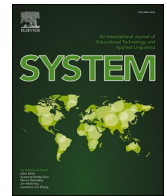




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Tracing the dynamics of motivational self-constructs across the lifespan: Tales from senior learners of English

Berenice Darnault^{a,*}, Elsa Tragant^a, David Lasagabaster^b

^a University of Barcelona, Faculty of Philology and Communication, Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 585, 08007, Barcelona, Spain

^b University of the Basque Country, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Philology, Paseo de la Universidad 5, 01004, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

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ABSTRACT

In the context of an ageing and increasingly more independent learning population, a narrative inquiry into the life stories of motivated and still active senior language users remains a promising yet unexplored area. This case study forms part of a PhD research (Darnault, 2023) on the motivational dynamics of lifelong foreign language learning (FLL) individuals. We recorded the retrospective stories of 3 exceptionally motivated French senior learners of English, aged 65 to 80, from childhood to their current learning experience. Our triangulated and multimodal approach elicited written, oral and visual data. An inductive thematic analysis first highlighted the emergence of motivational peaks, subsequently followed by the examination of clusters of self-constructs within participants' individual time frames in light of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework. Results showed that upon retirement all three learners integrated language learning into their daily routine, incorporating it as an integral part of their identity and broader sense of self outside L2 domain-specific motivational constructs. A particularly unyielding hybrid L2 self emerged in later years, drawing from the combination of ought-to, ideal and anti-ought-to selves that prevailed with different degrees of intensity and interaction according to life periods.

1. Introduction

Thanks to healthier lifestyles and advancements in medical care, retirees are now enjoying increased physical and cognitive fitness, enabling them to nurture and express an entirely new social narrative about themselves; one that is liberated from professional commitments and has minimal family responsibilities (van Kampen et al., 2023). This involves increased opportunities to choose how to spend their time, including learning new skills and improving existing ones. Shifts in social dynamics also extend to the field of foreign language learning (FLL), whose socialising and recreational impact (Oxford, 2018) need to be examined in relation to identity and the merging of self-constructs across the years. Relatedly, in mature learning communities, there is a striking feature of storytelling that involves taking into account the accumulative experiences and motivational idiosyncrasies that contribute to the growth of a life capital (Consoli, 2021a). This notion is particularly relevant for those who have actively pursued long-term language learning, and whose richness of life can provide valuable insights into motivational behaviours and interacting patterns.

Derenowski (2021) argues that the field of second language acquisition (SLA) typically examines three main groups: young learners, adolescents, and adults, even though research has primarily focused on young adults, specifically in the area of FLL

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: berenice.darnault@cantab.net (B. Darnault), tragant@ub.edu (E. Tragant), david.lasagabaster@ehu.es (D. Lasagabaster).

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motivation (Cox, 2019; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2019). In contrast, this study focuses on the third age, which covers the period beginning in the pre-retirement phase, and more generally refers to post-retirement life, which, depending on the country and professional trajectory, can extend over 20–30 years of one’s existence. In the context of this study, third agers are “healthy, motivated individuals” (Oxford, 2018, p. 3) over 60, who are either pre-retired, i.e., no longer working full-time, or fully retired.

Today, there is a renewed interest in the field to combat vernacular representations and negative stereotypes of ageing (Cox, 2019; Gabryś-Barker, 2018; Ramscar et al., 2014), and to conduct research with a more conciliatory view that encompasses the beneficial role of experience (Muñoz, 2019) in the process of FLL and lifelong self-instruction at a later stage in life. In other words, SLA studies on third age are turning away from the orthodox focus on the cognitive and physical degenerations related to this period to focus on agency and self-directedness instead (Gilleard & Higgs, 2010). In practice, new insights into third age experience in FLL has led recent studies to consider how, why, and what they learn (Amer et al., 2016; Hartshorne & Germine, 2015; Ramírez Gómez, 2016) rather than what, how and why they fail to learn (Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017).

Research on FLL in the third age remains limited, primarily due to a lack of specific teaching methodology and training (Derenowski, 2018; Pawlak et al., 2018). The few empirical studies so far have limited research to formal FLL education among senior students from the Universities of the Third Age across the world (e.g., the corpus of studies presented by Formosa, 2019), dismissing third age FLL outside institutional structures. This study aims to fill in the gap in the age-research agenda and understand FLL in the third age through the retrospective accounts and personal perceptions of motivated older learners in light of their own timelines.

2. FLL motivation research through qualitative perspectives

2.1. Theoretical foundations of FLL motivation

Traditionally rooted in the field of “individual difference” (ID) research, motivation is a multifaceted and complex mental process that is intricately connected to learning and context, and refers to the driving force behind the reasons, goals, and purposes that individuals have for engaging in a specific course of action (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Although there is often a lack of consensus regarding its conceptual range, FLL motivation is commonly understood as a cyclical process of experiential accumulation (de Bot et al., 2007) that should be explored longitudinally and in dynamic terms, with its historical variability and situatedness. Long regarded as the dominant theoretical framework in SLA (Boo et al., 2015; Liu, 2024; Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2022), Dörnyei’s (2005) groundbreaking second language (L2) Motivational Self System (L2MSS) model departs from Markus & Nurius’s Possible Selves parent theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and offers a comprehensive understanding of motivation in FLL (Csizér, 2019). The framework informs how self-concept and its related learning context contribute in directing long-term motivational behaviour.

Three core facets traditionally constitute the L2MSS, namely the ideal L2 self, based on internal wishes, the ought-to L2, based on external pressures, and the L2 learning experience, which encompasses “the immediate learning environment” (Csizér, 2019, p. 73). While the ideal and ought-to L2 selves have garnered significant research attention, the language experience component has been largely overlooked (Csizér & Kálmán, 2019; Thompson & Vásquez, 2015) due to conceptual confusion (Csizér, 2019; You et al., 2016). The present study considers the language experience as the accumulated experiential processes of FLL over life, involving both positive and negative attitudes towards FLL within specific contexts.

2.2. Expansions and contemporary trends in the L2MSS framework

Since its introduction in 2005, the L2MSS framework has received a wide range of interpretations and extensions (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Notably, Thompson, 2017 adds a new dimension to the L2MSS model by introducing the concept of the anti-ought-to self, also referred to as the rebellious self (Lanvers, 2016). This anti-ought-to self is a central aspect of the present study; it draws inspiration from the theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981) and involves individuals actively resisting societal expectations as a source of motivation (Thompson & Vásquez, 2015). Moreover, Dörnyei’s L2MSS framework serves as a springboard for new approaches centred on individual heterogeneity and the ever-evolving nature of self-guides in the learning process over time (Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Henry, 2017). Recent advancements in the field clearly indicate a need to embrace a broader and more integrative perspective that further explores the influences and dynamics of various possible selves, and assesses the degree of synchrony or asynchrony between them. Such analysis is essential for understanding the impact of their interactional patterns over time on long-term motivation.

Lately, the field has welcomed a growth of longitudinal and qualitative research, with increased connections to the Complex and Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST). Recent bibliometric and text network analysis has underscored three emerging trends in this matter: the increased focus on multilingual (rather than language-specific) future self-guides, the revision of the framework’s foundational tenants, and a shift towards a more inclusive approach to learners beyond traditional language learning contexts and populations (Liu, 2024).

In response to those growing trends and research shifts, Wang and Fisher (2023) studied the long-term interplay and impact of Chinese undergraduates’ multilingual selves on their overall motivation in learning Languages other than English (LOTES). Likewise, Zhen et al. (2020) conducted a CDST-driven analysis to capture the dynamic trajectory of the multilingual self-system of English-major students learning L4 Spanish over a period of 1.5 years. The L2MSS framework also triggers ongoing debates and critical appraisals regarding its utility and limitations, including discussions on various aspects such as the labelling, scope, and the clarification of the role and impact of self-guides in conceptualizing L2 motivation as a self-system (Henry & Liu, 2023). For example, there is a call to expand further the interpersonal experiences and influences that are related to social and societal contexts rather than to

preferred/desired end states, and which sometimes serve as more prominent reference points for self-appraisal than a self-based framework.

Overall, the L2MSS framework welcomes a holistic view on FLL motivation, while offering an expansive and adaptable model that keeps fostering active engagement, differing interpretations and an overall constructive debate from scholars of all methodological traditions, precisely situating this study in a particularly dynamic academic discourse that faces ongoing phenomenological challenges.

2.3. The role of narrative techniques in understanding FLL motivation

Exploring the interplay and power relations of ideal/ought-to L2 selves in still active senior learners can probably be best captured through a “wine and conversation” approach, as Ushioda coins it (Ushioda, 2020, p. 198), in other words, through a narrative paradigm. In addition to highlighting individual subjective realities and self-perceptions (van Kampen et al., 2023), one of the strengths of narrative inquiry is to bring SLA research beyond the borders of pre-defined learning spaces (i.e., outside classrooms in the case of this research) (Benson, 2021).

