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**THE NATURE OF MOTIVATION IN LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:**

**THE CASE OF BLIND LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS L2**

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Graduation thesis

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## **Abstract**

The research reported in this paper investigates the nature of motivation of three congenitally blind learners of English as L2. The main aim of this exploratory study is to get insight into various factors influencing their motivation. The study is based on the data gathered during classroom observations and the questionnaire in the form of an interview. The author provides detailed participants' profiles and discusses the results, connecting them to motivational paradigms proposed by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović and Zoltán Dörnyei. The results show that the nature of motivation of the three blind learners of English differs significantly. Also, the author discusses both motivating factors and the concept of lack of motivation in blind learners and indicates their possible sources.

**Key words:** blind learners of English, motivation, case studies

## **1 Introduction**

L2 learning motivation has been the centre of attention of numerous researchers for more than 50 years, who investigated various factors that form and influence this complex phenomenon. However, research on the nature of motivation in visually impaired learners is a rather unexplored area, which made the author's task especially challenging.

The author was first introduced with the issue of blind learners' challenges in the process of L2 learning during several courses held by Professor Renata Geld at the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Zagreb. The courses provided valuable theoretical perspectives which motivated the author to individually work, within the teacher training course, with three congenitally blind learners from the "Vinko Bek" institution specializing in education, upbringing and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired children and adults. During that time, the author got insight into the learning context of blind learners and decided to further investigate certain aspects of the context, more specifically, factors that affect their motivation for learning English as L2. The results of this investigation will be presented in this paper, which is organized as follows: firstly, we present and discuss theoretical background closely connected with our research, provide important series of research both in the field of L2 motivation and cognitive and linguistic development of the blind, including research in the Croatian socio-educational context. Secondly, we present our methodology and discuss the results, providing detailed participants' profiles. Next, we list the limitations of our research and give implications for further research. Finally, we present general conclusions on the topic and provide a list of literature used in this paper.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 What is L2 motivation?

First we wish to address the terminological issue of English as a foreign and as a second language, since the two terms are similar but not interchangeable. Although English is learned as a foreign language in Croatia, because of the media and use of computers, learners are exposed to it on a daily basis, providing them with numerous opportunities to acquire the language. English is the most prominent global language, with the community of speakers that exceeds any other language. Its status differs incomparably from all other foreign languages since the knowledge of English is becoming a basic educational skill (see Vilke 2007). Therefore, it is quite difficult to perceive it exclusively as a foreign language in the context of language learning, and we believe it is reasonable to consider it a second language.

Learning a second language is a complex venture consisting of various interrelated components, including learners' individual difference variables. These ID variables are generally classified into two groups of factors, cognitive and affective. Since we are interested in the nature of motivation in blind learners of English as an L2, we are not going to discuss the area of cognitive factors, but focus on attitudes and beliefs, motivation, language anxiety and other factors with emotional aspect. Before going into theoretical background, it is important to mention that there is no universal definition of motivation, only different perspectives and viewpoints. This is not surprising if we take into consideration all the modifications the concept of L2 motivation went through since 1960s when Gardner and his colleagues published the results of their seminal work and paved the way for future research. According to Gardner (1985: 50) "motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question". Similarly, Dörnyei (2005: 65) recognizes the dynamic nature of motivation and its changeability claiming that "motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process". In other words, "motivation is responsible for 1) *why* people decide to do something; 2) *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, 3) *how hard* they are going to pursue it" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 4).

The research on motivation has resulted in many different motivational systems dependent on different contexts and factors influencing learners' motivation. It is worth mentioning that there is almost no research on L2 motivation in blind and visually impaired

learners and some motivational systems are yet to be examined in specific language learning context. Jedynek (2012) reminds us that there is a great need for interdisciplinary research in order to “1. [enhance] the BVILs’<sup>1</sup> motivation towards foreign language learning, 2. [improve] teaching and learning process’ (...), 4. [establish] learning strategies effective for the learners with vision deficit”. In this paper, we will present many challenges blind learners are faced with in the process of L2 learning and how their learning context interacts with some of the existing theoretical framework. But first we need to look at the previous research on motivation and the results.

## 2.2 Previous research on L2 motivation

The chronology of L2 motivation research has been thoroughly presented by Dörnyei (2005) who distinguished three phases of L2 motivation research: The social psychological period (1959-1990) represented by the work of Gardner and his students; The cognitive-situated period (during the 1990s) focused on cognitive theories; The process-oriented period (during the 2000s) characterized by the work of Dörnyei and Ushioda and their colleagues. More recently, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2012) have identified the fourth phase: The socio-dynamic period, characterized by a concern with dynamic systems and contextual interactions. Since research on L2 motivation has been in the limelight for over more than 50 years, it is impossible to include in this paper all the significant research and theories that contributed to the development of the concept of L2 motivation.

We begin by looking into Gardner’s motivation theory and Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition. During the 1970s, together with his associates, Gardner conducted several series of research in order to understand the nature of motivation in the Canadian social context characterized by the coexistence of Anglophone and Francophone communities and intercultural exchange. They developed an instrument, called Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, which has had a major influence in the development of various instruments because of its good psychometric properties. Gardner (1985: 82) found that the key factor influencing language achievement is the *integrative motive* which is defined as a “motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language” as their native language. Furthermore, he believed that language achievement is influenced by various integrative factors including integrative

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<sup>1</sup> Blind and visually impaired learners



orientation, interest in foreign languages and attitudes toward the L2 community, attitudes toward the language teacher and the L2 course. However, we are interested mostly in his conceptualisation of motivation (and orientation). According to Gardner (1985: 54), “orientation refers to a class of reasons for learning a second language”, while motivation consists of three characteristics “attitudes toward learning the language, desire to learn the language and motivational intensity”. In his detailed analysis of Gardner’s concept of motivation, Dörnyei (2005) raises the issue of terminological difficulty and ambivalence regarding the notion of *integrativeness* and the *integrative motive*. We will address Dörnyei’s remarks and reconceptualization of L2 motivation later in this section. Gardner’s model has been reviewed by many researchers, providing new perspectives on the concept of motivation.

In the 1990s there has been a major change in thinking influenced by motivational psychology and researchers started to take on a cognitive perspective, focusing more on the learners’ immediate learning situation (the teacher, the curriculum and the learner group) and contextual factors (see Dörnyei 2005:74). Nikolov’s study (2001) demonstrated how situation-specific factors, in this case, the methodology, focus on form and rote-learning negatively influenced learners who originally had positive attitudes toward the English language. On the other hand, Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt and Shohamy (2001; as cited in Dörnyei 2005:75) showed that the best predictor of the intention to continue studying Arabic was the quality of teaching program, despite the negative attitudes learners had towards the target language group. Mihaljević Djigunović (1991) investigated learners’ subjective impression of the teacher’s traits and how they influenced learners’ attitudes and motivation for learning English. The results showed that if learners perceived their teacher as competent and inspiring, and their classes as meaningful and good, their motivation to learn increased, and subsequently their grades were higher. In her later study, Mihaljević Djigunović (1996) examined the differences in attitudes towards the English language teacher and the course, towards the process of learning English as an EFL and the differences in effort and achievement by Croatian learners of EFL. She introduced her own conceptualization of motivation. According to her, there are three types of motivation:

- a) affective (learners like the language and enjoy using it),
- b) integrative (learners wish to integrate into one of the socio-cultural groups that use English as a native language) and

- c) pragmatic-communicative (learners are instrumentally oriented and they learn the language in order to be able to communicate with other speakers of English), while the two demotivators are:
- a) teaching setting (it refers to the learner's negative evaluation of the teacher, teaching materials and teaching methodology) and
  - b) learning difficulties (learner believes he or she lacks basic pre-knowledge and consequently consider English to be too complex to learn).

