

**УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У НОВОМ САДУ
ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ**

ЈЕЗИЦИ И КУЛТУРЕ У ВРЕМЕНУ И ПРОСТОРУ XI / 3

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НОВИ САД, 2024

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XI/3

Тематски зборник



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Уреднице: проф. др Снежана Гудурић
проф. др Марија Стефановић
проф. др Јасмина Дражић

Технички секретари: мср Анђелка Гемовић и проф. др Драгољуб Перић
Издавач: Универзитет у Новом Саду, Филозофски факултет
Суиздавач: Педагошко друштво Војводине, Нови Сад

За издавача: Проф. др Миливој Алановић
За суиздавача: Сања Риста Попић

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Рецензенти: проф. др Михај Н. Радан, Западни универзитет у Темишвару, Румунија
проф. др Мира Трајкова, Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј”, Скопље,
Северна Македонија
проф. др Давиде Астори, Универзитет у Парми, Италија

Лектура и коректура: аутори

Идејно решење корица: Mihai Bădescu

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THE ROLE OF THE L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF SYSTEM IN PREDICTING EFL LEARNERS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

Denoting learners' predisposition to initiate and maintain communication in the target language, the concept of willingness to communicate with others in a foreign language (L2 WTC) is one of the core components of language learning and the primary objective of language teaching. Previous studies have explored various concepts as potential correlates or predictors of this dimension, including language anxiety, learning styles, motivation, etc. This study aimed to determine the role of the L2 Motivational Self System in predicting willingness to communicate in English among students of English language and literature in Serbia. The results revealed that both the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience significantly predict the participants' willingness to communicate, suggesting that students' strong visions of their future proficient self in the target language and the factors related to the immediate learning experience contribute to their readiness to engage in L2 communication.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate, the L2 Motivational Self System, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience

1. INTRODUCTION

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The decision of an individual to engage in interaction with another depends on a number of factors, including the individual's personality, momentary emotions, and attitudes towards the situation or the interlocutor. As language development can occur through interaction, it can be inferred that more communication contributes to enhanced language acquisition. The importance of authentic communication in L2 learning has led to the recognition of learners' readiness to speak as one of the key notions in L2 teaching. This prompted theorists to propose the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC), defined as "an individual's predisposition to initiate communication with others" (McCroskey 1997:77). Considered a personality trait and a situational construct, WTC is regarded as one of the factors that predetermines one's success in the process of foreign language learning.

Considerable research (e.g. Peng 2007; Yashima, 2002) has been undertaken to explore the relationship between L2 WTC and various psychological, social, and cultural factors in the process of foreign language learning and teaching. Despite much attraction attached to the importance of WTC for the process of foreign language learning and teaching, a search of the literature revealed few studies (e.g. Rešetar, Knežević and Topalov 2018) that have investigated the concept and its predictors in the Serbian educational context. Given the scarce literature and the significance of the concept of L2 WTC, the present study aims to explore WTC and the sources of L2 motivation that predetermine it in the Serbian context. More precisely, this study focuses on the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System as potential predictors of WTC among English major university students in Serbia. To create the theoretical background for this issue, we draw on various lines of research on the aforementioned constructs.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1. Willingness to Communicate

The concept of WTC was first developed in the field of mother tongue acquisition to denote “the probability of engaging in communication i.e. speaking when free to choose to do so” (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 546). At that time, it was considered a stable personality trait, predetermined by the lack of anxiety and perceived communicative competence (McCroskey and Baer 1985).

