Why can't I be doing this in English instead? An interview study of the impact of L2 English on girls' and boys' L3 selves

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Abstract

Although there has been very little research on L3 motivation, it would appear that the gender divergences commonly found in L2 motivation are also apparent when a third foreign language is learnt. In a previous analysis of quantitative data Henry (2010a) found an inverse relationship between i) the extent to which students compared the L3-speaking/using self-concept with the L2 English-speaking/using self-concept, and ii) L3 motivation. Further, this effect was stronger for boys. In an attempt to shed light on these gender differences, interview data from students with differing motivational profiles were analysed using the theoretical framework of the working self-concept (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Kunda, 1986). The results suggest that, for these students, the L2 English self-concept is frequently invoked in L3 learning situations and that it has a referential function. Whilst the girls interviewed appeared to be able to offset the impact of L2 English by creating cognitive barriers and recruiting positive L3-related self-knowledge, the boys seemed to rely more on forms of self-knowledge that emphasize a capacity for hard work and determination. For some of the boys the pervasive impact of L2 English meant however that it was impossible to sustain a viable L3 self-concept.

Keywords
L3 acquisition; L2 motivation; L3 motivation; L2 Motivational Self System; Gender; Global English

Introduction
It is widely believed that women are better learners of foreign languages due, amongst other things, to greater motivation. Despite the importance of the issue, especially given the ever widening gender gap in achievement (see e.g. Carr & Pauwells, 2005), the systematic investigation of gender differences in L2 motivation remains a rather neglected area of research and there are relatively few studies where the investigation of gender differences has comprised the focal area of interest (Dornyei & Csizer, 2002). In those studies where gender has been included as a variable, the results reveal a pattern of divergences in the motivation of females and males.

In a recent examination of the literature on gender and L2 motivation Henry (2010b) found systematic differences, particularly with regard to integrative motives, with females being more committed to embracing the TL in terms of having a liking for the language, an interest in the cultures associated with the language, and a greater affinity with L2 speakers. Further, in studies conducted within the emerging L2 Motivational Self System paradigm (e.g. Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Henry, 2009; Ryan 2009), similar gender differences have been found in relation to the *Ideal L2 Self* construct that forms the core of Dornyei's (2005) model and which functions in a way that is analogous to Gardner's (2001) notion of integrativeness.

In addition to the striking consistency with which gender differences are found in the literature, two additional observations can perhaps be made.[1] First, hardly any research with a focus on gender has been conducted using qualitative methodologies and, secondly, none of the research to date has had a focus on L3s. Thus the purpose of this interview study is to examine the nature of gender differences in L3 motivation. In the sections that follow I will first provide a brief outline of the L2 Motivational Self-System along with Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory of possible selves and Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory upon which Dörnyei's model is based. Thereafter I will move on to discuss the applicability of this theory in relation to L3 acquisition and the multilingual paradigm. Here I will in particular emphasise the importance of Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory of the working self-concept and its relevance to the possible selves framework in language learning motivation, especially in contexts involving multiple language acquisition.

The L2 Motivational Self System and theories of possible selves
In their seminal article Markus and Nurius (1986) define possible selves as representative of the desires, hopes, fears and expectations that are of significance to the individual and which, in determining the direction and intensity of behaviour, provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation. In developing the theoretical concept of the possible self, Markus and Nurius (1986) draw on established theories of identity that regard the self-concept as a global construct comprising a system of affective-cognitive structures that give meaning to individual experiences within particular domains, and thus regulate the individual's behaviour.

Possible selves are a type of self-conception constructed from the images we carry of ourselves in future states. In representing our hopes, wishes, desires, aspirations and fantasies, they create a spectrum of possible life outcomes. In their research Markus and Nurius identify three main types of possible selves; "ideal selves that we would like to become", "selves we are afraid of becoming" and, finally, "selves that we could become" (Markus & Nurius, 1986; 954). Whilst the first two of these three categories represent, respectively, the best and the worst possible outcomes, the third functions in a default capacity. The importance of possible selves for theories of motivation is that they form a context within which current selves can be evaluated. Consequently, behaviour is directed towards positive future conceptions (i.e. 'hoped-for' possible selves) and away from potentially negative outcomes ('feared' or undesired possible selves).

