

The impact of positive views on language learning and pupils' construction of L2: Imagined communities, possible selves, and investment in language learning

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Abstract

This paper is based on data drawn from PhD research investigating the relationship between language learning, identity, culture, and motivation. It specifically describes how a group of Arab Muslim female English as second language (ESL) pupils are motivated by their imaginings of the English language speaking community. In Saudi Arabia the education system concentrates on teaching, while identity and social aspects have only been given little attention. I seek to redress this balance by exploring the impact of pupils' positive imaginings of the linguistic communities and of themselves in the future as members of those communities. I show how this investment works to promote their language learning. I use the concepts of imagined communities, possible selves and investment to illustrate the relationship between language and identity and how they impact each other. Further, I utilise sociocultural theory to explore how participants negotiate their identities as female Muslim Arabs who desire to be members of the imagined linguistic communities. In this presentation I illustrate my arguments using data drawn from focus group and one to one interviews, and students' text messages, photos and drawings.

Keywords: second language; motivation; sociolinguistics; identity; imagined communities, possible selves and investment.

Introduction

English is the only foreign language taught in public schools starting from the seventh year to year eleven in secondary school for more than 50 years (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989); recently it has been taught during year 6, and from an age as early as kindergarten in most private schools. Furthermore, English is the language of instruction in all science university courses. Moreover, as a result of Saudi Arabia's economic leading role at the international level, the Saudi Arabian government has realized the great demand to learn English as a means of communication with the outside world. In addition, beside Arabic English is the only language used in hospitals, shops, and other public places, therefore, English could be regarded as a second language in Saudi Arabia. However, learning English in the Saudi context might clash with the mother tongue and the local cultures. This clash could result from certain social images created towards the target language culture and speakers, which as a result could demotivate language learners and discourage them to use English.

There is much debate surrounding the importance of motivation in language learning, and it has been agreed that motivation is one of the influential factors in ESL. For example, Ellis states that "SLA research... views motivation as a key factor in L2 learning" (1994, p. 508). Moreover, McDonough supports this argument, pointing out that the "motivation of the students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language" (1986, p. 142). In addition, lack of motivation could reduce learners' attention and sometimes push them to misbehave, while motivated pupils are more likely to concentrate and behave to a certain extent (Spolsky, 1989). It is argued that pupils who are interested in language learning perform better than those who are not motivated (Chang & Lehman, 2002).

There is much debate about the relationship between motivation and attitude, especially in learning a second language. De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor (2005) state that "teachers, learners and researchers will all agree that a high motivation and a positive attitude towards a second language and its community help second language learning" (p. 72). Attitude refers to the learners' positive and negative beliefs towards the target language speakers and their perception of their own local culture (Brown, 1973). Due to the belief that there is a direct correlation between learners' motivation and attitudes towards language learning, Triandis states that "attitude is defined as an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of action to a particular class of social situation" (1971, pp. 3-4).

Within the debate of defining the concept of motivation, some identified it as a learner's requirement to approach a goal (Gardner, 1985). For example, when motivating learners, it is important that they have a goal to look forward to as they learn a second language, such as getting a good job or gaining a high social status. This argument suggests that language learning could be a vehicle by which a learner achieves his or her goals. Dornyei (2005) also suggested a model that considers that the essential power that energises language learners are the images of their future selves as successful speakers of that language.

According to the debate above that empower the significance of motivation in language learning, I, therefore, argue for a motivating environment to teaching and learning, which integrates elements of learner's identity and imagination into the the learning and teaching process.

Basic objectives of the study

The main aim of this paper is to discover factors that may impact ESL pupils' attitudes towards themselves in the future and towards the speakers of English on motivating their learning in the Saudi context. The objective of my study are as follows:

- To explore girls' attitudes towards English language and culture.
- To explore pupils' assumptions about English language and culture.
- To describe how learning of English is related to pupils' identity construction.
- To explore the influence of images and future possible selves on ESL that could motivate learners in the Saudi context.

