Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers
Building vision in the language classroom

Zoltán Dörnyei
Magdalena Kubanyiova

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1 The role of vision in motivating human behaviour

You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.
Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Let us start our exploration of the nature of vision and its role in human behaviour with an extraordinary story about how far and (literally) how high vision can take us; the following is a true story adapted from Philippe Petit's (2002) autobiography:[2]

> It is winter, 1968, and a young, eighteen-year-old Frenchman, Philippe Petit, is sitting with a toothache in the waiting room of a dentist in Paris. Philippe has been practising wire walking for a few months and as he is waiting for his turn to be seen by the dentist, he is looking at some newspapers when suddenly he freezes: '*I am staring at an illustration and reading over and over a short article about a fantastic building whose twin towers, 110 stories tall, will rise over New York City in a few years and "tickle the clouds"*' (p. 4). At this point the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center only exist in an architect's imagination, but a powerful seed has been sown in Philippe's mind: '*So it is as a reflex that I take the pencil from behind my ear to trace a line between the two rooftops – a wire, but no wirewalker*' (pp. 4–6).
>
> Four years later, in 1972, Philippe comes across another article, this time in the French Magazine *Paris Match*; as he recounts, '*It tells of two pillars already towering above lower Manhattan. A full-page aerial shot portrays the towers as if they were already out of reach. I can hear the cranes bustling to complete the structure on schedule. I can smell the smoke, feel the incessant activity, the urgency … The article is so disturbing that I throw it into the large red box labelled* PROJECTS *and try to forget about it. I cannot. The towers keep erupting in my conversations, my thoughts, my dreams*' (p. 8).

The rest is history: two years later, in 1974, Philippe illegally rigged a tightrope between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, and on Wednesday, 7 August, shortly after 7:15 am, he stepped off the South Tower and walked the steel cable a quarter of a mile above the street

[2] In the summary of Philippe's story, italics indicate literal quotes from his autobiography. Philippe's remarkable adventure has also been made into an Oscar-winning documentary film, *Man on Wire* (2008).

level for over 40 minutes, making eight crossings between the towers as well as spending some time sitting and lying on the wire and giving knee salutes. The vision that was originally planted in a Paris dentist's waiting room six years earlier had borne fruit and had become fully realised.

Philippe's extraordinary story raises the question of what the secret of a 'vision' is: how can it suddenly appear out of nothing and then assume such astonishing power that it can drive someone like Philippe Petit to do such an incredibly risky thing as to walk on a steel wire a quarter of a mile above the streets of Manhattan?

1.1 What is 'vision' and why does it matter?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a vision is 'the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination' or 'a vivid mental image, especially a fanciful one of the future'. The term has been used widely both in the media and in a variety of diverse contexts in everyday life, so much so that van der Helm (2009) actually talks about 'the vision phenomenon' to cover 'the ensemble of claims and products which are called "visions" or could be called as such' (p. 96). In his insightful analysis, he distinguishes between seven different types of vision: religious, political, humanistic, business/organisational, community, public policy and personal visions. Within these contexts, he argues, the actual meaning of vision is fairly homogeneous, capturing three defining aspects: (1) the *future*, (2) the *ideal* and (3) the *desire for deliberate change*.

Our interest in this book concerns *personal vision*, which has to do with 'giving meaning to one's life, with helping to make shifts in professional careers and with coaching yourself in realising a personal dream' (van der Helm 2009: 98). This is the understanding of the term *vision* that is implied, for example, in self-help manuals (i.e. all the *How to* ... books sold at airport bookshops), and we have selected it to be the central theme of this book because it captures a core feature of modern theories of L2 motivation: the emphasis on the learner's desire to approximate a preferred future state, the sort of ideal self a language learner might envision for him-/herself. It is this directional nature of the vision, the *pull towards* an imagined future state, that makes the concept useful within the context of human motivation, because the attractive visionary target mobilises present potential in order to move in the preferred future direction, that is, to change in order to appropriate the future.

A key question we need to address in order to understand the exact nature of vision is in what way it is dissimilar to a 'goal' – after all, a goal

also represents directional intentions to reach future states. There is one fundamental difference between the two concepts: unlike an abstract, cognitive goal, a vision includes a strong *sensory element*: it involves tangible images related to achieving the goal. Thus, for example, the vision of becoming a doctor exceeds the abstract goal of earning a medical degree in that the vision involves the individual's actually seeing him-/herself receiving the degree certificate or practising as a qualified doctor. That is, the vision to become a doctor also involves the sensory experience of *being* a doctor. More generally, the main feature of a vision is that it subsumes both a desired goal and a representation of how the individual approaches or realises that goal. In this sense, a vision can be understood as a *personalised goal* (Markus and Ruvolo 1989) that the learner has made his/her own by adding to it the imagined reality of the actual goal experience. Talking about the vision of an organisation, Ira Levin (2000: 95) articulates this sensory element when she says that effective visions 'should outline a rich and textual picture of what success looks like and feels like'. She goes on to say that a vision 'should be so vivid as to enable the listener or reader to transport himself or herself to the future, so to speak, to witness it and experience it'. Vision, thus, has significant motivational capacity; as Taylor and his colleagues (1998) argued in their seminal paper 'Harnessing the Imagination', adding sensory information to a desired future goal enhances people's motivation to achieve it (see ILLUSTRATION 1.1 for an L2 learning-related example). As we shall see later, this aspect of vision has been systematically utilised in several disciplines, most notably in sport psychology, where generating a powerful vision in an athlete can make the difference between a good and a gold-medal-winning performance.

