE CONCEPT OF VISION IN L2 LEARNING

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# **THE CONCEPT OF VISION IN L2 LEARNING**

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UNIVERSITY OF SPLIT  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
Department of English Language and Literature

# **THE CONCEPT OF VISION IN L2 LEARNING**

BA Thesis

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## **1. Introduction**

This thesis explores the concepts and techniques described in Zoltan Dörnyei and Magdalena Kubanyiova's (2014) book *Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers*. In the book, the authors emphasize on the importance of vision, stating that vision is "one of the single most important factors within the domain of language learning." Vision can be used as motivation in every aspect of human endeavor. Using vision to develop and visualize a version of ourselves in the future (positive or negative) is extremely beneficial and motivating. With regards to L2 learning, vision is used to imagine oneself as a competent L2 speaker. Also, a student should be able to feel what it would be like to be a competent L2 speaker. The vision should be so clear and vivid that the person can use it as constant motivation, even when the going gets rough. Since there are many different definitions of the term vision, it is important to pinpoint the definition which will be used throughout this thesis and it is one that Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 9) use in the introduction of their book. Vision is "a vivid mental image, especially a fanciful one of the future." They use vision because of its enormous "pull effect" that fuels human motivation (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). The reason why this topic is so important, especially in the field of L2 learning, is that vision signifies an ongoing source of motivation. Having such a long-term source of motivation is necessary in the domain of L2 learning, because it is a lifelong process, which takes a lot of dedication over a long period of time. Therefore, vision is important so that the student can refer to it when things are not going as smoothly as one would like. After it has been constructed, the vision has to be strengthened, kept safe and alive, in spite of things getting in the way of it. In the following chapter the importance of vision, techniques for construction, maintaining and substantiating it will be described within the framework of Dörnyei's (2013) L2 Motivational Self System.

### **1.1. The origin of the L2 Motivational Self System**

In 2005, Zoltan Dörnyei, who was a Hungarian-born British applied linguist, came up with a new approach to motivation in second language learning or SLA. He developed a system called the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). The L2 Motivational Self System itself was derived from two different streams of research: one being L2 research and the other being psychology research (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). Regarding the L2 part of the origin of the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei used the concept of integrativeness or integrative motive. He considered the L2 Motivational Self System as "a natural progression from

Gardner's theory" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013: 80). This particular concept of integrativeness is defined as a "motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings towards the community that speaks the language" (Gardner, 1985: 82–3, in Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013).

Further research proved that a positive attitude towards the L2 group and the values which the L2 brings along are crucial for L2 motivation (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). In addition to describing the L2 Motivational Self System as a continuation of Gardner's theory, Dörnyei addresses certain criticisms of the concept of integrativeness. According to Dörnyei, these include the criticism of the notion that contact and identification with a certain L2 group were necessary for L2 motivation, which is not the case, as can be seen from the growing globalization of the English language (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). In a series of studies carried out at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which had the goal of researching attitudes towards foreign languages, Dörnyei used a factor originally thought of as integrativeness to determine the level of motivation in a learner (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). However, he discovered that the factor he originally thought of as integrativeness is actually broader and connected the L2 motivation with future selves. It was precisely this discovery that led to the development of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). The concept of the Self is an extremely popular topic of interest in psychology. According to MacIntyre et al. (2009, in Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013: 54) "a cursory scan of the PSYCHINFO database reveals more than 75,000 articles with 'self' in their title and a very long list of 'self' related concepts used in the literature." Because it is so well researched, there are many different definitions of the concept. For example, in Jungian psychology the Self would be the totality of being, meaning a combination of the person's conscious and unconscious psyche (Intro to Jung: What Is the Self? – Jung Society of Utah, jungutah.org). Another psychologist who popularized the concept of the Self during the 20th century was Carl Rogers. Rogers (1959) divided the Self into two categories: the real Self and the ideal Self. He believed that the difference between what one thought of oneself and what one wished to be is a primary force for action.

In 1986, Markus and Nurius proposed a theory of possible selves. These possible selves are visions of the future, they are not yet real, but they may materialize. They are the individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming (Markus and Nurius, 1986). According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013: 81), an important aspect of this theory is that possible selves "involve tangible images and senses; they are represented in the same imaginary and semantic way as the here-and-now self, that is, they are a reality for the individual – people can 'see' and 'hear' a possible self." What

this means is that, even though they have not yet materialized, people can sense what it would be like if a possible self came true. This is true for both the positive and negative possible selves. A student may feel that they have prepared extremely well for an exam and can already sense the feeling they will have once they get positive scores. On the other side, the student may have not prepared for an exam well and can already see their future which involves failing the exam and having to study the material again.

### **1.2. The structure of the L2 Motivational Self System**

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System consists of three different dimensions: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009: 29). The first two dimensions are based on the idea of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), while the third is based on the actual present self. The Ideal L2 Self is a derivative or a subpart of the ideal self, which would be the complete possible self we would like to become. This means that if the person we would like to ideally become also happens to speak an L2, this would provide powerful motivation in reducing the gap between actuality and potential.