The use of narrative techniques to investigate lifelong FLL trajectories from the perspective of older learners’ self-accounts and visual representations is very much in its infancy. Recent years have seen small-scale studies on third age FLL strategies involving partial narrative content, in the written form, collected from in-class based senior students, and elicited through open-ended questionnaires (i.e., Pawlak et al., 2018). On a larger scale, yet still in the context of a classroom-based study, Grotek (2018) also employed a qualitative analysis of narratives produced by a group of 87 senior students learning EFL at one of the Universities of the Third Age in Poland. However, those studies from the field of SLA and third age using narrative data predominantly focused on the ongoing experience of senior FL users, dismissing past practices.

Likewise, the narrative turn saw the rise of multimodal narrative studies in recent years, with a growing trend on the use of visual instruments (Kalaja et al., 2008a), such as metaphorical drawings to represent motivational perceptions, in the form of trees, pyramids, stairs or homes (Melo-Pfeifer and Chik, 2022). However, those studies, which also used photos, primarily focused on detecting aspects and representations of the multilingual self before the third age, thus overlooking this period as a significant identity shaper. The present study aligns with the research needs in the field to offer a comprehensive understanding and longitudinal examination of older learners’ FLL trajectories by combining narrative inquiry and multimodality to shed light on the dynamics of past, present and future selves of FL senior users.

3. Research question

This corpus of studies encourages to address the dearth of empirical work in narrative gerontology (Harvey, 2017) and the niche to study FLL motivation in a longitudinal and retrospective fashion (Gabrys-Barker, 2018). Previous work also makes it opportune to further reciprocate a multimodal approach within the context of older learners in an attempt to reflect upon the dynamic and multileveled layers of motivational profiles. Specifically, this article is a case study with a central focus on the L2MSS framework aimed at exploring the development, progression and ‘strength’ of L2 selves from a lifelong perspective and examining the following research question:

How is the trajectory of interacting motivational self-constructs expressed in the life accounts of three motivated and still active senior L2 users?

4. Methodology

4.1. Research team and reflexivity

The three co-authors (hereinafter referred to as we) involved in the study conceived the research design as an interview-based investigation, shaped by complementary expertise and a strong emphasis on reflexivity and transparency. Our team included a primary investigator/lead researcher (later referred to as PI for Primary Investigator), who was a doctoral student and who conducted the data collection in France, and their two supervisors, based in two separate Spanish universities, who monitored the procedures remotely. While the PI had been gaining familiarity with teaching and working with senior learners for several years prior to transiting to research, each supervisor possessed extensive experience researching long-term motivation through longitudinal and qualitative methods.

Incorporating reflexivity into our research (Consoli, 2021b), we strayed from the conventional division between ‘us’ as researchers and academics, and ‘them’ as language learners and users. This departure was inspired by our personal affordances and experiences, which played a significant role in shaping our understanding. As multilingual learners who had also participated in various language exchange discussion groups (Polo-Pérez, 2023), we were able to draw from our own encounters and interactions to engage rather intuitively with the concept of café groups. In particular, our connections with retired relatives and friends who had either engaged in social language exchange settings similar to café language groups, or decided to devote much of their time into learning or practising new activities upon retirement, further influenced our perspectives. By embracing these personal experiences and fostering ongoing feedback dialogues (Gillway & Santiago Sanchez, 2023), our research took on a more nuanced, dialogistic and comprehensive approach of the phenomenon at hand that we recognized extended beyond local boundaries, revealing a larger constellation of individuals.

4.2. Participants

This narrative-focused case-study draws its sampling procedure from previously used sampling methods with similar size sample, namely the Historically Structured Sampling (HSS) (Valsiner & Sato, 2006), and the Snowball Sampling method (SSM). The HSS consists in selecting a small pool of participants, usually ranging between 1 and 9 participants (Aoyama & Yamamoto, 2021), who have moved through a “common temporary state” (Valsiner & Sato, 2006, p. 215), also known as the “equifinality point”. In this study, the three participants were motivated and still active French native learners of English aged between 65 and 80 years old, who commonly participated in regular language conversation exchange during coffee meetings in Nice (France).

Participants are referred to by pseudonyms in the order of encounter with the lead researcher: Georges, aged 71, from Saint-Laurent-du-Var, was a former English student of the PI met in 2017. Based on his relational network, Georges introduced the PI to his friend and FLL peer Josette, aged 80, from Nice, whom the PI initially spoke to over the phone in late 2020 due to Covid restrictions, and met in person in 2021. Patricia, aged 65, also from Nice, was introduced via email by Josette and met the PI in 2021.

In purposefully selecting 3 highly motivated learners to obtain rich, varied data, we also carefully considered several other factors. Firstly, the rarity of the data compelled us to focus on a small but valuable sample with highly similar characteristics at the moment they were interviewed. Additionally, these three senior learners not only shared a lifelong experience with L2 practice but also demonstrated ongoing engagement in foreign language learning. This active involvement and motivation enabled them to actively participate in the study and provide valuable insights, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their experiences exacerbated through long-term engagement (Hiver & Papi, 2019). Given the substantial amount of data and the rigorous qualitative analysis required for each participant, assessing a small sample enabled us to avoid compromising the depth of our analysis and the description of the diversity of their life trajectories (Aoyama & Yamamoto, 2021).

4.3. Instruments

Primary data was collected by means of two semi-structured retrospective interviews. Participants were given a prompt with some weeks to prepare a few notes before the first interview. Instructions encouraged them to tell their language story in a chronological order (Appendix A), with no particular prompting of the motivation theme on the part of the interviewer. However, indications suggested to divide their life story into “periods (e.g., childhood, teenagerhood, adulthood)”, and think about key aspects and milestones (e.g., trips, events) related to FLL and the associated feelings.

A triangulated and multimodal approach was adopted through the use of secondary instruments, which served both as prompts to elicit more detailed recalls and as objects of analysis. Participants’ use of photos of their travels abroad and native friends, fiction books and language textbooks, letters, and academic records, helped them express new anecdotes related to their learning experience during the interviews. The inclusion of visuals and items proved to be helpful in situations where the participants did not have sufficient precision, thus efficiently compensating for this limitation.

Other prompting strategies involved providing participants with a blank motivational graph, inspired from Choi and Slaughter’s (2021) grid, on which they were invited to map out the level of their motivation over the years, by drawing a line, as a way to visualise the way they perceived their FLL motivational evolution. The vertical axis indicated their motivation intensity and strength of engagement, on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, while the horizontal axis represented their age, from 0 to 80 years old. A final structured follow-up questionnaire composed of eleven questions (Appendix B) was sent by email to them before the second interview to capture additional comments on their personality and specific use and context of learning.

4.4. Procedures

Both interviews took place in informal environments, at local cafés, reproducing participants’ usual learning contexts and positioning them in socialising spaces they were familiar with. The first interview, conducted in English at the participants’ preference, lasted 1 h and 17 min for Georges, 2 h and 9 min for Josette, and 1 h and 7 min for Patricia. The second interview was completed in French, the participants’ mother tongue, and lasted 1 h and 19 min for Georges, 1 h and 46 min for Josette and 50 min for Patricia. The second interview was a follow-up session focused on clarifying specific elements from the first interview, specifically focused on their motivational peaks. To visually capture the essence of their stories, our PI encouraged them to complete a drawing of a motivational tree, with the initial framework already sketched by our PI. This exercise aimed to showcase their lifelong journey with FLL, starting from its roots (representing its origins) and extending to the branches, symbolising the numerous impactful experiences and outcomes they had encountered along the way.

4.5. Ethics

In our effort to uphold ethical considerations and safeguard privacy, each of the three participants received a consent form prior to data collection so as to confirm their agreement for publishing personal information and items, while acknowledging that identifying information would be stored separately (Miles et al., 2020). The research supervisor obtained approval from their institution’s Bioethics Commission (Appendix C), confirming that the study adhered to the necessary ethical standards and was conducted with a strong sense of social responsibility. This validation ensured that the research was carried out in a manner that prioritised ethical considerations and upheld the welfare of the participants involved.

We ensured transparency and participant involvement by allowing a significant amount of time for participants to actively engage

with the research process. Following the completion of Interview 1, a period of 6–8 weeks was allocated for reflection and communication with our participants. The latter were encouraged to use their preferred communication channels, such as emails or WhatsApp (through voice recorded messages), to exchange thoughts and clarifications regarding the transcription process and the initial analysis of their narratives. During this period, participants were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the summary of their narratives, which was created as part of our analysis. They had the freedom to amend, correct, or add any missing information to ensure accuracy and completeness. Two out of the three participants were particularly active in this process, actively engaging in ongoing discussions and providing valuable insights. The third participant, who was still working and had limited availability, was less involved between the interviews but still contributed to the follow-up process. After the completion of Interview 2, an additional period of 4–7 weeks was allocated for further follow-up. Although this period was less busy than the initial follow-up period, it allowed participants to provide any additional thoughts or reflections related to the research. Overall, this extended timeframe for participant engagement and input allowed for a collaborative and iterative research process, ensuring their optimal involvement (Horneberger, 2006) and contributing to the rigour of the study.

