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## **DIRECTED MOTIVATIONAL CURRENTS IN ENGLISH L2 LEARNING**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Understanding the concept of motivation has proven to be one of the key factors in understanding why some second language (L2) learners are more successful than others. A recent L2 construct that attempts to explain intense motivational surges within complex dynamic systems (CDS) theory is *Directed Motivational Currents* (DMCs). Most people have probably experienced intense periods of motivation although they are not aware of them. For example, preparation for a high school English competition, a desire to obtain a university or a post-graduate degree all require devotion and commitment on the behalf of the student in order to realize their objectives. *Vision* plays a key role in DMCs along with action structure which propels an individual to achieve their goal (Dörnyei et al. 2015). DMCs have become a subject of interest for many L2 researchers, although they have not been well-researched in the Croatian context. In an attempt to better understand L2 motivation among language learners from this perspective, the aim of this paper was to examine DMCs among Croatian second-year English language university students. The study focuses on describing students' DMCs in terms of their awareness of DMCs and their duration. Furthermore, the study examines learner motivation within the framework of the main features of DMCs, namely goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality (Dörnyei et al. 2016). Finally, the study focuses on factors that trigger stimuli, as well as the necessary conditions that support the successful launching of DMCs.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Motivation in SLA

There are many different ways to define motivation. However, most would agree that it involves the choice of a particular action, persistence in that action, and a considerable amount of effort expended on it (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011). L2 motivation research has its roots in a social psychological approach which focused on identification and positive attitudes toward target language speakers and culture, including *integrativeness*, as principal elements of the desire to learn an L2 (Gardner 1985). One of the most influential L2 models in the current socio-dynamic period of L2 motivation research is Dörnyei's (2005) *Second Language Motivational Self System* (L2MSS) which is based on the concept of *possible selves*. It postulates that learners will be motivated to learn an L2 if they have a strong *ideal L2 self*. In other words, a vision of oneself as a proficient L2 speaker in the future.

Similar to the L2MSS, having a vision plays a major role in a relatively new L2 motivational construct, *Directed Motivational Currents* (DMCs). Dörnyei et al. (2016: 2) describe DMCs as “an intense motivational drive – or surge – which is capable of stimulating and supporting long term behaviour (such as the learning of an L2)”. In other words, such a current can be construed of as a distinct period of heightened motivation, a motivational current, which begins as a result of various elements while inspiring to attain a particular goal or vision (Dörnyei et al. 2015). A DMC is realized with the formation of a coherent vision and a corresponding action plan that propels it. Moreover, behavioural routines and short-term subgoals ensure that an individual stays on target by providing structure and satisfaction when these small goals are achieved.

### 2.2 Directed Motivational Currents

Before discussing the characteristics of DMCs, it is important to note how DMCs are created or launched. The successful launching of DMCs depends on two factors: necessary conditions and a specific triggering stimulus that sparks DMCs. The first necessary condition is the existence of clear goals which structure an individual's efforts and guide them toward the desired end (Dörnyei et al. 2016). In addition to setting a goal, the launch of DMCs depends on a learner's sense of ownership of their goals. Dörnyei et al. (2016) suggest that the sense of ownership is possible if the individual is confident in their capabilities to reach the goal and to successfully execute all the steps that will lead them there. However, confidence in one's abilities is not enough, as this needs to be counterbalanced by challenging aspects of the tasks needed to obtain that goal. Nevertheless, as Dörnyei et al. (2016) point out, this challenge-skill balance is not an exact science as it is based on the

learners' own evaluation of tasks and their abilities. No task is inherently too challenging or not challenging enough, but rather it is a question of the learner's perception of the task.

Another prerequisite for a successful launch of DMCs is the presence of an effective triggering stimulus. According to Muir (2016: 44), the most common triggers are an "opportunity for action" or "a negative experience" such as "an embarrassment, humiliation, failure or disappointment". In addition, DMCs can also be triggered by "the discovery of a missing piece of information" and "a specific call to arms" (Dörnyei et al. 2016: 69). Many factors come into play once a DMC is triggered and launched, including goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure and positive emotionality.

### 2.2.1 Goal-orientedness

According to Dörnyei et al. (2014), DMCs cannot be launched if a clear, well-defined goal is absent. In order for a goal to propel such intense motivation, it needs to be an "identity relevant self-concordant" goal (Dörnyei et al. 2016: 48). Learners need to believe the goal is really theirs and not imposed on them by some outside influence. In addition, goals need to be in sync with their interests, aspirations, and values (Dörnyei et al. 2016). However, what differentiates DMCs from other motivational constructs is *vision*, which is a key tenet in DMCs (Muir 2016). A vision, as opposed to a goal, involves a powerful sensory element embedded with actual images associated with achieving a goal (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova 2014).

In DMCs, visions can be considered as images of the "idealized future selves" (Muir 2016: 21), that is, visions are mental representations of what life will look like once the idealized future self is reached. Moreover, the idealized future self can be reached only once the individual has attained the goal they are striving toward. According to Dörnyei et al. (2016), the effort one is willing to invest in reaching one's goals is highly dependent on the existence of an idealized future self. Furthermore, in order for DMCs not be overshadowed by the tribulations of daily life, a vision helps to remind the learner of their desired future self, which in turn re-triggers the motivational current.