The Ought-to L2 Self consists of attributes that a person believes they should possess as a result of societal or familial pressures. The simplest way to describe the Ought-to L2 Self is as visions other people have for a certain individual. According to Taguchi (2009), this type of possible self is most notable in Asian countries, where students are pressured by their families to obtain a status position or a high paying job. The third aspect of the L2 Motivational Self System is the L2 Learning Experience, which describes the actual process of learning the L2, including the circumstances, experiences and the environment. Dörnyei therefore suggests that there are three crucial aspects in fuelling motivation: the learner's desire to become an L2 user, the pressures from the learner's environment and the engagement in the L2 learning process. (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Firstly, it is important to explain additional conditions that must be met for the L2 Motivational Self System to succeed.

### **1.3. Conditions for the successful implementation of the L2 Motivational Self System**

Apart from having a desired goal, other conditions have to be met for the L2 Motivational Self System to be implemented successfully. As Dörnyei himself states multiple times, there is a difference between a goal and a vision; "There is one fundamental difference between the two concepts: unlike an abstract, cognitive goal, a vision includes a strong sensory

element: it involves tangible images related to achieving the goal” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 10).

The first and the most obvious step is developing a desired Ideal L2 or Ought-to Self. Even though that seems to be a no-brainer, people differ in creativity, imaginativeness and the ability to formulate a clear path forward. Once the possible self is defined, it is extremely important that there is a sufficient difference, or rather distance between the actual self and the potential self. If there is no observable gap between the two, the L2 student will not be motivated to pursue the possible self. Having said that, the possible self has to be within the grasp of the student, so that they are not overwhelmed by the distance between actuality and possibility. The student must believe that their vision of being an L2 speaker can be achieved through sufficient effort and time, so it is important to find the correct balance between the vision being not challenging enough and too challenging.

The path towards the possible self has to be well defined and specified. There are two reasons for this: firstly, a possible self which has not been thought through properly and is not vivid may not provide a sufficient amount of motivation. Secondly, a well-defined path towards a possible self guarantees that the energy arising from having a possible self is spent wisely and not in vain. This is because the student will know exactly where the steps they take will lead to. The student must also have regular reminders of the vision in their everyday life, so that the possible self is not overridden with other things that require one’s attention. Finally, the vision of the possible self should be counterbalanced with an equally feared vision of the self. This is accomplished when one takes into account the negative consequences of not pursuing their desired vision.

#### **1.4. The neuroscience behind the L2 Motivational Self System**

A number of athletes use the technique of visualization as motivation during training. World-class athletes such as Tiger Woods, Muhammad Ali and Novak Đoković have all spoken about utilizing this technique in the past, the most famous being Ali’s technique called future history (Carrie 2022). Ali would visualize his fights before they even happened, famously predicting the outcomes before facing his opponents. This can be considered as mentally and physically preparing himself for the outcome that he wanted to achieve. This technique is called priming and will be explained in further detail in section 6.1.. Possibly the most popular example of using this technique in recent times is the former UFC two-division champion Conor McGregor, who, time and time again, has put emphasis on the vision he had



before getting to the level of success and fame he currently has. He frequently talked about the powerful visions he had when he was starting out in the sport and how he visualized arenas full of fans (Grynko, 2022). The reason these techniques work is because there is actually little difference in our brains when we perceive something and when we imagine it. It seems that imagining something is just a “weaker” version of actually perceiving it. Neurobiological research has shown that people activate similar mechanisms when perceiving and imagining something (Moulton and Kosslyn, 2009), just like it has shown that trauma to the brain influences people’s ability of perception and the use of mental imagery (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014).

While imagining the future, we are actually tapping into our memories of the past. The vividness of a certain image in our mind depends on either our previous experiences or the stories we have heard. The faces we have seen, the clothes people were wearing and things they were doing all play a part in thinking about the future. The evidence for this is that the same brain regions activate when we recall the past and imagine the future (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Additionally, people who have trouble recalling certain parts of their past also have trouble with imagining the future. The importance of this for the L2 Motivational Self System is that if students have trouble imagining their desired future, they can be encouraged to try and recall a certain aspect of their past, which could then help them develop a desired future (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). This process is called guided imagery and will be further explained later in the thesis (section 2.3.).

Finally, having a vision in mind can be compared to thinking about a literary work. Both are expressed through the form of a narrative. Novels, for example, can be written in the first-person point of view or the third-person point of view. The same goes for thinking up a vision in our minds and as it turns out, there are differences in the effects of imagining ourselves in the first-person point of view and the third-person point of view. The difference between the two is that, with a first-person perspective, we observe the imagined scene through our own eyes, which appears to improve the feelings and attitudes one has for oneself or the L2. However, imagining a scene in the third person allows us to imagine ourselves, as well as the entire setting that surrounds us, which seems to be more beneficial in motivating certain learning behaviors.