Seeking participants' permission, revision and validation in as many aspects of our investigation as possible, both during and between interviews was a constant concern to us, and our ethics reciprocated the practice of previous studies (Umino & Benson, 2016). Specifically, when it came to photographs, participants were personally involved in the selection and provision of images they had captured themselves, sometimes dating back several decades. We also requested that they provided input during data analysis and interpretation so as to maximise the credibility of their accounts. Overall, the items-elicitation methods we used yielded rich narrative data and encouraged participants' engagement with their stories in the first interview while enabling them to develop their own personal interpretation in the second interview.

4.6. Coding and analytical steps

The overall audio-recorded narrative data draw on the same datasets that were used in the PhD of the PI (Darnault, 2023) and examined in light of a CDST-driven analytical framework. CDST offers a comprehensive perspective on enduring motivation by considering the dynamic nature, emergence, and layers of interactions within a system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and adequately dovetails with our objective of examining the trajectory of motivational self-constructs (Wang & Fisher, 2023; Zhen et al., 2020).

All the data collected was stored and ordered under two labels: the Non-Informative Group (NIG) and the Primary Information Group (PIG). The NIG included phone text messages, phone calls, email exchanges with the lead researcher, and any confidential elements or parts of the narratives that participants wished to keep private but agreed to be collected and stored. These data were excluded from our analyses. On the other hand, the PIG consisted of all other personal items for which we received explicit permission to disclose. Appendix D is a summary of the data gathered for each participant excluding their respective motivational graph, filled in questionnaire and tree drawing, and organised in nature of items, number of items and transcribed words for both interviews.

Following existing narrative coding procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Mann, 2016), we adopted a two-step coding approach. First, we employed an inductive thematic analysis by allowing the topic of periodical intense FLL activities and specific sequences related to participants' motivation to emerge organically from the stories. We compared those thematic groups and related quotes to identify overarching themes that captured the experience with lifelong FLL.

We then conducted a deductive thematic analysis as a second step to explore the prevalence and interactions of specific motivational self-constructs within participants' personally-defined time frame. This second analytical phase contained a combination of content and thematic analyses by which we associated sets of adjectives and words used in the narratives and ideas conveyed in the latter to a category of L2 selves and its conceptual underpinnings (e.g., the ideal L2 self would be linked to ideas/words related wishes and visions, the ought-to L2 self to obligations and commitments, often detected in stark opposition to the anti-ought L2 self, revealed through the description of rebellious actions or use of reactance-ingrained comments).

For the purpose of this article, we drew from a similar analytical structure previously used by Thompson and Vásquez (2015), and re-wrote each transcribed story into a thumbnail biographical sketch, which follows participants' respective idiosyncratic life watersheds and experience with FLL. Following academic guidelines from narrative experts (Consoli, 2021b), we have displayed the more detailed narratives in Appendices E, F and G for Georges, Josette and Patricia, respectively. Findings below explore their respective distinct sets of historical circumstances, drawing from the origins of FLL motivation to its present expression and remit in light of the two key components of the L2MSS framework, namely ideal/ought-to L2 selves, and a possible additional self, the anti-ought to L2 self.

5. Results

5.1. Georges

5.1.1. Introduction to Georges's motivational self system

Georges' early self-constructs and traits, influenced by his family and natural predispositions play a significant role in shaping a robust and diverse motivational self system. When considering this system longitudinally and over the span of a lifetime, it becomes evident that it encompasses not only the specific domain of L2 learning and use (or L2MSS) but also a broader motivational self system. The latter, that we decided to refer to as the General Motivational Self System (GMSS), represents the collection of possible selves that the learner held throughout the years, beyond just language learning. In this case, it encompasses the various self-perceptions, aspirations, and motivations that have influenced Georges' behaviour and choices in different domains of his life, including personal,

academic, and professional dimensions. This concept has not been previously used in the literature to correlate motivation in language learning with broader life motivations. By recognizing the existence of the GMSS alongside the L2MSS, we acknowledge that Georges' motivational orientations are not solely confined to language learning but are interconnected with his broader sense of self and aspirations.

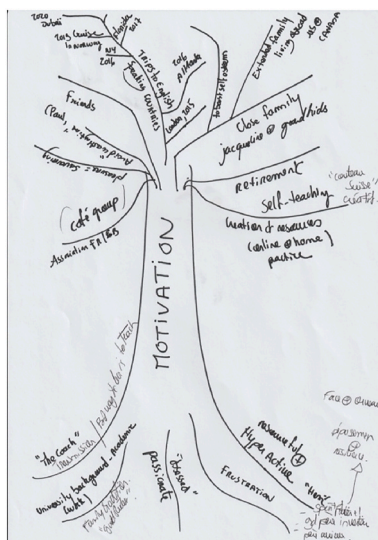
Fig. 1 summarizes the transformative process of Georges' self system and the interaction between the GMSS and the L2MSS. We divided the timeline into three separate periods, namely (1) childhood/early adulthood, i.e., covering the period from birth to the university years; (2) adulthood, i.e., professional life, and (3) pre-retirement to third age, including the current phase Georges is now experiencing. Beneath the timeline, there are two layers of motivational self-constructs. The first one (in the square box) refers to the GMSS, i.e., the main motivational self-concepts that are understood from the narrative outside the sphere of L2 learning and use. The second one (in the round box) refers to the L2MSS, which includes the self-concepts in relation to L2 motivation only. Results underscored the parallel impact and mutually reinforcing power of both sets of self-constructs.

5.1.2. Early influences and self-perceptions

Georges describes his social farmer background as a space of discomfort, especially when moving to town and experiencing a gap: "kid from the farm, we get to the city, I didn't feel legitimate about this stuff. It seemed too much to me ... Too much not of my background". He transposes his "complex" of inferiority, as he names it, and feeling of illegitimacy to his own vision of himself as a learner of foreign languages, which he believes is not innate: "I think I learn math more easily than languages, eh. That's my hunch, isn't it?". Childhood thus introduces a very weak ideal self, both generally and within the context of FLL, which interacts with strong ought-to imperatives from parents to remain at the farm.

In reaction to those expectations, a clear psychological reactance emerges, for Georges rapidly moves himself away from his initial social background and leaves the countryside, opposing both his parents and older brother who, contrary to Georges, decides to remain and work there. Georges' detachment from his family and from his predestined work life is described as an early wish for independence, which takes root in his family's traditional fondness for autonomy, as Georges narrates, "the gene of autonomy runs in the family". In parallel, despite his natural abilities for science subjects, a similar anti-ought to L2 self operates in that he becomes "obsessed" with learning English as a young adult, as indicated in the roots of his motivational tree drawing (Item 1, bottom middle), and further adds, "I had this kind of thing in my head, the desire to learn English that was dragging me somewhere". Because of his adult career commitments and ideal self focused on sports, Georges took his first English course quite late in his life, one year before retirement, thus postponing a strong ideal L2 self later in life.

5.1.2.1. Item 1. Georges' motivational tree drawing.

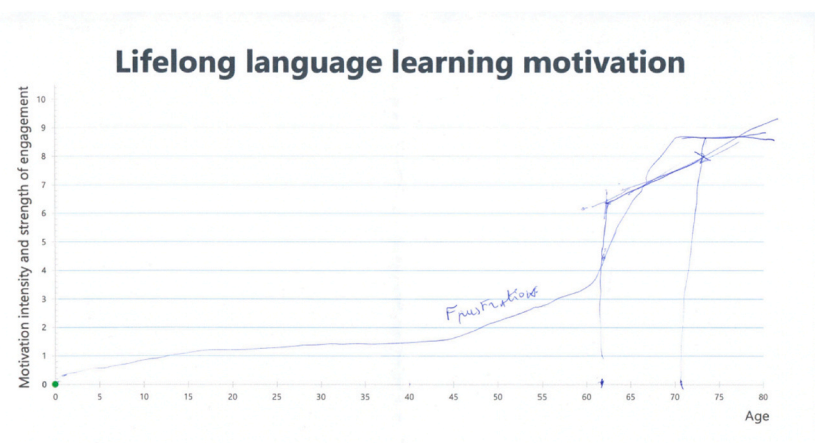


5.1.3. Adulthood and evolving motivations

In adulthood, a strong ought-to-self emerges with Georges' related family commitments and inner obligations, together with external requirements from his work life as a university sports teacher and family expectations. His family trip to the UK in the early 1990s both triggers the reaction of his ought-to self (i.e., as "the father figure", be able to handle a conversation in a foreign language and understand driving regulations in a foreign country), and the concomitant emergence of ideal and ought-to L2 selves, nurtured by the desire and duty to be understood in English when travelling abroad with his family. Because he does not feel any "transfer", as he names it, with any native speaker or a model he could have created an ideal L2 self from, his projected ideal self remains an inner and self-made vision during adulthood.