### 2.2.2 Salient facilitative structure

Research has shown that people who experience DMCs develop new behaviours that help them reach their goals, and together these can be thought of as a salient facilitative structure (Dörnyei et al. 2016). These behavioural routines lead to a type of "motivational autopilot". In other words, once these new behavioural routines are formed, the execution of tasks becomes automatic and does not require volitional control (Dörnyei et al. 2016: 83). Furthermore, a combination of a powerful initial impetus and a set of automatized behavioural routines is strong enough to carry the learner through various tasks without the need to re-trigger motivation for the successful execution of the many steps along the way to success (Dörnyei et al. 2014).

In addition to a final goal, learners caught up in DMCs also set a series of short-term goals, or proximal subgoals, that divide the process of goal attainment into smaller steps and create a clear path toward the end goal (Muir 2016). In this way learners have smaller objectives that are easier to reach. Muir (2016) suggests that subgoals are crucial because they highlight progress which sustains the intense motivational energy in DMCs. In other words, successful completion of smaller goals encourages learners to continue their efforts. In addition, Dörnyei et al. (2016), also highlight that reaching short-term goals has the capacity to yield positive affective energy, and thus to generate positive emotions.

Another feature of these salient facilitative structure is affirmative feedback. Dörnyei et al. (2016) suggest that discrepancy feedback is more common than progress feedback in the majority of classrooms. However, in DMCs positive progress feedback is referred to as affirmative feedback, which refers to positive evaluations of the learner's progress. Along with subgoals, affirmative feedback affirms progress and helps ensure that one's final goal is possible (Dörnyei et al. 2016).

### 2.2.3 Positive emotionality

The experience of DMCs can be described as a sense of "eudaimonic well-being" (Dörnyei et al. 2016: 104). Those experiencing DMCs will experience positive emotions, such as joy, satisfaction, and a sense of reward on the path toward their desired goal. This is a joy that goes beyond the temporary excitement that a wide variety of activities can cause. It is a deeply rooted sense of joy and satisfaction that is produced by doing something personally important which is associated with a future one wants (Dörnyei et al. 2016). In other words, while experiencing DMCs tasks are accompanied by a sense of well-being because an individual is working toward making their dream a reality, and becoming a self who has reached their final goal. In practice, this means that any kind of task or activity, which previously might have been considered boring, can generate positive feelings because they are associated with a sense of self-actualization or accomplishment (Dörnyei et al. 2016). In short, DMCs involve a personal journey very close to a sense of one's true self which gives rise to feelings of satisfaction and joy (Dörnyei et al. 2015).

## 2.3 Research on DMCs

DMCs are a relatively new area of research within the field of L2 motivation research, but one that has gained in popularity fairly quickly since its introduction (Muir 2016; Murillo-Miranda 2019; Sak 2020; Selçuk and Erten 2017; Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli 2016). One of the most influential studies carried out to date is that by Muir (2016), who developed the *DMC Disposition Questionnaire*. Muir suggested that many people have experienced DMCs or witnessed them in others. She found that the most common

triggers of DMCs were linked to intrapersonal reasons, such as finding one's passion and interest, or external influences, such as an opportunity for improvement presenting itself. Many other studies have given a descriptive account of language learners' DMCs. Murillo-Miranda's (2019) study indicated that some learners experiencing DMCs are not aware of them, but all the characteristics of DMCs are nevertheless present. Having a vision was shown to be a strong factor in motivating English language students in Selçuk and Erten's (2017) research, while Sak's (2020) found that specific L2 competences, such as improving speaking skills, were important language goals among non-language students learning English at university. Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli (2016) found that the goal of becoming an English language teacher was a powerful motivator that supported students' DMCs.

Overall, DMCs can be considered as distinct periods of intense motivation that are prompted by various factors in which an individual strives to achieve a specific goal or vision. They can be a powerful motivating factor, especially in acquiring a complex skill such as a second language. As a result, understanding their complexities and characteristics can help us unravel the elements that motivate learners on their journey toward second language proficiency.

### **3 AIM AND METHOD**

#### **3.1 Aim**

Since DMCs can play an important role in motivating language learners, the focus of this study was to examine them in a specific context. The primary aim of this paper was to examine the experiences of DMCs among second year English language students at the University of Zadar, in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the participants become aware of their DMCs with regard to English language learning and what was the duration of their DMCs?
2. How were the students' DMCs launched?
3. What are the characteristics of students' DMCs based on goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality?

#### **3.2 Method**

##### **3.2.1 The study group**

It was important for this study to find participants who had the potential to experience DMCs in L2 learning. English L2 university majors were considered an appropriate group as there was a greater possibility that they had experienced this type of motivation,

in particular second year students who had already gone through one year of university studies. As a result, all second-year English language major university students were approached during their classes and asked to volunteer for this research. However, only 12 participants came forward, and one participant did not respond to the follow-up emails, which resulted in a total sample of 11 participants. All of the participants were female, aged between 19 and 24. Ten participants were Croatian, and were second-year English language students at the University of Zadar. One participant, who was 24 years old and originally from Portugal, was studying at the University of Zadar as part of the Erasmus+ programme.