Illustration 1.1 'When I think about my vision ...' (from Magid 2011: 214)

Extract from an interview with a learner of English:

> When I think about my vision, I feel excited and I have a strong desire to make it come true. The feeling of excitement motivates me to learn English. I realised that I need to put more time and effort into learning English to achieve my vision. That's the way that my vision encourages me!

In the following sections we explore in more detail the motivational capacity of vision, first by looking at one specific motivation theory in psychology – possible selves theory – that is particularly relevant in this context, and then by examining the implications of this theory for language learning contexts both for learners and for teachers.

1.2 Vision, motivation and the self

How can we best understand the motivational dimension of vision? Or to put it another way, which theoretical approach to motivation can best accommodate the visionary aspect? In order to capture the whole breadth of vision, we would need a motivation construct that concerns human behaviour in a holistic manner. This is particularly true for language vision, because a foreign language is more than a mere communication code that can be learnt similarly to other academic subjects; instead, the knowledge of a language is part of the individual's personal 'core', involved in most mental activities and forming an important part of one's identity. Therefore, an adequate motivation theory of language vision would require a paradigm that approaches motivation from a whole-person perspective, which makes psychological theories of human identity and the self likely candidates for this purpose.

1.2.1 'Possible selves'

Over the past three decades, personality psychology has increasingly turned to investigating the active, dynamic nature of the self-system – that is, the 'doing' side of personality – by examining how the self regulates behaviour and how various self-characteristics are related to action (see Cantor 1990). Indeed, in a comprehensive review of the topic, Leary (2007: 318) concludes that the popularity of the self as a psychological construct is largely due to its ability to link people's thoughts or behaviours to 'self-motives', such as motives for self-enhancement, self-verification, self-expansion or self-assessment, all within the broad effort to promote and maintain one's self-image through action. Because motivation research, by definition, also focuses on human action, there emerged in the 1980s a promising interface between the two psychological fields.

Within the dynamic approach of linking the human self with human action, the notion of *possible selves* offers the most powerful, and at the same time the most versatile, motivational self-mechanism: first introduced by Markus and Nurius in 1986, the concept of the possible self represents individuals' ideas of what they *might* become, what they *would like* to become and what they are *afraid of* becoming in the future. That is, possible selves include the manifestations of one's future goals and aspirations, allowing people to experience what it would be like to be in that future state.

What is particularly significant from the point of view of our current discussion is that possible selves also involve *images* and *senses*

(a point that we will elaborate on below in a separate section); as Markus and Nurius (1986) emphasised, possible selves are represented in the same imaginary and semantic way as the here-and-now self, that is, they are a *reality* for the individual: people can 'see' and 'hear' their possible future self (see also Ruvolo and Markus 1992). This means that, in many ways, possible selves are similar to dreams and visions about oneself. Indeed, Markus and Nurius (1987: 159) confirm, 'Possible selves encompass within their scope *visions* of desired and undesired end states' (our emphasis) – thus, possible selves can be seen as the 'vision of what might be'.

1.2.2 The ideal and the ought-to selves

From the point of view of education, one type of possible self, the *ideal self*, is of particular interest, because it refers to the representation of the characteristics that someone would ideally like to possess – that is, the representation of hopes, aspirations and wishes (see Higgins 1987, 1998). The assertion that someone who has a powerful ideal self – for example a student who envisions him-/herself as a successful business-person or scholar – can use this self-image as a potent *self-guide* with considerable motivational power requires little justification. This is expressed in everyday speech when we talk about someone following or living up to their dreams.

A complementary future self-guide that has educational relevance is the *ought-to self*, referring to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess – that is, the representation of someone's sense of personal or social duties, obligations or responsibilities (see Higgins 1987, 1998). Thus, in contrast to the ideal self, which concerns the individual's own visions for him-/herself, the ought-to self represents other people's visions for the individual. This 'imported' self-image is particularly salient in some Asian countries where students are often motivated to perform well to fulfil some family obligation or to bring honour to the family's name (see e.g. Magid 2012).

The motivational aspect of the two self-guides (ideal and ought-to) was clearly explained by Higgins's (1987, 1998) *self-discrepancy theory*, which states that people have a feeling of unease when there is a discrepancy between their actual real-life self and their aspired future self. This psychological tension, then, spurs the desire for action towards reducing the gap, and it thus becomes a potent source of motivation. This makes perfect sense and the resulting motivational power can indeed be significant (although, as we shall see below, some conditions need to be in place for the natural process of discrepancy-reduction to exert its full effect).