Conflicting feelings emerge in that Georges's ideal L2 self is also nurtured by high "frustration linked to (his) very poor English skills," as he realizes on his trips to Ireland in 2002 and to Scotland in 2008. Frustration takes "root" in young adulthood, as his drawing shows (Item 1, bottom right hand-side), and is a recurrent deep-seated motivational trigger throughout his narrative, repeated 17 times overall, mainly explained by a lack of "Regulatory Fit" (RF), in Higgins's (2014) own conceptual terms, in other words, a lack of congruence between Georges' high desire to be fluent and the absence/inadequacy of concrete means to achieve this vision. In fact, "frustration", the only word that Georges wrote on his motivational grid (Timeline 1), is the permanent emotional stimulus that shapes a stronger ideal and ought-to L2 self during adulthood.

5.1.3.1. Timeline. Georges' motivational grid.



5.1.4. Transition into retirement and identity crisis

Retirement introduces the premises of a deep identity crisis related to ageing, and causes a shift in his L2MSS, impacted by his GMSS. While Georges does not name this period as a crisis, he uses words like "shock" three times and "cracked down," which clearly convey an idea of rupture and nervously abrupt response to the encounter with his new age group. A clear anti-ought-to self emerges one year before retirement (both in the GMSS and L2MSS), and has maintained ever since close and intertwined connections between the two systems. His decision to study English at a language school one year before retirement at the age of 63 signalled Georges' refusal to be treated and to treat himself as an old person ("I feel young").

From the start, he experiences a clear resistance to social influence. For instance, his definition of old age remains rather elusive throughout the two interviews; the dynamics he feels with younger groups suits his personality better than the one within older groups of people ("I'm more comfortable with young people"). His decision to study English a year before retiring highlights his desire of noncompliance with the age group he now belongs to, as this learning space provides him with a smoother transition from university life to retirement, and helps him remain engaged with a mixed-age group of people, including younger ones.

Excerpt 1

It [socialising with old people] shocked me a little bit ... it's these old people dating things [...] because I was used to a university environment with young people. [A friend of mine] cracked down because we were too many ... We weren't used to these seniors' assemblies.

The anti-ought-to self thus nurtures Georges' ideal general and L2 selves, which builds up in response to the social process of ageing, and eventually consists in mixing up with all age categories ("I like the mix of population, the mix of cultures, of ages"). In essence, the concept of Georges' ideal L2 self involves bridging the gap between younger and older L2 learning communities and integrating diverse language usage practices across generations, irrespective of cultural and social hurdles. By prioritizing his lifelong goals over family obligations without compromising his dedication to raising his grandchildren, Georges has further strengthened his FLL resilience by adapting his activities accordingly.

In his current motivational state, Georges experiences stable and life-absorbing L2 motivation ("I must say that [the period] of my life [in which my passion for English] is the most absorbing is right here, right now, eh. That, it is clear to me," associated to a practice that remains consistently self-concordant and identity-congruent with his passionate nature ("I'm a natural enthusiast ... Besides, I've always been considered that way"). His narrative highlights other aspects of his language experience which forms part of the L2MSS, and most prominently, the various plans, scripts, and self-regulatory strategies (Dörnyei, 2009) he used across the years to become highly proficient in English and, as he describes with imagery, learn like a 'hen' pecking at any material he finds.

5.1.5. Emergence of the hybrid L2 self

In summary, Georges has developed a novel concept that we have chosen to term the "hybrid L2 self" (Fig. 1). This construct is

characterised by a cohesive interaction between the anti-ought-to L2 self, and the ideal L2 self, enabling a complete alignment between his GMSS and L2MSS. This alignment is guided by his pursuit of long-term pleasure and wellbeing (Waterman et al., 2008). Pleasure is indeed particularly acute in his current phase and emerges as an emotional endpoint and life top priority: “I always prioritize my pleasure”. His fulfilled and self-concordant motivational system thus consists in experiencing a life focused on well-being, pleasure and engagement (commitment to his family and friends), and emerges out of a combination of a general anti-ought to self and an ideal L2 self, both inspired from lifelong personal visions. This hybrid L2 self is powerfully experienced and encapsulated in the participant’s own concluding words: “[English] It’s my life. [English] It’s part of my life”. These seemingly contradictory statements suggest a slight ambiguity in the level of intensity Georges positions English in his life. While he suggests that English is the primary focus and central aspect of his life, he also implies that English is just one part among many in his life. This is a clear demonstration of how his hybrid L2 self unifies conflicting views and integrates multiple “selves” into a cohesive whole. Importantly, the concept of the hybrid L2 self has

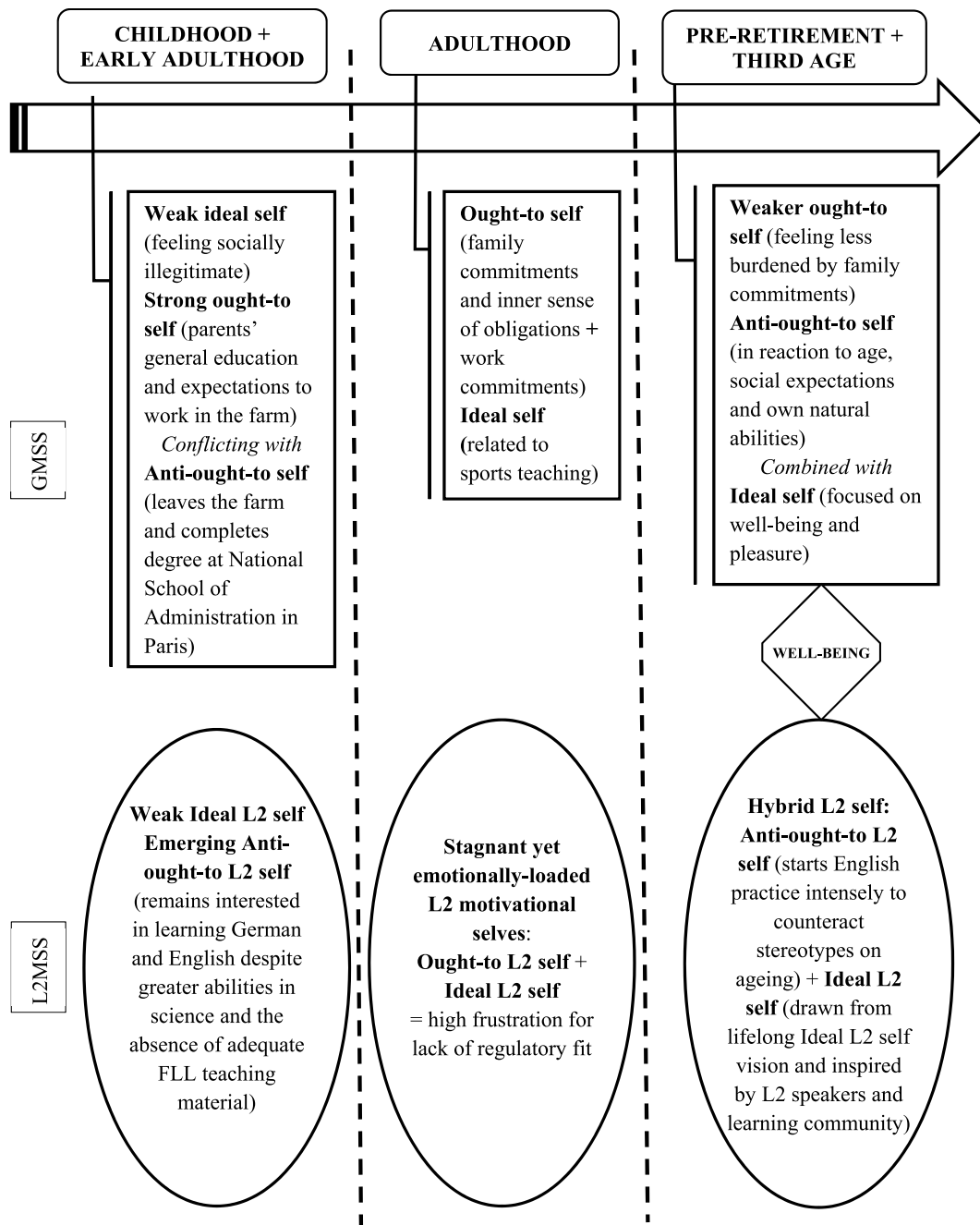


Fig. 1. Evolution of Georges’ motivational selves across life.

not been previously established in the literature. We believe that this innovative framing offers new insights into the complexities of language learning motivation and its relationship with broader motivational constructs.

5.2. Josette

5.2.1. Introduction to Josette’s motivational self-system

As Fig. 2 shows, the L2MSS framework clearly situates Josette’s self-constructs within a well elaborated multi-layered structure, which communicates longitudinally on different levels.

Josette’s ideal and anti-ought-to L2 selves both initially take root in inspiring and adverse family figures, respectively.