So, should we use mental imagery in the first- or third-person perspective? According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 19), “The emerging consensus among scholars is that when we imagine something in the first-person perspective, our focus is on the experience itself, but we tend to switch to the third-person imagery when we want to integrate that experience into

our self-concept and this, in turn, appears to have implications for what we do.” Therefore, both perspectives of mental imagery can be used, depending on the effect we want to achieve.

### **1.5. The role of a vision**

Like the concept of the self, the concept of vision has a variety of different definitions and uses. Companies have visions for their future, politicians have visions for their parties and/or countries, the environmentalists have visions for the future of the planet. Apart from these long-term visions, using mental imagery is extremely common in everyday life as well. Not only do people use mental imagery to consciously develop plans, but half of human thought qualifies as daydreaming or mental imagery (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). What is common with all of these types of vision is that they are oriented towards something in the future that is not yet realized. This is why previously mentioned possible selves (section 1.1) are considered to be so important. They are the fundamental building blocks in the process of constructing a vision.

## 2. Constructing a vision

As mentioned in section 1.3., the first step in successfully implementing the L2 Motivational Self System is having a possible self to begin with, having something to strive for. It is highly unlikely and rather difficult to think up an entire possible self from scratch. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to other sources of inspiration. One of those is our past and the possible selves we may have already vaguely entertained. Another way of constructing a vision is turning to those around us, taking into consideration their expectations of us and then implementing those into our final vision. An example of this could be the parents or peers of a student. The final route that will be mentioned is turning to people we do not know personally, but admire for one reason or another. These could be athletes, actors, musicians, politicians, physicians or any other person who is, at least in part, in the public eye, so that one can draw motivation from their behavior.

To sum up, it is necessary to think through possible selves which have intrigued us in the past, take into account the expectations of others and then rely on sufficient role models as inspiration. Finally, once a number of possible selves arise, it is important to decide which one to pursue and which to leave behind to maximize the focus and channel the energy in one direction. The following sections will deal with the techniques used to construct a vision.

### 2.1. Guided imagery

The power of visualization has already been mentioned in section 1.4., with many athletes using the technique in preparation for a big event. Dörnyei uses the same concept in his L2 Motivational Self System, but calls it guided imagery, using the following definition: “Guided imagery in the classroom can be understood as directing students in controlled daydreaming, that is, helping them to consciously generate images of desired (language) selves in their own minds” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 49). There are three different types of guided imagery. The first two require input from a teacher or a superior, while the third one allows students to be more independent with their visualization. *Scripted fantasy* involves asking students questions which make vision more detailed. Questions that are asked have to do with the surroundings they are in, what they are wearing, how they are feeling at a given moment etc. “The purpose is to let the students explore their own visions, which will be unique to each student, and to encourage them to communicate their visions in some form of a follow-up activity, either orally or in writing” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 49).

The second type of guided imagery is called *scripted imagery*, which is fairly similar

to *scripted fantasy*, with the difference being that *scripted imagery* involves some sort of a pre-made script or scenario, which takes into account students' current ambitions and/or problems. This means there is less personal input from the student, whose task is only imagining the given scenario, without influencing the story. An example of this technique could be asking students to visualize a job interview for a position requiring them to be proficient L2 speakers. The final type of guided imagery is called *image streaming*. This technique requires the student to develop their vision in detail, being given only an initial prompt. The key to this technique is to encourage students to describe their vision in the present tense. Not only does this improve the vividness of the vision, but it also strengthens students' general ability to visualize.

Dörnyei describes these guided imagery techniques “not as a substitute for language practice but rather as a ‘vitamin supplement’ or a ‘language-building steroid’.” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 52) In order for guided imagery to be successful, certain conditions have to be met. As with any undertaking, the person who is involved in the activity has to be on board with it. They have to find it motivational and enjoyable and see some benefit from the activity. The learners also have to be able to visualize in the first place. The ability to visualize will impact the vividness of each vision, and consequently its motivational capability. Lastly, students have to be in an optimal state of mind to visualize, meaning they should not be tired. This means that the perfect time for visualization exercises would be at the beginning of a class, easing into the lesson with a short visualization exercise.

## **2.2. Exposure to role models**

Probably the most powerful sources of inspiration are the people we admire. Most commonly, various types of celebrities are taken as role models. They “model” the behaviors, sometimes even opinions and attitudes of others, mostly young people. As Dörnyei and Kubanyiova put it, a role model is “an individual who has achieved outstanding success – can raise the observers' hopes for the future and thus motivate them to pursue similar excellence.” (2014: 63) Of course, it would be rather difficult for a teacher to get hold of a popular celebrity and include them in a class. Another problem with celebrities is that they are highly successful in a certain field and reaching their heights or levels of excellence could be considered overwhelming or even discouraging.