1.2.3 Conditions for the motivating capacity of future self-guides

The question that most teachers would probably want to ask at this point is this: OK, if future self-images are indeed so instrumental in impacting motivation, does this mean that if my students can develop a vivid and realistic vision of themselves as successful learners, they will be guaranteed to become keen and active members of my class? Regrettably, not necessarily. It has been widely observed in various educational contexts that although visionary future self-guides have the capacity to motivate action, this does not always happen automatically but depends on a number of conditions. The following list contains some of the most important prerequisites (see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011); this list will be highly relevant – and will be discussed further in Chapter 2 – when we consider ways of generating an L2 vision in learners, because the essence of all the vision-enhancing practices is to ensure that these conditions are met.

- The learner *does have* a desired future self-image. People differ in how easily they can generate a successful possible self and therefore not everyone is expected to possess a developed ideal or ought-to self-guide.
- The future self is sufficiently *different* from the current self. If there is no observable gap between current and future selves, no increased effort is felt necessary and no motivation emerges.
- The future self-image is *elaborate* and *vivid*. People vary in the vividness of their mental imagery, and a possible self with insufficient specificity and detail may not be able to evoke the necessary motivational response.
- The future self-image is perceived as *plausible*. Possible selves are effective only insofar as the individual does indeed perceive them as *possible*, that is, realistic within the person's individual circumstances. Thus, a sense of controllability (i.e. the belief that one's action is conceivable and can make a difference) is an essential prerequisite.
- The future self-image is *not* perceived as *comfortably certain* to reach, that is, within one's grasp. The learner must not believe that the possible self will happen automatically, without a marked increase in expended effort.
- The future self-image is in harmony – or at least does not clash – with other parts of the individual's self-concept (e.g. a conflict between the ideal and the ought-to selves), particularly with expectations of the learner's family, peers or other elements of the social environment.
- The future self-image is accompanied by relevant and effective *procedural strategies* that act as a *roadmap* towards the goal. Once our

vision generates energy, we need productive tasks into which to channel this energy or it will ebb away.

- The future self-image is *regularly activated* in the learner's working self-concept. Possible selves can be squeezed out of someone's working self-concept by other contenders for attention and will therefore become relevant for behaviour only if they are primed by frequent and varied reminders.
- The desired future self-image is offset by a counteracting *feared possible self* in the same domain. Maximal motivational effectiveness is achieved if the learner also has a vivid image about the *negative consequences* of failing to achieve the desired end state.

1.3 Mental imagery

We saw above that the distinguishing feature of desired future possible selves is the sensory images they carry, and this makes possible selves appropriate to describe the motivational dimension of vision. *Mental imagery* (as such internal images are usually referred to in psychology) is something we are all familiar with, because a significant amount of human thinking, problem-solving, creating, hoping, learning, planning, musing and daydreaming happens in pictures that stimulate all our senses. The process involves generating an imagined reality that we can see, hear, feel and taste. This quasi-perceptual experience is often described in everyday parlance as 'visualising', and Shakespeare coined an expressive term in *Hamlet* to describe the process: 'seeing in the mind's eye'.

Neurobiological research has confirmed that people activate similar neural mechanisms when they see or hear something and when they imagine seeing or hearing the same event (Moulton and Kosslyn 2009). Likewise, studies of brain damage have shown that such injuries often produce parallel deficits in one's ability of perception and the use of imagery (Reisberg and Heuer 2005). That is, to put it bluntly, the brain cannot tell the difference between an actual physical event and the vivid imagery of a simulated scenario (Cox 2012). For this reason, mental imagery lends itself to versatile applications in a range of diverse areas and can be used for the purpose of preparation, repetition, elaboration, intensification or modification of behaviours. For example, as we shall see in Section 3.1 in detail, virtually all world-class athletes use *guided imagery* as an integral part of their training programme, because it is a well-documented fact in sport psychology that imagery can be used for mentally practising specific performance skills, improving confidence, controlling anxiety, preparing for competitive situations and enhancing actual performance (cf. Morris, Spittle and Watt 2005).

1.3.1 Potency and frequency

Throughout this book we offer many quotes and illustrations to describe the power of mental imagery, but perhaps nothing is so spectacular as Albert Einstein's case. As Norton (2013) relates, while Einstein was still a teenager, he repeatedly imagined himself chasing after a beam of light and visualised how the world would look from this perspective. He recalled later that this thought experiment had played a memorable role in his development of the concept of special relativity (see also Finke 1990, which discusses various discoveries and inventions in visualisation). The potency of mental simulation is also demonstrated by Beethoven, who began to lose his hearing at the age of 26 and composed some of his best-known music – such as his Ninth Symphony – while being totally deaf. And to prove that visualisation is not restricted to cognitive or artistic creation but can even have tangible financial outcomes, ILLUSTRATION 1.2 describes a fascinating research project in the business world that was even reported in mainstream television news bulletins in many countries because some clever technology succeeded in triggering off people's mental imagery in a targeted way to increase their pension saving intentions.