### 3.2.2 Instruments

Due to the complex nature of DMCs, qualitative methods were considered to be most appropriate to use in this study. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allowed the researchers to explain questions that were unclear to the participants and, if necessary, ask any follow-up questions. An adapted version of Muir's (2016) *DMC Disposition Questionnaire* was used as a basis for the questions in the interviews. Questions related to the main components of DMCs (goal-orientedness, salient facilitative structure and positive emotionality) were also included. Additionally, questions focused on how DMCs were launched, their duration, and participants' awareness of DMCs. A total of 17 questions were used in the interviews. The interview questions are provided in the appendix.

### 3.2.3 Procedures and data analysis

All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the fact that their participation was voluntary, and that their responses would be anonymous. With the participants' consent, all the interviews were recorded. To aid understanding and create a comfortable atmosphere all the interviews were conducted in Croatian, with the exception of the Erasmus participant from Portugal, who was interviewed in English. The interviews were conducted online and lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. All the interviews were transcribed, and the data was subjected to content analysis whereby common themes and patterns were classified and ordered according to the frequency of responses. In order to ensure the validity of the content analysis, another colleague was asked to verify the categories and themes.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 A description of students' DMCs

#### 4.1.1 Awareness

DMCs are intense bursts of motivation that are different from general motivation. Those experiencing DMCs can usually feel that something out of the ordinary is happening, so it was important to see if the participants were ever aware of having experienced such intense motivation. The majority of the participants, eight of them, reported being aware of periods of intense motivation toward English language learning at different stages of their life. The minority, that is, three participants, reported no awareness of ever having experienced DMCs. Nevertheless, two participants who stated they had not experienced DMCs acknowledged that they always wanted to learn English, and that it was something they loved and did for pleasure, indicating that DMCs were likely present although they were not aware of it.

#### 4.1.2 Duration

The duration of DMCs is one of the characteristics that distinguish them from other similar concepts. The results were somewhat mixed regarding students' past English L2 learning experiences. For example, three participants stated that they experienced periods of intense motivation for English language learning during their time in university. In addition, two participants reported periods of intense motivation either during both high school and university, or during the time of transition from high school to higher education. Moreover, one participant said they experienced periods of intense motivation in elementary school when "English was my biggest motivation" (Participant 7). Finally, two of the participants who experienced intense motivation during childhood said they became motivated in early childhood and that this feeling has been present since then. Both participants highlighted coming into contact with the language at a very young age as a factor that contributed to their motivation.

Regarding their present feelings of intense motivation for English language learning, four participants thought they were still experiencing DMCs. Furthermore, two participants stated that they could not identify a specific moment when their DMCs started or ended. They stated they believed they were just as intensely motivated as they were in childhood, which would imply that the motivation was still present. In contrast, four participants stated that they experienced a decline in their DMCs for English learning. One participant experienced fluctuation in intensity during university, while another participant stated that her intense motivation decreased during the second half of the second semester. Moreover, one participant reported experiencing periods of intense motivation only during exam time. Finally, one of the participants noted that the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their motivation.



## 4.2 The launch of DMCs

### 4.2.1 Triggering stimuli

A triggering stimulus is one of the major prerequisites for the successful launching of DMCs. By far, the most common triggers of participants' DMCs were the love of the English language, interest in the related culture, and in gaining more knowledge of the language itself, the latter of which was often sparked by everyday contact with English. Another common trigger for DMCs was a positive past learning experience connected with a teacher or a professor. These teachers inspired a general desire to learn and study the language, or the participants were encouraged by their teachers or professors to pursue teaching as a career goal. Another triggering stimulus mentioned by several participants was some sort of failure to meet their own expectations, which later turned to success as a result of increased effort. For example, one student reported that she struggled with vocabulary and unknown word lists and felt less successful than her peers, which triggered her motivation to try harder. Excitement about higher education and the change from high school to university was another trigger mentioned by a few students. One participant mentioned how the novelty of it all triggered new levels of motivation and described how "at the beginning of first year when everything was new, I really got into it, I was, like, I am going to be successful" (Participant 8). Another potential triggering stimulus was the influence of parents and other family members. It should not be surprising that this was the trigger mentioned by those participants who reported experiencing periods of intense motivation from early childhood, since most young children are introduced to a language, or any kind of interest, by their family.

### 4.2.2 Challenge-skill balance

It was also important to examine if the participants perceived themselves as capable of reaching their goals while still being continually challenged by it, as this is another important condition for the successful launching of DMCs. All of the participants in this study believed in their ability to eventually reach their goals. Moreover, all of them were challenged by certain requirements they would have to meet in order to become their desired future selves, but none of the participants reported believing that these obstacles would ultimately prevent them from realizing their goals.

While for five of the 11 students language knowledge was a skill they had already gained, for the others language improvement was a challenge they believed they could overcome. For example, one participant described how she thought she had insufficient knowledge of the language and even referred to this feeling as "fear" (Participant 1). Four participants referred to specific aspects of the language as challenging. For example, for one participant certain aspects of linguistics was the biggest challenge. She stated that "I think I do [have sufficient capabilities], but I still need to work on them"



(Participant 9), and added “I definitely need to work on (...) phonetics, phonology, morphology, linguistics, syntax, everything that’s related to language, I definitely need to work on that because I need a moment to figure it out, I need somebody to explain it to me” (Participant 9).