The results of the study showed that the most desirable type of motivation in terms of achievement in learning English is pragmatic-communicative motivation, which is not surprising and it may point to a change in the way learners perceived English and how they started to recognize the importance of communicative competence.

The third period in L2 motivation research, the process-oriented period, is represented mostly by Dörnyei's new conceptualization of L2 motivation. Influenced by previous research and concepts of possible and ideal selves from personality psychology, he reinterprets Gardner's concept of *integrativeness* and *integrative motivation*. Dörnyei (2005: 97) claims that Gardner's concept of integrativeness should be reinterpreted in such a way that it fits the perception of English as an international language with a global community of speakers, and that it should imply "some sort of a virtual or metaphorical identification with the sociocultural loading of a language (...) [which] would be associated with a non-parochial, cosmopolitan, globalized world citizen identity".

Dörnyei's construct of L2 motivation, called the *L2 Motivational Self System*, is made up of three dimensions:

- 1) *Ideal L2 Self* (a learner's motivation stems from a wish to reduce the discrepancy between his/her actual and ideal self);
- 2) *Ought-to L2 Self* (refers to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess, i.e. various duties, obligations, or responsibilities in order to avoid possible negative outcomes); and the third dimension
- 3) *L2 Learning Experience* (refers to situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience).

His theoretical framework has been a result of a longitudinal study including more than 13,000 learners of English, German, French, Russian and Italian language. Recently, Dörnyei

and Ushioda started to further develop L2MSS and they are currently focused on the dynamic systems, in which motivation is no longer perceived as an isolated variable, but a part of system that is constantly adapting, restructuring and evolving (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 218). This latest motivation model implies that the different components of L2 Motivational Self System can be considered as “three possible attractor basins, one centred around the internal desires of the learner, the second around the motivational regulations of social pressures exercised by significant or authoritative people in the learner’s environment, and the third around the actual experience of being engaged in the learning process” (Dörnyei 2009:218, as cited in Csizer, K., Lukács, G., 2009). Dörnyei’s L2MSS has been widely recognized and researchers have adopted his concept of the *selves* and have been examining its validity in different contexts (eg. Martinović, 2013; Csizer, K., Lukács, G., 2009).

It is quite interesting that the concepts of integrative/instrumental motivation have been continuously present in the field of L2 motivation research. Nevertheless, globalization has caused inevitable changes, which not only affect traditional L2 motivation research, but also, since there is a lack of clearly definable L2-speaking communities with which students can identify themselves or into which they can integrate, English now represents the language of the ‘world at large’ rather than the language of any specific English-speaking country. That is why learners’ motivation may be connected to a tendency to develop a new global *bicultural identity* (see Csizer, K., Lukács, G., 2009: 2).

### **2.3 Research on L2 motivation in Croatia**

Research on L2 motivation in Croatia has been largely marked by the work of Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović and her colleagues. During the 1990s and 2000s she has conducted a series of research on individual difference variables (see Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998; 1995). In the previously mentioned research, she introduced her own conceptualization on motivation based on the results which are of great importance for our qualitative study since they provided valuable insight into the nature of motivation in Croatian socio-educational context. In 2002, Mihaljević Djigunović headed a research team in a project *English in Croatia*<sup>2</sup>, that lasted until 2006 and its aim was to investigate the status of English in Croatian

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<sup>2</sup> Scientific project no. 130514, approved by the Ministry of Science, Sport and Education, conducted from 2001 to 2006 in Croatia, led by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović and a team of researchers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb and Osijek and from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb.

context. Within the study, several investigations were carried out on important topics in SLA and L2 motivation. Mihaljević Djigunović (2007a) conducted a study aimed at investigating the role of IDs in affective learner factors among Croatian English language learners. The sample included 2,137 participants including primary and secondary school learners covering all regions in Croatia. The questionnaire used in the research provided a basis for our study, which will be presented in detail in one of the following sections. The overall results of her study showed that participants listed the following aspects as positive: communicative approach to teaching, opportunity to express their attitudes and opinions, exposure to authentic language situations in the classroom (e.g., watching films in English without subtitles), and the use of activities which ask for active involvement (e.g., group work, project work). On the other hand, too traditional approach to teaching, too few communicative activities, too many tests (especially grammar tests) were listed as negative aspects. Learners from vocational schools especially criticised teaching approach as being grammar-translation oriented. One of the major factors mentioned as highly influencing was the teacher, which had already been identified as an important factor in early studies on learners' attitudes and motivation by Mihaljević Djigunović.

In their Comparative Study of Attitudes and Motivation of Croatian Learners of English and German, Mihaljević Djigunović and Bagarić (2007b, 2007c) narrowed down the sample from previous research and examined the differences between learners of English and German language. This research also provided valuable insight into factors generating motivated behaviour. The research included 220 participants from primary and secondary schools. The instrument was developed in Hungary and it was validated in a previously mentioned study in 2007. The results showed that learners of English, compared to the learners of German, had more positive attitudes and, consequently, their motivation was higher. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, learners are exposed to English every day through the media (TV, radio, Internet...), which enables them to acquire the language unconsciously, and stimulates automatic language production. Secondly, learners of German found their teaching materials out-dated, irrelevant and tasks unimaginative and not useful enough. The authors conclude that the reasons for the differences in learners of the two languages are related to the immediate learning environment, the different status of the two languages and out-of-class exposure to the languages.

## 2.4 The blind

### 2.4.1 What is blindness?

Defining blindness is a rather challenging task since there are different criteria used to define blindness among different countries and even among institutions (Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 3). Blindness can be defined as a lack or impairment of vision. In Croatia, the term *legal blindness* is used and it refers to the visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best correction possible. That means that a legally blind individual would have to stand 20 feet (6 meters) from an object to see it with the same degree of clarity as a normally sighted person could from 200 feet (60 meters) (Geld, Šimunić, 2009: 406). According to the Croatian Association of the Blind<sup>3</sup>, visual impairments can be categorized into low vision and blindness, with additional subcategories depending on the level of residual vision. Also, it is important to distinguish among visually impaired people the ones with congenital (people who were born blind) and with adventitious (people who lost their sight in the course of their life) visual impairment, because research has shown that there are significant differences in the course of cognitive development between the two groups. Also, blindness may have different causes and aetiologies, and this may result in children facing not only blindness, but in many cases, other additional problems, not easily detectable (Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 61).