Illustration 1.2 The impact of future images on people's saving habits

In a study focusing on people's savings for the time after their retirement, Hershfield *et al.* (2011) utilised people's vision of their future selves in an ingeniously powerful way: the researchers devised an instrument that, by means of virtual reality hardware and software, allowed the participants to interact with realistic visual computer simulations of their future selves. That is, people could actually see their future images on the screen as a result of the computer's 'ageing' of their current appearance. This short-circuiting of present and future self-images had a dramatic effect on the participants' financial disposition: in all cases, those who interacted with their virtual future selves exhibited an increased tendency to allocate more resources towards their future retirement funds!

With regard to the frequency of mental imagery, Klinger's (2009) research on daydreaming (see ILLUSTRATION 1.3) shows that various forms of daydreaming are a surprisingly common part of our mental activities, with as much as half of human thought qualifying for it, and as Markus (2006: xii) points out, within this category the time people spend envisioning their futures is enormous. As she adds, in the USA it is actually 'both a birthright and a moral imperative to tailor one's

personal version of the American Dream', which is also reflected in the phrase, 'if you dream it, you can become it'.

Illustration 1.3 On daydreaming

Eric Klinger (2009) describes a series of experiments in which he and his colleagues investigated the thought flow of research participants as they went about their everyday activities. At a given signal by the researcher, the participants were asked at quasi-regular intervals to note down their latest thoughts and rate them on a series of scales. Three of the findings are particularly noteworthy from the point of view of this book:

- It appears that about half (!) of human thought qualifies as *daydreaming* (i.e. thoughts that are undirected and primarily based on imagination). Although this proportion is reduced by the intensity of the task, the results indicate that even in high-pressure, demanding tasks our minds seem to wander into imaginary worlds for about 10% of the time on average. This suggests that imagination-driven daydreams are an integral part of our thought processes.
- Our daydreams are often visual and are heavily influenced by daydreamers' future goals. It appears therefore that although daydreams are predominantly spontaneous and undirected, much of human daydreaming in fact involves explorations of future visions.
- We appear to be in charge of the daydreaming flow to some extent as we can influence not only when to stop but also what to daydream about.

In sum, this research programme has shown that daydreaming about our future in images constitutes a significant portion of our thoughts as we plod through our daily tasks. These daydreams, then, seem to function as reminders of our future aspirations, and sometimes even give us clues about how to attain them.

1.3.2 Imagery in psychology: Paivio's theory of imagery functions in performance

Within psychology, the role of imagery was foregrounded by an influential cognitive theory, the *dual coding theory*, proposed by Canadian psychologist Allan Paivio (1986; for an educational discussion, see Clark and Paivio 1991). He was initially interested in the powerful mnemonic effects of imagery – that is, the use of imagery as a memory aid – but his research expanded into a more comprehensive theory of cognition. Paivio suggested that cognition is made up of two interacting mental subsystems, verbal and non-verbal, and that visual and verbal information is processed differently and stored separately in long-term memory. This means, in effect, that we code environmental information in two

different modes, which is well illustrated by the fact that, for example, we can think of an 'orange carrot' both as a verbal phrase and a mental image. Thus, Paivio's theory proposed that a basic dimension of human mental operations is a non-verbal imagery system whose critical functions include 'the analysis of scenes and the generation of mental images (both functions encompassing other sensory modalities in addition to visual)' (1986: 53–4).

Paivio's dual coding model is particularly relevant to our book because it highlights motivational and emotional functions as a central component, and Paivio further elaborated on the links of this functional aspect to mental imagery within the area of sport psychology: his description of the cognitive and motivational functions of imagery in sport performance (Paivio 1985; cf. also Hall *et al.* 1998) initiated a great deal of research on specifying the various behaviour-modificational roles that imagery can play in our mind. The key aspect of Paivio's framework of imagery functions is the separation of cognitive and motivational functions. The former involve imagery used by athletes for mental rehearsal to plan, refine and practise various strategies, routines and perceptual-motor skills (e.g. specific movements), while motivational functions concern keeping up one's motivation, psyching oneself up for specific events, inducing relaxation and imaging oneself working towards and achieving specific goals (e.g. winning an event). Thus, as Cox (2012: 277) summarises, an athlete can use imagery 'to plan a winning strategy (cognitive function) or to get energised for competition (motivational function)'. (We will come back to imagery in sport in Section 3.1, where we discuss imagery training.)

1.3.3 Imagery in language education

Educational research has also shown that what worked for Albert Einstein or successful Olympic athletes also works in the classroom for both teachers and learners, and the field of language education has seen an increase of interest in the role of imagery in learning and teaching. Since the publication of a pioneering volume by Earl Stevick in 1986 called *Images and Options in the Language Classroom* that drew attention to imagery, as well as a dedicated book chapter by Jane Arnold in 1999 entitled 'Visualization: Language Learning with the Mind's Eye', two practical recipe books have appeared focusing on this topic (Arnold *et al.* 2007; Hadfield and Dörnyei 2013) alongside a number of more general publications incorporating some aspects of imagery within creative approaches to L2 lesson planning (Thornbury 1999) and teaching various language skills, such as L2 writing (Wright and Hill 2008) or grammar (Gerngross, Puchta and Thornbury 2006).

practical terms, guided imagery from the first-person perspective may be effective if our primary purpose is to enhance the students' positive feelings about themselves or to improve their attitudes towards the L2, while the third-person perspective may be more powerful if we want the students' L2 visions to motivate specific actions such as learning behaviours. Thus, both perspectives have a useful place in a comprehensive 'visionary programme'.