Literature review

The relationship between identity and language

Falout and Maruyama have argued that "People's identity inheres in their voices, spoken, written or signed and their identities are always present in what they say and in the understanding of what others say" (2004, p. 21). One can read others' identities, therefore, through their speech, their choice of words and their linguistic structures in the process of interaction whether in formal settings, as in schools and learning institutions, or in informal places, as in other daily life situations such as with friends and relatives. In addition, "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time" (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

The relationship between foreign and second language learning and identity has been discussed in many studies (Adger, 1998; Block, 2007; De Fina & Schiffrin, 2006; Maybin, 2006; Pavlenko, 2004; Toohey, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). In this study I address the relationship between English learning and the Islamic and Saudi identities in the context of Saudi Arabia, where the first and the target language and culture might clash.

This concluded that people use language varieties to show their loyalty to a social group and display their identities through their speech.

Bilingual speakers

Speakers of more than one language can feel the effect of using more than one code in their identity construction. Also, bilingual speakers could use code switching to show their identities and their "linguistic variability must have effects not just on how people refer to and explicitly categorize states of affairs but also on what social acts people accomplish through talk" (Koven, 1998, p. 412). Garret (2007) argue that when bilinguals "use particular linguistic resources in a particular context or at particular moment of interaction" (p. 234), they purposely want to show their identity.

Motivation

The term motivation is complicated and varies according to the dynamic changes in a person's psychology, it is not an easy task to define this phenomenon (Dornyei & Tseng, 2009; Judge, 2011; Nishino, 2007). Harmer (1991) describes motivation as the 'internal drive' that pushes somebody to do something. If we think that our goal is worth doing and attractive for us, then we try to reach that goal; this is called 'the action driven by motivation' (p. 3). It has also been explained that learning and motivation are two fundamental components necessary to reach a

goal; learning enables us to obtain knowledge, and motivation attracts us to become involved in the learning process (Parsons, Hinson, & Brown, 2001). Moreover, motivation and attitudes could be identified as two vital, equivalent factors in the language-learning process. For example, Karahan states that "positive language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English" (2007, p. 84). To conclude, motivation is a complex concept to identify, however, it could be defined it as a factor that pushes people to do something.

A teacher's role in motivating learners

The role of the teacher in motivating learners has provoked a great deal of debate among language-learning researchers together with acknowledgement of its significance in watering pupils' learning roots and improving their performance (Dornyei, 1994; Ellis, 1994; Tanaka, 2005). Increasing learners' expectancy for success could also impact pupils' motivation, while reminding them of their failures and difficulties in language learning might negatively impact their enthusiasm and performance (Atkinson, Raynor, & Birch, 1974). In response to this theory, teachers should increase pupils' expectations for success and help them form positive images of themselves as future members of the community connected to the language such as encourage them to create images of themselves as language teachers in the future.

The motivational self-system and parental encouragement

Numerous studies stressed the importance of parental encouragement in enhancing learners' motivation (Gardner, 1985; Kormos & Csizer, 2008; Ryan, 2009; Williams & Burden, 1997). Many studies stressed the impact of parents on their children's self-system and future self-images (Kormos & Csizer, 2008; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). Self-images and role models are identified as the main factor in energising pupils' imagination of possible selves and thus their motivation. In addition, poor ideal second language images could result from a lack of social encouragement, which was sometimes caused by lack of role models or the conflict between the current social identities and one's possible selves (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Therefore, parents could play a significant role in facilitating their children's language learning by watering their positive images towards language and towards themselves as language speakers in the future.

The Imagined Community

The notion of imagined community was first described by Anderson (1991), who proposed that our sense of nationalism is a fantasy image because we create this vision without even meeting all of our nation's fellows. Various scholars developed this notion in relation to language learning, including Kanno, Norton (2003), and Wenger (1998). Norton (2001) developed 'the imagined communities' concept to understand the correlation between language learning and identity. She proposed that language learning takes place not only through our actual engagement in accessible communities, but also through our imagined views of the language communities that we do not ever meet. This theory refers to the learner's imaginative vision of target language speakers that they have not yet met and how this vision influences their identity construction and language learning (Norton, 2001). The imagined communities are defined as "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241).

Moreover, language teachers can play a significant role in transmitting cultural images to their learners and enhancing the construction of their imagined community, and “what kind of adult the students will grow up to be and what communities they will join in the future” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 287).