### 2.4.2 Cognitive development in blind children

Vision has a substantial role in children's cognitive development, especially because vision enables us to simultaneously perceive our environment. That is why children with vision impairments employ other sensory modalities, resulting in a different course of cognitive development. Thus, the auditory system, and, more importantly, touch become the major spatial sense for them (Hollins, 2000: 343).

Research on cognitive development has generally been approached from two different perspectives. According to Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, (1999: 2), the first perspective, which was predominant for many years, views blind children's development in terms of normal developmental course similar to other non-impaired children; however, the differences between blind and sighted children are attributed to visual impairment. The

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<sup>3</sup> Hrvatski savez slijepih ([www.savez-slijepih.hr/hr/kategorija/ostecenje-vida-3/](http://www.savez-slijepih.hr/hr/kategorija/ostecenje-vida-3/))

second perspective implies that blind children may use different routes and styles of development, resulting in different strategies and learning styles through which they compensate for the absence of visual information by paying attention to other sources of information. Cognitive development of blind children is largely influenced by various factors, such as cognitive and intellectual potential, social context, the degree and age of vision loss, but the most important factor is the child's environment and the demands it places on the child in the course of development, because it poses challenges that shape child's skills and capabilities (Warren, 2000: 326). Although there are some general principles in blind children's cognitive development, we have to take into consideration that the blind are an extremely heterogeneous group and there are many individual differences among them (Stančić, 1991: 80; Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 61).

According to the research literature on children with visual impairment, blind children generally show delay at an early age (Stančić, 1991: 79). Furthermore, many reports indicate that blind children show a delay in locomotor activities; on the other hand, some authors (see Warren, 2000: 326) have noted that lack of vision is not entirely responsible for delay in locomotion, but the failure of the appropriate opportunities and encouragement play a major role as well.

At the end of their first year, children start to acquire the concept of *object permanence*, that is, the understanding that an object continues to exist even if it is not currently perceived (Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 19). Fraiberg, as well as Bigelow (see Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999), studied the development of the concept and their findings show that blind children have a slower development of the notion of object permanence than sighted children, unless they benefit from environmental circumstances which promote their development (including significant amounts of residual vision). On the other hand, when it comes to the concept of *conservation* (the preservation of volume with the change of shape or container), research provided interesting results. Those studies that used Piagetian tasks of conservation and classification have found that blind children have slower cognitive development than sighted children. On the other hand, when researchers used conservation tasks that required haptic perception, blind and sighted showed similar patterns of results (Cromer, 1973; Gottesman, 1971, 1973, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 29).

Concept development involves the ability to recognize similarities and differences of objects, as well as development of meaning (Warren, 2000: 331). The first aspect is called

*classification*, and research showed that both sighted and visually impaired children progress from more perceptual (dimensions such as colour, shape, pattern, thickness, weight, size) to more conceptual bases for classification. Higgins (1973, as cited in Warren, 2000: 331) demonstrated that conceptual basis for classification is related to children's experience, rather than visual status. Concept-based classification is closely connected to *concept formation* (which involves meaning), that leads us to the area of language acquisition. But before analysing in more detail the issue of language acquisition, we need to address the question of memory in children with visual impairment. So far, research has shown inconsistent results in the blind. Warren (2000: 332) argues that there is no evidence that infants and young children with vision impairments have any difficulty with memory functions. On the contrary, their performance on memory-related subscales of IQ tests (WISC) is often superior to that of sighted children. Research conducted by Tillman and Osborne (1969, as cited in Stančić, 1991: 86), showed that blind children excelled on the subscale (WISC) called Digit Span. On the other hand, Ljubešić and Pinoza (1983) found that visually impaired children's performance on short-term memory (tactile, visual and aural sequences) was inferior to sighted children. However, the authors concluded that visual impairment might not be directly responsible for the results but that aetiologies and immediate environment have to be taken into account as well.

As we have seen, the area of cognitive development in children with visual impairments requires further research since there are still important issues to be clarified. Warren (2000: 334) points out to several implications for future research: it must adequately consider individual differences; it should be longitudinal; researchers should move away from the comparative model (blind vs. sighted) because it cannot provide valid and complete picture of development, and finally, cognitive development should be studied within the context of increasingly prevalent multiple disabilities.

### **2.4.3 Language acquisition in blind children**

Why is language acquisition in blind children interesting? Because "individuals who are visually impaired offer a unique perspective on the patterned complexities of human communication" (Rogow, 2000: 395).

#### **2.4.3.1 The prelinguistic phase and speech production**

Before articulating their first words, young children interact with their parents using a range of communicative signals, such as, a variety of gaze behaviours and eye-to-eye contact

in order to attract adult attention, maintain contact and participate in interactive routines (Rogow, 2000:397). With visually impaired children, according to Fraiberg (1977; as cited in Rogow, 2000:397) there is an absence of these signals, which constrains communication between parents and infants. Some researchers (Bean, 1932; also, Tronick and Brazelton, 1980; Urwin, 1983, 1984; Dote-Kwan, 1995 as cited in Rogow, 2000: 397) have disputed this standpoint and found positive correlations between maternal responsiveness and communicative development in children with vision impairments. According to Stančić (1991: 101), speech development depends on several factors; however, vision plays a minimal role because it can be compensated by auditory and tactile-kinaesthetic modalities.

#### **2.4.3.2 Morphology and syntax**

Dunlea and Andersen (see Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 91) conducted several studies devoted to morphological development in blind children and concluded that it is not delayed compared to sighted children, but different. In their study of twin sisters (one blind and the other one sighted), Pérez-Pereira and Castro (see Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 94) found that the blind child produced more over-regularization errors<sup>4</sup> than her sighted sister, which questions the view that blind children are less creative than their sighted peers.

The research literature on the development of syntax in blind children again shows contradictory findings. Researchers (Fraiberg, 1977; Wills, 1979; Andersen et al., 1984, 1993; Dunlea, 1989, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 95) reported that lack of vision leads to deficient and slow cognitive development, which consequently causes deficiencies in the language learning. Contrary to this view, other researchers (Landau, 1997; Landau & Gleitman, 1985; Pérez-Pereira, 1994; Pérez-Pereira & Castro, 1992, 1997, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 95) have concluded that linguistic development of blind children is not delayed. They believe that linguistic development is relatively independent of cognitive development, and that children combine linguistic and non-linguistic input in acquiring the language. More importantly, these researchers relied on theoretical views stating that children employ different linguistic strategies and mechanisms, which enables them to extract the meaning and functions of the elements of language from the linguistic context in which they occur. Finally, there is general agreement that

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<sup>4</sup> Over-regularization errors are considered to be the application of a general rule to forms which are exceptions.



morphosyntactic development, as measured by MLU<sup>5</sup>, is not delayed in blind children (Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 102). Although there are temporary delays in acquiring certain structures (verb-auxiliary structure) in English, this is not applicable to other languages, thus, further research is needed.