Therefore, it is important to make use of peer role models. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 63) argue that having peers as role models is more beneficial since “students are likely to be more inspired by an outstanding individual who excels in their own area of interest and

who is close to their social background or age level, because in this way they can more easily use this model for generating a possible future image for themselves.” This makes perfect sense, as it is easier to compare yourself to a classmate who won the English school competition, as opposed to an English professor teaching at a university you really like. The gap in competence and knowledge is nowhere near as big between peers as it is between a student and an established person who has had 20 or more years of experience to perfect their craft.

### **2.3. Guided narratives**

American psychologist Jerome Bruner (2004) claimed that people have no other way of describing reality apart from the form of a narrative. Bruner believed that what we ultimately become are the autobiographical narratives of ourselves or, to simplify, the stories we tell about our own lives. He argues that narratives have the power to structure our experiences and memories, as well as building the actual events of our lives (Bruner, 2004). Even the most basic events in our lives are told as a story. Stories are what we use to make sense of the world. Accordingly, any sort of vision we devise will be a form of a narrative. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) explain that it is useful to encourage students to write autobiographical narratives in three different ways:

1. Writing an autobiographical story about the future – students should imagine themselves in the future as competent L2 speakers. The goal is to describe a path taking them from their current state to that imagined self. The entire exercise should be written in the past tense, as if it had already happened. This way, being a competent L2 speaker is not only a goal – it turns into a detailed, thought-through vision, as it has a pathway which precedes it.
2. Retelling a story from a different light – as it is commonly known, there are infinite interpretations of a particular narrative. Since the events in our lives are told in the form of a narrative, there are infinite interpretations and perspectives which we can apply to a single event. This technique takes advantage of that fact and uses it as an opportunity to analyze past negative experiences. Through this analysis, it is possible to derive a learning experience from something negative that has occurred in the past. An example would be making students find a positive side in one of the negative experiences they had throughout their language learning histories. These can be thought of not as negative, but rather as

problems that the student has to resolve. By putting a problem-solving spin on the issue, they might find motivation to further progress in their L2 learning experience.

3. Identifying ‘self-defining moments’ in language learning histories – each person has certain events which have influenced their later behaviors. These events can influence entire trajectories of education, career and relationships. They are fairly easy to define and obviously differ from person to person. What is common across these moments is that they are very potent and can cause the construction of Ideal or Ought-to visions, depending on whether the moments themselves are positive or negative. It is useful to define and identify these moments. Along with being catalysts for constructing a vision, they can also be something that will keep the flame of vision alive.

#### **2.4. Taking into account current situations and concerns**

Any type of future vision will be influenced by one’s current circumstances and concerns. This means that every ideal or dreaded vision will be influenced by the person’s age, sex, financial situation and relationship status. There are a multitude of variables which have to be taken into account when constructing an ideal vision. For example, age is a major factor in developing an ideal vision, since every age group has goals which other age groups are not concerned with as much or in some cases at all. Young adolescents will typically be more concerned with things like education or starting in a field of work, while older adolescents might be more concerned with starting a family or advancing their careers. In their book *Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers* (2014), Dörnyei and Kubanyiova provide an excellent example of Erin Gruwell, a teacher who had to use all alternative teaching methods in order to adapt to a group of students she was teaching: “On the first day of her teaching career, Erin found herself in a classroom full of ‘at-risk’ inner-city youths, also known in that school as the ‘unteachables’, who had no vision, no hope for the future and, consequently, no motivation for academic work. Yet – and this is a true story! – by not having anything else to rely on but a range of creative educational strategies to raise the students’ motivation and promote group dynamics in her classes, Erin was able to transform her students’ learning experiences and, without exaggeration, their lives” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 63).

A paragraph from Erin’s book (2006) *The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them* best describes how difficult both the group and the situation were to begin with:

“Once the students left, I picked up the paper airplane off the floor. I circled the room, collecting handouts that had been left behind, and saw ESL scribbled in black marker on several desks on the left side of the room. In educational jargon, ESL stands for English as a Second Language. Earlier, when I’d seen ESL etched on my door, I’d foolishly thought some Spanish speaker was paying homage to my classroom. I soon realised this ESL had nothing to do with education – it was the acronym for East Side Longos – the largest Latino gang in Long Beach.(...) In lieu of a seating chart, I naively let the students pick their own seats. What struck me now was that they chose comfort zones determined by race. This realization gave me pause. I had imagined my students filing into my class and forming a melting pot of colors as they chose their seats, but the pot must have been pretty cold, because there was absolutely no melting. The Latinos had staked out the left side, while the Asian students occupied the right. The back row was occupied by all the African American students, and a couple of Caucasians sheepishly huddled together in the front.”

This example is far too extreme for everyday life, as most teachers find themselves in fairly ordinary classes. Having a class full of gang members is luckily a rarity. However, it is an excellent example of taking circumstances into account. Had teacher Erin decided to stick with her methods, which she probably learned as a graduate student, and decided to apply them to this group of students, she would have made no progress and would have probably been laughed out of school. She recognized that this group needed something different than ordinary learning methods and that, first and foremost, the group had to be shown that it was beneficial for them to make an effort and put work into education.