Imagination to provoke a reaction: the possible selves

The idea of ‘Possible selves’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) is a theory that links language learners to how they envision themselves in the future. This theory is built on learner’ imagination of themselves, what they wish to become and what they are afraid of becoming as members of the imagined communities, which can inspire learners’ vision of possible selves. Dornyei (2005) claims that “possible selves are specific representations of one’s self in future states, involving thoughts, images, and senses, and are in many ways the manifestations or personalized carriers, of one’s goals and aspirations (and fears, of course)” (p. 99). This notion can motivate language learners to create a plan for their future by creating a balance between their goals and fears through imagining possible negative outcomes if they have not achieved their wishes (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Imagination can also provide teachers with opportunities to provoke learners’ reactions towards language learning by imagining their ‘possible selves’ (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in the future, and what they desire to be or what they are afraid of becoming.

Investment

Simon (1992) argues that people struggle to fulfil their expectations; however, these expectations can be enhanced with the help of their imagination. Wenger (1998) also brought attention to the strong relationship between identity and imagination. He points out that imagination not only serves to encourage participation and engagement, but it also promotes a sense of belonging to those imagined groups. Hence, Wenger regards imagination as a way to create new visions of ones’ self, ‘possible selves’, and the world with no space or time boundaries. Norton (2001) proposes that imagined communities play a crucial role in second language learning through investment in communities that do not have the boundaries of the classroom. Therefore, imagined communities inspire a learner to create an imagined identity and possible selves for the future that facilitate investment in language learning and the struggle to meet these expectations.

This review of the literature about the importance of motivation in second and foreign language learning emphasised the impact of certain self-images on ESL through influencing pupils’ motivation. This also provides an overview of what research says about identity influence in language learners’ motivation.

I am intended to shed light on the interaction between females’ language learning and their identity construction, whether actual or imagined, within Saudi society, which may affect their language learning. Furthermore, it examines how learning English influences and is affected by Saudi females’ identity construction and how learners cope with their local ideologies and the new ideologies held by the English language.

In order to support my argument for the impact of pupils’ future expectations and attitudes towards the imagined community on motivating them and enhance their learning, it is important to provide a brief background about the context of teaching and learning English in Saudi.

Methodology

I discuss my research design, the methodology, and the methods used in the current study. I also explain the rationale beyond using a case study approach. Moreover, I discuss my research participants and then refer to the research ethics.

Case study approach

In order to match my study objectives, I adopted a case study method that involves one secondary school involving ESL pupils and teachers.

A case study can be explained as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The choice of a case study approach is significant and appropriate for my study, as this approach is suitable for studying complex settings involving social aspects such as culture, gender and religion. Moreover, in order to answer why and how questions in my study.

Research participants

My study sample involved 132 second-year pupils from a secondary public school in Taif city and three Saudi English language teachers. I interviewed thirty pupils, divided into five groups of five to six pupils. In addition, I interviewed the three English teachers individually once or twice at the end of study according to their availability. I was the only person who had access to these data.

I describe the learning situation in Saudi Arabia and briefly define motivation in order to justify the argument being made. I then provide an overview of my study objectives and participants. After that, I discuss the relationship between language and identity for bilingual speakers. Then, I present arguments about categories of motivation and the role a teacher and parents may have in motivating learners and energise their self system. I also describes the concepts: imagined community, possible selves and investment with relevance to ESL. I then identify the main aim and objectives of my study followed by a discussion of the main findings. Finally, I conclude by summarising the main findings of my study.

Methods of data collection

According to Silverman (2013), a methodology encompasses the process of studying a certain phenomenon and selecting a case study, tools and methods used for data-gathering and analysis. On the other hand, ‘methods’ refers to procedures, tools and techniques utilized for data collection (Kaplan, 1973), including quantitative and qualitative techniques such as questionnaires, interviews, surveys and case studies. In this research I have used focus group and individual interviews, classroom observation, field notes, multimodal materials.

Interviews

In my view, the rationale of using interviews is because “interviews can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach ... allowing a researcher to investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe like interviewee’s thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives” (Wellington, 2000, p. 71).

I preferred to use pupil group interviews in order to “discover how interpretations were collectively constructed through talk and the interchange between respondents in the group situation” (Morley, 1980, p. 33). Also, this method is useful for reflecting the social realities of a cultural group and relevant to identify pupils’ implicit beliefs and thoughts about their English learning and how it might be affected by certain cultural practices whether inside school or in everyday life (Hughes & DuMont, 2002). Teachers’ one-to-one interviews were friendly conversations informally arranged according to the availability of the teachers.