### 4.3 Features of students’ DMCs

#### 4.3.1 Goal-orientedness

One of the driving forces or characteristics of DMCs is the necessity of having goals. The most common goal among the participants was a career in teaching, with six participants citing it as their main goal or one of their goals for learning English. Two participants reported the desire to share their love of language with their students. For example, one participant stated: “The profession of a teacher is calling my name and I want to show other people the love I have of the English language”. While for some participants teaching was always the goal, three participants reported that their interests had changed over time. For example, one participant stated that she always wanted to study languages and be a translator, but that now she had become more interested in literature. Two participants mentioned the goal of becoming a teacher while not rejecting the opportunity to work in other fields, such as in translation.

Three participants mentioned other career goals which motivated them to study English. For instance, one participant stated that she aimed to become a translator. However, this participant said that her primary goal is “to get a diploma” and “find a job” (Participant 11). When asked about the preferred career option she said that her “ideal job would be translating movies, series and maybe even books”. Another participant stated that her main goal in choosing to study English was to improve her vocabulary and speaking skills, which would then allow her to travel without the burden of a language barrier. Finally, one participant said that her main goal was to be able to use English every day. Due to her love of language itself, this participant would welcome any career opportunity that required her to use it.

#### *Vision*

When experiencing DMCs, goals are accompanied by a strong vision of one’s idealized future self. The majority of participants, seven of the 11, reported experiencing having a vision of their idealized future self. One of the most prominent characteristics of their idealized future self was one that could best be described as an improved version of their current self. However, this future self was not imagined only in relation to the ideal L2 speaking self, but also in the wider sense of qualities that the participants would like to possess. Becoming more confident was mentioned by several participants, with one

student highlighting the importance of “having confidence and being surer of myself than I am now” (Participant 2). Another student mentioned confidence in her knowledge and abilities as an important characteristic of her idealized future self as a teacher. Being more responsible was another important quality of many students’ future self, as well as fluency and improved language skills. For example, one participant described her future self as “not fully fluent, but very close to complete fluency” (Participant 1).

Since some participants stated that they wanted to work in education, it is not surprising that their future selves included a vision of themselves as teachers. One participant reported imagining herself in a classroom and explained how this image served as motivation: “Well, I see myself in a classroom surrounded by students and that... for example, when I study, I try to study as if I am explaining something to somebody else and I think this will be helpful if I become a teacher”, and added “... when I study, I often see myself in the future, teaching, so to speak” (Participant 6).

One participant not only imagined herself working as a teacher or professor, but also constructed her vision based on her previous and current professors. Another common element of the idealized future selves of the students was a vision of studying or living abroad. One participant thought that the English language would serve as a means to a life that she envisioned: “... when I reach my goal, I will have a completely different life that will help me financially and that will help me move to another country” (Participant 1). Another participant saw it as an opportunity to “gain some kind of experience... and then, later find a job in an office or some kind of, I don’t know, [translation] agency” (Participant 11).

### *Re-triggering the DMC*

In order to ensure that the motivational energy of a DMC is sustained, it needs to be re-triggered repeatedly. This is best achieved if a person’s vision of their idealized future self is continuously activated, and thus if they are reminded of who they are striving to become. Two participants said that thinking about the future motivated and served as a guide because “I think about my next step, what can I do next to motivate myself” (Participant 3). For five participants being in a learning environment encouraged the re-triggering of their vision. As one participant explained, “when you are in that kind of environment it is easier to imagine yourself in a similar situation” (Participant 6). Furthermore, the participants also stated that imagining themselves in the position of a teacher during lectures helped to sustain their motivation. Two participants reported their vision being triggered in ordinary situations, most notably in interactions with friends and family.

### 4.3.2 Salient facilitative structure

#### *Automatized behavioural routines*

Another important component of DMCs is the salient facilitative structure, which includes the development of automatized behavioural routines. Most of the participants, nine of the 11, confirmed they applied different habits that they believed would help them reach their language learning goals within the context of their idealized future self. For six participants these routines included exposing themselves to the English language through different forms of media. Some highlighted reading as a way of improving their English language skills, while others preferred movies, TV series or videos on YouTube.

In addition, engaging in various language tasks during their studies was another common routine mentioned by the students. These included completing homework assignments, studying regularly, as well as preparing for the next lecture. One participant described how something that had posed a challenge at the beginning eventually became a routine and aided in the process of learning. For example, when talking about struggling with vocabulary and having to make tedious lists of unknown words this participant said that over time “it became a habit, and that habit has led me to success, to successfully learn the vocabulary. So, every day, it became a routine, making word lists, using the words in stories, using them in practice through writing a diary, different activities” (Participant 1).