### **3. Strengthening the vision**

As mentioned in section 1.3., simply having a desired goal is not enough to initiate action, at least not productive action which is sustainable long-term. A goal has to be well-defined, (the 4Rs): relaxation, just like the steps which will take the student towards the goal. The vision has to be vivid and elaborate, in order to fulfill its full potential and motivating power. As Dörnyei and Kubanyiova state: “the more intense the imagery accompanying the vision, the more powerful the vision” (2014: 65). This section will deal with techniques which can be used to strengthen and enhance imagery accompanying the vision. Some of the techniques that have already been discussed, which are used to construct the vision, can be used to strengthen it as well (such as guided imagery in section 2.1.).

#### **3.1. How to train imagery skills?**

Imagery skills are useful not only for constructing a vision, but also for strengthening and enhancing it. For a vision to be vivid, it has to have a sensory element. A person should be able to see, hear, even smell the actual situations they are working towards. Imagery, just like any other skill, needs to be learned and developed. There are four aspects of imagery training which are worth mentioning realism, regularity and reinforcement (Hale, 2004: 8-10).

Relaxation is the condition in which both the mind and the body are relaxed, and it is necessary for virtually any mental practice, allowing the person to focus on one single given task. Realism implies that the vision should be as close to reality as possible. The need for realism also includes considering possible failures, such as missing a deadline or failing a class. It is easy to assume that a visualization exercise should only include visions of a person reaching their goals. However, there is utility in considering scenarios which are not optimal, which will lead to solutions for certain problems which may occur. This relates back to counterbalancing the Ideal L2 Self, which will be discussed later in Chapter 7.

Regularity is the training frequency. Similar to any other type of exercise, the best results will be achieved with regular sessions. Incorporating visualization (three to five minutes) into the first part of a learning/training session seems to be the optimal solution (Hale 2004: 9). Reinforcement means that having material visual aids, such as pictures or videos, can help in making the vision more clear and vivid. An exercise which could be used for this goal is a student videoing themselves engaging in a desired behavior successfully. One example could be speaking the L2, while reading an article or a paragraph and then playing the footage back to themselves. A benefit of this is that it will make the mistakes easier to spot, rather than



controlling them in the process of reading. Not having a material recording and just relying on spotting mistakes at the moment may leave a lot of them overlooked. The other benefit, which is more relevant to strengthening the vision, is that through editing the recording and cutting out the mistakes, one can see a glimpse of what it would be like to be a fluent L2 speaker. Because the desired state would not be as abstract, but rather something that the person themselves created, it would strengthen the vision, making it more plausible and, therefore, more likely to be achieved.

By using general mental imagery exercises, students can lay the foundations for more specific language exercises. Starting with a basic scene, such as an interaction in the store or with a doctor can lead to exercises in other areas with which the student may struggle, such as a job interview or public speaking. Using imagery is a common form of battling phobias in psychotherapy, using a process called desensitization. This process, in basic terms, means that one is exposed to something enough times so that it does not provoke any anxiety or worry. This would be regarded as a first step in battling the fear, since actually being exposed to that which they are avoiding brings much better results. So, if a student is afraid of public speaking, the first step would be imagining having a presentation while using the L2. Once that is accomplished, they can present the material to one person, then to a small group and finally, to an entire class.

### **3.2. Strengthening the group's vision**

All of the previously mentioned techniques described how to help strengthen an individual student's L2 vision. However, most teachers simply do not have the time to devote themselves to each individual student. Therefore, it is necessary to implement methods that can impact larger groups at the same time. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 83) there are multiple techniques that can be applied to a group. One possible strategy is developing a group goal. This can be done by considering different individual goals and then deriving a common goal out of those.

As mentioned in section 3.1., the most important part of a vision is the intensive sensory experiences. Is it possible to develop something a large number of people will share in the same way? As it turns out, it is, with various political or artistic movements proving this hypothesis. Extracting a common goal can be achieved through different channels. Newslettering is a form of compiling ideas from journals which belong to different students and then presenting them anonymously to the group. Because the material comes from peer role models, it is much easier

for students to relate and find inspiration from it (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). It gives them an insight into the lives of their peers and makes them realize that perhaps they are not alone in their own personal doubts or problems, but rather that other students share them as well. If someone had the same problems learning an L2 in the past and managed to prevail, it acts as a powerful source of motivation. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 85), “within applied linguistics contexts, it has been a well-known fact that one of the most inspiring and instructive parts of learning strategy training is the ‘sharing session’, where students are asked to share their learning discoveries and self-generated learning strategies as a regular part of class.” The sharing of authentic personal learning strategies can often be amusing, and it directly includes students in the learning process, since they can share their experiences in simpler and more direct/personal terms, as opposed to learning about the techniques out of a textbook. Students may talk about switching their phone settings to the L2 they are currently learning or trying to watch TV shows dubbed in that particular L2. This can, hopefully, lead to a transformational engagement and may even result in developing a unanimous vision. While this may be a coincidental consequence of the sharing session, it is the precise goal of something called a group chronicle (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). A group chronicle is constructed by taking individual visions, fantasies and experiences of each individual in a group (a class, a company) and extracting a collective identity or a vision.

