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## MULTILINGUALISM AS REALITY? – THE SERBIAN AND ENGLISH MOTIVATIONAL PROFILE OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

*A kétnyelvűség mint realitás? A kisebbségi létben  
 élő magyar középiskolások szerb és angol nyelvi  
 motivációs profilja*

*Realnost dvojezičnosti? Motivacija za učenje srpskog  
 i engleskog jezika kod srednjoškolaca mađarske  
 nacionalne zajednice*

### Summary

The present mixed-method research aims to examine the English and Serbian language learning motivational profiles of Hungarian minority students in Vojvodina. By implementing Dörnyei's 2005 theoretical framework I try to explore the situation-specific properties of motivation constructs of this specific community.

**Keywords:** motivation, language attitudes, multilingualism, minority group, Vojvodina.

It is a fact almost beyond dispute in the field of second-language acquisition (SLA) and language pedagogy that motivation is the driving force of language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). Although, motivation is a highly complex term, most motivation researchers would agree that it concerns the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it (Dörnyei, 2010).

Second and foreign language motivation has been researched in different paradigms and numerous language learning contexts in the past decades. Language-learning-motivation research started from Gardner and Lambert's (1959) pioneering work in the bilingual context of Canada. One of the key elements of Gardner's (1985, 2001) socioeducational model of L2 motivation is the emphasis of L2 learners' integrativeness (Kim, 2009: 51), which can be broadly defined as the learners' 'language attitudes', referring to the language learners' perceptions of the L2, the L2 speakers, as well as the sociocultural and pragmatic values and benefits associated with the L2. Thus the main tenet of Gardner's theory is that success in language learning depends on the learners' attitudes towards the linguistic cultural community of the target language (Dörnyei,

2005). However, the 1990's brought about a general dissatisfaction with the scope of Gardner's theory, and L2 motivation research became rather 'education-friendly', focusing on motives associated with classroom learning and as well as on the main components of the learning situation (Kormos and Csizér, 2008).

Beyond this, motivation research in the 21st century has to face two major challenges. First, the lack of a well-specified target language community in case of English undermines the attitudinal base of Gardner's traditional concept of integrative motivation in the sense that English as a foreign language learners today may not suppose any specific target group to be integrated in the globalized world (Dörnyei et al., 2006: 9). Since due to its spread as a world language English has become separated from its native speakers and their cultures (Skutnab Kangas, 2000) for perhaps the majority of the users of the language. Therefore, instead of integrativeness it seems to be more appropriate to talk about some kind of cosmopolitan identity or "international posture" (Yashima, 2002).

Second, English is rapidly losing its national cultural base, and with its becoming associated with the global culture for many people now, it represents the language of the 'world at large' (Dörnyei et al., 2006: 9). As Kormos and Csizér remark, a high number of students learn a second language in a foreign language setting with the purpose of being able to communicate with other non-native speakers in an international environment (Kormos and Csizér, 2008: 6). Therefore, motivation is not seen as a static attribute but rather as a dynamic factor that continually fluctuates, and as a consequence, the new approaches to motivation research are characterized by an interest in motivational change and in the relationship between motivation and identity/self with emphasis laid on "how students' images of themselves as language learners affect the learning process itself" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009).

In an attempt to address the above-mentioned challenges Dörnyei (2005) put forward a conceptual framework called 'L2 Motivational Self System' describing L2 motivation processes. In his theory, he argues that the conceptualization of L2 motivation from a self-perspective does not contradict the traditional concept of L2 motivation but presents a broader frame of reference with increased capacity for explanatory power. The model can be used to explain the motivational set-up in diverse learning contexts even if they offer little contact with L2 speakers (e.g., in typical foreign language learning situations where the L2 is primarily a school language) and it is also suitable for the study of the motivational basis of language globalization. This proposed construct consists of three main components: the Ideal L2 self, Ought-to self, and L2 learning experience.

The Ideal L2 Self is the language learner's vision of him/herself as a user of the language. More specifically, it is a cognitive representation of all the incentives associated with L2 mastery. The strength of the vision helps and in this way motivates the learner to reduce the discrepancy between the actual and the imagined future self. Dörnyei (2009) claims that „traditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives with a promotion focus would typically belong to this component” (p.29).

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On the other hand, the Ought-to L2 Self is the vision of a future self that possesses certain attributes to meet the expectations of important others and it is more related to negative consequences coming from not achieving sufficient L2 proficiency. Therefore, it represents „the more extrinsic (i.e. less internalized, ‘prevention’ focus-types of) instrumental motives” (Dörnyei, 2009: 29). The third dimension is the L2 learning experience, referring to the „immediate learning environment and experience”, including all factors affecting the learner yielding elements in the social, educational environment that might to some extent influence the motivated language learning behavior of the language learner.