Similarly, in Higgins' (1987) theory of future selves, focus is placed on the functions of self-guides that regulate behaviour in relation to an idealised future self. Here there are two key components, an *ideal self*, and an *ought self*. Whilst the former relates to attributes that the individual would ideally like to possess, the later concerns those that it is felt ought to be possessed in order to conform to the expectations of others. Thus, whilst the *ideal self* encompasses hopes, desires, aspirations and wishes, the *ought self* includes self-experienced obligations, duties to others and perceived moral responsibilities. In terms of the effect of the ideal and ought selves on motivation, Higgins argues that the individual behaves in a manner

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1. Whilst there were some studies where no gender differences were found, these seem to involve heritage languages where there is a special interest in, or reason for learning, and/or can be explained in terms of the sample composition (Henry (2010b).

accordant with a desire to reduce the discrepancy between the here-and-now self and future ideal and ought selves.

In combining elements from both Markus and Nurius' (1986) and Higgins' (1987) theories, the L2 Motivational Self System consists of three dimensions; an ideal L2 self, an ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The *Ideal L2 Self* represents the L2-specific component of the individual's overall 'ideal self'. Thus if the type of person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ideal L2 self will function as a powerful learning motivator in the sense of creating a desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. It is this component that encompasses the affective domain accounted for by integrativeness. The *Ought-to L2 Self* concerns the attributes that one believes that one should possess in order to meet social expectations and avoid possibly negative outcomes. Finally, the *L2 Learning Experience* concerns situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment (Dörnyei, 2005: 106).

SLA research and the multilingual paradigm
Up until recently, SLA scholars have by and large ignored, or at best underplayed differences in the processes of acquisition of L2s and L3s. DeAngelis (2007) for example talks in terms of an implicit 'no difference assumption' that pervades mainstream SLA research and Dornyei (2009) notes that it is not uncommon to read statements to this effect in the literature. However, over the last decade, scholars whose research focus is on differences in L2/L3 acquisitional processes have challenged this simplex assumption by providing compelling arguments for the need to view L2 and L3 acquisitional processes as inherently different. The later, they argue, are characterised by a greater inherent complexity due to the presence and effects of the metalinguistic knowledge that the L3 learner has gained from previous study of/exposure to the L2 (Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). In an attempt to approach the issue of L3 motivation from the perspective of the multilingual paradigm, Henry (2010a) has suggested that, in L3 learning situations or other situations involving exposure to the L3, the L2 is active in cognition and has a referential function in learners' appraisals of their L3 self-concepts. This is an idea which draws on Markus and Nurius' (1986) theory of the working self-concept.

Possible selves and the working self-concept
In describing the function of possible selves, Markus and Nurius (1986) emphasise that, isolated from particular contextual circumstances, a possible self may have little effect on purposeful action. Instead, it is the domain-specific possible self along with other contextually relevant self-conceptions that together determine the individual's behaviour and responses in particular situations. This array of self-knowledge and self-conceptions is contained in what Markus and Nurius call the 'current' or *working* self-concept. This they define as "that *subset* of one's total repertoire of self-conceptions – including core, habitual views of the self, the more episodic and domain-specific views of the self, and the conceptions of possibility – that is active and 'working' at any given point in time" (Markus & Nurius, 1987, p.163).

Although integral to the theory of possible selves in that it forms the interface between self-conceptions and situated behaviour, the working self-concept has been curiously overlooked in the early research that has taken place within the emerging Motivational Self System paradigm. This is somewhat unfortunate in that, as Markus and Nurius (1986) explain, an

understanding of motivated behaviour demands that proper account is taken of variations in internal states as a consequence of unfolding events:

> The value of the considering the nature and function of possible selves is most apparent if we examine not the self-concept, which is typically regarded as a single, generalized view of the self, but rather the current or *working* self-concept. Not all self-knowledge is available for thinking about the self at any one time. The working self-concept derives from the set of self-conceptions that are presently active in thought and memory. It can be viewed as a continually active, shifting array of available self-knowledge. The array changes as individuals experience variation in internal states and social circumstances. The content of the working self-concept depends on what self-conceptions have been active just before, on what has been elicited or made dominant by the particular social environment, and on what has been purposefully invoked by the individual in response to a given experience, event or situation. (Markus & Nurius 1986, p. 957)

The triggering of compensatory responses and the recruitment of positive self-knowledge into the working self-concept