#### **4. Making the vision plausible**

The most important property of a vision is that it is plausible and realistic (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). Being able to fly would be a wonderful ability, but it would be a horrible vision, as it is unrealistic. The vision has to be a combination of reality and imagination (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). With regards to L2 visions, certain tasters can prove beneficial, since they make the end state feel more realistic and within reach (such as a trip to a country in which the L2 is spoken). Additionally, presenting (peer) role models to the group will prove that, although everyone faces hardships and obstacles in their journey, it is in fact, possible to achieve the desired end state.

A huge danger when constructing a vision is starting from the point of self-deception, either consciously or unconsciously. The student may overestimate their abilities or underestimate the difficulty of learning the language. For a future self to be optimal, it has to be grounded in reality rather than fantasy. Therefore, it is most important to get rid of any illusions or unrealistic expectations before constructing a vision. The student has to be ready to put in the work and time necessary to master the L2. It is a widely known hypothesis that, in order to master any skill, one is required to put in at least 10 000 hours of practice into it (Gladwell, 2010: 16). Although this number seems arbitrary, since it will not take everyone the same amount of time to master a skill, it is a good rule of thumb to make students aware of the amount of time required to achieve a vision. Having reasonable standards for progress through time and realizing that there are alternative routes to success, which makes every effort and learning personalized, are the best precursors to having a vision grounded in reality.

##### **4.1. Dealing with pessimists**

The duty of a teacher is to encourage pessimists. These are the students who believe that achieving their desired end state is simply out of reach and therefore put in little to no effort, as they consider it not worthwhile. Unlike optimists, who are able to formulate their visions based on positive experiences, pessimists use previous negative L2 learning experiences as the foundation for possible selves. This could result in an Ideal L2 Self not being created. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) describe two techniques to combat this. The first one involves positive affirmations. Writing a simple sentence such as “*I will become a successful L2 user*” ten times in a row, but doing this mindfully and noticing any doubts or resistance which might arise in one’s mind and writing these down as well. These can later be addressed in the hope of resolving them, proving to the pessimists that they can overcome these obstacles.

The second technique can be used as a part of a journaling task. This technique is summed up through a simple motto: “identify what is going well, do more of it, and build on it” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 95). By making students meditate on the things they have going for them, they are made aware of their current strengths which might have been otherwise negated through simple pessimism.

#### **4.2. Dealing with optimists**

While pessimistic learners need to be made aware of their strengths and abilities, those who would be considered as over-optimistic have to be taken out of their comfort zone. This undertaking has to be threaded carefully though, since it can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is important to keep students grounded, as one of the most important traits of a vision is that it is realistic. On the other hand, an intervention like that can totally deflate one’s hopes, leaving students without even that healthy dose of optimism.

So, what would be the correct strategy to approach this problem? As it turns out, it is important to make optimists aware of their weaknesses, just like it is important to make pessimists aware of their strengths. Once they are made aware of their weaknesses, students should not lose all of their ambition and drive; they should just redirect them to other channels (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Once they have refocused their energy, they should be able to come up with alternative goals/plans. Therefore, the dilemma has to be approached with considerate, but honest feedback on students’ abilities. Additionally, the teacher has to be careful, because there is a chance that they are wrong - no matter their knowledge or experience, they are not omniscient and cannot predict future outcomes with 100% certainty.

#### **4.3. External barriers**

In addition to their internal barriers, each student has external barriers, which may prevent them from achieving their desired self. The obstacles which appear most often are those regarding the financial situation of the student or the student’s family. These kinds of obstacles would be considered situational obstacles (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 97). The other sort of external obstacles stem from students’ immediate groups, more precisely, their negative attitudes towards students’ ambitions. Students could face resistance from their parents or their peer group regarding their plans. This type of barrier could be described as the Ought-to L2 Self (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). For a vision to be valid, both the Ideal L2 and the Ought-to L2 Self should be aligned, since it is not productive to construct a vision which opposes

social norms, conventions or the expectations of those around us. However, these things should not exert influence to the point they define the entire vision. Everyone knows someone who managed to succeed despite the odds and despite things people told them were possible. There is a line which has to be defined, with both the student's wishes and the wishes of those in the close proximity of the student taken into account.

## 5. Taking action

All mentions of a vision in this thesis up until now were mostly abstract. The most important part of achieving any vision is putting in the work and putting the plan into action, instead of leaving it only as a wishful dream. It is useless to construct a vision if there are no additional steps or a pathway which would make it possible to materialize. The energy and the motivation released by the vision itself have to be channelled through productive means into realizing it and making actual progress. The best way of creating concrete plans out of an abstract vision is to break the vision down into smaller, more manageable goals and then try to achieve those, a process Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009: 66) described as “subtask generation and implementation.” This is because the vision itself seems more attainable and not overwhelming when broken down into smaller goals. Another reason is that through breaking it down into smaller goals the student is forced to strategize and analyze the pathway that would take them to each of these smaller goals. Focusing on smaller goals might even impact the trajectory of the entire vision with the vision itself becoming clearer as time goes on.