Dörnyei’s proposed L2 Motivational Self system not only recognises that language learning motivation is not fixed – rather changing under the influence of variety of factors over time – but offers “a sharp focus on the individual, and on the various selves existing in the motivational framework of the student” as well (Henkel, 2009: 65). The understanding of motivation as a dynamic process, as Bavendiek remarks, leaves room for intervention and is therefore interesting for practitioners trying to help students improve their motivation and hence their learning behaviour (2008: 3).

### **The objectives of the study**

Although English language learning motivation is a well-researched area in the field of second language acquisition much less attention has been paid though to motivation of students learning languages not as widespread as English. Therefore the present study applies Dörnyei’s (2005) model of the L2 Motivational Self System in empirical testing on a specific population of Hungarian minority secondary school learners of English and Serbian in a single context in Subotica, a town in northern Serbia.

Whereas having a good control of the state language, Serbian, would be compulsory for minorities living in Serbia, they are very often reluctant to study this language; thus, it obviously raises a serious barrier to integration to students belonging to the Hungarian language minority group. In addition, though several studies on L2 motivation explored the profiles of minority students learning a second or foreign language (most often English) around the world, no such investigation has been carried out for Hungarian minority students in Vojvodina, Serbia.

The present case study may lead to an understanding of how members of the community relate to and how they are motivated to learn the language of local relevance, that of Serbian, and also the language of global relevance, that of English. In other words, this empirical research strives to examine the multilingual day-to-day reality of the Hungarian minority students in a specific public arena with a specific combination of languages at work as reflected in their linguistic and interactional routines and practices. The specific research questions relate to the students’ perceived identities, attitudes and motivations, how they see themselves as non-native speakers and also to their experiences and difficulties when they use the language(s).

**Methodology: participants, instruments, data analyses**

In order to gain a more complex picture of the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of the community being researched, the present small-scale project combines two types of motivational data. The mixed-method design, namely the concurrent combination of quantitative and qualitative research (providing questionnaire and interview data) makes it possible to look at the phenomenon such as language learning motivation both from a macro- and a micro perspective.

In the quantitative phase of the pilot study, carried out in 2010, altogether 50 secondary school students participated (39 girls and 11 boys). The average age of students was 16.5 years. Typically, these students had studied Serbian, the state language, from when they were 7, while English (the first foreign language) was added to their studies around grade 5 (age 11).

Data was collected with a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire that consisted of 61 Likert-scale items and a 9-item section containing short answer questions that provided background information about the participants and their language learning biographies. The questions were adapted from three sources: from Ryan's (2005) motivation questionnaire, Henkel's (2009) motivation questionnaire for Ukrainian minority students and finally some of the language contact items were taken from Kormos and Csizér (2008). The final instrument contained the following 9 scales: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to Self, Learning experience, Motivated learning behaviour, Direct contact with L2/L3 speakers, Cultural interest, Parental encouragement, Attitudes towards learning Serbian/English, Language use anxiety.

The data from the 50 questionnaires were computer coded and SPSS 17.0 was applied as a tool for carrying out the following statistical analyses: internal consistency reliability indices of the scales were calculated, descriptive indices were computed for each of the scales, significant relationships among the scales were identified, and a regression analysis was carried out to determine the most affective scales playing relevant roles in shaping and constituting the language learners' motivational disposition towards Serbian and English, respectively.

In the second, qualitative phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 female and 2 male secondary school interviewees in March 2012. The participants were randomly chosen with the aim of reflecting a wide variety of student experiences. The interviews were made in respondents' L1 (Hungarian) and lasted at least for 40-45 minutes. The audio-recordings were transcribed, and parts of the data were translated into English. A semi-structured interview template was used containing pre-established questions, however besides this, students were asked to freely introduce and elaborate on any relevant topics. The interview transcriptions were analyzed in order to extract categories affecting students' language learning motivation. The identified relevant dimensions (referring to both the English and the Serbian language) can be grouped under the following 12 components: Integrativeness, Instrumentality, Ideal L2 self, Ought-to self, Cultural interest, Direct contact, Course

attitudes, Language use anxiety, Milieu (including parental encouragement), Attitudes to learning the language, Motivated learning behaviour, and EIL posture (in case of English only).

The interview data were analysed in several steps. In the first place, emerging themes were analysed, then based on the agreed relevant themes, definitions of the categories of analysis were defined and worded followed by the coding of the transcripts separately.

## **Results and discussion**

In order to gain a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of motivation and to further explore the inherently superficial questionnaire data in depth the results presented and discussed here are primarily based on the categories of the qualitative data. Although both the questionnaire items and the interviews covered a large amount of issues relating to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Theory, I decided to concentrate in particular on the students' goals, perceived identities, attitudes, motivations and effort invested into learning, and how they see themselves as non-native speakers and also to their experiences when they use the Serbian and the English language.