Multimodal materials

In the last decade, multimodal sources have been increasingly used in qualitative research (Chaplin, 1994; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Guillemin, 2004; Mair & Kierans, 2007; S. Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1998) to argue that an image’s significance as a wall decoration goes beyond use as a tool to represent and display some aspects of the owner’s life (Morgan, 2001). Drawing as a research method is usually used as a complement to verbal means (Guillemin, 2004) that not only involves drawing, but evokes the drawer to express the conveyed meaning he/she intends.

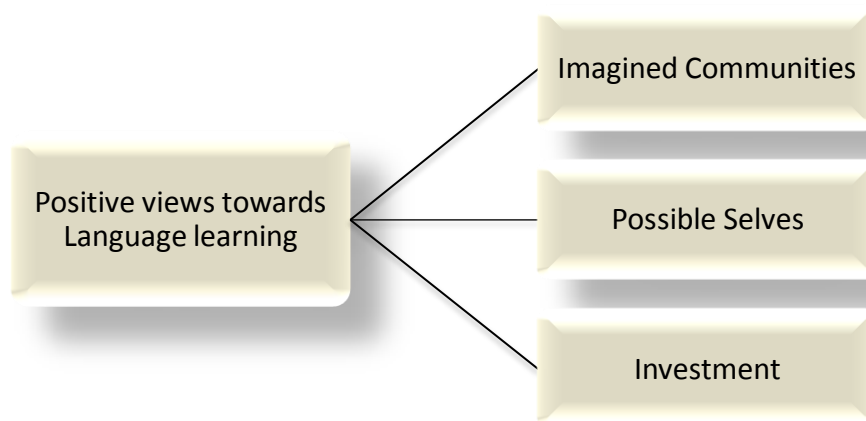
In this study, I used two forms of visual materials to support my research. The first form is photographs taken by me as the researcher. The second form includes drawings produced by respondents. The photographs do not reveal participants’ identities and have been ethically approved.

Discussion

I aim to analyse and discuss how English language learners negotiate their identities as Muslim, Arab, and Saudi, who desire to be members of the global linguistic cultures. The origins of these positive views towards English and how they develop within the global cultural and social ideologies. It is also about the impact of beliefs towards English and its communities on the process of language learning. It discusses how positive views about English could facilitate language learning in the Saudi context, where culture and social principles play significant roles in everyday life.

In this study I discuss how some pupils could create idealised views towards English and its communities to invest in language learning by visualising idealised views of the linguistic communities and of themselves in the future as members of those communities. It also reflects on the origin of these idealised images and the role they play in language learning.

In order to promote my discussion I refer to three concepts as follows:



Positive views of language learning and its communities

These three notions clarify how learners adopt an idealised vision of the imagined communities and of themselves as part of those communities and the adjustment of those learners, who care about their own local ideologies and dream about participating in the language communities. These learners desire to select suitable language ideologies that do not contradict their local ideologies and help them to perceive English positively without any tension. These three concepts are post-structural and social concepts, which clarify that language learning is not only an exchange between speakers, but is a form of social interaction.

Pupil interviews

The following quotations were typical examples of pupils' construction of their imaginative images of the linguistic communities that encouraged them to invest in language learning by imagining their possible selves in the future.

Nouf: I like English, and I like to use it while chatting with my friends. I need it to complete my education, and it is the language of modernity, globalisation, and communication. Most people use it. I like to watch English films – they are exciting. I have learned a lot about the Western people through those films. I wish to complete my university education abroad and communicate with those nice and respectful people there. People respect those people who study abroad. I know that it's not easy to leave your home country and study abroad, and I know it will be difficult, but this will add a lot of experience to my life, like exposure to new ways of life, new ideas, new cultures, and new experiences. I know that some cultural aspects might not suit me, but I can simply leave them if I don't like them. My mum always encourages me to learn English; she wishes to see me one day speaking English fluently. She always says that English is important.

(1-G S: pupil interview, April 2012)

Nouf identified five different goals that motivated her to learn English as follows:

- To complete her education.
- To be part of the modern and globalised world.
- To communicate with people around the world and discover new ways of life, new ideas and new cultures.
- To gain more social respect.
- To learn about other cultures.