5.2.2. Early influences in childhood

In childhood spent between Italy and France during World War II, Josette’s ideal L2 self emerges thanks to the multilingual small group made of her Italian grand-mother and the latter’s two sisters who “spoke French, Italian and Piemonte”¹. They embody a sense of rebellion, independence and freedom, which Josette clearly opposes to the inertia of the surrounding drunk men: “men drank a lot. And they died. But these three ladies were so full of energy”. At this point, Josette seems to associate multilingualism to a greater sense of freedom, positive energy, and independence (her ideal self).

She further describes the emotional gap triggered between two opposite atmospheres and polarized views on gender; her grand-mother’s affectionate tenderness on the one hand (“She was not clever, but very cheerful and very tender. So, the atmosphere was an atmosphere of kindness”), *versus* the cold rigidity of her parents (“At home, it was an atmosphere of duty”) who force her to stay home and impede her from learning anything else than sewing, as depicted in the following excerpt from her personal notes.

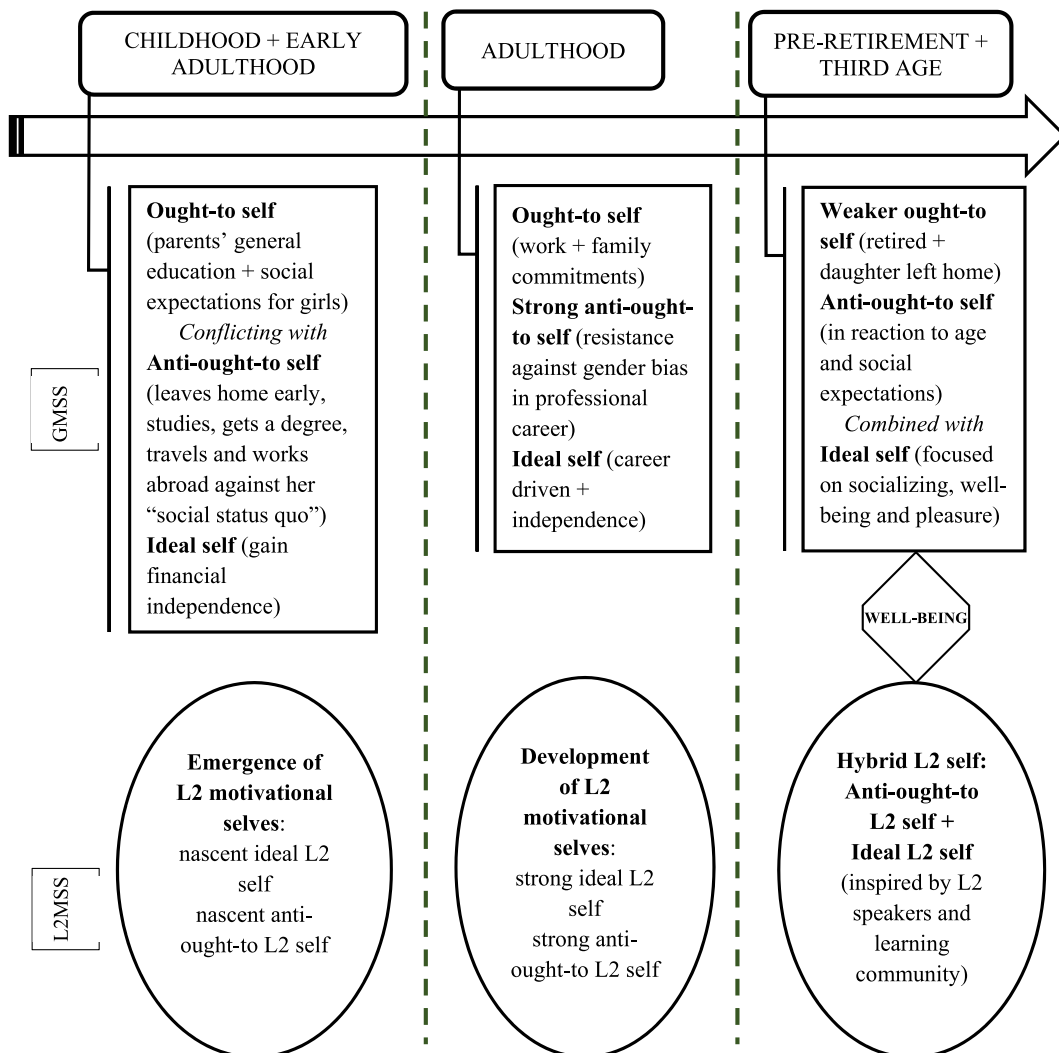


Fig. 2. Evolution of Josette’s motivational selves across life.

Excerpt 2

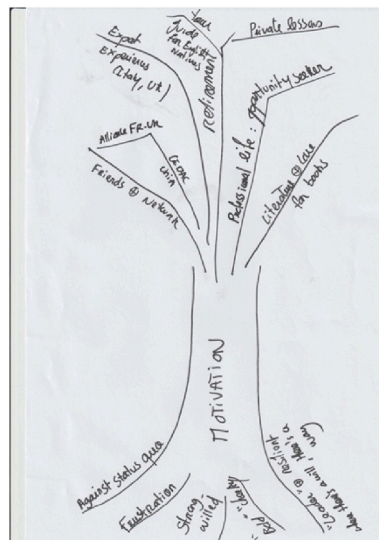
My feeling: terrible sense of unfairness. My brothers were allowed to learn what they wanted: drawing, painting, riding a bike, cycling, skiing, playing the guitar, etc ... Me = sewing and staying at home. Nothing else – My eldest brother was a bully.

This relational – and thus emotional – duality (friendliness *versus* coldness) remains a catalyst in determining the evolution and intermingling of Josette’s motivational selves. In the early years of her life, the people she emotionally connects with (Italian family, British “sunny” strangers, as she calls them in English, on the boat to London, British boyfriend, Italian friends in Naples) help her grow her ideal L2 self, while the ones she opposes (parents, brothers) help her foster her anti-ought-to L2 self. Within her motivational system, distinct layers of selves seem to operate interconnectedly in response to her external environment.

5.2.3. Resistance and emergence of the ideal L2 self

Josette’s projected ideal L2 self begins at an early stage of her life, and thrives on resistance and reactance to social influence, and on the need to restore “threatened or eliminated behaviour” (Miron & Brehm, 2006, p. 10) imposed by a highly patriarchal and stigmatizing society. In the motivational tree that she draws (Item 2), she describes herself as an ambitious, “bold” and “very cheeky” (Item 2, bottom right hand-side) insubordinate young woman looking for freedom (“I wanted freedom”) and independence. Besides one of the visual roots to her motivation, she writes “against status quo” (Item 2 bottom left hand-side). Clearly, growing up in the early 1960s–70s impacts the deployment of her L2 selves inasmuch as it requires an almost survival-like attitude, which involves specific attributes, such as being “strong-willed” (Item 2, bottom middle), self-assertive, loud and articulate (“I had the gift of the gab”).

5.2.3.1. Item 2. Josette’s motivational tree drawing.



As Josette’s story unfolds, we understand from Josette’s narrative that she fought tooth and nail to demonstrate that she could live up to her own and *against* others’ expectations. Her personal notes indicate that her motivation stemmed from a clear desire “not to lose something which was MINE and that I had fought for” (her capitalization). Her decision to learn languages indeed began with a clear desire to take “a revenge for not having had a good education,” and involved disobeying her parents (“without telling them”/“without my parents’ agreement”/“My first rebellion was from 15 to 17–18 years old, hitchhiking everywhere”). Furthermore, her determination to learn English and make the learning *hers* is evident as she explains that being told she could not do like her brothers had the reverse effect in that it motivated her to trace her own pathway and disobey her parents: “My two brothers were allowed everything [...] I was forbidden everything. Okay? [...] So, I cycled and I talked with people with no problem either in Piemonte, or in Italian”. In other words, the strong anti-ought-to self she describes acts as a dynamic conduit, simultaneously nurturing her ideal self and actively feeding into her L2MSS.

5.2.4. Adulthood: peaks of motivation and assertion of identity

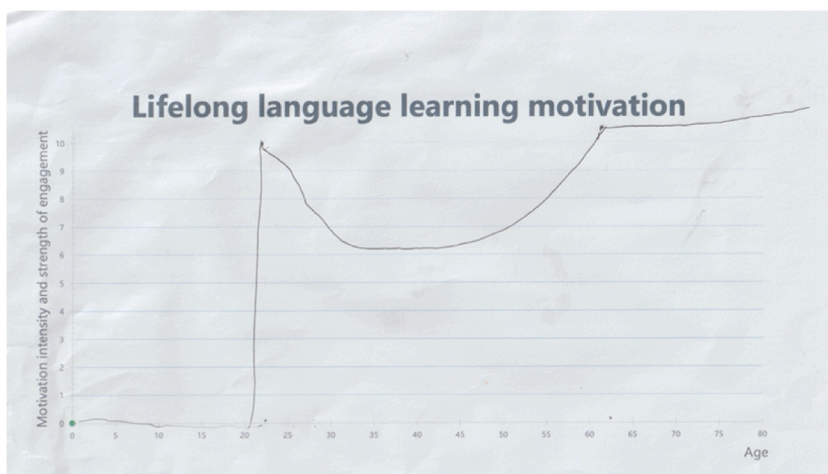
In early adulthood, Josette continuously strengthens her ideal L2 self in the form of psychological reactance – being motivated by doing what others believe is not possible (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). This rebellious attitude follows her throughout her journey in Italy: “French wearing trousers. Oh yes. I didn’t tell you that the first day [in Italy] I was stoned. Because I had trousers. In 1966”. She eloquently describes her opposition to society in one of her letters to Tony (Item 3).