#### **2.4.3.3 Meaning construal**

When addressing the nature of development of meaning or *meaning construal* in blind children, the focal point of the research has been the controversial issue of *verbalism* and Cutsforth's research (1951, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 81) which resulted in his characterization of blind children's words as meaningless, empty and unrelated to the real experience. In line with Cutsforth's findings, researchers (Burlingham, 1961, 1964, 1965; Nagera and Colonna, 1965, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 81), in clinical experience with blind children, observed that they tend to imitate words without an appropriate understanding of their meaning, that is, "parroting" the words. On the other hand, Dokecki (1966, as cited in Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 82) reviewed Cutsforth's concept of verbalism and criticised his conception of meaning, according to which meaning of words derives solely from sensory experience. Cutsforth's study provoked many criticisms and reviews (see Pérez-Pereira, Conti-Ramsden, 1999: 82; see Geld, 2014: 30) and general conclusion is that, apart from the sensorial or experiential sources of meaning, word to word or intralinguistic relationships in the semantic structure of the language play an important role. Pérez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden conclude that old conceptions about the meaninglessness of blind children's words do not seem to be well grounded; nonetheless, although the developmental process they follow does not seem to be atypical, it is likely that blind children take a longer time to construct conceptual meanings of some words (1999: 90). The issue of meaning construal leads us to important studies conducted by Geld and her colleagues (2009, 2014).

#### **2.4.3.4 A case study of a blind speaker of English as L2 (Geld, Šimunić, 2009)**

In a cognitive linguistic view of understanding language as an experiential and perceptual phenomenon, the authors aimed to offer evidence that a blind person's experience of the world is influenced by various factors and coded in his/her language. Their basic assumption is that "the language of the blind and the language of the sighted cannot be

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<sup>5</sup> Mean Length of Utterance

identical, since the blind and the sighted rely on different sensory modalities in perceiving the world around them” (p. 404) and they argue that “it is their unique contact with the environment that allows for an alternate perception and conception of reality, resulting in different mental imagery and specific linguistic realization of various cognitive processes (p. 411).

The study was an exploratory and confirmatory case study of a congenitally blind 16-year old boy, attending Vinko Bek institution. The instruments used in the research included a task-based writing assignment (titled “Award for Best Friend of 2007”<sup>6</sup>), a modified version of the Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire, and interviews. In the first task, the boy was supposed to describe an imaginary friend. His descriptions were highly influenced by western movies and country music. His language proficiency was so high, that he outperformed a large number of his sighted peers (who were, on average, 2 years older than him).

The second part of the instrument was a VVIQ, a test that was originally designed to investigate the clarity and liveliness of images in sighted individuals, but the authors used it as an elicitation instrument for obtaining descriptions of mental images from a blind person. The first question was to think of a relative or friend whom he frequently saw. According to the authors, his descriptions were schematic and almost entirely based on what he saw and heard on TV, and since the boy did not focus on olfactory and tactile details, it might point to the lack of intimacy of the person described. The second task in the VVIQ was to visualize the rising sun. He imagined the whole scene in detail, relying heavily on the tactile and olfactory input he experienced in his life. This was also the case with previous research with the blind. On the other hand, he provided detailed contextualization (he visualized the scene from afar), again influenced by TV scenes and not by his real life experience. These descriptions mirrored both perceptual and cultural character of the knowledge of the world.

The third task in the VVIQ was to think of a country scene which involved trees, mountains and a lake. Again, his imagery was constructed in such a way that he established the scene first, and he further elaborated it. The descriptions reflected different sensory input and influence of TV scenes coded in the language, similarly to the previous task. The authors recognized blind boy’s position with regard to the imagined scene as a key point for discussion. Contrary to previous research, where the results suggest that a sighted individual

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<sup>6</sup> The assignment was used within the project “English in Croatia”.

is more likely to present the scene from a bird's eye view, whereas a blind person is often in the scene he/she is describing, this blind boy imagined a wide-scope scene and then provided details about it. Furthermore, the whole image is not egocentric, but some aspects of the scene are derived from real-life experience, which, according to the authors, indicates *epistemic egocentricity*, that is, it is his specific knowledge of the world that determines what is being used in the description of images viewed by the mind's eye (p. 425).

This study confirmed that the blinds' perception of the world is reflected in both their first and second language, and, more importantly, that visual impairment as such does not result in any language deficiencies or linguistic inferiority.

#### **2.4.3.5 Salience of topology in the strategic construal of English particle verbs in blind users of English (Geld, Čutić, 2014)**

The aim of the study was to investigate whether blind users of English employ similar cognitive strategies in the process of meaning construction of particle verbs (PVs) as sighted users of English. The study included 75 participants (30 blind and 45 sighted L2 users of English). The authors had three specific hypotheses:

- 1) there will be differences in the strategic construal of PVs between blind users of English and sighted users of English;
- 2) there will be differences in the strategic construal of PVs in the group of congenitally blind users of English in comparison to both adventitiously blind and sighted users of English;
- 3) there will be no differences between the three groups of participants in terms of which semantic determination prevails in PVs in relation to the nature of the verb (light vs. heavy).

The research instrument used in the study was taken from a previous study by Geld and modified for this particular study. It was a questionnaire that contained 12 particle verbs (both light and heavy) and all the questions were open. The results show that the blind users of English employ the same strategies as their sighted peers (Geld, 2009, 2011, Geld and Letica Krevelj, 2011, as cited in Geld, 2014: 48). Furthermore, the results show that the semantic weight of both components plays a significant role in the process of meaning construction in L2. Also, their findings confirm that “the blind pay special attention to spatial

relations and their analytical skills are highly valuable cognitive strategies in the process of linguistic meaning construction” (p. 26).

#### **2.4.3.6 Investigating meaning construal in the language of the blind: a cognitive linguistic perspective (Geld, 2014)**

In her paper, Geld (2014) describes and raises the issues of meaning construal in the language of the blind. On the basis of previous series of research, conducted over a period of eight years, she synthesizes the results and proposes a model integrating key language internal and language external factors affecting the process of meaning construal in the blind. The model emphasizes the importance of a broadly-conceived nature of input consisting of the following: a) linguistic input, b) metalinguistic input, and c) contextual and sensory input (pp. 50-51). The findings of the studies discussed in the paper confirmed the author’s initial assumption “that our knowledge of language, be it first or second, is both deeply rooted in our experience as well as tremendously informative about our conception of the world” (p. 55). More importantly, contrary to the predominant view that language of the blind does not differ from language of the sighted, the author suggests, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, that the linguistic meaning constructed by the blind is certainly different from the meaning constructed by the sighted. She reminds us that we should always keep in mind that the differences must not be interpreted as deficiencies.

### **3 Research – the case studies**

The research to be described in the following sections is a descriptive, qualitative case study of three congenitally blind learners of English as L2. In section 3.1, we present the aim of the research and key questions which the study aimed at answering; in section 3.2, we provide the sample and profile the participants. In sections 3.3 and 3.4, we describe the instrument and the procedure of our research. Finally, we present and discuss results, which are followed by a list of the limitations of our study.