Because the working self-concept involves a "shifting array of available self-knowledge" it is, as Markus and Kunda (1986) point out, constantly undergoing reconfiguration as a result of situational changes. Whilst certain contextual factors might have a more enduring compositional impact, meaning that different self-conceptions will occupy a dominant place in active cognition, others, such as the individual's reaction to a specific event or micro-contextual change, might trigger a response that involves the sudden incorporation of self-knowledge or a self-conception that, up until that specific instance, had not previously been constituent. To illustrate how this might work, Markus and Kunda (1986) provide an example of how an unguarded or ill-timed comment to another person can trigger a flow of negative self-conceptions, i.e. of being foolish or naive. However they make the point that such self-inflicted challenges to self-esteem are unlikely to go unchecked, explaining that other, more positive self-conceptions become purposefully invoked and brought into play:

> Instead, the individual is likely to counter these newly activated negative self-conceptions by recruiting from the universe of self-conceptions those that offer a different view of the self – the self as tactful, controlled, and socially skilled. The result of this cognitive work is that the content of the working self-concept becomes decidedly different from what it was prior to the embarrassing remark. In fact, the consequences of an embarrassing or a challenging self-relevant event may actually be a momentary rise in self-esteem or a brief period of self-promotion caused by the positive self-conceptions that are recruited to counteract the initially negative thoughts about the self. Such variations in the content of the working self-concept are significant. They can have powerful consequences for one's mood, for temporary self-esteem, and for the immediately consequent thoughts and actions. (Markus & Kunda, 1986, p. 859)

If we think in terms of the L3 classroom and the idea that, within the working self-concept, the L2 self-concept might have a referential function in the appraisal of the L3 self-concept, the notion that protective or compensatory processes might *also* be triggered is particularly interesting. To extend Markus and Kunda's line of reasoning to the L3 classroom, we might thus expect to find processes in which counteracting self-knowledge or conceptions of the self-as-L3-speaker/user are purposefully recruited into the working self-concept as a means of offsetting negative comparisons with the L2-self.

Purpose

In a previous study involving a sample of Swedish secondary school students (n=101) who were simultaneously engaged in learning two foreign languages (L2 English and L3 French, Spanish, or German), Henry (2010a) found support for the hypotheses that in L3 learning situations, i) L2 English would be an active constituent of the working self-concept and have a referential function, ii) that a high degree of L3-to-L2 referencing would be associated with low L3 motivation, and, iii) that this effect would be significantly greater for boys. In a follow-up to this study involving a reanalysis of the data using cluster techniques, Henry (in press) found distinct gender biases in students' motivational profiles, with boys dominating the two clusters where L3 motivation was low and L3-to-L2 referencing was either moderate or high. As an extension of both of these studies the purpose of this paper is to gain insights into girls' and boys' awareness of L2 English in L3 learning situations, the effects that the L2 English speaking/using self might have on the L3 self, and the ways in these effects might be offset in active or 'working' cognition.

Method

The sample

The sample in this study (n=101) is the same as in Henry (2010a) where students were simultaneously studying an L2 (English) and an L3 (French, German or Spanish). Results of regression analyses where L3-to-L2 referencing was the independent variable and L3 motivation the dependent variable revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship ($p<0.05$). In Henry (in press) K-means cluster techniques were applied to the dataset. Four main clusters emerged. A number of participants from each cluster were invited to participate in an interview. In Henry (in press) individual case studies of one student from each cluster are presented. The data relevant to the current study are provided in Table One. Interested readers are referred to Henry (in press) where the data are more fully described.

Table One. The cluster data and selection of interviewees.

Cluster	*N*	*Females*	*Males*	Cluster centre means		*Interviews (N)*
				L3 motivation (max 6.0)	L3-L2 self-referencing (max 6.0)	
One	10	5	5	5.66	2.44	4 (F=2, M=2)
Two	52	39	13	5.09	3.84	6 (F=6, M=0)
Three	28	2	26	3.80	3.88	3 (F=0, M=3)
Four	6	0	6	1.76	5.77	4 (F=0, M=4)
Totals	96	46	50			17

Note: A fifth statistically significant cluster (N=4) was ignored due to the lack of a clear nucleus. Data for one participant is missing.

The interviews

In the current study interview data from all 17 participants is examined. As demonstrated in Table One, the gender distributions for the four clusters are strikingly different. In particular,

for clusters 2 and 3, whilst the mean scores for L3-to-L2 self-referencing are almost identical, L3 motivation scores differ dramatically. One possible reason, in accordance with Markus and Kunda's (1986) proposal, could be that girls are more effective in counteracting the potentially negative impact of the L2 English-self in L3 learning situations. For this reason, students' awareness of and responses to L2 English in L3 learning situations were focused on in the interviews.