Since MacIntyre and Charos (1996) introduced the notion of WTC into the studies of foreign language learning, it has become an increasingly popular subject in the field of applied linguistics, because studies have shown that learners’ levels of willingness to communicate in target language (L2WTC) affect the amount and frequency of L2 communication, which, in turn, contributes to successful L2 learning (Clement, Baker, and MacIntyre 2003). While the goal of foreign language learning is to increase learners’ communicative competence, some students tend to avoid communication in the target language, even though they are highly proficient in it (MacIntyre et al. 1998). The discrepancy between communicative competence and performance could be attributed to learners’ WTC, that is, to their readiness to engage in conversation in a specific situation (Ibid.). In contrast to the stable and trait-like construct of willingness to communicate in the mother tongue, L2 WTC is considered to be a more complex, situated dimension that includes both state and trait characteristics. A multilayered model of L2 WTC, proposed by MacIntyre et al. (Ibid.), comprises numerous linguistic and psychological dimensions, including social and individual context, affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, various personality traits, etc. Thus, the approach to WTC has changed from considering the dimension as a stable, trait-like variable to studying it as a complex, situated concept that fluctuates over time. Contemporary approaches stress the importance of considering the dimension in the interaction with a variety of psychological, linguistic, social, and communicative elements in the process of foreign language acquisition. By incorporating multiple factors that can predict learners’ success in foreign language learning (Öz et al. 2015), L2 WTC can be considered as both the core component of language acquisition and “the primary goal of language instruction” (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 545).

A number of studies explored the variables that influence and predict the concept of L2 WTC, including anxiety (Baker and MacIntyre, 2000), identity styles (Zarrinabadi and Haidary, 2014), age and gender (Donovan and MacIntyre, 2004), perceived communicative competence (Yashima, 2002), L2 motivation (Peng, 2007, MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; Yashima, 2002), etc. Most studies have revealed that the key variables influencing L2 WTC include perceived communicative competence (Kim, 2004; Peng and Woodrow, 2010), language anxiety (e.g. Papi 2010), and L2 motivation (e.g. Yashima 2002).

Early studies of the relationship between L2 WTC and L2 motivation revealed an indirect relationship between L2 motivation and L2 WTC via self-confidence, communication competence, and communication confidence (Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Asadpour 2012; Khajavy et al. 2016; Yashima 2002). Considering the relationship from the perspective of contemporary models of L2 motivation, a set of studies have focused on the predictive value of the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience, on L2 WTC. The results of a range of the studies (Bursali and Öz 2017; Kanat-Mutluoğlu 2016; Munezane 2013) have revealed a direct relation between L2 WTC and the first dimension of the model, the ideal L2 self, which denotes students’ visions of their future proficient self in the target language (Dörnyei 2005). The findings also indicate that the ought-to L2 self, representing the attributes students feel they must possess to meet external expectations and avoid negative consequences related to L2 learning (Ibid.), is indirectly related to their L2 WTC through the mediating factor of language anxiety (Khajavy & Ghonsooly, 2017; Papi 2010). While the third component of the L2 Motivational Self System was intentionally excluded from some research, the results of other studies (Khajavy et al. 2016) have identified the L2 learning experience as a strong correlate of L2 WTC, as it includes situational factors related to the immediate learning environment.

2.2. L2 MOTIVATION

L2 motivation research has emerged as a distinct field of study, despite having its roots in the theories of learning motivation. Thus, the process of foreign language learning and teaching involves specific psychological, cultural, and social dimensions. Tending to adapt the mainstream psychological concepts of motivation to the complexity of foreign language acquisition, theories have offered a range of approaches to explain L2 motivation, focusing on separate aspects of this phenomenon. As a result, the early theories of L2 motivation emphasized the psychological aspects of the dimension, suggesting that L2 motivation is predominantly affected by learners' attitudes towards the specific language community and integrativeness, that is, learners' desire to socialize with people in the target language community (Gardner 1985). However, in the 1990s, the cognitive-situated approach to L2 motivation suggested that situated and contextual factors are the main source of learners' motivation to learn a foreign language, while the turn of the century was marked by process-oriented models, which highlighted the significance of its temporal aspects. Modern theories emphasize how important it is to consider the contextualized complexity of L2 motivation and its development in dynamic interaction with various internal and external factors (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011).