#### **3.1 Aim of the research**

The aim of the present research was to investigate the nature of motivation in three congenitally blind learners of English as L2 and get insight into the various factors influencing their motivation. Furthermore, based on the findings from previous series of

research conducted by Mihaljević Djigunović and her conceptualization of motivation (see section 2.2 and 2.3) and on Dörnyei's L2MSS motivational system, we wished to examine our participants' attitudes towards the English language, language learning context, self-perception, aspirations and effort they make in L2 learning, language anxiety and parental involvement and relate it to the Croatian socio-cultural context. The basic feature of this context is the assumption that English is perceived as a global language which is used for international communication and as a means of integration into the global English-speaking community. We hypothesized that motivation in blind learners would not differ significantly from their sighted peers. However, since the issue of motivation in blind L2 learners is a largely unexplored area of SLA, we wished to examine the intricacies of this phenomenon and raise awareness of the difficulties blind L2 learners are faced with in terms of L2 learning motivation.

Considering the fact that our study is of the exploratory type, we formulated the following research questions:

- What is the nature of motivation of blind learners of English as L2? What are the predominant factors related to their motivation?
- In what way do these factors influence motivation of blind learners of English as L2?
- What is the overall intensity of their motivation?

### **3.2 Case studies - participants**

As previously mentioned, there were three participants in the study. Since visually impaired population is highly heterogeneous, we decided to minimize the heterogeneity and include only congenitally blind learners. As a result, we included three participants, aged 17-18, attending "Vinko Bek", an institution specializing in education, upbringing and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired children and adults. All three participants came from the same class and have been learning English for nine years. Also, all of them are Braille users as well. We will provide more detailed profiles of our participants in *Results and Discussion*.

### 3.3 Instrument

The instruments used in the case studies were: a questionnaire in the form of an interview and sessions during several English classes. The questionnaire consisted of five parts (see Appendix I). It was mostly based on questionnaire used in the *English in Croatia* project; however, we decided to include additional dimensions as well. Thus, five statements were added from Gardner's AMTB<sup>7</sup>, in order to examine the level of *integrativeness*<sup>8</sup>. Also, we added one open-ended question (the last part of the questionnaire) connected to Dörnyei's concept of Ideal Self which was designed to examine learners' image of an ideal L2 speaker.

The first part contained questions related to the participants' age, sex, learning English and/or other foreign language(s) in terms of duration and context (in class or out-of-class learning). The second part contained 26 statements referring to attitudes to English language, language learning context (formal and informal contexts), to self-perception as a learner of English as L2, to language learning motivation, aspirations and efforts, language anxiety and parents' attitudes. The level of agreement to each statement was specified by a five-point Likert-type scale of agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The third part consisted of five statements, specified by a seven-point Likert-type scale of agreement (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree), based on Gardner's AMTB, examining learners' attitudes. The fourth part consisted of three questions asking participants to assess the probability of success on an imaginary English language test and the level of their parents' and their own satisfaction with the result. Finally, the fifth part included three open-ended questions asking for an elaborate opinion on how they perceive the notion of perfect knowledge of the English language, and opinion on what they liked/disliked in their English classes. The interpretation of research results is mostly related to the following two sources

- 1) results from previous series of research conducted by Mihaljević Djigunović and her conceptualization of motivation;
- 2) Dörnyei's L2MSS model.

For this reason we organized questionnaire items into six groups, containing items that referred to the same aspects of L2 learning:

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<sup>7</sup> Međunarodni projekt AMTB (hrvatsko-engleska verzija); Gardner, R. C. i Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (Copyright 2003)

<sup>8</sup> Here, we perceive *integrativeness* according to Dörnyei's reconceptualization of Gardner's term (see section 2.2.)

- 1) Attitudes towards the English language (including *integrativeness*),  
Some examples:
  - I like the English language.
  - English enables us to become a part of the world.
  - I like music in English.
- 2) L2 learning experience (the teacher, methodology and materials)
  - What do you like in your English classes?
  - I think my English language teacher is: (1 = really bad, 7 = excellent)
- 3) Parents' attitudes
  - My parents think it important that I speak English.
- 4) Self-perception (as L2 learner)
  - I have no feeling for this language. I'm a hopeless case for FLs.
  - It is easy for me to learn English.
- 5) Motivated learning behaviour (learner's aspirations and effort)
  - No matter how much I try, I can't achieve better results.
  - After getting a bad grade in English I lost the will to learn.
- 6) Language anxiety
  - I am afraid of oral examination in my English classes.

Considering the fact that our sample consisted of three participants, the statements and additional comments will be presented in a descriptive way and discussed in relation to the previously mentioned conceptualizations of motivation.

### **3.4 Procedure**

The questionnaire was written in Croatian and the participants answered orally to the questions, which were noted down by the examiner. They were first explained the purpose of the research and asked to answer honestly. The participants were interviewed individually in their classroom after their classes and all the answers and additional comments were audio

recorded. They lasted between 25-60 minutes<sup>9</sup>. There were several reasons for this kind of procedure:

- firstly, transcribing questionnaires into Braille and printing them requires a lot of time and technologies which were not easily available to the examiner;
- secondly, participants were able to immediately clarify possible misunderstandings with the examiner;
- thirdly, the examiner could obtain additional information regarding a certain issue;
- finally, the procedure ensured that all questions were answered.

### **3.5 Results and discussion**

The results from the questionnaire and classroom observations will be presented in the following way: firstly, we provide detailed participant's profile based on the classroom observations and information obtained during the interview and individual sessions. Secondly, we provide answers from the questionnaire and discuss them in detail. Finally, we conclude with the limitations of our research and consider some implications for future research. In order to protect the identity of participants, their names have been changed.

#### **3.5.1 Case study: Zeta**

At the time we conducted our study, Zeta was a 17-year-old congenitally blind boy. He had been learning English for 9 years, both in school and in informal contexts (mostly on the Internet, and by chatting with people from all over the world). His language proficiency was high, as well as his interest in languages, which was partially reflected in his English grade (4) at the end of school year 2011/2012. We wish to stress that his proficiency was considerably higher than his classmates'. In addition to learning English as L2 and German as L3 in school, he has been learning Polish, Bulgarian and Macedonian on his own (mostly on the Internet). When asked to describe himself as a language learner, he said that languages were his strong points and that ever since he was a child he enjoyed reading and studying various topics. Also, he mentioned during the interview that his goal was to study languages in the future (he did not specify which ones). He said that he was going to invest more time

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<sup>9</sup> The interview with one participant (Theta) lasted longer than the remaining two because he needed additional clarifications on each item.



and effort in order to improve his grades, which would enable him to enrol in the university. During our classroom observation, we noticed that Zeta's engagement in classroom activities was extremely high; he insisted on answering all the questions, reading all the texts, translating and even correcting his peers' mistakes. As expected, this kind of behaviour was not supported by the teacher, who tried to engage all learners equally. There is another interesting story involving Zeta; after realizing that the questionnaire was going to be in Croatian, and not in English, Zeta was genuinely disappointed. Nevertheless, he frequently provided comments in English: for example, his comment to the item no. 23: "When I finish school, I will quit learning English because I don't find it interesting", after strongly disagreeing with the statement, he exclaimed in English: "No comment!"