The interviews, which took place during school time, were conducted at the start of the students' second year of upper secondary education. In order to understand each individual as unique and as possessing a unique perception of her-/himself as a future L2/L3 speaker/user, the early part of each interview was devoted to gleaning biographical insights and to asking about current L2/L3 use, current L2/L3 exposure, experiences of both formal and informal L2/L3 learning, and the reasons for choosing and persevering with the L3. The participants were also asked to consider a scenario in the form of a vignette that placed them in a learning situation where processes hypothesized to take place within the working self-concept (Markus & Nurius, 1986) might be occur (see the Appendix). The strategy of placing the participants in a particular situation is encouraged by Markus and Kunda (1986) who emphasise that, as a regulator of behaviour, the working self-concept is best explored in the context of a particular situation or event. The analysis of the data was phenomenologically-inspired and interested readers are referred to Henry (in press) for a full account of the procedures employed.

Results and discussion

The focus of enquiry is initially directed towards the students' *Ideal* and *Ought-to L3 selves* and a brief synopsis of these results is provided. Thereafter focus shifts towards the cognitive processes involved in L3 learning situations where the L2 English speaking/using self might be active in cognition. In these in-depth analyses three main themes were generated; *negative appraisals of the L3 self*, *constructing cognitive boundaries* and *the recruitment of positive self knowledge*.

Ideal L3 selves

When invited to project into the future, all of the interviewed students in groups one and two found it easy to imagine themselves in situations in which they would use their L3 skills, often conjuring up vivid accounts of imagined interaction. In group three, however, the three boys who were interviewed seemed to have greater difficulty in imagining themselves in concrete situations as future L3 users/speakers. In group four only one of the four boys interviewed could offer an imaginary picture of himself communicating in his L3. As Dörnyei (2009) makes clear, it is the power of the imagined reality encapsulated within a possible self that functions as the driving force for motivation. Thus, for a self-guide to be effective, not only must it exist and be perceived to be plausible, but it must also have sufficient visual strength and vividness. In this respect the differences between the ease with which the interviewed students (mainly girls) in the first and second groups and the boys in the third and fourth groups were able to visualise themselves in future situations engaged in L3 interaction was clearly noticeable.

Ought-to L3 selves

The students in group one, although all expressing the clear desire to progress to higher education and having firm ideas about their future careers, were less concerned about the

need to do well in their L3 as means of enhancing their overall grade point average. Indeed, in choosing Russian as a 'new' language (effectively an L4) in upper secondary school, two of the students in this group (a boy and a girl) were actually prepared to sacrifice the additional credits that a further year of successful L3 study could have earned them.[2] This approach can be contrasted with the students in groups two and three who, without exception, explained that continuing with their L3 for a fifth and sixth year was important to them since the extra credits available were of great importance to their final grade point average. The need to match up to social expectations, a factor also subsumed within the ought-to self, was, for some students (mainly in group two) also of importance. For three of the four boys in group four, the enticement of a potential grade point average enhancement as a result of extended language study was not sufficiently alluring and they had dropped their L3. For the fourth boy, Joel (group four, German), the primary reason he gave for continuing with his L3 was to improve his grade point average, which he explained in the following way:

> In the eighth grade it was a real slog, but when we found out about extra credits it was full steam ahead.

Negative appraisals of the L3 self

Whilst all of the students in the sample had completed four years of L3 learning in secondary school, by the time of the interview, which took place at the beginning of the third term of upper secondary school, three of the four boys in group four had given up their L3s. When I ask why, all of them, in different ways, give voice to a notion that being able to speak English will be sufficient to them in the future and that knowledge of an L3 is simply not necessary. Freddie (group four, formerly learning L3 Spanish) describes for example the status and utility of English using the Swedish word '*grundspråk',* which in translation means a 'basic' 'standard' or 'foundational' language, when he says that:

> English is the standard language (*grundspråk*). It's all you need. You'll go a long way
> with English

Another boy, Niklas (group four, formerly learning L3 Spanish), when I ask him how he would react if he were to be stopped in the street on his way home by someone who asked him a question in Spanish says, without a second's hesitation, "please speak English!". In my interview with a third boy, Joel (group four, German) – the only one in the group who is still learning his L3 – we talk about his envisaged future L3 usage. Even though he has been learning German for six years he would, he says, when projecting into the future to imagine a situation on a business trip to Germany, nevertheless conduct conversations in English:

I: Can you imagine yourself in a situation in the future where you are speaking German?