#### *Subgoals*

Another important element of DMCs are short-term goals or subgoals. Nine participants reported setting short-term goals. The majority of subgoals were related to different university tasks, such as passing midterms and exams, completing class assignments, and doing additional work for their course. It’s important to mention that most of the participants agreed that short-term goals had a positive effect on their motivation to pursue the bigger goals and helped them not to become overwhelmed. For instance, the students suggested that these subgoals gave them confidence in their abilities, as “they show me that I can reach my long-term goal through small steps” (Participant 8), motivated further effort as “it encourages me to keep going and use them [the unknown words] daily” (Participant 1), served as “energy boosters” (Participant 5), helped maintain focus on the goal “... it seems easier and easier to focus on the goal” (Participant 3), and showed that “no matter how hard it seems, it’s not impossible” (Participant 2).

### *Affirmative feedback*

Affirmative feedback is another important element of the salient facilitative structure as it highlights progress and improvement in the process of learning. Most participants reported receiving both positive and negative feedback on their progress from professors. While three claimed that the professors exclusively focused on successfully completed tasks, others felt that the focus of the feedback was on gaps in their knowledge or that the focus was both on achievements and areas where improvement was needed. Regardless of the type of feedback they received, most participants found it to be a source of motivation. To illustrate, Participant 6 stated that "... they want to motivate us additionally and I think that's good. They give us motivation to go on". On the other hand, Participant 4 described their feedback as "well-meaning advice", while one participant even stated that she "feels better" when gaps in knowledge are highlighted because "that is a way for me to improve" (Participant 1).

### 4.3.3 Positive emotionality

#### *An overall positive experience*

Another important component of DMCs is positive emotionality. All the participants described periods of DMCs while learning English as a generally positive experience. The main reasons for the positive emotionality varied, but one of most common was the awareness that it led to goal attainment. For example, one participant stated that "everything that has happened has led me to where I am where I will, maybe, later be" (Participant 5). Another common source of positive emotions was the pleasure of learning. In addition, instead of being discouraged by mistakes the participants perceived these as learning opportunities.

Another factor that contributes to an overall positive experience of DMCs is that individuals want to dedicate time and effort to completing tasks related to their DMC. This element was also confirmed in this study, as all the participants reported that they did not struggle to invest time and energy into completing assignments. As one participant stated, when sufficiently motivated the work "is not a problem, then that is all I think about, and I focus on that" and attributed it to the fact that she "wanted to know more" (Participant 3).

#### *Effects of reaching subgoals*

In addition to motivating further effort, reaching short-term goals can generate feelings of joy. All the participants who reported setting short-term goals said that completing these inspired feelings of enjoyment and suggested several reasons for this. For some participants the feelings of enjoyment were primarily due to a sense of improvement and progress. For

example, one participant said that she enjoyed completing tasks because “I feel like I am improving and slowly moving forward” (Participant 3). Other reasons for finding joy in completing short-term goals included gaining confidence in one’s abilities, enjoying the tasks in themselves, and serving as an example and a source of motivation to friends.

### *Effects of challenging and mundane tasks*

When mastering a new skill, in this case learning the English language, one will undoubtedly encounter challenges. While experiencing DMCs, these challenges do not discourage effort; on the contrary, they are perceived as an obstacle that when overcome will bring an individual a step closer to their goal. For five of the participants in this study these challenges provided additional motivation. For example, one participant stated that difficulties become a challenge which then serves as a source of motivation. On the other hand, challenging tasks can demotivate, which is obvious from several of the participants’ responses. For example, one participant stated: “of course it lowers it because I’m thinking, ‘wow, I do not want to deal with this’” (Participant 3). Regardless of the possible lack of motivation, most of the participants reported a sense of enjoyment while carrying out these challenging tasks. One of the most common contributors to feelings of enjoyment and reward was a sense of progress. In addition, some participants attributed these positive emotions precisely to the fact that they were being challenged. Finally, the third major contributor to positive emotions was the sense that one can achieve goals despite the challenges and struggles encountered on the way.

Concerning mundane tasks, what is most interesting here is the predominantly negative effect that these tasks had on the participants’ motivation during periods of DMCs. Almost all the participants reported feeling unmotivated or that their motivation decreased while being bored by a task. While engaged in tasks that were deemed boring, six participants found that these tasks were still able to generate some positive emotions, while five others experienced the opposite. The most common source of positive feelings was a sense of progressing towards one’s goal.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Awareness and duration of learners’ DMCs**

Regarding the first research question, the results showed that eight of the participants were aware of having experienced, or were experiencing, intense motivation, which is in accordance with Muir’s (2016) conclusion that DMCs are not a rare phenomenon and most people will experience them at some time. The results also revealed that three participants did not believe they had experienced DMCs, although none of them attributed

this to a lack of motivation to study or a disinterest in language learning, and instead all of them emphasized their love of the English language. These results are comparable to those obtained by Murillo-Miranda (2019), which showed that awareness of periods of DMCs is not an absolute prerequisite for the experience itself and that learners who do not consider their motivational intensity strong enough can still present all the characteristic features of DMCs.

This study showed that the duration of DMCs varied from lasting a few months to some years. However, it is likely that the participants' DMCs are still ongoing, as students are all still in the process of trying to achieve their language goals. It has been noted that awareness of DMCs is not necessary for their existence, so it is possible that the participants are still experiencing them and will continue to do so until they have reached their L2 goal. For the participants in this study their DMCs had already lasted a significant amount of time, which is comparable to Muir's (2016) study in which the author found that the participants' DMCs lasted more than six months.