The questionnaire provided interesting results. Zeta either strongly agreed (5), or strongly disagreed (1) with the statements. His answers indicate that his attitudes are very strong and that he is passionate about various aspects of learning English. Statements regarding attitudes towards the English language showed that his attitudes were extremely positive. For example, he strongly agreed with the following statements: "English enables us to become a part of the world.", "I find English-speaking people interesting", and "English enables me to communicate with many foreigners." which refer to the integrative motivation and indicate that he has positive disposition towards the English-speaking community. However, he explicitly stated that his attitudes towards American socio-cultural environment were negative, because he considered Americans "stupid". Thus, contrary to Gardner's initial integrative conceptualization, Zeta's motivation does not seem to originate from the wish to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language, but rather from an ambition of what can be explained in terms of metaphorical identification with the globalized world citizen identity (see Dörnyei, 2005, as cited in Mihaljević Djigunović and Bagarić, 2007: 274; and in Csizer, K., Lukács, G., 2009: 2).

Statements regarding his L2 learning experience and the additional comments he provided showed that his learning experience was also perceived as positive. For example, he strongly agreed with the statement "My English language teacher is motivating" and strongly disagreed with statement "My English classes are extremely boring". Interestingly, the statement "If my English classes were more interesting, I would have the will to learn", he commented that he would have the will to learn English no matter how interesting or uninteresting his classes might be, thus showing that his motivation might not stem from L2 learning experience, but is more connected to his Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2005: 106) and his

personal goals. Moreover, regarding the statement “I enjoy using English in my free time”, which is connected to motivated learning behaviour, Zeta explained that in his free time he often browsed the Internet in order to find out more about a certain topic discussed in class. He also said that he liked to read the texts from his textbook and look into grammar lessons in advance; moreover, he used special software for reading and listening in order to prepare for the following classes. In addition, he strongly disagreed with statements “After getting a bad grade in English I lost the will to learn” and “I would need much more effort to be better at English”. It is apparent that he invested a lot of effort and time in the process of learning, which in turn resulted in even higher motivation. This is also confirmed by research with sighted learners conducted by Mihaljević Djigunović (1988: 114) which showed that learners with higher level of motivation (all three groups: affective, integrative and pragmatic-communicative) invested more effort in learning. If we look at this within the L2MSS paradigm, it is clear that Zeta’s wish to reduce the discrepancy between his Actual and Ideal L2 Self encouraged him to invest even more effort and energy in learning.

It is worth mentioning that Zeta found his textbook quite interesting (especially parts with grammar). This was rather surprising since the textbook used in our participants’ English classes was a textbook normally used in classes with sighted children. The textbook was transcribed into Braille, but the tasks were not adapted to the blind. Since there were plenty of illustrations and tasks relying on the visual modality, it was reasonable to assume that the materials would not be regarded as good, let alone, excellent.

Regarding statements which referred to the amount of encouragement in learning English and parents’ attitudes, Zeta strongly agreed with the statement “My parents find it important that I learn English” and strongly disagreed with “My parents force me to learn English”, adding passionately: “Force me?! Why?” This comment demonstrated his high level of intensity of motivation. The third part of the questionnaire contained one statement on the subject of parental involvement: “My parents encourage me to learn English”, which Zeta strongly agreed with. In the fourth part, which was designed to examine participants’ prediction of success on an imaginary English language test and their parents’ satisfaction, Zeta said that his parents would be satisfied with 50 out 100 points on the test. Interestingly, he would be satisfied with 75 points. This clearly showed that his desired level of L2 competence<sup>10</sup> differed greatly from his parents’. Moreover, he predicted on the imaginary test

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<sup>10</sup> See Dörnyei (2005: 105-106).

that he would gain 95 out of 100 points. Thus, his aspirations reflected his high level of Ideal L2 Self. In connection to this, the remaining two statements related to self-perception “I have no feeling for this language. I’m a hopeless case for FLs.” which he strongly disagreed with, and “It is easy for me to learn English.” which he strongly agreed with, showed that Zeta perceived himself as highly successful, and his positive self-image might be the most powerful motivator in his learning.

The statements on language anxiety “I am always worried in my English classes because I won’t understand anything my teacher asks me” and “I am afraid of oral examination in my English classes” showed that his level of language anxiety was considerably low.

The last part of the questionnaire contained open-ended questions examining attitudes on his English classes. Zeta mentioned his teacher’s explanations related both to texts and grammar as positive; on the other hand, he strongly criticised his teacher’s unwillingness to “let him participate more in classes and read the texts he prepared in advance”. During the interview he also expressed dissatisfaction with the school programme, more specifically, he criticised the lack of classes for advanced students. Finally, the question “What does it mean to have a perfect knowledge of the English language?”, which referred to his concept of Ideal L2 Self, showed that for Zeta it implied “using English consistently, speaking and writing fluently and intelligibly” and he added: “It is possible to have a native-like knowledge of English, because anything is possible if you put in enough effort!”.

As we have seen, Zeta is a highly motivated learner with a well-developed Ideal L2 Self. Since motivation is a complex and dynamic process, we cannot pinpoint to the source of his motivation, but only observe the interaction between various factors. Nevertheless, it is possible to assume, on the basis of the results from the questionnaire and his comments during the interview, as well as our classroom observation, that it is precisely his view of himself as a future English language user that serves as a crucial component to his motivated behaviour in language learning.

### **3.5.2 Case study: Theta**

At the time we conducted our study, Theta was a 17-year-old congenitally blind boy. He had been learning English for nine years in school. In addition to learning English, he had been learning German as L3 in school. His language proficiency was considerably lower than

Zeta's, and although his English grade was 3, it did not correspond to his actual level of knowledge, which was fairly low.

Regarding results from the questionnaire, Theta's answers were quite different from Zeta's. First, he had problems with understanding the items (even though the questionnaire was written in Croatian), so the examiner needed to further explain almost every item from the questionnaire. Also, it seemed that Theta had problems with listening and paying attention to the questions. The reason for this might lie in the fact that the interview took place after Theta's classes in late afternoon and he was probably quite tired. However, his uncertainty and hesitancy might also indicate that his capacity for introspection and self-assessment was not at a very high level. For instance, his most frequent comment to almost every statement was: "I don't know.", "I'm not sure." and "What does it mean?"

Statements regarding attitudes towards the English language were miscellaneous. For example, he strongly agreed with the following statement: "English enables us to become a part of the world." and "English enables me to communicate with many foreigners." adding that since foreigners did not speak Croatian and he did not speak their native language, it was important to learn English to be able to communicate. It is evident that he recognized the importance of English as a means of international communication. On the other hand, he strongly disagreed with items referring to cultural orientations "I like music in English." adding that "he doesn't understand the lyrics and that is why he doesn't like it". For the same reason, he strongly disagreed with "I like movies in English." adding that he enjoyed watching movies only if someone read the subtitles out loud, since he did not understand just by listening. He could not decide if he liked or disliked the English language and he ranked the statement "I like the English language" with (3). Although his answers showed he was aware of the importance of English as a global language and had positive attitudes towards the English-speaking community, his motivation was not activated. We could assume that the source of his lack of motivation might lie in the difficulties in L2 learning experience (seeing English as too complicated, being unable to understand it). This has been suggested in Mihaljević Djigunović's (1998: 117) research with sighted learners, where learners with high level of demotivation by the teaching setting had significantly less positive attitudes towards learning English and achieved lower grades.