Watching films provoked Nouf imagined communities and inspired her to invest in learning English by imagining herself in the future. She envisioned the language communities as an exciting, educated, modern, respectful people, which encouraged her to draw a picture of herself as a member of those communities in the future. Her image of herself as more respected, educated, and experienced person promoted her investment in English. These clear imagined images and future plan were deciding factors in Nouf's educational and professional identities, although, these visions were uncertain. In addition, her mother's wish and awareness of the significance of English was another motivating factor for Nouf to invest in English.

The difficult situation for language learners in Saudi Arabia was also exemplified by Amal, who tried to explain her own complicated experience. Amal's lack of social support, encouragement, openness, cooperation, and lack of sufficient space to use English pushed her to imagine herself as part of a fantasy environment that is more suitable to her wishes and needs.

Amal: English is freedom (laughing), polite people, Native English speakers will encourage us to learn English. They will be more open and deal with us in a good way cooperative, understandable, accept other opinions, no social restrictions. I will learn the language in only two weeks because I will speak and break my silence, I will be free from the social criticism. You can discuss and say what you want without being worried about anything, fabulous feeling. New culture and traditions and ways of life, but the most important thing is not to be influenced by their culture and change our own identity. But in Saudi if you use English, people think that you are arrogant. They will ignore you.

(2-1 L: pupil interview, May 2012)

She imagined idealised images of the linguistic communities to suit her needs and wishes. These fantasy pictures paved the way for her investing in language learning. She imagined the language communities as a hero who will free her from all the social restrictions. Opening the discussion by saying 'freedom' revealed her serious need for independence from social pressures such as:

- Social criticism and negative perceptions of English users as arrogant people.
- Silence and the lack of expression of opinions and needs.

Moreover, Amal regarded English as a gateway to travel and access other cultures and new ways of life. However, her love and sense of belonging to her local communities helped her draw some red lines between what she wishes to be in the future and what she wishes to keep for the future. She wishes to benefit from English to facilitate and support her future life, but not at the expense of her own local identities.

Teachers' interviews

This idealised view of the imagined communities was also identified by teachers. The following two quotations were parts of the interviews with teachers 'D' and 'N' justifying why some pupils prefer to use some certain English words rather than Arabic.

Teacher 'D': Pupils speak English just to show off and to show that they are stylish. That's why pupils prefer to say some words in English, rather than in Arabic. For example, they like to say love in Arabic or wear a necklace with the word love written in English. This is in contrast to wearing a necklace with the word love in Arabic. One reason for this is that in Arabic, saying love is not accepted and restricted by rules in the culture.

(Teacher interview, May 2012)

Teacher 'D' stated that pupils perceive the linguistic communities as stylish, open, and romantic worlds. She exemplified that with the preference of wearing a necklace with the word 'love' in English rather than Arabic for two reasons:

- People have imagined images of the linguistic communities associated with love, openness, and modernity.
- The local culture does not prefer to express love explicitly as a way of showing modesty and politeness.

Using some English words is one of the strategies pupils use to invest in language to identify themselves as part of the open English culture.

Teacher 'N': Most pupils know certain words like smile, kiss, love, friendship, don't forget me, etc. Sometimes they ask me about the spelling of these words because they are more emotional at this age. And sometimes they are influenced by films like 'Titanic'. In fact, they learned many words from Titanic.

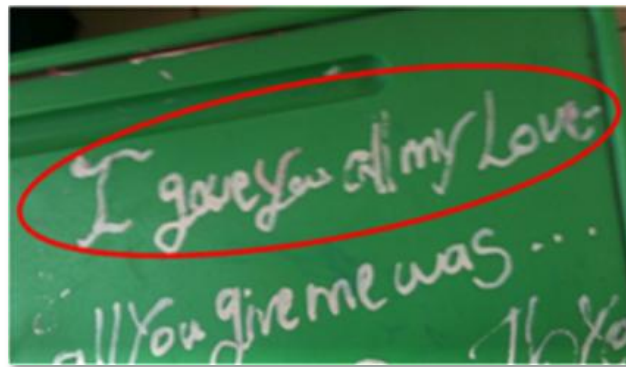
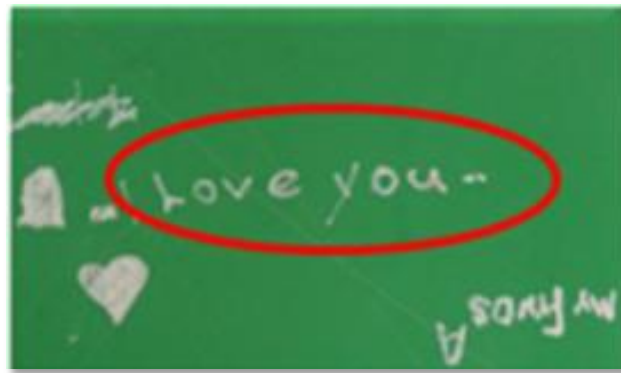
(Teacher interview, May 2012)