## 5.2 Launching of students' DMCs

The results of this study showed that DMCs for language learning were most commonly triggered once the participants discovered their love of the English language. They then developed an interest in improving their knowledge and wanted to become familiar with the culture of English-speaking countries. Following Muir's (2016) taxonomy of triggers, the love for a language could be classified as a trigger linked to intrapersonal reasons. Furthermore, DMCs can be triggered by other intrapersonal reasons, such as a significant life change. The transition from high school to university is a significant change in a young person's life, and some of the participants found themselves experiencing DMCs as a consequence of this transition. The study conducted by Sak (2020) also showed that starting university can be a powerful motivating factor. Sak suggests that after completing a stressful period of choosing and enrolling into a university, the participants are more likely to discover and pursue other important goals (Sak 2020).

Another common trigger found in this study was a positive experience with a teacher or professor which inspired learners to learn English or pursue a teaching career. Similarly, some DMCs were triggered when the participants were encouraged by family members to pursue their goals. Both of these triggers could be considered examples of what Muir (2016) calls triggers linked to external influences with a positive connotation. Finally, this study has shown that DMCs can also be triggered by a failure to obtain the desired results. As Muir (2016) explains, triggers can also be related to external influences with a negative connotation. When learners fail in some way there is a need to save face and improve one's self-image, which can then trigger DMCs (Muir 2016). Another important component for successfully launching DMCs is the balance between the learners' current

skills and challenges that reaching the goal will present. This study has shown that the participants were generally confident in their abilities, but also faced some challenges in pursuit of their goals.

### 5.3 Characteristics of students' DMCs

#### 5.3.1 Goal-orientedness

The results of this study showed that the most common goal among the participants was to continue studying English in order to become a teacher of English as a foreign language, or to teach English literature. Similarly, a study conducted by Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli (2016) focused on students in the teacher training programme whose main goal was to work as teachers at a language institute. Furthermore, the results of this study revealed that sometimes learners experiencing DMCs focus on a specific area of the language so as to reach a goal for which that particular skill is required. These findings are in accordance with Sak (2020), who found that in DMCs the goal can be to master a specific area of the language rather than to reach overall high levels of proficiency, and in this specific study the participants wanted to improve their spoken English, just as the participants of this research focused on improving their vocabulary.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that for five of the 11 participants in this study their goals were not very clearly defined, as they mentioned working towards several goals at once. Interestingly, a few participants highlighted a desire to work in any field as long as it included daily communication in English. The results revealed that for many participants English language learning is a way to reach various goals, mostly in terms of a career, which is comparable to the findings of several other studies which showed that learning English can serve as a sort of a subgoal for reaching a professional or social goal. This was especially emphasized by Sak (2020), who showed that the participants needed to learn the language so that they could participate in different social and academic interactions. In addition, one of the participants in Selçuk and Erten's (2017) study needed to learn English to advance in her career, while Murillo-Miranda (2019) showed that the participants wanted to learn English in order to be able to study and work abroad.

This study revealed that the participants do have an image of their idealized selves in the future which helps guide them towards their goals and serves as a source of motivation. However, in many cases the idealized future self did not relate specifically to L2 goals, but instead the participants described their visions in terms of general qualities they would like to possess and what life in general would look like in the future. In addition, the participants also envisioned themselves as fluent speakers of the English language, similar to the participants in the study conducted by Selçuk and Erten (2017). The most elaborate visions of the idealized future selves were held by those participants whose goal was to teach English. These images included the participants envisioning themselves as



being in a classroom surrounded by students. In some cases, the idealized future selves were based on a teacher who had had a powerful impact on the participant and served as a role model. The visions of these participants can be compared to the visions found by Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli (2016), in which the participants also imagined themselves teaching and interacting with students. In addition, the current study also showed that in some cases the vision is more likely to be activated in language learning contexts, such as lectures or while studying. In other cases it is more likely to happen in other situations, for example when talking to family and friends about the future.

### 5.3.2 Salient facilitative structure

The study showed that the participants regard behavioural routines as beneficial. The most common routines that the participants implemented were extracurricular activities, such as watching TV series or movies, listening to music, reading, and so on, which they believed would help to improve their English language knowledge. The same findings were reported by Sak (2020), who found that consuming this type of content in English can be considered an automatized behavioural routine in DMCs. These forms of entertainment are highly present in the daily lives of Croatian youth, and exposure to English language media is the norm. However, students might approach such materials more eagerly and attribute more importance to them during periods of DMCs, while at other times engaging with the language may be considered more of a hobby or leisure activity. According to Sak (2020), it is not necessary to create a completely new set of routines in order for DMCs to exist, as previously acquired routines can be just as effective. Selçuk and Erten (2017) also mentioned watching TV series as a behavioural routine implemented by language learners, which reaffirms that old habits can be a part of DMCs. The second most frequent type of routine implemented by the participants was completing different types of university-related tasks, such as studying regularly, completing homework, or preparing for future lectures. Similarly, Murillo-Miranda's (2019) study showed that language learners caught up in DMCs tend to implement both class work and homework, as well as individual learning, into their routines.

