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AND THEORY**Motivation as ethical self-formation**

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**Motivation as ethical self-formation**

**Abstract**

Motivation is a concept more frequently found in venues concerned with educational psychology than in ones concerned with educational philosophy. Under the influence of psychology, and its typically dualistic way of making sense of the world, motivation in education has tended to be viewed in dichotomous terms, for example, as *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* in character. Such psychology-derived theories of educational motivation operate within a dichotomous ontology, traceable to structuralist notions of agency *versus* (rather than *within*) structure, whilst exemplifying the tendency in psychology that philosopher R.S. Peters identified over half a century ago, of seeking to provide totalizing, comprehensive theories of human behavior in emulation of the achievements of the natural sciences. This paper offers an alternative reading of motivation in terms of Foucauldian ethical self-formation that attempts to recognize motivation as arising from the individuals’ socially situated and constrained agency and that focuses on how individuals pursue learning as a way of creating a particular desired version of the self. We illustrate this approach through a vignette of Wolfgang, a Hong Kong learner of German as a third language. Whilst we are certainly not seeking to supplant other approaches to theorizing motivation, we believe that the approach we elaborate here offers significantly to the repertoire of motivational research in education and language learning.

## Introduction

Motivation has had a far greater presence in educational psychology venues than in educational philosophy. As a consequence, motivation in education is often conceived within an individualistic, cognitive orientation, i.e. as something pertaining to the mental and attitudinal makeup of the discrete individual, seen as separate from social contexts and activities. This orientation is itself reflective of what psychologist Lisa Blackman describes as “the mind/body dualism so entrenched within our discipline” (2005, p. 194). Psychology has been particularly influential in language studies and sub-fields like second language acquisition, where dualistic approaches frequently structure debates. As applied linguist, Diane Larsen-Freeman notes, “our field is beset by dialectics: learning versus use; psychological versus social; acquisition versus participation” (2007, p. 784). Such dualistic models are particularly evident in theories of motivation in language education (and education generally) whereby motivation is seen as either *integrative* or *instrumental* (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Inherent in this dualistic approach, in which examples of motivated behavior can be categorized as *either* ‘X’ *or* ‘Y’ (insert terms from relevant pair) is a tendency in psychological theories, critiqued by philosopher R.S. Peters over fifty years ago in his treatise on the concept of motivation, to posit “an all-inclusive theory of human behavior from whose basic postulates answers to all forms of the questions ‘Why does Jones do X?’ will eventually be deduced” (1958, p. 148). Such systematic, comprehensive and exhaustive explanatory aspirations can be read as symptomatic of the modern dream of an ideal method, an ideal language, an ideal rationality and an ideal reason (Toulmin, 1990, p. 99).

This paper offers an alternative reading of motivation in terms of Foucauldian ethical self-formation, one that is more closely aligned with ethics and politics than with psychology, that views motivation as the enactment of agency in everyday practices *within* situated social constraints (de Certeau, 1984), and that seeks to see the individual and their social context in a

dialogical, rather than dichotomous, relationship “characterized by oscillations, slippage and unpredictable transformations” (Donald, 1992, p. 2). We begin with a brief discussion of how motivation has been conceptualized in applied linguistics and second language acquisition – conceptualizations which reflect thinking about motivation in education more broadly – in order to locate our own approach.

**Motivation and/in language learning**

In the early years of second language acquisition’s (SLA’s) history, numerous studies investigated the concept of motivation in language learning. These studies emphasized the psychological factors involved in motivation, from a cognitive perspective, framing motivation as either ‘instrumental’, i.e. goal-oriented, or ‘integrative’, i.e. assimilation-oriented, behavior (Gardner, 1979, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Despite describing itself as ‘social-psychological’, this approach was characterized by an ontological separation of ‘external’ factors like context and culture from the atomistic, psycho-logistic individual. Context here was conceived as more of a static container, rather than something “fluid, dynamic, complex, heterogeneous” (Watson-Gegeo, 2004, p. 338). While other approaches which have adopted a more pedagogical, classroom-oriented perspective (Dörnyei, 1990, 1994a, 1994b, 2001a, 2001b), or examined motivation in connection with learning styles (Gao, 2010; Hativa & Birenbaum, 2000), language learners’ beliefs (Mori, 1999), or the concept of autonomous and self-regulated learning (Noels, Pelletier, & Vallerand, 2000; Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan, 2002), the ontological basis for conceptualizing motivation has still been to a greater or lesser degree the discrete individual, in whose inner psychology motivation resides, and who is herself located within, but nevertheless distinct from, her context. Yet as Edwards & Potter note, “one of the lessons of Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy and more recent ethnomethodological developments is that motive talk...does not have a simple inner referent but is a performative speech act in a complex

language game” (1992, p. 141). In other words, motivation is contingently shaped in and through everyday situated social practices.