5.2.4.1. Item 3. Excerpt of love letter to Tony, August 12, 1966, p. 5.

missing his opportunity. The responsible one is society, which expects people to live in ridiculous flat, everybody is separated, closed, far from friendship, community. Are we used? Yes, we, the poor one, the people, certainly are. But I ~~think~~ think that this world built by the powerful ones and for them is cunningly built for them. But why do we accept it? We've nothing to do with them, we are against them.

In early adulthood, Josette's overall individuation indeed appears to form its basis on a balanced combination of general and L2 ideal and anti-ought-to selves, and particularly develops during her two highest motivational peaks as she spends 6 months working and studying in London (UK) in 1965, immediately followed by her immersive experience in Naples (Italy) for five months. The visualized representations Josette brings during both interviews, with the photos of her ideal L2 self, the English novels, textbooks, and reading notebook she has kept and still uses in later years, vividly define her ideal FLL self from the start, and the many FLL related "selves" ("different lives") she experiences from her early twenties onwards. As she shows in her motivational grid (Timeline 2), the curve of her motivation in FLL forms a weak dip during her work career at IBM in France, because she does not use foreign languages as often as she wished to. The curve that she draws also indicates that while her mental engagement with FLL still remains high (7/10 at the lowest), her ideal and anti-ought L2 selves are concurrently nurtured with her repeated volunteering to complete any missions with English-speaking clients, and be proudly regarded as the "only English-speaking female" employee of her company, offering her professional promotions and a higher ranking in the work hierarchy, thus nurturing her ideal self.

5.2.4.2. Timeline 2. Josette's motivational grid.



5.2.5. Third age and the hybrid L2 self

In third age, upon the accumulation of motivational selves (both L2 and non L2 related), Josette has reached a deeper sense of L2 self that presents a more balanced and harmonious integration of her prevailing selves, ultimately focused on pragmatism (i.e., with the aim to always learn something new about the English language), self-regulatory fit and well-being, highly grounded on socialising and networking with native speakers.

At present, Josette's language experience integrates self-regulation, by which her beliefs and activities are self-congruent, so much so that the practice "is a realization and expression of the self," (Noels, 2009, p. 298). This idea was already quite clearly articulated from the very beginning of her story and in Josette's own words: "I have summarized who I am. Skiing. Cycling. The mountains, English. In order. Then my daughter plus my lovers. Then my job. All this is me". Josette finds her own way to study and practise, whatever the setting and conditions, and has a remarkable sense of adaptability.

Josette looks for a life equilibrium, especially now that the increase in her practices of English and Italian are largely due to compensating the "void", in her own words, created by the interruptions of physical activities (and the "death" of one ideal self associated to her high-level athlete profile) due to her age. Josette's goals today remain self-concordant and clear ("learning English is a part of ... who I am"), and so is her learning structure ("To summarize: I need a good teacher, a good book, meeting and talking with natives, and reading"). Developed in retrospect of a lifelong use with FLL, her hybrid L2 self is congruent with her values ("when there is a will, there is a way") and lifelong commitments ("all my life, I managed"), and conveys an eudaemonic² emotional tone, which can

be interpreted as a feeling of self-fulfilment.

5.3. Patricia

5.3.1. Introduction to Patricia’s motivational self-system

Since her early childhood, Patricia expresses a rather clear combination of three motivational selves, which clearly develop in parallel to her L2 motivational selves, as Fig. 3 shows.

5.3.2. Early influences and emergence of the ideal L2 self

First, a general ought-to self emerges with the context of being raised up mainly by her mother, after the early death of her father, in a poor social background. Patricia is left with no other choices but to *fight* and succeed through hard work (she writes and underlines the word “hardworking” on the tree roots of her drawing, Item 4, bottom left hand-side), and quickly develops resilience as a survival toolkit to compensate on the absence of her father and the appropriate educational and financial supports. In parallel to this background, the French Eastern region she grows up in provides a limited access to L2 instruction, with the obligation to learn German first

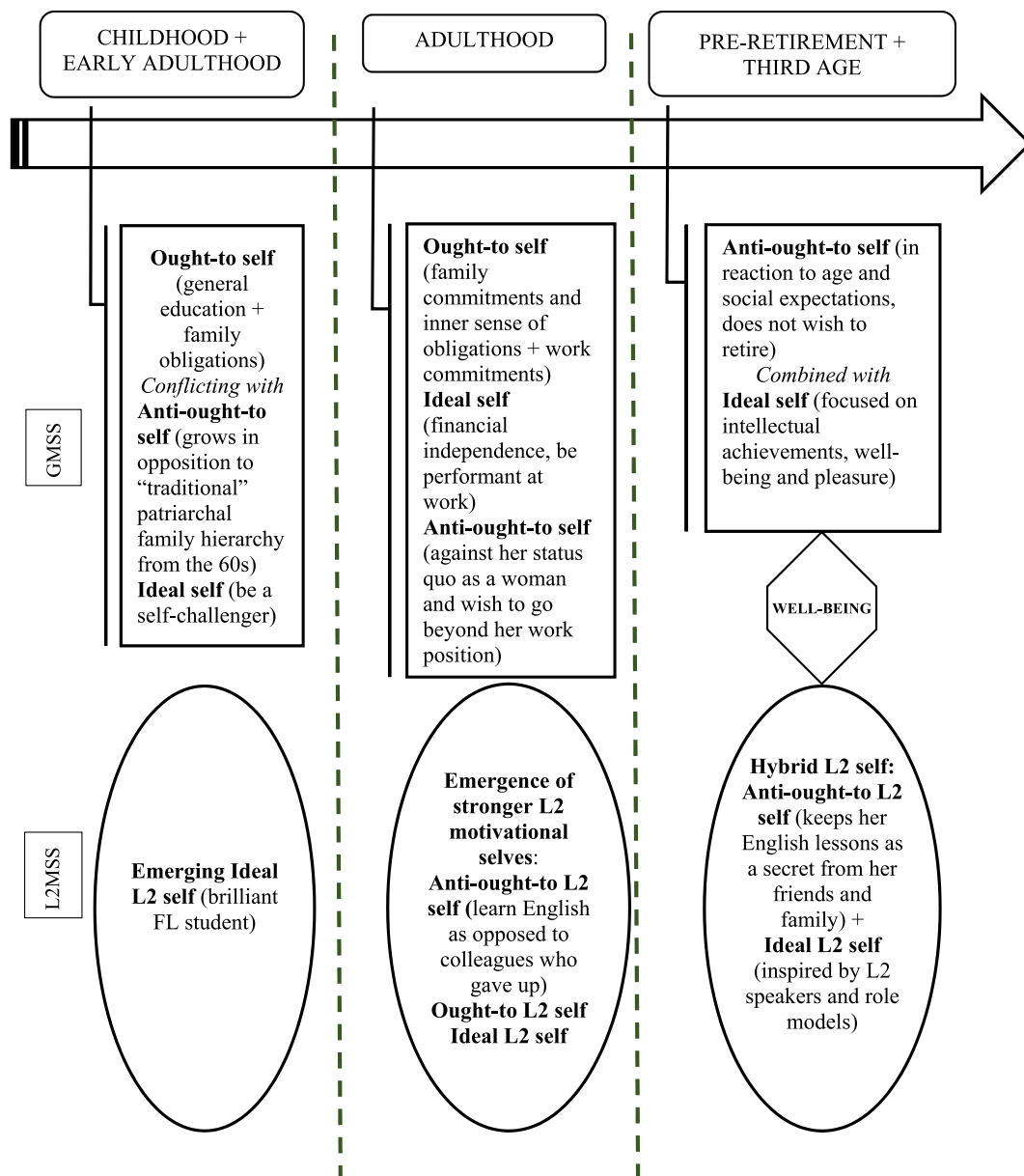
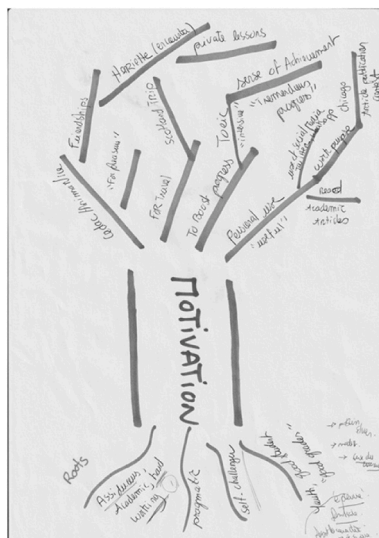


Fig. 3. Evolution of Patricia’s motivational selves across life.

before any other languages: “I learnt German language first. It was ... hum ... we had no choice”. This lack of FL instruction choice – in her eyes –, and the general family obligations she is confronted with from an early age build up her ought-to-self quite early in life.