### **The Serbian motivational profile**

Concerning the Ideal L2 Self scale, a mean of 4.40 on a scale of 1 to 5 was obtained indicating that Hungarian minority learners do envision themselves as successful users of the state language, and attach relevant attributes to using Serbian in their future (see Appendix 1 for the descriptive statistics concerning the Serbian language). However, the interviews revealed that all the participants expressed strong needs to learn the language either for good grades or for their future career with a third frequently mentioned reason being to avoid embarrassing situations as a result of the lack of knowledge of Serbian. Therefore, the main needs for learning and knowing Serbian could be categorized as instrumentality with a prevention focus, as in case of failure, unexpected consequences such as potential unemployment or the lack of promotion in the work place might follow (see similar findings in the case of Kim's 2009 study, p. 62).

The mean of the Learning experience scale is the lowest among the three scales (2.90). This reflects that learners do not really enjoy Serbian language classes and also that there are controversies in the majority language teaching to the Hungarian linguistic minority in Vojvodina. The basic needs to teach the state language are not met; both teaching methodologies and the lessons' content are inadequate, which has also been echoed by a recent study (Videsott et al. 2009). Respondents' comments support the quantitative results since all of them share a negative attitude towards the course book; they consider it old, boring, old-fashioned and they also resent that it is full of archaic literary texts and extracts written in Cyrillic.

In spite of the fact that students in general do not really enjoy Serbian classes, the quantitative results showed a 3.90 average score for motivated learning behaviour

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which could be the result of an increasing parental support and encouragement that can be traced in the respondents' comments as well. All of the students in the interview reported on a strong and recurring parental encouragement which undeniably plays an important role in shaping and constituting the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of the learners towards learning Serbian.

Still, the interview data suggest that students' language use outside the classroom is mostly limited to short, screenplay-like conversations with native speakers at school or bus stations, for instance. Consequently, the infrequent contact with L2 speakers might account for lower self-confidence and higher levels of anxiety when using the language (see Appendix 1. where the mean of Language Use Anxiety scale is 3.14). On the bases of the answers in the interview, it appears that most of the informants have frequent bad experiences when using the language:

*Until the third grade of secondary school I was full of complexes and I was hung up when speaking in Serbian mostly because I was laughed at by Serbian girls at my school. I did not really like to speak at all...but lately, something has been changed in me. I decided that I won't bother myself if I say something incorrectly as I speak much better Serbian than a Serb speaks Hungarian (hardly at all), anyway. (respondent 5)*

Despite this, it is worth mentioning that more frequent contact with L2 speakers in itself is not enough to motivate students to learn and use the language more frequently, especially as the interview data pinpointed that the respondents have fairly negative attitudes to L2 native speakers – indicating the lack of the construct of 'integrativeness' as suggested by Dörnyei (2005). The lack of the desire to identify with Serbian people and their culture was often mentioned in the interviews. The students reported that although obviously there are various differences in the mentality between Serbians and Hungarians, there is one thing they cannot accept and this is nationalism. As one of the respondents briefly put it: "I do not want to overgeneralize, but nationalism is present, one can feel it from time to time, it's all around us..." The interviewed students mentioned several cases at school or at hospital (where they go weekly or monthly for vocational training) when they felt Serbian students or nurses behaving as superior and displaying their dominance. These minor and major affronts when witnessing negative discrimination on ethnic basis could also contribute to minority students' reluctance to learn the state language as well as suggests that communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries is rather limited. Though evidently there are exceptions and counter examples, the social practice of multilingualism does not necessary foster social cohesion as seen in this context.

### **The English motivational profile**

As for English, the mean value on the Ideal L2 Self scale reached 3.76, which suggests that learners attribute a relatively important role to the English language in their future, in contrast to Serbian, to which they attribute a significantly smaller role. The interviews confirmed that although most of the respondents have various short-term goals (mainly instrumental ones such as getting good grades or passing the

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language exam in order to gain extra points on the entrance exam at university) they don't have – except for developing proficiency – stable long-term views concerning how the knowledge of English is going to be useful in their future career. The following quote from a first-year student (respondent 4) stands as an illustration:

*Well, in the future maybe I would like to work as a doctor in a health institution somewhere abroad, for example in England or Sweden. As a good knowledge of English is a requirement I would really like to become a competent speaker... But to be honest, this future plan seems to be so distant right now that I learn English just for the grade... I know that I have to change something radically if I want to become a good English speaker.*

Surprisingly, and in contrast with my assumptions, cultural interest had the lowest coefficient, .67 and a mean score of 2.93, suggesting that Hungarian minority students – in contrast to Hungarian teenagers of Hungary (Kormos and Csizér, 2007) – are not specifically interested in music, films and magazines of the English speaking world. Similarly, the findings of the interview study suggested that 'integrativeness' (identification with values associated with the L2 community and the language) are also not intensely part of their motivational profile. Though they have quite positive attitude to the language itself (more specifically to the British accent) – which they consider attractive – the interviewed participants do not have strong integrative orientation.