The progress which is achieved over time should be written down and monitored. Having some sort of revision on a weekly basis is beneficial because it will allow the student to more clearly see the progress they have already made (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 100). A valuable document that can be used in this regard is the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which can prove extremely helpful in tracking progress in L2 learning. The Council of Europe website describes the ELP as a “document in which those who are learning or have learned one or more languages can record and reflect on their language learning and intercultural experiences” (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/introduction>). By incorporating such a document into the classroom, students get the sense that their language learning experiences are more real, since they have a physical record of all the skills they have developed throughout the years of L2 learning.

Optimists and pessimists (sections 4.1. and 4.2.) were the students described as having unrealistic expectations about their end goal. There are, however, other students, who might have perfectly reasonable expectations or goals, but lack the knowledge of how to achieve them. These are students who are missing that first step to get the ball rolling and it is the teacher’s duty to provide them with an effective roadmap (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2007). A method used in this regard might be the teacher telling students about his/her own experiences and methods when starting out as an L2 speaker.

Using mental imagery can also be a productive way of putting vision into action. Until

now, any mention of mental imagery focused on the end goal and the person the student would try to become at the end of the process. While this is the most popular way of using mental imagery, it is possible to use mental imagery to focus on the process itself, instead of purely focusing on the end goal (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Instead of thinking who the student will be at the end of the process, they can visualize how they will react to certain situations which may arise on their journey of becoming an L2 speaker. An example might involve getting ready for an exam. To combat procrastination, the student may decide to simply sit at the table and open up the textbook. This is often enough to start the studying process. Visualizing precisely this action, instead of the person the student would become if they passed all of their exams, is the best description of using mental imagery to put vision into action.

## **6. Maintaining the vision in everyday life**

Each person has different possible selves, each of them relating to a certain aspect of life. Some might be related to the social part of life, regarding family and friends, some might relate to education or careers. Each of them cannot be activated simultaneously, simply because it is difficult for people to focus on many things at once. Additionally, everyday life can get in the way of a person and their possible selves: different stresses in the school or work environments can occupy our attention, leading us to put the possible selves into the background of our minds. Since that is the case, it is important to incorporate activities, which would regularly remind students of their Ideal L2 Selves into the L2 classroom (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). Classroom activities, which would include bringing a native L2 speaker into the classroom or having the class interact with an L2 cultural aspect, such as a movie or music, can be used as powerful reminders. This is because these reminders bridge the gap between the present and the future - they give an insight into what it would be like to achieve the Ideal L2 Self.

### **6.1. Priming**

In order to keep alive, the visions of his students, Dörnyei (2014) used a technique called priming in his lessons. He would have students perform a warm-up exercise which would involve them reading out the names of different British or American cities in different manners (sad, happy, surprised). Soon enough, he discovered that this would prime students for a positive affective state. There are different ways to trigger priming, as is explained by Dörnyei: “Priming is a well-known technique in psychological research; it refers to activating certain mental mechanisms indirectly, without the participants of an experiment being aware of what is being examined. For example, if the first task is to read a long list of words which includes window, and the second task requires the participants to complete a word stem that starts with win..., the probability of producing the word window rather than something like winter or winner is significantly higher than without having had the initial reading task, even if the participants cannot consciously recall that the first list contained window” (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014: 108).

Priming content can be implemented into the classroom tasks. However, it would have to be active in the long-term, as opposed to the short-term example in the quote. This can be done by adjusting a situation in a communicative task, in such a way that students feel the interaction is likely to happen to them in the future. The most important thing to achieve is that



the tasks feel personal to the student. Priming can also be “provoked” outside of the classroom. The most common way would be a trip to the L2 speaking country, with the purpose of using L2 in real everyday situations. This kind of undertaking cannot happen regularly, because it is both time and money consuming. However, it is an experience potent enough to evoke motivation for a fairly long period of time, as it is much more impactful than a simple language exercise inside a classroom.

## 7. Counterbalancing the vision

All techniques discussed up to this point have been related to something that students would like to achieve or become. They rely on the fact that a vision has a “pulling” property, with students finding them appealing and worthwhile, which results in them striving towards the desired end state. There is also a technique which has been mentioned throughout this thesis, which takes advantage of the more negative feelings and visions students have of themselves, using these visions as a source of motivation. By developing a vision of the person, they would like to avoid becoming, students have something to run away from, in addition to having something they are striving towards. According to Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014: 114), the reasoning behind this is that “...future self-guides are most potent if they utilise the cumulative impact of both approach and avoid tendencies – we do something because we want to do it but also because not doing it would lead to undesired results. This dichotomy is reminiscent of the age-old ‘carrot and stick’ contrast, referring to the effectiveness of both rewards and punishment as tools for motivating learners”. The most important thing to get right in regards to this technique is balance. Using the negative vision runs the risk of negative connotations taking charge and instead of supplying the student with motivation, they may feel overwhelmed by negative thoughts. Both ends of the spectrum have to be equally elaborate.