5.3.2.1. Item 4. Patricia’s motivational tree drawing.



Patricia’s early ought-to-self has a counterpart; the self-determination she develops – she writes the word “self-challenger” in her roots (Item 4, bottom middle) – also helps her create psychological reactance in opposition to other children of her age, including girls. She alludes to the gender issue, albeit very discreetly, and explains that she and her brothers bucked the trend of traditional patriarchal families from the 60s. While families would traditionally differentiate male from female educations, she and her two brothers did the same activities, and were raised up on equal terms due to the family context: “my two brothers and I, we did the same”. Contrary to Georges and Josette, Patricia’s early psychological reactance builds up outside the family cocoon, and is instead supported by her family.

In parallel to her ought-to and anti-ought-to selves in childhood, a projected and ideal L2 identity emerges from the start, which propels her motivation upward (Appendix G). Her initial portrait as a “good student” (Item 4, bottom right hand-side) in her youth involves having “good grades” in every subject (also indicated in Item 4, bottom right hand-side), including English and German. Furthermore, she writes “assiduous” and “academic” in her tree roots (Item 4, bottom left hand-side), which both inform on the emergence of an early ideal L2 self. This particular trait of general ideal self remains across life, as she often repeats in her account how much she enjoys homework because of her “academic” personality, and positively impacts and even merges with her ideal L2 self, since she wishes to be good at all subjects, including languages.

5.3.3. Adulthood and integration of multiple motivational self-constructs

During adulthood, not only Patricia’s GMSS and L2MSS impact one another, blurring the borders between the systems, but also the different layers of selves within each motivational system interact with one another in some sort of a communicating vessel. Patricia both develops a better understanding of her needs and goals as an L2 learner and as a professional radiologist. Overall, she transforms her motivation into an instrumental one. Her sense of “pragmatism” (Item 4, bottom middle) together with her increasing self-acknowledgement through her experience with German make her realize that for her study to be optimal, it needs to be useful at work (“in my job, a lot of equipment came from America, so the operating manual [manuals, sic] are written in English ... so I stopped German courses”). From this growing self-awareness, there persists a strong ought-to L2 self that is related to Patricia’s sense of duty to understand English equipment in order to increase her performance at work. Her ideal L2 self is concordant both with her growing interest for languages and her ideal self, which consists in a lifelong objective to achieve her career successfully.

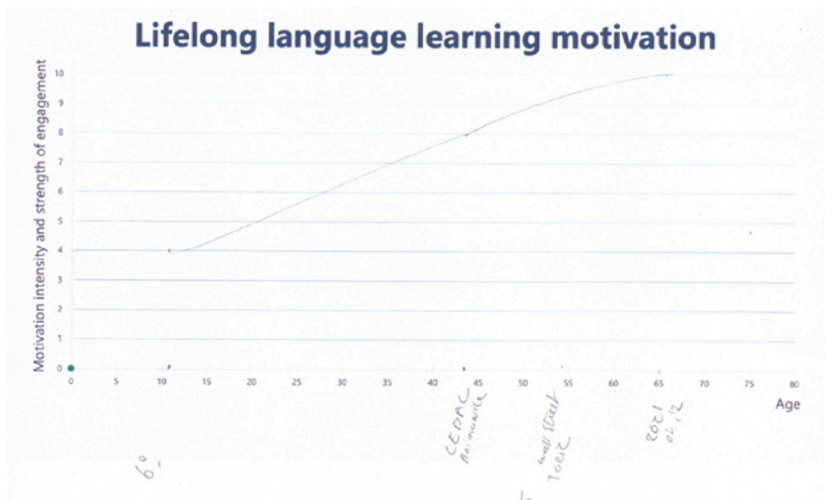
Likewise, Patricia’s L2 selves help her move to the top of her team, and even rather proudly access the rather exclusive sphere of doctors and radiographers, few of them being able to fluently speak in English as she does. Her allusion to her professional ambition (ideal self) through English achievement (ideal L2 self) provides the first glimpses of an emerging professional and L2 anti-ought-to self (“I’m the only one from the gang learning English”). Against all odds, she decides to go beyond her role as a clinical radiography assistant and, without being forced nor even told to, she takes the initiative to improve her English skills to work closer to doctors.

As Patricia prepares for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) exam at a language school at the age of 44, she decides to keep it a secret from her family and friends (“I told nobody, in fact. Not even my husband”), a clear indicator of her wish to somehow detach herself from her strong family commitments (and ought-to). The positive feedback that she receives from her course, and from the academic reports that she kept for twenty years, clearly emphasize the weight that her ideal L2 self has during this highly intense L2 learning period (Item 5).

5.3.3.1. Item 5. Student progress profile from language school, feedback from favourite teacher, May 07, 2014.

The drastic take off of her ideal L2 self during this highly intense period is strengthened up by her anti-ought-to L2 self. The combination of the two sustain her motivation (Timeline 3), *no matter what*, even if, after the departure of her favourite teacher at the language school, the teaching quality was not satisfying anymore (“Even if the teachers were not so good ... I continue [continued, sic]. I never gave up”).

5.3.3.2. Timeline 3. Patricia’s motivational grid.



5.3.4. Pre-retirement and Patricia’s hybrid L2 self

Patricia describes her current self-regulatory strategies (Dörnyei, 2009) and her capacity to “glean” information in English wherever she can. She clearly depicts her current practice deeply grounded in the “pleasure to speak, the opportunity to speak”, which is self concordant and very much aligned with the future ideal L2 self that she projects upon retirement: “when I will be completely retired, I have a lot of English books [...] at home. Yes, to read”. She presents a prevailing hybrid L2 self that is the result of a lifelong journey she experienced both on her own, and through collective stimulation, especially via past and present role models. Clearly, and as for the two first participants, Patricia’s motivational self systems – both related and unrelated to FLL – build up in tune throughout the years.

6. Discussion

6.1. Constellation of lifelong interacting and mutually reinforcing L2 selves

Not only have Georges, Josette and Patricia developed different and conversing selves across their lives at distinct levels of situatedness, but also common ones across historical phases and milestones, forming a “highly personal organisational framework” of their own (Dörnyei, 2020, p. 6). Moreover, all three “Integrative Life Narratives” (*ibid.*) commonly revealed patterns of strong ideal and anti-ought-to selves that interacted cross-dimensionally (Dörnyei, 2017) and evolved toward a hybrid and mature L2 self in later life, associated with self-concordant goals, and eventually generating abiding motivational perseverance and long-term striving. Unlike earlier stages, in which parallel motivational selves are present but often put in stark opposition to one another (as conveyed by the anti-ought-to self, which pervades all three lives in that they chose to study English against the social norms and external pressures that were imposed upon them across the years), the period starting in pre-retirement welcomes a hybrid L2 self which fully integrates and acknowledges as a unit the combined experiences of multiple selves also growing from other standpoints (own/other) (Liu, 2024).

Over time, participants’ GMSS and L2MSS have interacted and influenced each other. While the L2MSS specifically pertains to their motivation and self-perceptions related to language learning, the GMSS provides a comprehensive framework that captures their motivational self-constructs related to other areas of their life. Understanding the interplay between these two systems offers a more holistic perspective on their motivations and self-development throughout their lifetime.

Participants’ single life stories, or *life capital* (Consoli, 2022), integrate a conglomerate of selves, both general and L2 related, which psychologist William James first recognized as the ‘one-in-many-selves-paradox’ (Knowles & Sibicky, 1990, p. 676). The task of defining each and every ‘possible self’ is likely to remain incomplete or partially resolved due to the breadth of fluctuations and differences not only among, between but also within individuals and at different timescales. However, we argue that exploring the interplay and lifelong dynamics of those self-constructs can help gain a better view on the general patterns that ultimately lead to high motivation in third age. The three narratives show that the ideal L2 self (internal projection) and anti-ought-to self (reactions against external expectations) progressively take precedence over any ought-to self (resulting from external expectations in early years or family commitments in later years) and merge together, forming a hybrid L2 self.

What demarcates a hybrid L2 self from other possible selves is not only its late formation in life but also its integrative and accumulative nature. The threshold for the emergence of a hybrid L2 self involves a transformation in the relationship between these possible selves that percolate life. In the case of all three participants, it occurs when the anti-ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self no longer exist in isolation or conflict but instead collaborate and work in tandem to turn the language learning experience into a search for well-being. This collaboration leads to a more integrated and holistic self-concept that aligns personal goals and motivations with the external expectations and ideals of their L2 learning communities and learning peers, strengthening their self-regulatory system (Henry & Liu, 2023). Therefore, the hybrid L2 self represents a state of equilibrium where these prevailing selves coexist and interact in a mutually beneficial manner, fostering a sense of empowerment and long-lasting engagement with language learning.