1.4 Language learning motivation and future L2 self-guides

As we saw in Section 1.2, vision is a powerful motivational construct whose essence can be captured by the psychological concept of possible selves. This concept has been successfully adapted to language learning situations under the rubric of 'possible L2 selves' or 'future L2 self-guides'; let us have a brief look at how this understanding has emerged in the history of L2 motivation research, leading to the development of Zoltán's theory of the L2 Motivational Self System, which is fully compatible with possible selves theory and which also embraces the experiential nature of 'vision' discussed earlier.

With a long-term learning process such as the mastery of a second language, the learner's ultimate success will largely depend on the level of motivation; without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement. This truth is clearly expressed in arguably the oldest English proverb that is still in regular use today (first recorded in the twelfth century): 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.' Indeed, most teachers would agree that you can give someone the opportunity to do something, but you cannot force them to do it if they do not want to, which means in educational terms that motivation is essential for students to take ownership of their learning in order to succeed. Accordingly, the concept of language learning motivation has been the target of intensive research in second language acquisition (SLA) research for over five decades, with several books and literally hundreds of articles published on the topic (see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011 for an overview). It is useful to divide the evolution of motivation research during this period into three broad phases:

- *The social psychological period* (1959–1990), which was initiated and characterised by the work of social psychologist Robert Gardner and his associates in Canada (e.g. Gardner 1985; Gardner and

MacIntyre 1993). The best-known concepts stemming from this period are *integrative* and *instrumental orientation/motivation*, the former referring to the desire to learn an L2 of a valued community so that one can communicate with members of the community and sometimes even become like them, the latter to the concrete benefits that language proficiency might bring about (e.g. career opportunities, increased salary).

- *The cognitive-situated period* (during the 1990s), which widened the perspective of the study of L2 motivation by importing a range of contemporary cognitive theories from educational psychology. Besides wishing to bring L2 motivation theory in line with mainstream motivational psychology, a second general objective in this period was to adopt a more *situated* analysis of motivation in specific learning settings, particularly in L2 classrooms. The best-known concepts associated with this phase are *intrinsic* and *extrinsic motivation* (i.e. performing a behaviour for its own sake or as a means to an end), *attributions* (i.e. how one explains past successes and failures), *self-confidence / efficacy* as well as *situation-specific motives* related to the learning environment, such as motives related to the L2 course, the L2 teachers or the learner's peer group (see Dörnyei 1994).
- *New socio-dynamic approaches* (first decade of the twenty-first century), which have been characterised by an interest in *motivational change / evolution* and the relationship between motivation and *identity* in specific social contexts. The best-known concepts originating in this period are the *process-oriented conceptualisation of motivation* (Dörnyei 2000), motivation as *investment* (Norton 2000), a *dynamic systems perspective* in motivation (i.e. research that integrates the various factors related to the learner, the learning task and the learning environment into one complex system; see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011) and the concepts of the *ideal* and *ought-to L2 selves*, which will be described in detail below.

1.4.1 The L2 Motivational Self System

In 2005, Zoltán proposed a new approach to the understanding of L2 motivation (Dörnyei 2005), conceived within an 'L2 Motivational Self System', which integrated a number of influential L2 theories (e.g. Gardner 2001; Noels 2003; Norton 2001; Ushioda 2001) with the findings of 'self research' in psychology (described in the previous sections). The model consists of the following three main constituents (for a more detailed discussion, see Dörnyei 2009):

- *Ideal L2 self*, which concerns the L2-specific facet of one's *ideal self*: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2 (e.g. the person we would like to become is associated with travelling or doing business internationally), the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because we would like to reduce the gap between our actual and ideal selves.
- *Ought-to L2 self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess to avoid possible negative outcomes, and which therefore may bear little resemblance to the person's own desires or wishes.
- *L2 learning experience*, which concerns situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the positive impact of success or the enjoyable quality of a language course).

Thus, the L2 Motivational Self System suggests that there are three primary sources of the motivation to learn a foreign/second language: (1) the learner's internal desire to become an effective L2 user, (2) social pressures coming from the learner's environment to master the L2 and (3) the actual experience of being engaged in the L2 learning process. This model is therefore fully compatible with possible selves theory and also embraces the experiential nature of 'vision' discussed earlier: the first two components involve future self-states that the learner envisages and experiences as if they were reality, while the third component focuses on the direct experience associated with the actual self.

1.5 Motivation and vision in language teachers' development

The new conceptualisation of L2 motivation in terms of language identity and vision offers a fresh perspective on a motivational teaching practice (we will discuss the practical implications in detail in Part II of this book). Yet, research on language teachers' development also suggests that novel ideas, however powerful and attractive they may be, do not necessarily translate into transformed teaching practices. Consider a far from unique scenario from Maggie's experience as a teaching practice supervisor, in which two student teachers processed their newly learnt knowledge in a strikingly different way (see ILLUSTRATION 1.5). It is clear that while one of the two trainees seemed to have got things right and this manifested itself in the actual class she conducted, the other perceived and then transmitted the new methodological input in a rather ineffective way.