2.2.1. REFRAMING L2 MOTIVATION AS A PART OF THE SELF-SYSTEM

The L2 Motivational Self System was proposed as part of the socio-dynamic approach to L2 motivation by Dörnyei (2005). The model is based, on the one hand, on a reevaluation of Gardner's notion of integrativeness and, on the other hand, on the self-discrepancy theory and the psychological concept of possible selves. The author (Ibid.) claimed that integration emerges within the learner's self-concept and not exclusively as a process of identification with the target language community. The model provides a three-dimensional construct including: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience.

The ideal L2 self, defined as the L2 specific component of a person's ideal self, is concerned with "the attributes that one would ideally like to possess" (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011: 82). In other words, if a learner's ideal and real self differ and the person that a learner would like to become speaks a L2, the ideal L2 self may be a strong motivator to learn a new language (Ibid). A number of studies (e.g. Taguchi, Magid and Papi 2009) conducted to validate the model revealed that a key component of the process of foreign language learning and teaching is the learners' internal desire to become proficient L2 users. With its promotion focus, the ideal L2 self is oriented towards learners' hopes, advancements, growth and accomplishments (Dörnyei 2009).

The ought-to L2 self refers to the qualities that learners believe they should have to meet their environment's expectations (i.e. fulfilling various obligations and responsibilities) and avoid potential negative outcomes (e.g. disappointing others). The construct involves external, instrumental motives. Having a prevention focus, the dimension regulates the presence or absence of negative consequences of failing to fulfill various responsibilities and obligations (Dörnyei 2009).

Finally, L2 learning experience refers to situational and contextual motives associated with the immediate learning environment and experience (Ibid.), including language teacher, language course, coursebooks, classroom, peer group, etc.

As can be noted, the first two components were derived from possible selves theory, while the third dimension focuses on the impact of the learners' environment on their L2 motivation. Emphasis on the importance of the motivational influence of contextual factors has been recognized as the achievement of the new wave of motivational studies in the 1990s (Dörnyei 2009). Some learners are motivated to learn a foreign language by their immediate learning experience, rather than by the self-images they have created. To summarize, the L2 Motivational Self System proposes that learners' perception of themselves as successful L2 users, social pressure from their environment, and fulfilling learning experiences are the main sources of motivation for learning a foreign language.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aims and research questions

The aim of the study was to identify the level of L2 WTC and the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience) of English major university students in Serbia; and to determine whether and to what extent the dimensions of the model are predictors of the participants' L2 WTC.

The following research questions were considered in this paper:

What is the level of L2 WTC, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience of English major university students in Serbia?

How well do the motivational dimensions predict L2 WTC? How much variance in L2 WTC can be explained by these factors?

Which is the best predictor of L2 WTC: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and learning experience among the sample of students?

3.2. Participants

The survey participants were 114 students of the English Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Philology and Arts, University of Kragujevac. Of these, 33 (28.9%) were males, 79 (69.3%) were females, and 2 (1.8%) were non-binary. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 with a mean age of 21 ($SD=1.06$), while 43 (37.7%) students were in the second year of study; 51 (44.7%) students were in the third year of study; 20 (17.5%) students were in the fourth year of study.

3.3. Instruments

Data were collected using a questionnaire, which consisted of 48 five-point Likert-type items ranging across four variables: L2 WTC, motivated learning behaviour (L2 motivation), the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience, and a three-item part that provided background information about the participants. The variables were developed from previous studies and adapted to the Serbian context.

The dependent variable, L2 WTC, was assessed using 27 five-point Likert-style items (Cronbach's $\alpha=.931$) that explored participants' communicative self-confidence, integrative orientation, situational context of L2 use, topical enticement, learning responsibility, and off-instruction communication (Khatib and Nourzadeh 2015), for example, "I am willing to find opportunities to speak in English no matter how crowded the classroom is" or "I am willing to speak in English if other students laugh at my language mistakes".