Teacher 'N' also discussed how some pupils were impacted by the Western culture by watching films such as 'Titanic' which shows Western people as extremely romantic. She explained how some pupils ask her about some English words that refer to love and feelings such as 'smile, kiss, love, friendship, don't forget me' illustrating their perception of English as a language of romantic people. She justified her pupil's situation based on the fact that they are teenagers, claiming that they usually care about feelings at this age.

Multimodal data

Sometimes multimodal data such as pictures, images, and drawings can express real feelings and stories more than verbal words. This part of my data includes some photos taken by me or pupils, in addition to some drawings created by the pupil 'Samyah'. These pictures depict some unique creations of imagined communities by young female language learners in Saudi Arabia. These pictures illustrated how local and global identities merged together to construct unique second language identities within the Saudi context.

As I was carrying out my research, I discovered a difference between formal and informal language pupils use. I took the following photos of some pupils' writings on their desks; they are typical examples of pupils' creations of imagined communities.



Pupils' writings on their desks

I noticed here that pupils had sometimes inscribed aspects of their identity through English on the walls and desks of the school starting to live with the language around them and feel of belonging to the linguistic communities. These two photos show pupils' use of certain words that express emotions and feelings, such as love. The frequent use of this word indicated the romantic view pupils created towards the linguistic communities. Both photos show the actual use of the English word 'love' in English codes. Pupils used English codes to add a sense of prestige to their writing, as English is perceived in Saudi Arabia as a symbol of prestige. These photos narrated one tale in the English language in the Saudi context, in which learners try to identify themselves locally and globally within their current contexts.

Samyah also is one of those young learners who invested in language learning creating romantic idealised imagined pictures of the language communities. The following drawings were created by 'Samyah' as part of her everyday diary. Due to my strong relationship with this pupil, she expressed her willingness to participate with her diary even without my request.



Samyah's drawings

These drawings identify an imagined image of a Western girl, who is stylish and romantic. Samyah preferred to express her love in English rather than Arabic according to the romantic image she created of the linguistic communities. Samyah tried to break her silence and search for a more expressive environment to express her emotions explicitly. These romantic imagined images about the linguistic communities motivated Samyah to imagine herself in the future as a romantic English speaker, which encouraged her to invest in English by identifying herself as part of these communities.

According to my data, second language learners themselves and those in the language communities suggested that pupils could create an idealised image of language users and of themselves in the future as being members of those communities.

Sometimes language learning can be facilitated because global ideologies have more power and domination over local ideologies, which leads to learners' willingness to become a member of the language communities creating an idealised view of those communities. In other cases, learners' ideologies might interact with each other to cautiously create a balance that fits with local and global ideologies. Sometimes, dissonance might occur due to contradictions between local and global ideologies, which can lead to a complete rejection of language learning.

This theme summarised the impact of positive and idealised views towards English on language learning, as Karahan stated that "positive language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English" (2007, p. 84). Karahan discussed the impact of idealised imagined communities on the construction of second language identity and on investing in language learning.

Conclusion

In this study I explored the origins of imaginative views towards the English language and culture on language learning in relation to three concepts: imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Wenger, 1998), possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and investment Norton (2001). Some pupils' beliefs about the English language and culture appeared positive, impacted by positive imaginative views towards the English language and its speakers. My findings indicated that positive images towards speakers of English were a motivating factor in encouraging girls to learn and invest in English learning. According to my study, I suggested that

some pupils could create positive views towards English and its communities to invest in language learning by visualising idealised views of the linguistic communities and of themselves in the future as members of those communities. Perceiving speakers of English positively as exciting, educated, modern, respectful, gentle, attractive, powerful, clever, successful, and experienced elicited more social respect and seemed to inspire some of the Saudi girls in my sample to depict their future selves as members of those communities and pushed them to invest in English learning. These findings supported previous research into the effect of learners' beliefs about themselves and their linguistic communities on their language learning (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004).