Even though he strongly disagreed with the statement "My English classes are extremely boring", he added that he found grammar boring. This is in line with Mihaljević Djigunović

and Bagarić (2007b; 2007c) research results which showed that their participants perceived grammatical content as abstract, complicated, difficult and boring. On the other hand, Theta strongly disagreed with “If my English classes were more interesting, I would have the will to learn”, he commented: “I have the will to learn English because I have to learn”. It seemed that he associated the process of L2 learning with the feeling of obligation, that is, his motives for learning might be generated by a sense of duty or a fear of punishment, influenced by some external factors. This refers to Dörnyei’s concept of Ought-to Self and Higgins’ (1998; as cited in Dörnyei, 2006: 104) instrumental motives with prevention focus (studying in order not to fail the test); however, we do not know precisely which factors from his environment interacted with his Ought-to Self.

It is interesting that even though his attitudes towards the teacher were positive, as shown from the statements he strongly agreed with “My English language teacher is motivating”, and ranked the statement “I think my English language teacher is: (1 = really bad, 7 = excellent)” with (6), they did not promote motivated learning behaviour. One of the reasons might be found in his self-perception as L2 learner and efforts he invested in learning. For example, he strongly agreed with the statement “I have no feeling for this language. I’m a hopeless case for FLs.” Commenting: “I have no talent for English, but I have to learn”. He could not decide between (2) and (3) on the statement “It is easy for me to learn English.” but strongly agreed with “I would need much more effort to be better at English” adding that his English grade was bad because he did not study enough. This shows that he attributed his failure to his own lack of effort, which was the case with sighted learners in Mihaljević Djigunović research (1999: 146) as well. However, his strong disagreement with “I enjoy using English in my free time” and his additional comment “in my free time I don’t use English because we learn it at school and that is more than enough” but he “would enjoy talking to a translator in his free time” pointed to a problem with his lack of basic pre-knowledge, which debilitated his understanding of English and, subsequently, his motivation.

The statements on language anxiety showed that he was quite (4) “afraid of oral examination in English classes” and even though he neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement “I am always worried in my English classes because I won’t understand anything my teacher asks me”, his additional comment “I get worried because I don’t understand anything” provided a more reliable answer. We could assume that language anxiety played a substantial role in his lack of motivation, but we cannot determine the exact source of it. It is

possible that the lack of basic pre-knowledge which affected his understanding of English made him insecure and nervous during his English classes.

Statements examining parental involvement showed that “his parents find it important that he learns English” but they “do not force him to learn English”. Items regarding participants’ prediction of success on an imaginary English language test and their parents’ satisfaction with it showed that Theta’s parents would be satisfied if he passed the test, but they hoped for better results. This was also what Theta would be satisfied with.

The final part of the questionnaire, aimed at obtaining an elaborate opinion on how Theta perceived the notion of perfect knowledge of the English language, showed that an ideal speaker of English “is like a native speaker, who speaks fluently and writes without making mistakes”. However, this ideal L2 speaker was not related to his possible L2 Self. As far as his opinion on his English classes was concerned, he stated that he liked some topics they covered in class (especially with reference to culture) and he liked the illustrations (that is, their descriptions, which were written in Croatian), but he disliked grammar and the textbook, however, he did not complain about the content, but he had problems with navigation through the textbook, because “the paper is greasy and it creases easily”. However, he wished there were more explanations in Croatian. Also, he wished they worked more on their reading skills and that the teacher provided more explanations and examples, especially related to grammar.

To conclude, Theta’s lack of motivation might stem from two main sources: firstly, he lacked basic pre-knowledge of English which interfered with his understanding of English, and consequently resulted in considerable level of language anxiety. Secondly, his main motive for learning English was connected to avoidance of failure, more precisely, he invested effort in learning only to pass the examinations, not because he wished to become fluent in English or integrate into a global community of speakers of English.

### **3.5.3 Case study: Delta**

The third participant in the study was Delta, an 18-year old congenitally blind boy at the time of our study. Just as our previous two participants, Delta had been learning English for nine years, and German as L3. His proficiency was rather low and his English grade at the end of school year 2011/2012 was 2. The results from the questionnaire showed that he

generally lacked motivation for learning English, which was also the case with Theta. The results also showed that his attitudes towards the English language were varied, for example, he ranked the statement “I like the English language.” with (2), but strongly agreed with “English enables us to become a part of the world.” and with “English enables me to communicate with many foreigners.” which points to a general agreement among our participants when it comes to the status of English. Interestingly, it seemed that they all recognized the importance of knowing English for the purpose of international communication and integration, but were not equally motivated by it. Delta’s motives for learning English were not connected to the affective type of motivation, which could be seen from his strong disagreement with the statement “I am motivated for learning English because it enables me to communicate with English-speaking people.” rather to the instrumental motives. During the interview, he commented that he was interested in computer sciences and was aware that in order to be successful in that field, one should have a good knowledge of English, which he listed as his main reason for learning English.

Although he did not like the English language (he ranked the statement with 2), Delta was very interested in music in English, and listened to it mostly on the Internet. However, he was neither interested in movies, nor in the English-speaking people. Statements regarding L2 learning experience showed that Delta found his English classes boring, especially grammar. He also commented that his lack of interest was not connected with the teacher or teaching methodology. On the contrary, he strongly agreed with the statement “My English language teacher is motivating” and he thought his English language teacher was excellent. He also added that his teacher was highly motivating: often emphasizing the importance of knowing English; employing interesting methods, providing numerous examples and giving clear explanations. Delta’s attitude towards the teacher can be summarized in one of his comments: “I don’t care about English, I care about the teacher”. His positive disposition towards the teacher influenced his level of language anxiety, which was relatively low. Although he agreed with the statement “I am afraid of oral examination in my English classes.” he disagreed with “I am always worried in my English classes because I won’t understand anything my teacher asks me.” This ambiguity in his answers as well as his additional comments may indicate that his language anxiety was not related to the attitudes towards the teacher or teaching setting but to his own lack of effort in learning.

As far as teaching materials go, Delta said that the textbook was uninteresting, topics were boring and out-dated. However, he found some of the topics interesting, and enjoyed

listening tasks (found on the CD which accompanied the textbook). Apart from that, he said that his English classes were mostly boring.

According to Delta's strong disagreement with statements "My parents find it important that I learn English" and with "My parents force me to learn English", it seemed that his parents did not show active involvement or interest in his progress. He commented that his parents supported him in every way, but that they did not interfere with his academic activities.