The concept of motivated learning behaviour, as a measure of learners' L2 motivation, and the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System were measured by the items taken from a study conducted by Taguchi et al. (2009). The measure of learners' intended efforts toward learning English consisted of five items (Cronbach's $\alpha=.709$). The items measured participants' current and expected future efforts to learn English (for example, "I think I am doing my best to learn English", or "I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning English.").

Six questions (Cronbach's $\alpha=.843$) from the same study comprised the ideal L2 self measure (Ibid.). Some of the statements, like "I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals", relate to the L2-specific aspect of an individual's ideal self.

Five items measured the ought-to L2 self (Cronbach's $\alpha=.794$). The variable assessed the participants' tendency to fulfill obligations, expectations and wishes from their environment while avoiding

negative consequences of not learning L2 (e.g. “Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my peers/teachers/family/boss.”).

The third dimension of the L2 Motivational Self System, L2 learning experience (Cronbach’s $\alpha=.749$), was measured by five items, referring to situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience. For example, “I think that time passes faster while studying English.

3.4. Procedure of data collection and statistical data analysis

The questionnaire was administered to the participants in October 2023 during their regular lecture periods. The obtained data were processed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses as recommended statistical methods. The analyses were performed using SPSS version 20.0.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the five variables measured in this study. The mean scores and standard deviations revealed that the participants’ willingness and readiness to engage in discourse using English are considerable ($M=3.48$; $SD=.788$). Likewise, the level of their L2 motivation, i.e., the amount of effort that they devote to English language learning as well as their intended future efforts, is substantial ($M=3.5$; $SD=.671$). Regarding the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System, the findings indicated that the students’ ideal L2 selves scored significantly high ($M=4.49$; $SD=.546$), the score of their L2 learning experience was above the average level ($M=3.5$; $SD=.717$), while their ought-to L2 selves scored the lowest compared to the other two dimensions of the model ($M=2.30$; $SD=.881$).

The results suggest that the students have salient and vivid visions and aspirations for their future selves as proficient speakers of English. This suggests that the students have a clear idea of the standards they aim to meet in the following stages of their learning processes. The findings then demonstrate that their experience and attitudes towards the entire learning environment (including the curricula and interactions with teachers and other students) are rather positive. Finally, low ought-to L2 self indicates that the participants are less susceptible to pressure and external influence in relation to their language learning efforts.

	Items	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Willingness to communicate	27	1.52	4.96	3.48	.788	-.507	-.045
L2 motivation	5	1.00	5.00	3.5	.671	-.497	1.113
Ideal L2 self	6	2.5	5.00	4.49	.546	-1.276	1.369
Ought-to L2 self	5	1.00	4.60	2.30	.881	.248	-.714
L2 learning experience	5	1.20	4.80	3.5	.717	-.776	-.793

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the variables in the study

To examine whether the participants’ L2 WTC can be predicted from their ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience, we performed a multiple linear regression analysis. The assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity, homogeneity, and normality have not been broken, according to preliminary investigations.

As correlations between independent variables and dependent variables above the value of 0.3 are required for performing regression analysis (Pallant 2007), we performed correlation analysis. It showed that L2 WTC correlated with ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience, whereas the correlation between WTC and ought-to L2 self was not statistically significant. Therefore, the first two variables were included in the regression analysis.

The results indicated a moderate positive correlation between the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC ($r=.425$, $p<.001$) which shows that the clearer the learners' visions of their ideal L2 selves, the more willing they are to participate in L2 communication, and vice versa, which accords with earlier observations (e.g. ; Öz 2016; Yashima 2002). The strong relationship between L2 learning experience and WTC ($r=.484$, $p<.001$) shows that learners who find the learning settings enjoyable, nonjudgmental, and supportive are usually ready to engage in discourse with specific people using an L2.