However what do play a significant role are attitudes towards learning English (3.14), their learning experience (4.14) and motivated learning behaviour (3.60). In addition, in the interview study, international posture emerged as one of the most significant motivating factors. Five students out of six explicitly stated that they would like to acquire English because English is an international language and a common language to people who have different mother tongues. As one of the respondents said "I am attracted to English, because it is a window to the world, I can speak to anyone in English wherever I go."

Interestingly enough, the mean of the learning experience scale is the highest among all the scales with 4.14 (in contrast to that of Serbian, where the mean was 2.90). As learning the first foreign language for minority learners take place mainly at the school where they study, the impact of the learning environment leaves its mark on the attitude towards learning and the effort they are ready to undertake to master English. In spite of the fact that the quantitative analyses indicate that learners do enjoy English language classes, which is also reflected in the relatively high motivational intensity (3.60), the interviews only partially confirmed the findings of the questionnaire study. Though it was generally true of all the participants that they do enjoy English classes at school, they were mainly dissatisfied with the low number of language classes (2 classes per week) and the low proficiency level of most of their classmates and sometimes themselves. In addition, students complained that they have few opportunities to use the language in the classroom, mainly due to the fact that they are learning in large groups (often including 30 or more students) The answers of some respondents can also lead to the conclusion that somehow they wish to gain the language competence

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from the school in a direct way; they shift the responsibility for learning to the teacher and the lessons, as noted elsewhere “students expect to be taught rather than taking an active role in learning” (Kormos et.al. In press), which indicates a low level of learner autonomy.

### Implications

In this paper I investigated the Serbian and the English language learning motivational profile of a particular population, that of Hungarian minority secondary school students. From the results discussed above, concerning the Serbian language first, it can be concluded that although there is a moderately strong Ideal L2 Self image existing in the learners’ perception of their future, it most probably might be affected and influenced by the parents and perhaps by their viewpoints and attitudinal dispositions. The study reveals that students are very often reluctant to study the state language, mostly because they have frequent bad experiences when using Serbian, therefore the actual language competence of the students is rather poor, which also points to the problem in majority language teaching to minority students.

The results concerning the English language indicate that even if students attach a great importance to the international role of English and are aware of the fact that a good knowledge of English is required to be successful in their future careers they do not invest sufficient energy in studying outside the classroom. The interview data also suggest that the students somehow wish to gain the language competence from the school in a direct way, without taking an active role in learning. Consequently, the findings concerning the discrepancy of the positive motivational characteristics and the low level of English proficiency of the students not only highlight that the overall quality of instruction, course materials and classroom learning conditions are necessary, but also that students have to learn how to become more autonomous learners, for instance by widening their intercultural experiences.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Serbian quantitative data

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ideal L2 Self	50	4.40	0.76
Ought-to L2 Self	50	3.80	0.59
Learning Experience	50	2.90	0.68
Motivated Learning Behaviour	50	3.90	0.74
Direct Contact with L2 Speakers	50	2.43	0.94
Cultural Interest	50	2.97	0.85
Parental Encouragement	50	4.47	0.56
Attitudes towards learning Serbian	50	2.87	1.03
Language Use Anxiety	50	3.14	1.02
Valid N (listwise)	50		

Mean and standard deviation of the scales concerning  
Serbian included in the questionnaire

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## Appendix 2. English quantitative data

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ideal L2 Self	50	3.76	0.88
Ought-to L2 Self	50	3.21	0.58
Learning Experience	50	4.14	0.62
Motivated Learning Behaviour	50	3.60	0.88
Direct Contact with L3 Speakers	50	1.53	.059
Cultural Interest	50	2.93	0.58
Parental Encouragement	50	3.98	0.89
Attitudes Toward Learning English	50	3.14	1.06
Language Use Anxiety	50	3.51	0.94
Valid N (listwise)	50		

Mean and standard deviation of the scales concerning English included in the questionnaire.

### Összefoglaló

A jelen, kvantitatív és kvalitatív adatgyűjtési technikákat ötvöző kutatásban arra a kérdésre keresem a választ (felhasználva Dörnyei elméleti megközelítésmódját), milyen dimenziók mentén írható le a vajdasági magyar középiskolás diákok nyelvtanulási motivációs profilja az angol és a szerb nyelv esetében, illetve foglalkozom az ezt meghatározó tényezők feltárásával is.

**Kulcsszavak:** motiváció, nyelvi attitűdök, többnyelvűség.

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