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2.   In Sweden, as result of a recent government initiative, additional credits can be gained by students for each of two additional years that they continue their L3 learning after the end of secondary school. These enhanced credits can be of great importance when competing for places on popular programs provided by prestigious institutions.

Joel: Well [pause] I can imagine myself as a sales director and I would have some customers in Germany. And mostly I would take care of things in English of course. But perhaps you'd want to impress them a bit and go over to German [pause] to be a little [pause] you know [pause] business contacts and stuff...

Thus, in projecting into the future and conceptualising his future self as a speaker of German, it is interesting that Joel nevertheless sees German as an option only if he wants, as he says, to impress his business partners in social interaction, and not as an obvious choice given the situation that he has conjured up.

For both of these boys it seems that in any situation involving the L3, the English L2 self-concept appears to form a dominant, and in some cases even a primary self-conception within the working self-concept.[3] As Markus and Nurius (1986) explain, the content of the working self-concept will, at any instance in time, comprise self-conceptions that have "been elicited or made dominant by the particular social environment". Here, in interaction with imaginary L3 interlocutors, a self-conception as an L2 English-speaker would seem to be immediately activated and, once active, to become cognitively dominant.

Constructing cognitive boundaries
As mentioned previously, compositional changes in the working self-concept can come about as a result of self-conceptions triggered by contextual fluctuations. Thus, in an L3 learning situation, due to similarities in the nature of the instruction, the learning environment and the learning processes involved, the learner's self-conception of herself as a current/future speaker/user of L2 English can readily be invoked. Once incorporated as a constituent in the working self-concept, such a self-conception is likely to exert an influence on the other self-conceptions currently active in cognition. However, the degree to which one particular self-conception is likely to impact upon another will be dependent not only on their relative strengths, but also on the individual's motivational disposition.

Of the seventeen students I interviewed, sixteen recognised that they could sometimes find themselves thinking about English when engaged in L3 learning. This would appear to often take place when the student perceives that her/his L3 competency is weak or insufficient for the task she/he is confronted with. Lovisa (group two, Spanish) puts it like this:

I usually think that [pause] if we are going to translate a sentence, well then I usually think it out in English first. What is it English? Umm [laughs]

For one student however, the notion of thinking about English when involved in L3 learning was a strange one. When considering the learning situation vignette I present to her (see the Appendix), Sofia (group one, Spanish) makes the reflection that the situation envisaged is not something she has experienced:

I: Do you ever make this type of mental comparison?

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3. Interested readers are referred to Henry (in press) where the fourth boy in this group is presented in depth as a case study.

Sofia: No, I don't think that I've ever done that.

I: Do you think that other people might make such comparisons?

Sofia: Yes, I think they might.

I: But you don't?

Sofia: Well, no...

I: Why do you think that might be?

Sofia: Well, I don't think I've ever thought like this.

I: Is it perhaps that you see them as being different, this is English and this is Spanish?

Sofia: Yes, that's how I guess I've seen them.

For Sofia it seems as if the working self-concept active in Spanish lessons never includes an English-speaking self. Being highly motivated to do well in Spanish, both in terms of envisioning herself using the language in Spanish-speaking countries later in life, and as a means of improving her final grade-point average (and thus improving her longer-term education and employment opportunities), Sofia seems to immerse herself in the language. The focus of her learning behaviour is thus such that the type of catalytic micro-event needed to bring about the elicitation of her L2 English speaking/using self-conception quite simply never occurs.

Like Sofia, Annika (group one, Russian) is another highly motivated student who, in our interview, explains how she loves languages and, if she had the opportunity, would one day love to learn Japanese or perhaps Chinese. Since her upper secondary school, like most in Sweden, does not offer either of these languages, Annika says she decided on the next-best option of Russian which, although completely different to other European languages, nevertheless lacked for her the allure of Japanese. When I ask her to reflect upon the situation presented in the vignette, Annika pauses for some time before offering the following answer:

> Well, of course I think like that sometimes. Like if you're sitting there and there is suddenly a really hard word, then I can think, 'God, how much easier it would have been if it had been in English'. But, err.... But you can't really do that. You can't compare English with other languages, because English is so big whereas others, particularly Russian, it's just those countries. Russia and former Soviet colonies. So it's hard to make such a comparison between such a big language with one that is so small.