He stressed on several occasions that he was generally not a very motivated learner. This attitude was reflected in the statements regarding self-perception and motivated learning behaviour. He neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "I have no feeling for this language. I'm a hopeless case for FLs." but his predicted number of points on the imaginary test was 45, which was, in his words, barely enough to pass the test. This was also the number of points both him and his parents would be satisfied with. It seems that Delta recognized a potential for learning English, but was aware that he did not employ enough effort, as we could see from his strong agreement with the statements "I would need much more effort to be better at English" and strong disagreement with "No matter how much I try, I can't achieve better results." Thus, he attributed his failure to his own lack of effort, which was the case with Theta as well. The reason for this lack of effort and motivation might be found in Delta's lack of Ideal L2 Self. According to Higgins (as cited in Dörnyei, 2006: 101), the absence of sufficient motivation in many people can be explained by their inability to generate an ideal or ought self guide. Dörnyei (2009: 33) suggests that the first step in a motivational intervention following the self-approach is to help learners to construct their Ideal L2 Self, that is, *to create their vision*.

The final three open-ended questions on attitudes towards his English classes showed that what Delta liked best was his teacher. He disliked grammar, because it was "too complex and one has to work really hard to understand it". On the other hand, Delta stated he would like the school to offer some additional classes for learners experiencing difficulties, because he would then have the opportunity to master the basics of English and improve his overall knowledge, which might motivate him to study harder. Finally, the question related to the notion of an ideal speaker of English, "What does it mean to have a perfect knowledge of the English language?" showed that Delta, similar to Zeta and Theta, believed that perfect knowledge of English implied "being like a native speaker, in all aspects of English, in



speaking, writing and so on” and “it is possible to have a native-like knowledge, but you have to *work hard* and you have to *care* about the language”. It is precisely this last comment that reflected Delta’s general attitude towards learning English. Since he did not have an initial desire or interest in learning the language, he did not employ effort in it.

To sum up, on the bases of answers and comments Delta provided during the interview, and on observation during English classes, we could assume that his lack of motivation might originate from two main sources: the difficulties in the L2 learning experience (he perceived English as too complicated; he found the materials boring, he lacked the necessary pre-knowledge); and from the absence of a developed Ideal L2 Self.

#### **3.5.4 Research limitations**

There were three main limitations in the research. First, since our research included three blind learners of English, which was both atypical and a very small sample in the field of L2 motivation research, we cannot generalize our research results and establish relevance, significance and external validity for people beyond this research. However, they were selected precisely because of their atypicality and uniqueness. Therefore, the interpretation of results is descriptive and explanatory in nature. Secondly, since research was conducted within teacher training course, the author had limited time and access to valuable information, such as prospective aetiologies, learners’ immediate environment and family context for the triangulation of data. Thus, in order to get a contextual completeness and detailed insight into all factors that might affect blind learner’s motivation, future studies should consider conducting interviews with family members, teachers and/or specialists involved in blind learner’s life. Also, it would be most beneficial to take a longitudinal approach and begin to observe and investigate the dynamic nature of motivation as early as possible and monitor its fluctuations through time. Finally, since the area of motivation of BVILs is a rather unexplored area and there are no reference points related exclusively to L2 motivation of BVILs, there is a possibility that the author has overlooked some crucial pieces of information or alternate explanations.

## 4 Conclusion

In the process of language learning, motivation is seen as the most influential factor, which, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 4) nicely put it, “is responsible for why people decide to do something; how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it”. As we have seen, in the case of our blind learners of English, there are great differences among them on all three abovementioned levels. There was one highly motivated learner whose main motivating factor could be found in his Ideal L2 Self and the wish to integrate into a global community and develop a bicultural identity. His positive attitudes towards English language and the English-speaking community, language learning context and positive self-perception resulted in highly motivated behaviour. On the other hand, there were two learners with the lack of motivation, influenced by various factors. Even though they showed awareness of the importance of knowing English, and liked their teacher’s methodology, their motivation was not activated. The main reasons for that might lie in their lack of basic pre-knowledge, which interfered with their understanding of English and, consequently, resulted in demotivation for learning English. It is important to stress that their lack of vision might not play a significant role in their demotivation, rather, the educational circumstances and lack of opportunities for their academic progress. However, the picture is not that gloomy. As we have already mentioned, the first step in motivational intervention is to help the learners create the vision of a successful L2 learner and increase their mindfulness about the significance of ideal selves. Therefore, future research should be focused more on the language learning context (teacher, materials and methodologies) that could promote their positive self-image. It would be beneficial to investigate L2 learning motivation and educational context starting from primary school level. Since motivation is highly dynamic in nature, future research should take a longitudinal approach. Also, research might include a bigger sample and quantitatively investigate factors which influence the nature of motivation in order to ensure greater validity and reliability of the data.

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23. Kad završim školu, odustat ću od učenja engleskog jer me on ne zanima. 1 2 3 4 5  
 24. Engleski mi omogućava da komuniciram s mnogo stranaca. 1 2 3 4 5  
 25. Želim tako dobro naučiti engleski da mi on postane prirodan. 1 2 3 4 5  
 26. Važno je učiti engleski jer će mi omogućiti da bolje razumijem i cijenim način života ljudi koji govore engleski. 1 2 3 4 5

II. Cilj je ovog dijela upitnika saznati koje je tvoje mišljenje o nekoliko stvari. Željeli bismo da ocijeniš svaku tvrdnju prema tome koje je tvoje mišljenje o njoj. Nakon svakog pitanja nalazi se skala od 1 do 7. Zaokruži onaj broj od 1 do 7 iza svake tvrdnje za koji smatraš da najbolje opisuje ono što ti misliš.

1. Motiviran sam za učenje engleskog jer ću moći komunicirati s ljudima koji govore engleski:  
 VRLO MALO    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    VRLO PUNO
2. Moj stav prema ljudima iz zemalja u kojima se govori engleski je:  
 NEGATIVAN    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    POZITIVAN
3. Moj stav prema učenju engleskog je:  
 NEGATIVAN    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    POZITIVAN
4. Moj stav prema mom nastavniku engleskog je:  
 NEGATIVAN    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    POZITIVAN
5. Moji roditelji me potiču da učim engleski:  
 JAKO MALO    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    JAKO PUNO

III. Pretpostavimo da iz engleskoga imate test na kojem se maksimalno može postići 100 bodova. U tvom razredu prosječan broj postignutih bodova je 70.

Što misliš, koliko bi bodova ti dobio? \_\_\_\_\_

S koliko bi bodova bio zadovoljan? \_\_\_\_\_

Što misliš, s koliko bi tvojih bodova bili zadovoljni tvoji roditelji? \_\_\_\_\_

IV. Što za tebe znači savršeno znati engleski jezik?

V. Što smatraš dobrim u nastavi engleskog jezika, što ti se najviše sviđa?

Što smatraš lošim, što ti se ne sviđa?

## **Sažetak**

Istraživanje predstavljeno u ovome radu pokazalo je da se priroda motivacije kod kongenitalno slijepih učenika engleskog kao drugog jezika značajno razlikuje. Rezultati dobiveni na temelju upitnika i promatranja tijekom nastavne prakse pokazali su da iako slijepi učenici imaju pozitivne stavove prema učenju engleskog jezika i globalnoj zajednici govornika, kao i prema nastavniku engleskog jezika, neki učenici pokazuju visok stupanj demotiviranosti. Ovaj rad raspravlja o mogućim izvorima motivacije, ali i demotivacije.

**Cljučne riječi:** slijepi učenici engleskog jezika, motivacija, studije slučaja