The concept of hybrid self that appears in later life seems to articulate rather autonomously, yet self-narratives show that participants have created a natural chronological ordering of motivational selves and profiles across the lifespan, i.e., from the least accomplished to the most complete, i.e., self-fulfilled version. The three narratives disclose four levels of L2 motivational selves, as we show in Fig. 4.

Fig. 4 indicates that while Level 1 (i.e., ought-to L2 self) is probably the most exposed to external influences, and thus the *weakest* version of all motivated selves in the case of our participants, Level 4 (i.e., hybrid L2 self) represents the strongest version of motivated selves that involves detachment from external pressures, a high degree of maturity, self-acknowledgement and an overall sense of unity

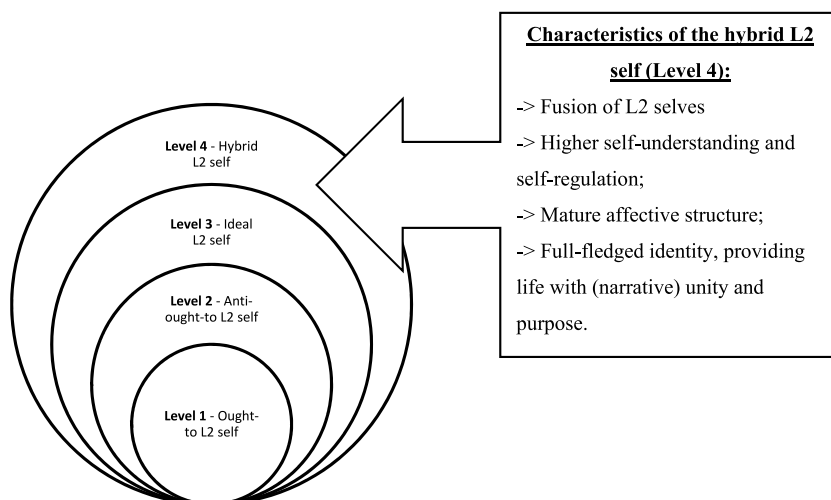


Fig. 4. Scaffolding of lifelong FLL motivational self-constructs in Georges, Josette and Patricia.

(Dörnyei, 2020) thanks to stable self-concordant goals.

The hybrid L2 self that is formed in the ultimate level in pre- and post-retirement is nurtured by all the selves from the past, and consists in having exceeded social/family expectations from the past as much as keeping exceeding the ones they face today in light of their age. In fact, their stories commonly display a strong desire to appear as the “anti-stereotypes” with regards to ageing, as well as with regards to the cultural and social norms each faces in his/her respective context from birth to adult life.

6.2. Impact of the hybrid L2 self on the language experience

The hybrid L2 self in later life could be defined as the product arising from the lifelong accumulation of a variety of L2 selves across different phases. All stories show that participants’ L2 self-construct antecedents play a prominent role in their overall language experience. The three narratives also confirm what Dörnyei et al. (2016) have described as the merging of present and future ideal selves in third age. Regardless of how uncertainly attainable participants’ ideal future selves may seem at an advanced stage of their lives, these envisioned versions of themselves are actually distinctly formed and projected into their present ideal selves. In other words, ideal future selves and ideal present selves fuse and form only one single entity in all three cases. This mental ideal L2 self combination is a key feature in the hybrid L2 self, and results in a deeper sense of instantaneous enjoyment and self-fulfilment, because positive mental imagery largely focuses on present activities.

Participants’ present hybrid L2 self is very much related to the notion of the mere and instant pleasure they are seeking while using L2. This construct presents high levels of metacognition and perseverance that enable them to express precisely what type of L2-related content they want to learn, and how they want to approach FLL. The notion thus feeds into expanding on Dörnyei’s language experience component. Concretely, in their present position as advanced L2 learners, Georges, Josette and Patricia create new ways to use and improve their language skills beyond classrooms and the traditional forms of teaching and learning, by associating digital learning with group and individual learning.

The hybrid L2 self also enhances Dörnyei’s language experience component through its permeable nature, connecting solitary FLL journeys together, and turning the language experience into a collective and collaborative one in later life. This clearly aligns with literature on self-regulation, which describes the self-system as “highly sensitive to influences in social contexts” (Henry & Liu, 2023, p. 9). Georges, Josette and Patricia know each other, whether directly (Georges and Josette are friends, and Josette and Patricia too) or indirectly (Georges and Patricia have never met each other yet, but they have heard of one another through Josette). Beyond common – resilient, self-challenging, resourceful, knowledge-seeking and curious – personality traits, they share common aspects of L2 learning experience.

As Henry and Liu (2023) argue, the way L2 communities, in which a learner evolves and interacts with, perceive the attributes they desire or prefer, in other words the way they project possible future selves or normative self guides (ideal/ought-to/anti-ought-to), can play a significant role in shaping the learner’s self-evaluative standards. Individual’s self perceptions are thus influenced by relevant social and societal groups (Dörnyei, 2020). In this case, Georges, Josette and Patricia’s motivational self-guides also have an impact on the direction of their peers’ own self system and motivated behaviour. Participants’ learning experience has developed over the years and has taken root in specific social category factuals composed of a shared desire for personal well-being and the goal of combining intellectually stimulating activities with social engagement. Their overall L2MSS thus grows on a reciprocal level with their peers as they share common concordant goals and motivational visions.

To summarize, not only have Georges, Josette and Patricia enriched their own personal *life capital*, referred to as “the repertoire of [their] life experiences” (Consoli, 2022, p. 1402), but also established strong connections with/reliance on their life capital that allow for mutual growth and influence. These relationships create permeable boundaries of their motivational self systems, enabling the interactions of learners’ motivational selves to evolve both on intra and inter individual levels.

7. Conclusions and future research

The study showed that strong motivational drives emerged from the merging of ideal and anti-ought-to selves, both related and unrelated to FLL across life, revising the L2MSS model as a relevant tool that is compatible with longitudinal and dynamic analysis. Understanding the evolution of the L2MSS in interaction with other *forces* and variables, as we addressed by looking at parallel developments of the GMSS, is indeed a stimulating and novel angle of research that examines lifelong learning in a situated manner and integrated unit that contains past, present and future motivational constructs.

The L2MSS framework used from a later life perspective contributed in addressing researchers’ caution against the elusive and poorly defined use of the self-concept, and the proliferation of multiple “selves” in the field (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Damasio, 2010). The narrative approach we take goes beyond this pitfall by bringing full credibility and legitimacy to seniors’ “autobiographical sense of self” (MacIntyre, 2022, p. 86), in which the self is, by definition, a unique and mental representation of the learner’s dynamic and non-static experience in permanent re-construction. Instead of adding yet another *self* to the list, the hybrid L2 self embodies such historical and life-integrative narrative self, which not only represents the combination of all life L2 selves, regardless of their labels, impacted by the parallel existence of other motivational selves (from the GMSS) but can also better inform, and in fact adequately connects with key aspects of the overall language experience. Therefore, taking a lifetime perspective best captures the overall “sense of self”, i.e., a hybrid and lifelong identity construct which undergoes several shifts.

For all three senior participants, non-linear change in foreign language practice did not necessarily entail strong differences between them in terms of L2 self-constructs and FLL experience. On the contrary, results from the analysis of the narratives showed that all three senior learners revealed common patterns of strong anti-ought-to self that eventually led to sustained L2 motivation

conducive to well-being in later life. We thus presented conditions of prolonged L2 motivated action and sustainability in light of an all-encompassing language learning context that includes the interrelationship between individual self-constructs and their interaction with collective environments and group motivational dynamics.

This study's primary focus was to research the trajectory of L2 possible selves, yet narratives also showed a few occasional references of other languages (such as German or Italian). One future direction would be to integrate multiple language learning into the lifelong self-system motivational framework to understand interrelationships between Lx possible selves. In addition, researching the self-organization of senior LOTE learning communities, and more particularly delving into the power relations of self-guides within underresearched populations is an area that holds immense potential, and would complement this study on the influences of group motivational dynamics and synergies on both individual and collective wellbeing. This would be particularly relevant in regions where heritage languages play a significant social role in post-retired groups of learners (e.g., Breton in Brittany). Specifically, studying how members of those groups negotiate their identities and enhance their overall sense of community cohesion and well-being is an unexplored and promising area of research. More generally, this would also encourage the development of socially sensitive and participatory research practices that would engage with the members of those groups in a reflexive and ethical manner, and thus serve as a methodological launching pad for the field.

Notes

- 1 Piemonte is the language spoken in the North of Italy.
- 2 By eudaemonic, we understand pleasurable experience and positive functioning in relation to one's environment, which encompasses aspects such as personal growth, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, behaviours towards others, self-acceptance, and the meaning attributed to one's future vision (Ryff, 1989; Tov, 2018; Waterman et al., 2008).

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Berenice Darnault: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Elsa Tragant:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology. **David Lasagabaster:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103487>.

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