This question of balance is extremely important when the student is faced with multiple visions simultaneously. When this happens to be the case, there is a risk that the student will wander between the different visions, without committing to a single one of them. However, by using the negative counterbalance, they can pinpoint which of the positive visions are most important to them. An example is a student having many assignments due fairly soon. They would like to dedicate their time to each one of them equally, but do not have enough time to do so. They then imagine the embarrassment or problems that would arise if they miss a specific deadline. The one that triggers the most negative emotion is the one that is most important to them at that specific moment. This way, by using the negative vision, the student can decide which assignments to prioritize (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014).

Another thing to consider when counterbalancing the vision is the distance between the present self and the feared self, as having an exaggerated feared self might result in a lack of action out of fear. However, the exaggerated feared self might also work in the other direction. This means that some students might perceive the feared self as improbable or too far away from their present state for it to evoke any motivation or fear. The feared self has to be grounded

in something that is likely to happen, such as missing a deadline. This keeps the urge “to get-away” from that place much more powerful than an extreme vision which involves poverty or homelessness would (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014). An example of this would be exams, which are periods of extreme stress and pressure for students. As the exam season approaches, students feel more and more motivated “to get-away” from failing the exams, leading them to study much more effectively and efficiently than they would if the exam season just ended. This avoidance tendency, which is characteristic of exam season, is also a primary marker in the functioning of the Ought-to L2 Self.

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis dealt with the work of Zoltan Dörnyei and his colleagues (M. Kubanyiova and E. Ushioda) and the importance of the concept of vision in L2 learning. Taking many examples from Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's book *Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers*, the thesis explores the role of vision in improving motivation in L2 learning. The concept of vision is grounded in the L2 Motivational Self System Dörnyei (2009) developed as a result of his studies on motivation in L2 learning, taking inspiration from the theory of possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Following Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), a number of techniques are described which can be used to improve motivation in L2 learning, such as mental imagery, exposure to role models, and factoring in the current circumstances in students' lives. Additionally, the role of teachers in the L2 learning group is explained, including their role in facilitating visions and motivation of their students. They have a duty to maximize the opportunities for each student, those who are enthusiastic, as well as those who are pessimistic about their chances of success. Finally, the thesis describes a technique which is a bit controversial and delicate, but effective - counterbalancing the vision. Namely, there is no need to assume that motivation can only be acquired from positive visions, but rather that there is some benefit in having something to run away from.

The scope of Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's book is quite broad, as it covers the fields of L2 learning (learners' vision) and L2 teaching (teachers' vision), meaning that both L2 teachers and learners can use the strategies and techniques described in the book in actual L2 teaching and learning to deal with the sheer longevity and occasional boredom of the language learning process. As Dörnyei himself used to say, "where there is a vision, there is a way."

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## **Summary**

This thesis deals with the concept of vision in L2 learning. The techniques used to develop and maintain vision within L2 learning were presented through a framework of Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System. Dörnyei developed the L2 Motivational Self System as a progression of Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory of possible selves. Following a brief description of the history and structure of the L2 Motivational Self System, techniques of constructing, substantiating and maintaining students' vision were discussed. All of the techniques were described with an emphasis on L2 learning, although they can be used in other fields, such as sports psychology or psychotherapy. Finally, the idea of counterbalancing the developed vision is discussed. The thesis concludes with a final emphasis on the importance of vision and its properties of both "pulling" towards a desired vision, as well as "pushing away" from a dreaded one.

**Keywords:** vision, motivation, L2 learning, L2 Motivational Self System

## Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada je opisati koncept vizije u učenju drugog jezika. Načini korištenja vizije u učenju drugog jezika prikazani su uz pomoć inojezičnog motivacijskog sustava pojma o sebi, koji je razvio Zoltan Dörnyei (2009). Dörnyei je razvio navedeni inojezični motivacijski sustav pojma o sebi po uzoru na teoriju *moguće ja* (Markus i Nurius, 1986). Nakon kratkog opisa povijesti i strukture inojezičnog motivacijskog sustava pojma o sebi, opisuju se metode konstrukcije, unaprjeđenja i održavanja vizije. Sve su metode opisane s naglaskom na učenje drugog jezika, iako se mogu koristiti i u drugim poljima, kao što su sportska psihologija ili psihoterapija. Na kraju rada opisana je ideja razvoja negativne vizije, kao opreka pozitivnoj viziji. Zaključno, naglašava se uloga vizije u učenju drugog jezika, kao i njezina svojstva kojima vuče učenika prema željenoj viziji, dok ga u isto vrijeme odmiče od vizije koju želi izbjeći.

Ključne riječi: vizija, motivacija, učenje drugog jezika, inojezični motivacijski sustav pojma o sebi