Willingness to Communicate		
Ideal L2 Self	r	.426
	p	.000
Ought-to L2 Self	r	-.133
	p	.158
L2 Learning Experience	r	.484
	p	.000

Table 2: Results of the correlations for the tested variables

Tables 3 and 4 show the results of the regression analysis, which indicate that the model consisting of the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience can predict the participants' L2 WTC. The findings suggest that the model is statistically significant $F(2, 111)=25.324$, $p<.001$, with $R^2=.313$, which indicates that 31% of the variance of the participants' L2 WTC can be explained by the model consisting of these two dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System. In other words, L2 WTC can be relatively effectively explained by considering the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience, i.e., the students' aspirations of their future self as proficient L2 users and various factors related to their immediate learning experiences, which contribute to their readiness to enter into L2 communication.

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.560	.313	.301	.65906

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	p
Regression	21.999	2	11.000	25.324	.000
Residual	48.214	111	.434		
Total	70.214	113			

Table 4: ANOVA

The main research question in this study was to determine which dimension of the L2 Motivational Self System is the best predictor of L2 WTC. Table 5 shows the relative contribution of each independent variable to the participants' readiness to enter L2 communication. The results revealed that both ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience are significant moderate predictors of L2 WTC ($\beta=.298$, $p<.001$; $\beta=.385$, $p<.001$ respectively).

Model	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	p
1 (Constant)		.134	.894
Ideal L2 self	.298	3.571	.001
L2 learning experience	.385	4.614	.000

Table 5: Coefficients

Regarding the predictive power of the ideal L2 Self, it could be claimed that the development of L2 WTC is influenced by an individual's perception of their ideal L2 self, which is in accordance with previous studies that identified a direct path from the ideal L2 self to L2 WTC (Kanat-Mutluoğlu, 2016; Munezane 2013, 2015; Öz, 2016; Öz et al., 2015). The findings suggest that because of their idealized standards, any foreign language learner may be encouraged to actively participate in L2 communication, regardless of their current level of language proficiency. In other words, the significant predictive value of the ideal L2 self for L2 WTC shows that this group of language learners can overcome communication apprehension and actively participate in communicative activities by having a strong vision of their future successful self in the target language.

The results also revealed that the second significant predictor of the participants' L2 WTC is L2 learning experience, which emerged as an even stronger predictor than the ideal L2 self. This shows that pleasant learning experiences activate learners' potential initiative in L2 WTC. The findings suggest that students' readiness to enter into L2 communication arises not only from their self-image but also from successful experiences in specific learning contexts such as teachers, syllabi, and peer groups. Learners are more inclined to initiate interactions and actively participate in communicative tasks in the target language when they receive positive reinforcement from their immediate learning environment. Furthermore, it may be claimed that their positive learning experiences contribute to their self-confidence, which is, in turn, reflected in their increased willingness to engage in discourse using English and consequently facilitates language learning.

With regard to the third dimension of the L2 Motivational Self System, the ought-to self, it should be noted that the relationship between the dimension and L2 WTC was not statistically significant, which means that the participants' efforts to meet expectations of the environment and/or to avoid possible negative outcomes in the process of English language learning are not related to their readiness to communicate in the language. The results of previous studies showed that the relationship between the ought-to L2 Self and L2 WTC is rather complex. Namely, while some studies revealed that the relation between these two concepts is significant in secondary school settings, others showed that they are not correlated in university contexts (Csizér & Kormos, 2009). Additionally, some studies (Taguchi et al., 2009; Lanvers, 2016) showed that learners with collectivist cultures, such as Thai, Chinese, or Iranian ELF learners, tend to have stronger ought-to L2 self, and thus, the relationship between the dimension and other factors, with L2 WTC being one of them, is stronger. In the same vein, a study (Topalov, Radić Bojanić 2021) comparing how Thai and Serbian students construct their L2 motivational self-systems, revealed that while Serbian learners develop their motivational self-system on the basis of their ideal L2 selves, the motivation of Thai students generally stems from their ought-to L2 selves. The authors explained the difference by Thai collectivist cultural patterns and teacher-centered language education, as opposed to individualist principles and the communicative approach to language teaching in the Serbian educational context. A few studies have revealed an indirect relationship between L2 WTC and the ought-to L2 self via language anxiety (Khajavy & Ghonsooly, 2017; Papi, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to determine the level of L2 WTC and the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience of English major university students in Serbia, as well as to determine whether and to what extent the dimensions of the model are predictors of the participants' L2WTC.