2 Creating the language learner's vision

We are limited, not by our abilities, but by our vision.
Attributed to Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)

As will be clear by now, the (obvious) prerequisite for the motivational capacity of any desired future self – or future self-guide – is that it needs to exist. It has also been mentioned that people differ in how easily they can generate a successful possible self, which suggests that one of the main sources of the absence of motivation in some learners is likely to be the lack of a properly developed desired self-image in general, and an ideal language self component of this image in particular. For instance, even if a foreign language has been made a compulsory subject in the school curriculum for a good reason, many students sitting in our classrooms will not have a clear idea of what that reason might be or how knowing that language could enrich their personal lives. Therefore, the logical first step in a motivational intervention programme that follows the self-approach is to help learners create their desired future selves that is, to *construct their vision* of who they could become as L2 users and what knowing an L2 could add to their lives.

What do we mean by 'constructing' a vision?

Before we discuss specific approaches for constructing desired future self-images, some reflection is needed on what we mean by the verb *construct* in this context. It is highly unlikely that any motivational intervention will lead a student to create a brand new ideal self out of nothing; the realistic process is more likely to be one of *awareness raising* and *guided selection* from the multiple aspirations, dreams and desires that the student has already entertained in the past. Dunkel Kelts and Coon (2006) explain that during the formation of their identities, adolescents produce a wide variety of possible selves as potential identity alternatives to explore and 'try on' without full commitment The origins of these tentative possible selves often go back to views held by others, most notably to the ideals that parents hold for themselves and for their children (Zentner and Renaud 2007). In countries where several languages coexist – for example, English or French is used as an official language besides the local vernacular – these views are

often affected by language attitudes. Alternatively, the various possible selves can also stem from the students' peer community, which acts as a powerful reference group exerting strong social pressure (Boyatzis and Akrivou 2006). The fourth common route is related to the impact of role models that the students have seen in films, on TV or in real life: the term *celebrity culture* that is so often mentioned in the media nowadays refers exactly to the increased impact of such external models to serve as behavioural templates for the wider population.

Whatever the source may be, the fact is that most adolescents encounter a number of ideological and occupational options available in society, and experiment with a wide range of social roles and possible identities in an attempt to consolidate their beliefs and values into a more or less personal ideology which will, in turn, allow them to make provisional commitments to life plans and projects (McAdams 2001). Put simply, they search widely to establish who they really are. Ideal self-images offer an optimal framework in their search for the integration of the disparate roles, talents, proclivities, hopes, desires and visions into a unified configuration that provides life with some semblance of sense and purpose. Thus, igniting the vision involves, in effect, increasing the students' mindfulness of the significance of desired self-images, guiding them through a number of possible selves that they have entertained in their minds in the past, and presenting powerful role models as templates for crafting their own ideal language selves. Dunkel *et al.* (2006) note in this respect that alternative possible selves can often be mutually exclusive or at least difficult to reconcile. Therefore, the construction of an ideal self also involves the process of making decisions about which possible selves to pursue and which to give up on. Finally, Oyserman, Terry and Bybee (2002) underline the importance of helping students to personalise the emerging preferred self-images, that is, to build into them as much as they can of what they know about themselves in order to capitalise on their own existing strengths and unique features.

Why is 'agency' important?

Taking Oyserman *et al.*'s (2002) recommendation to personalise the emerging self-images one step further, another reason for further reflection on the term *construct* stems from a specific view of education which places *learner agency* – that is, learners' proactive investment in the learning process – at the heart of the educational process. This emphasis is embedded in numerous approaches to language learning and teaching, including a focus on learner autonomy (e.g. Murray, Gao and Lamb 2011), learner identity (e.g. Norton 2000), action-based

teaching (e.g. van Lier 2007) and self-regulatory learning (e.g. Cohen and Macaro 2007) as well as specific views of motivation, including motivational self-regulation (Ushioda 2008) and self-determination theory (Noels 2009). Central to these approaches is the belief that learners enjoy a fuller and more meaningful learning experience when they are in charge of their own learning, when their motivation is generated from within rather than through external rewards such as grades, and when they are given opportunities to make the learning material their own. In short, agency implies that learners are allowed to exercise their capacity to act in ways that are congruent with their own lived experiences and identities. Leo van Lier (2007: 47) describes the significance of this notion within language education well:

> our learners are people with their own lives, aspirations, needs, worries, dreams and identities. As I envisage an AB [action-based] approach to teaching and learning, treating the learners as persons in their own right is crucial. This means, quite simply, that they are listened to and respected as speakers in their own right, and as agents of their own educational destiny ... Learning an L2 involves a struggle to forge a new identity that is true to the self. The core of identity is voice, and voice implies agency.