Unlike Sofia, Annika recognises that, when learning Russian, she can find herself making comparisons with English. So, in the context of the example she gives, the difficult word that she encounters might function as the catalyst that causes her English speaking/using self to be invoked and become an active component within the working self-concept. Yet, at the same time, she seems to check herself; "you can't really do that", she says. Thus in this way the threat to her Russian speaking/using self-concept posed by her English speaking/using self-concept seems to be warded off by a secondary process of cognition that involves a further and more considered appraisal. Put another way, a cognitive boundary between the two languages would appear to be created and functions in a way that insulates the weaker Russian speaking/using self-concept from its more dominant and currently-invoked English speaking/using twin.

The recruitment of positive self-knowledge

As previously discussed, Markus and Kunda (1986) have suggested that contextually-derived challenges to the self-concept are unlikely to go unchecked in that the individual is likely to counter newly-activated negative self-conceptions by recruiting forms of self-knowledge that offer a different view of the self. This form of cognitive counteraction was found to be used by three of the four students whose case studies are presented in Henry (in press). However, when examined from a gender perspective, differences in the type of self-knowledge that the female and male students use to offset the impact of the English speaking/using self seem to emerge.

Promotive self-knowledge

For the girls I interviewed, the self-knowledge that was recruited to counter the effects of English appeared to involve a reassertion of their ideal L3 self. This would often take the form of the recognition that the L3 was personally rewarding and that L3 competence was a personal goal. Moa's (group two, Spanish) reflection upon the scenario in the vignette I present her with is typical of something that several of the girls in the second group gave voice to:

> Well, yes I can actually think like that as [*in Spanish lessons*] there's so much that's new all the time but with English, well you know it anyway, you might make a few mistakes, but Spanish is like more difficult. So then you think sometimes, why can't I be doing this in English instead? But Spanish is fun, it is.

Having earlier in the interview described how she could envision herself using the language in the future, here Moa seems to indicate that, when Spanish is perceived as difficult, she seems to remind herself – in the form of the cognitive prompt 'Spanish is fun, it is' – that in spite of the problems encountered, Spanish is worthwhile persevering with. The positive self-knowledge comprised in this cognitive prompt would seem thus to function as a means of reasserting the primacy of the L3 self in response to the temporary, but nevertheless potentially threatening, incursion of the English-speaking/using self.

A similar, although somewhat more sophisticated approach seems to be adopted by Emelie (group two, French). Whilst recognising that thoughts about English and negative comparisons with French can crop up in L3 learning situations, Emelie seems to have developed an awareness of the problem that this could cause and appears to have developed a cognitive response that involves a second comparative turn. This involves the self-reflexive contrasting of her situation – as someone with a strong desire to learn the language and who will use it in the future – with others who don't have the same level of motivation:

Emelie: Er, yes I do. Absolutely. I also think that it is much easier in English. I don't know. It's more rewarding if you like, can [*understand – author's interpretation*]. So it's not surprising that you think that English is more fun because of this. Because you struggle and struggle and struggle with French and English comes so much easier. So, yes, I recognize this.

I: Do you yourself make this type of mental comparison between the two languages?

Emelie: Well, not quite in the same way because I, well I know that I think it is harder and all that, but I so much want to learn so I don't think that it is quite so much of a problem as all of those others who don't have my attitude.

Thus for both Moa and Emelie, the counterweight to the incursion of the English speaking/using self is, as Markus and Kunda's (1986) theory predicts, the recruitment of self-conceptions that focus positive dimensions of their ideal L3 selves and positive self-knowledge. In Moa's case this positive self-knowledge is that she is someone who enjoys L3 learning, whilst for Emelie it is additionally accompanied by the awareness that she is someone who is rather fortunate in this.

Preventative self-knowledge
Whilst the recruitment of counteractive self-knowledge is equally evident in the accounts given by the boys in the study, it seems to take a somewhat different form. For several of the boys, offsetting the potentially negative incursion of L2 English involves a recognition that, first, because languages are hard, extra effort and focus are required, and, secondly – in the form of a secondary recognition – that this is something they are fully capable of. Anton (group one, Russian), when presented with the scenario in the vignette provides the following response:

I: Do you recognize this type of situation?