The second component of the salient facilitative structure are short-term goals, and this study has shown that nine of the participants set short-term goals because they believed that a series of successfully completed subgoals would bring them to their desired final goal. Moreover, they agreed that subgoals make goal-attainment more manageable. The study also showed that final goals can be daunting and that reaching one goal motivates the participants to reach the next one. The study found that reaching subgoals boosts confidence in one's abilities and helps maintain focus on the end goal. Similar findings were reported in several other studies in which subgoals played an important role in language learners' DMCs (Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli 2016), especially with regard to supporting feelings of improvement and progress (Murillo-Miranda 2019; Selçuk and Erten 2017).

The final element of the salient facilitative structure is the affirmative feedback that learners receive from their surroundings. According to the results of this study, the participants believed that their professors emphasized both the progress they had made and the gaps in their knowledge that still exist. However, according to eight participants the focus was more on the discrepancies between their current and desired knowledge. Nevertheless, the results of this study also show that this type of feedback can still have a powerful motivating effect, and for some learners it can even be more beneficial than progress feedback because it focuses on improving L2 knowledge.

#### **5.4 Positive emotionality**

The results of this study show that DMCs were a generally positive experience for the participants. The results also reveal that positive emotions were most commonly attributed to the participants' awareness that they were actively working towards goal attainment. Furthermore, the study shows that the participants were enthusiastic about learning and with every successfully completed step were gaining confidence in their abilities. Other studies reported similar findings, and showed that learners experiencing DMCs gain self-confidence when making progress (Zarrinabadi and Tavakoli 2016), and fondly remember their DMCs (Murillo-Miranda, 2019). Furthermore, the current study shows that while experiencing DMCs learners are willing to invest as much of their time and energy as is necessary in order to learn what they need to simply because they enjoy it, or because reaching the end goal is of great importance to them. Similarly, Selçuk and Erten (2017) reported their participants' eagerness to study and complete various assignments, while Murillo-Miranda (2019) emphasized the participants' surprise at their own productivity. Another aspect of DMCs that has the power to generate feelings of joy and satisfaction are subgoals and their successful completion, which was confirmed in this study. The positive effect of short-term goals was also mentioned by Murillo-Miranda (2019), who stressed how reaching milestones, or subgoals, was a source of happiness for the participants.

The current study revealed that while for three participants challenges served as a source of motivation, the other participants' motivation decreased when faced with difficulties. On the other hand, boring tasks tended to only lower their motivation. Regarding the positive emotions that challenging and boring tasks might generate, the results were mixed. Even though positive emotionality was more dominant in the context of challenges, in both cases the most common source of joy, reward or satisfaction was a sense of progress that participants experienced once they completed these tasks. These results could be compared with those obtained by Murillo-Miranda (2019), who reported that for two participants it was sometimes difficult to persevere through tasks, while for one participant the necessary work felt too difficult. Nevertheless, all the participants reported

enjoying periods of DMCs. Although the author did not specify during which times the participants faced difficulties, these findings could indicate that learners experiencing DMCs can be negatively affected by certain aspects of language learning. Moreover, these occasionally negative experiences do not necessarily have an adverse effect on the entire motivation process.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study showed that DMCs are complex constructs. Nevertheless, the participants displayed the major characteristics of this type of motivation, although there were some variations in their experiences. Regarding the first research question, the results show that DMCs are commonly experienced by the participants, who feel excited about learning English and are willing to dedicate time and energy to reaching their goals. Furthermore, the results reveal that DMCs can vary significantly in duration and that they can last from a few months to several years. With regard to what inspires DMCs, the results indicate that the most common triggering stimuli are linked to intrapersonal reasons, such as passion for L2 learning and a significant life event. With respect to goal-orientedness, this study reveals that most participants set L2-related goals. Some of them set very concrete goals, most often to become an English language teacher, while others were not tied to a particular profession. Regarding the second key feature of DMCs, the salient facilitative structure, the results illustrate that most participants use automatized behavioural routines that they believe will enable goal-attainment. It was also shown that automatized behavioural routines can stem from pre-existing routines which can be used in DMCs. Furthermore, on the subject of subgoals, the results show that most participants set short-term goals and were aware of how they assisted in the process of achieving their final goal. In reference to affirmative feedback, the students reported that discrepancy feedback did not have a negative effect on participants' motivation. Regarding positive emotionality, the results revealed that the participants' experiences with DMCs were enjoyable and rewarding, mostly due to the achievement of subgoals, the sense that progress was being made toward the main goal, and the self-confidence that was gained throughout the process.

Some of the limitations of this study include the use of a single interview, whereas a longitudinal study could have yielded more in-depth results. Moreover, considering the importance of English language learning in today's society, further studies could investigate whether DMCs are experienced by high school or even elementary school learners. In conclusion, this study has shown that DMCs are an important motivational concept which can contribute to a better understanding of intense motivation and the mechanisms that sustain it, which is why they deserve to be further researched.