In keeping with this view, we see the 'construction' of ideal language selves ultimately as the outcome of the students' rather than the teachers' effort. The way teachers can help to facilitate the construction process is by orchestrating encounters for the learners with a variety of images of attractive possible selves and by supporting students in their pursuit of those self-images that are congruent with their own identities. In short, the teacher can listen and prompt, but the L2 vision must ultimately become the students' own.

Towards designing a 'visionary' programme

There are several examples of successful motivational intervention programmes focusing on possible self-enhancement, and we have listed some of the best-known ones in TOOLBOX 2.2. So far little work has been directed at specifically developing an ideal language self, although for interesting exceptions, see the motivational experiments conducted by Michael Magid and Letty Chan (Chan 2012; Magid 2011; Magid and Chan 2012), the self-enhancement projects by Fukada *et al.* (2011 and Sampson (2012), and the motivational programme described by Hadfield (2012). However, it seems to us that in an era when international

holidays are becoming increasingly accessible and cross-cultural communication is a standard part of our existence in the 'global village', it is possible to devise creative ideal-self-generating activities that draw on the students' past adventures, the exotic nature of encounters with a foreign culture or on role models of successful L2 learning achievers. In the remainder of this chapter, we break down the broad process of generating language learning vision into five facets: (1) understanding students' current identity concerns and lived experiences, (2) providing regular tasters of desired future states, (3) using guided imagery, (4) using guided narratives and (5) ensuring ample exposure to role models.

Toolbox 2.2 Examples of possible selves intervention programmes

Oyserman, Terry and Bybee's (2002) School-to-Jobs programme

As part of what has been the highest-profile possible selves intervention programme to date, the researchers developed a nine-week after-school syllabus to enhance African American low-income teenagers' abilities to imagine themselves as successful adults and connect these future images to current school involvement. The intervention had positive effects on the participants' engagement and behaviour at school, as well as on their possible selves, providing evidence that the self-concept of adolescents can be shaped with a structured intervention.

Hock, Deshler and Schumaker's (2006) Possible Selves programme

This successful intervention programme was aimed at increasing the motivation of university and middle-school students with academic difficulties. After students explored their expectations, hopes and fears, and then identified words or phrases that described them in targeted areas (as a learner, a person, a worker and in a strength area) in an individual interview with an adviser, they were asked to draw a Possible Selves Tree: the limbs and branches of the tree represented the areas the students had talked about in the interview and the positive possible selves associated with those, while the feared possible selves were represented by dangerous conditions for the tree such as termites, poison in the soil and lightning. They were instructed to add the exact words they recorded in the interviews to the relevant parts of the tree, and afterwards they discussed with their tutors how to maintain the strength of the tree, provide it with nourishment, make it grow and protect it from harm.

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky's (2006) 'Best Possible Selves' writing project

In this project university students were asked to visualise themselves in the future and imagine that they have succeeded in accomplishing their life goals. Then, they were to prepare a written narrative that described their

'ideal future life' in as much detail as they could (for more information about such tasks, see Section 2.4). The task was found to produce a significant increase in positive emotions, leading the researchers to conclude that envisioning ideal future selves is inherently motivating and self-relevant.

Magid and Chan's (2012) pioneering training programmes in language education

Based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, Michael Magid and Letty Chan designed and conducted two separate training programmes with Chinese university students of English (one in England, the other in Hong Kong) which were successful in enhancing their language vision. The programme in England consisted of activities asking the learners to list current concerns and goals regarding their future jobs, relationships and lifestyle as well as their ideal selves in each of those domains in order to help them create a vision of their ideal L2 self. This was followed by further tasks of drawing a timeline, developing action plans and considering feared selves. The intervention programme in Hong Kong was based on the 'Ideal Self Tree' activity adapted from the above-mentioned Possible Selves Tree (Hock *et al.*, 2006). In spite of the differences between the circumstances of the programmes, both were effective in motivating the participants to learn English and in increasing their linguistic self-confidence through strengthening their ideal L2 self-image. As a result of the motivational interventions, participants on both programmes reported exerting more effort towards learning English and motivation to work harder to achieve their ideal L2 selves.

2.1 Understanding students' current identity concerns and lived experiences

All the programmes outlined in TOOLBOX 2.2 start with considerations of the students' present state. This is, of course, logical and is supported by research findings which show that possible self-images are rooted in people's developmental and contextual concerns (Oyserman and James 2009). That is, these images of ideal (or dreaded) future states are anchored in the reality of our most immediate and pressing concerns in the present time. For example, occupational concerns tend to be more prominent for young adults, while family- and parenting-oriented future images usually come a bit later, followed by health-related and then pension-related concerns even later. With regard to the relevance of sociocultural issues, an extreme example is a study of imprisoned fathers by Meek (2007), which reveals that becoming like their own

teaching Chinese learners of English. Many of my former Chinese students told me that they were inspired by both of them to follow their dreams. Therefore, I chose to use them during my intervention programme. After discussing the poem and listening to the song, I asked the participants to tell me about the three things that they value most in order to get a better sense of them as individuals and have them think about themselves in more detail in order to help them think about their ideal selves. Then, I read a scripted imagery situation to the participants in order to help them start to create a vision of their ideal L2 self. The scripted imagery situations were all based on the interviews about the students' ideal and feared L2 selves that I had conducted with them prior to the intervention programme.