Girls' perception of English as a tool to increase their self-confidence or to obtain a good future education and job seemed also to have an impact on pupils' encouragement to invest in English learning to approach these future goals. Furthermore, pupils' real-life models of speakers of English, such as a relative or a friend, appeared also to feed pupils' imagination of themselves in the future and energised them to invest in English learning. These findings also are in line with Gardener's (1985) and Simon's (1992) arguments regarding the effect of approaching a goal on motivating language learners and energising their investment in language learning.

My findings also suggested that girls' ideal and positive future images they created of themselves motivated them to invest in English learning. Also, pupils' desire to learn English to avoid certain negative results, such as academic failure or losing social respect, also encouraged them to learn English. These findings also reiterate other research that emphasises the significance of future self-images in enhancing language learning (Dornyei, 2005; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). This model argues that the ideal L2 self and the 'ought to' L2 self could be positively employed for the benefit of language learners. My findings are also in line with Higgins's theory (1987) of self-discrepancy that aims to decrease discrepancy by enhancing motivation and establishing a relationship between a person's current actual selves and his or her possible selves in the future.

Girls' practices of English usage also indicated the impact of imaginative views towards English on their attitudes and assumptions about the English language and culture. Pupils' romantic English writings on their classroom desks seemed to indicate that imaginative images towards the users of English had an impact on their perceptions of English as a language of love and romance. This perception also has been shown through girls' overuse of certain English words that relate to feelings such as the words 'love, miss you, sorry, and cute'. Samyah is one of the pupils involved in my study, her romantic drawings and English writings could also be a typical example of the beneficial use of visual materials in qualitative research. These drawings help me to discover pupils' hidden thoughts and feelings that are difficult for participants to express verbally (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993; S. Pink, 2001; Sarah Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1998). These drawings are typical examples of the influential role imaginative pictures of the linguistic communities play on learners' beliefs about English language and its culture. Samyah's drawings and writing appeared to demonstrate her positive view of the English language and its users. These findings reiterate Karahan's (2007) statement that "positive language attitudes let learners have positive orientation towards learning English" (p. 84).

Saudi girls' positive imaginative views about English and its speakers or about their possible selves were not as simple as I had expected, since they were influenced by a complicated network of factors. One's positive possible self does not always lead to positive assumptions and attitudes towards language learning. These results are illustrated by the findings by Oyserman, who states that "a particular possible self may fail to sustain regulatory action because it conflicts with other parts of the self-concept" (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006, p. 118). Those pupils reacted negatively towards English learning despite their positive perceptions of the English language and culture. Therefore, there is a need for further deep research on investigating such situations in relation to the pupils' context and social attributes.

Teachers' narrations about their pupils indicated the impact of positive imaginative beliefs about the speakers of English on pupils' perceptions of English and its culture. Findings also appeared to indicate that teachers think that pupils are motivated to learn English because they believe the linguistic communities are romantic and stylish. Teachers also suggested that English learning could be facilitated if parents reduced their kids' fear of the English language. Moreover, teachers' narrations demonstrated the belief that some negative perceptions about the English language and culture held by some pupils' parents could impact learners' attitudes, practices, and assumptions about English and could sometimes demotivate them. These findings align with other studies (Gardner, 1985; Kormos & Csizer, 2008; Ryan, 2009; Williams & Burden, 1997) that emphasized the parents' role in motivating their children's language learning. These findings also are similar to those of Karahan (2007), who argues that positive beliefs towards language leads to positive actions towards learning that language. Findings also seemed to indicate that teachers emphasised the significant role parents play in inspiring kids' positive and negative images towards English language and culture.

About the author

Salwa Al harthi is a language lecturer at King Saud University (Riyadh), Saudi Arabia. She has been teaching English for the past nine years. Currently, she is a Ph.D. student at the University of Sheffield, UK. Salwa's main research interests include: learner motivation, e-learning, sociolinguistics, language and gender, communicative and interactive English language teaching.

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