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## POVZETEK

**USMERJENI MOTIVACIJSKI TOKOVI PRI UČENJU ANGLEŠČINE KOT DRUGEGA JEZIKA**

*Usmerjene motivacijske tokove* (DMC) lahko opišemo kot močne poraste motivacije, ki lahko učence drugega jezika (J2) vodijo k doseganju ciljev, povezanih s tem jezikom. DMC sprožajo močni dražljaji različnih vrst, katerih uspešno sprožanje je odvisno od več dejavnikov. DMC zaznamuje več ključnih značilnosti, med drugim ciljna usmerjenost, izrazita podporna struktura in pozitivna čustvenost. Posamezniki, ki doživljajo DMC, so zelo osredotočeni na jasno opredeljen cilj, ki ga spremlja vizija idealiziranega prihodnjega jaza, ki je cilj dosegel. To vizijo podpira nov niz avtomatiziranih vedenjskih navad, podciljev in pozitivnih povratnih informacij. Hkrati posamezniki – ne glede na vrsto dejavnosti ali naloge – med zasledovanjem cilja, povezanega z J2, doživljajo pozitivna čustva. Namen pričujoče raziskave je opisati DMC pri študentih angleščine kot drugega jezika na podlagi analize podatkov, zbranih s pomočjo intervjujev. Rezultati analize potrjujejo prisotnost ključnih značilnosti DMC pri hrvaških študentih angleščine. DMC sprožajo različni dražljaji, med katerimi so najpogostejši znotrajosebni razlogi. Cilji, povezani z J2, se večinoma nanašajo na načrtovano poklicno pot na področju izobraževanja, vizije idealnega tujejezičnega jaza pa so povezane z željo postati dober govorec angleščine in z željo po osebnem razvoju. Večina študentov si pri doseganju ciljev pomaga z avtomatiziranimi vedenjskimi navadami. Rezultati raziskave kažejo tudi, da negativne povratne informacije nimajo škodljivega vpliva na motivacijo študentov. Poleg tega DMC študentov spremlja pozitivna čustvenost, ki izhaja iz zadovoljstva ob doseganju cilja, kar vzajemno vpliva na njihovo samozavest.

**Ključne besede:** učenje angleščine kot drugega jezika (J2), usmerjeni motivacijski tokovi (DMC), ciljna usmerjenost, idealni tujejezični jaz, pozitivna čustvenost

## ABSTRACT

**DIRECTED MOTIVATIONAL CURRENTS IN ENGLISH L2 LEARNING**

*Directed Motivational Currents* (DMCs) can be described as intense surges in motivation which can carry second language (L2) learners towards achieving their L2 related goals. DMCs are triggered by powerful stimuli which can be diverse in nature, and they depend on various conditions. DMCs are characterized by several key features, including goal-orientedness, a salient facilitative structure, and positive emotionality. Individuals experiencing DMCs are highly focused on a clearly defined goal accompanied by a vision of an idealized future self that has reached the goal. This vision is supported by a new set of automatized behavioural routines, subgoals, and affirmative feedback. Furthermore, individuals experience positive emotions while engaged in pursuit of their L2 goal, regardless of the type of activity or task in question. The aim of this study was to describe DMCs among English L2 university students based on an analysis of interview data. The findings indicated that Croatian university students displayed the key features of DMCs, which were launched due to various triggering stimuli, the most common of which were intrapersonal reasons. L2 goals were mainly related to a future career in the teaching profession, while visions of their ideal L2 self were tied to becoming proficient English language speakers, but also to personal development. Most students used automatized behavioural routines which aided in attaining their goals. The results also suggested that negative feedback did not have a detrimental effect on students' motivation. Moreover, students' DMCs were associated with positive emotionality, through the satisfaction gained by goal attainment which reciprocally affected their self-confidence.

**Keywords:** English second language (L2) learning, Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs), goal-orientedness, ideal L2 self, positive emotionality

## APPENDIX

### Interview questions

#### Directed Motivational Currents in L2 English Learning

1. As an English language major, have you ever experienced periods of intense motivation when language learning was a central part of your life, and you became committed to pursuing that goal?
2. Can you estimate how long this experience has lasted?
3. Why is learning English important to you? Please describe your final goal.
4. Would you describe this period of intense motivation as a pleasant experience? Why or why not?
5. Would you mind describing how this intense period of motivation to learn English began? Was there a specific moment or event that made you experience this kind of intense motivation?
6. When thinking about reaching your final goal, what is the image that comes to mind?
7. How does this future 'you' differ from the current 'you'?
8. When you began thinking about your goal, did you feel you had sufficient capabilities to reach that goal? What part of it seemed the most challenging to you?
9. Do you think about your future self in ordinary, everyday life situations or only when actively engaged in the learning process?
10. During this period of intense motivation, did you find it harder or easier to invest time and energy into completing different tasks and assignments?
11. Do you set any short-term goals that you believe will help you reach your final goal?
12. Do you enjoy while carrying out those short-term goal/tasks?
13. How does reaching those goals affect your motivation?
14. Are there any habits or behaviours that you have implemented into your routine that help you make progress towards your goal?
15. Are there any tasks that you find challenging? How does that affect your motivation? Considering your final goal, are these tasks still able to generate feelings of satisfaction or reward?
16. Are there any tasks that you find mundane or boring? How does that affect your motivation? Considering your final goal, are these tasks still able to generate feelings of satisfaction or reward?
17. Do you receive positive feedback on your progress? How much emphasis is put on what you have already achieved versus what you have yet to achieve?