2.2 Providing regular tasters of desired future states

We have pointed out above that the teacher's role is not so much to actually 'construct' a specific future image for the students as to create opportunities that will allow them to 'taste', explore and try out various versions of their possible selves. One way of doing this is to help students to experience a range of situations involving the L2. Depending on the resources available, this can include participating in intercultural encounters, meetings or campaigns either face to face or online, inviting L2 speakers to the language class, having a video conference with students from another country, working on a class project involving communication with other L2 speakers around the world, visiting an international company or university locally or abroad and, if possible, organising school exchanges, study-abroad trips and field visits. These experiences are important because they can sow the seeds of future images. An image-seed in this sense is a remembered moment from our history of an encounter that imprints itself in our memory, and it is these pictures that can later aid the construction of fully-fledged desired language selves by serving as useful building blocks.

The significance of creating such experience-based images explains, for example, why renowned Michelin-star chef Michel Roux, Jr, who decided to train eight young apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds to become world-class waiters, started his unique training programme – documented in the BBC television series *Michel Roux's Service* – by taking his trainees to one of the finest restaurants in London to let them experience the best of the world that they could one day become part of. A further illustration of how tasters of future possible selves are utilised to motivate us is offered by tourism advertisements.

While some of the beautiful scenes in magazines or in the travel agents' windows describe attractive destinations (e.g. happy camels in front of pyramids in the sunset), others show less exotic scenes, for example a family having a meal on a sunny veranda or a couple walking hand in hand on a quiet road. These images serve a purpose that is very different from showing the Taj Mahal: they are there to help the viewers to create their ideal 'holiday self', made up of familiar scenarios that are cleverly fused with holiday fantasy. These images obviously work – that is, motivate us to spend money – or travel agents would not use them.

In sum, in order to build up a vivid image of a desired future self, we first need 'tasters', that is, sensory glimpses of the bigger picture to which our efforts could eventually lead us. Such short 'vision-immersion' opportunities offer a kind of foretaste of the future, which is exactly what Michel Roux's trainees were allowed to experience on their first day or what travel agents would like to provide us with. The lesson is this: *we need to taste the future in order to desire it.* ILLUSTRATION 2.4 presents an example from Maggie's early encounters with an L2 – English in her case – which demonstrates well just how powerful such tasters can be in motivating action.

Illustration 2.4 From our own experience (Maggie)

I still have a very vivid image in my mind's eye from the early days of my learning English. For the first time in my life, I am outside my country, taking part in a large international conference. I am wowed by the atmosphere: all the interesting people, some from countries I had not even heard of ... a whole new big and exciting world is opening up before my eyes ... But I can also feel the frustration of not being able to make the most of this 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity – I am unable to put together a single coherent sentence in English!

I am convinced today that this was a significant turning point in my English language learning history; this was the critical encounter when the seed of my L2 vision was sown and grew almost instantly with immediate consequence for action. While friends of mine were enjoying the rest of that summer swimming and doing hiking trips, I spent mine cramming irregular verbs and lexical chunks!

It is difficult, if not impossible, to consciously orchestrate such significant 'chance encounters' that will have a profound and lasting influence, but what teachers can do in order to inspire and facilitate

the construction of ideal L2 self-images is to create a rich menu of 'future-self-immersion' opportunities both in the classroom and outside it. Modern language teaching methodologies such as project-based instruction or task-based language teaching lend themselves to simulating intercultural situations in order to experience what it would be like to be a successful user of the L2; to illustrate an imagery-based approach that might also work for this purpose, TOOLBOX 2.4 presents an example of utilising the students' own imagination for creating tasters of possible desired L2 end states.

Toolbox 2.4 How to create a 'vision board' of one's ideal L2 self

You will need: *lots of different types of old magazines (e.g. travel magazines, college prospectuses, etc.), a flipchart or cardboard paper for each student to create their treasure maps on and glue. You can ask the students to bring their own supply.*

Step 1: Ask students to think about who they would ideally want to become and how the L2 features in that vision.

Step 2: Ask them to go through the magazines and cut out interesting bits from them. No gluing yet! Just let them have fun looking through magazines and pulling out pictures or words or headlines that strike their fancy. They should end up with a big pile of images and phrases.

Step 3: Then they should go through the images and begin to lay their favourites on the board and eliminate any that no longer feel right. You should encourage the students to design their board creatively, in any way they want. Once they have finalised the design, they can start gluing everything onto the board, also adding writing if they want or even some further painting/colouring to complete the composition.

Step 4: Students should leave space in the very centre of the vision board for a fantastic photo of themselves and paste it there. Alternatively, they can display a picture (or several pictures) of themselves being, doing or having their desired objective (travelling around the world, having a high-profile international job, studying at a university/college abroad, etc.). They should show themselves in a realistic setting and insert a corresponding caption (e.g. 'Here I am graduating from Harvard').

Step 5: Hang their vision boards in the classroom where they will see them often. You could revisit them every once in a while and refer to them from time to time during the class, perhaps when you feel that a boost in motivation is needed.