Anton: Yes it's happened. You're sitting like and you've got a text [pause] and then you stare at the text and sigh a little and think that it would have been much easier in English because the alphabet is so completely different and all of the different sounds and all that, so you look at the text like and OK, in your mind it's very easy to read a text but when you have to read it out loud it becomes incredibly hard because then you think, 'how should it be now' is it like this, is it like this, and it can be so disjointed, so yes then I recognize that it would have been much easier in English.

I: Is this something that you yourself experience sometimes?

Anton: Yes, it is, but I go on and do it anyway. I completely refuse not to read a text. Instead I read it and in this way try to learn.

I: So it doesn't trouble you, this type of thought, when you compare with English? You get over it and read it anyway?

Anton: Yes, it's like so you get a text, ah-ha, it would have been much easier in English, well who cares? I read it anyway, I don't really care if it had been much easier in English.

Johan (group three, Spanish) seems to adopt a somewhat similar approach. For him too comparisons with English in the working self-concept involve him having to step up a gear in the intensity of his learning.

Yup, yup, I have definitely thought that [laughs] because it is more natural, everything is more natural with English because you can [*speak it – author's note*] so that's something I've thought myself. Ah [pause] But I don't really know how I should answer actually. I would perhaps say that I agree because I think that it would have been easier in English but we probably ought to know this stuff because we have probably been through it. Ah [pause] it is not really so hard if you put your mind to it.

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Thus, in the recruitment of positive self-knowledge that can offset the temporary incursion of the L2 English-speaking/using self in the working self-concept, there would appear to be differences in the responses of the girls and boys in this study. Whereas some of the girls interviewed recruited forms of self-knowledge that functioned as a means of enhancing their L3 selves, the boys seem to be aware that more effort is required, meaning that the self-knowledge that this is something that they are capable of becomes prominent in cognition.

Conclusion

As an extension of two previous studies (Henry, 2010a; in press) the purpose of this paper was to gain insights into girls' and boys' awareness of L2 English in L3 learning situations, the effects that the L2 English speaking/using self might have on the L3 self, and the ways in which these effects might be offset in active or 'working' cognition. Analyses of the data indicate that for the least-motivated boys in group four, the L2 English self may be a prominent component in the working self-concept activated in L3 learning situations and appears to have a strong referential function. For the boys in the other groups, L2 English would also, on occasion, appear to be present in the working self-concept. Although functioning as a cognitive referent, its potentially negative effects may however be countered by the recruitment of positive self-knowledge that emphasises a capacity for hard work and the recognition of a determination to succeed. For the girls, some seem to be successful in offsetting the potentially negative influence of the L2 English speaking/using self in L3 learning situations by constructing cognitive barriers between these two linguistic self-concepts. Others appear to recruit positive self-knowledge into the working self-concept as a means of enhancing the L3 self. These results are by nature tentative and will need to be followed up in future studies. They do however suggest that focusing on cognitive processing within the working self-concept may offer useful insights into the gender gap in L3 motivation.

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Notes

1. Whilst there were some studies where no gender differences were found, these seem to involve heritage languages where there is a special interest in, or reason for learning, and/or can be explained in terms of the sample composition (Henry (2010b).

2. In Sweden, as result of a recent government initiative, additional credits can be gained by students for each of two additional years that they continue their L3 learning after the end of secondary school. These enhanced credits can be of great importance when competing for places on popular programs provided by prestigious institutions.

3. Interested readers are referred to Henry (in press) where the fourth boy in this group is presented in depth as a case study.

Appendix

Towards the end of the interview the participants were asked to consider a vignette portraying an L3 learning situation where, talking out loud, a student verbalises comparisons that she/he makes with English:

> OK, here is a fictional situation. There is a student in your class – we can call her/him Emma/Emil. And just like you she/he is learning [Spanish/French/Russian]. You are sitting close to each other in a [Spanish/French/Russian] lesson and you are working with a text that you have been asked to read. Suddenly she/he sits up, sighs and, thinking out loud, says "Shit, this would have been so much better if it had been in English. This stuff that we are doing now would have been so much easier if it had been in English. No, it is much more fun reading something in English".[i]

After a short pause to think about the scenario, the participants were asked the following questions:

> Do you recognize this type of situation?
>
> Do you sometimes make these types of mental reference?
>
> Does this happen often?
>
> Can you tell me a little about how you think in such situations?