The results revealed that the students have clear visions of themselves as fluent English speakers in the future. Their experiences and opinions regarding the immediate learning environment are generally favorable. The participants' low ought-to L2 self suggests that they are less sensitive to the pressure of their environment regarding their language learning efforts. The findings then indicated that L2 WTC is significantly and moderately predicted by both the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience. The predictive value of the ideal L2 self for L2 WTC implies that this dimension of the L2 Motivational Self System contributes to the students' willingness to engage in L2 communication irrespective of their current proficiency level. The study also revealed that L2 learning experience can predict L2 WTC even more reliably than the ideal L2 self, suggesting that pleasant learning experiences enhance the students' communicative intentions.

Since the results provide insight into the predictors of L2 WTC, some pedagogical and practical implications arise from the study. First, the implications are aimed at creating and maintaining learners' ideal L2 self, which would be, in turn, reflected in their increased L2 WTC. According to Dörnyei (2009), there are six steps to creating vivid ideal L2 selves: construction of the ideal L2 self (creating the vision), imagery enhancement (strengthening the vision), making the ideal L2 self plausible (substantiating the vision), activating the ideal L2 self (keeping the vision alive), developing an action plan (operationalizing the vision) and considering failure (counterbalancing the vision).

Secondly, as the results of the study demonstrated the positive impact of the L2 learning experience on learners' L2 WTC, the implications are also aimed at controlling the factors that the L2 learning experience refers to. Dörnyei (2019) claimed that the following elements are the components of L2 learning experience, and therefore, the variables that should be regulated for improving learners' L2 WTC: learning context, syllabus and teaching materials, learning tasks, one's peers, and teacher.

Regarding the directions for further research, since the study focused exclusively on the dimensions of the L2 Motivational Self System as potential predictors of L2 WTC, neglecting other factors that could play a significant role in foreign language learning, further research could explore these factors as potentially direct or mediating predictors of L2 WTC. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore the predictive power of these dimensions among secondary school learners, non-English major university students, or some other group, and to compare the results with the findings of this study.

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УЛОГА МОТИВАЦИОНОГ СЕЛФ-СИСТЕМА У УЧЕЊУ СТРАНИХ ЈЕЗИКА У ПРЕДВИЋАЊУ СПРЕМНОСТИ НА КОМУНИКАЦИЈУ НА ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ

Резиме

Дефинисан као предиспозиција ученика да започну и одрже комуникацију на циљном језику, концепт спремности на комуникацију на страном језику представља једну од кључних компоненти процеса учења језика и основни циљ наставе језика. У претходним студијама различити концепти су испитивани као потенцијални корелати и предиктори ове димензије, укључујући језичку анксиозност, стилове учења, мотивацију за учење страних језика, итд. Циљ овог рада је да се испита улога димензија модела мотивационог селф-система у учењу страних језика у предвиђању спремности на комуникацију код студената енглеског језика и књижевности у Србији. Резултати су открили да и идеално-ја, и искуство испитаника у учењу страног језика предвиђају њихову спремност на комуникацију, указујући на то да снажне визије ученика о себи као успешним говорницима енглеског језика у будућности, као и фактори који се односе на непосредно искуство у учењу, доприносе спремности ученика да учествују у комуникацији на страном језику.

Кључне речи: спремност на комуникацију, мотивациони селф-систем у учењу страних језика, идеално-ја, очекивано-ја, искуство у учењу страних језика

Аница Радосављевић Крсмановић
Универзитет у Крагујевцу, Србија
Филолошко-уметнички факултет
anica.krsmanovic@filum.kg.ac.rs

Нина Манојловић
Универзитет у Крагујевцу, Србија
Филолошко-уметнички факултет
nina.manojlovic@filum.kg.ac.rs

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