The notion of investment, drawn from Bourdieuean sociology, added a new dimension to the concept of language learners’ motivation by conceptualizing motivation from a poststructuralist perspective as part of “a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context” (Norton, 1995, p. 9). This approach foregrounds socio-cultural, discursive, and power-related factors for learners’ commitment to language learning (Norton, 1995, 2000; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) and focuses on sociopolitical notions of the ‘right to speak’ and the ‘power to impose reception’ (Norton, 2000, p. 8). However, these studies were conducted in the setting of teaching and learning English as a second language, where issues of power, access and struggle were central to learners who had immigrated to English speaking countries and had to communicate in the target language on a daily basis as a matter of socioeconomic survival. The risk in such a perspective is that it becomes trapped in a binary of power and resistance, in which the only scope for the exercise of agency is in an act of resistance to external power structures (Mahmood, 2005).

There thus appears to be a gap in terms of approaches to motivation that capture the ways in which learning is perceived as meaningful for learners’ lives, that capture the ways in which statements about motivation are used by learners to position themselves within social constraints, and that focus on how learning can support learners in their self-development and the formation of their ‘selves’, in ways not necessarily linked to necessity, struggle and survival. In this paper we seek to address this need, approaching motivation from a perspective that incorporates consideration of learners’ deliberations and decisions about who they are, who they want to become, how to live their lives, and how to act and behave towards others. Foucault’s analysis of ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1984, 1985) addresses the fundamental question of ‘*how one is*

to live?” (O’Leary, 2002, p. 1) and therefore offered a suitable starting point for the development of this framework. The key characteristics of the notion of ethical self-formation, set in the wider context of Foucault’s thought, are thus outlined below.

**Foucault and ethical self-formation**

Within education, Foucault’s work tends to be associated with an unrelenting determinism, with *Discipline and Punish* in particular read as a genealogical mapping of our imprisonment in oppressive regimes of disciplinary power and totalizing discourses. Yet this perception is based on Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical works from his early and middle periods. By contrast, a number of scholars have seen the later ‘ethical’ works as offering a corrective balance to the deterministic vision of human society portrayed in the earlier works. In particular, his notions of ethical self-formation and care of the self are perceived as offering enhanced scope for thinking about issues of freedom and resistance (Besley & Peters, 2007; May, 2006; O’Leary, 2002; Wain, 2007). As Infinito notes, “Foucault’s ethics is a direct political response to normalization’s effect of blocking us from asserting an identity, a self, and a future of our own making” (2003a, p. 160).

These notions are developed most fully in the books, *The use of pleasure* (1985) and *The care of the self* (1986) and the interview, *The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom* (1997a). However, as Foucault himself emphasized, his ideas about ethics need to be read as a further development of the social and historical shaping of subjectivities characteristic of his earlier work, insofar as the freedom proffered here is relative rather than absolute, involving interdependence and connectedness to others rather than detached autonomy. In order to fully grasp the way the ethical works developed from Foucault’s earlier ideas, we need to briefly revisit the penal world of *Discipline and punish*, in which Foucault analyzes transformations between the classical and modern periods in practices of punishment along four dimensions. First, there is

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3 a transformation in the punishable ‘substance’, which is transferred from the physical body to the  
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5 treatable soul of the offender (1977, p. 16). Second, there is a change in the ‘mode of subjection’  
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7 implicit in these practices of punishment, such that the simple equation of crime and punishment  
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9 (‘an eye for an eye’) is replaced by subjection to a range of expert knowledge, that of  
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11 psychologists, criminologists, counselors and prison workers, for example, that is brought to bear  
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13 on the criminal. Third, there is a shift in the practices of punishment where “the symbolics of  
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15 blood”, centered on the spectacle of judgment and sentencing, “gives way to the continuous,  
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17 hidden work of assessment, management and normalization” (Dean, 1994, p. 161). Fourth and  
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19 finally, there is a shift in the ‘telos’ or ultimate purpose of practices of punishment, whereby the  
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21 focus moves from exacting total submission to sovereign power, to producing useful and docile  
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23 subjects of modern disciplinary practices.  
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29 This four-part schema is employed again in Foucault’s later ethical works, where he uses them as  
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31 a framework for thinking about the different ways in which ethics was conceived in the Greek,  
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33 Roman, and early Christian eras, and where they become four axes of ethics (Clarke, 2009a,  
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35 2009b; May, 2006; O’Leary, 2002). These axes are  
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- The ethical substance (the part of the self pertaining to ethics)
  - The mode of ethical subjection (the authority sources of ethics)
  - Ethical self-practices and;
  - The telos, or ultimate endpoint, of ethics.

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Thus the four dimensions of the genealogy of repressive power become the four axes for critical genealogical work focused on enhancing the potential freedom of the subject; it is in this sense that Foucault talks of ethical self-formation when he writes about ethics. It is important to note



that, following Nietzsche (Schrift, 1995), Foucault does not subscribe to the Cartesian-Kantian view of human beings as autonomous, free and self-conscious subjects from which all knowledge, moral conduct and political agency emanates (M. A. Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 19); but neither does he see human activity as completely socially determined. Consequently their selves cannot be considered ‘a consistent, coherent and rational, autonomous and harmonious unit but rather a multiple, ever changing de-centralised and at times contradictory construct’ (Foucault, 1988, in Besley and Peters, 2007, p. 58). For this reason, Foucault referred to human beings as ‘subjects’ rather than ‘individuals’ as he sees them as formed through social, political, and regulatory discourses, events, institutions, and structures that lie beyond their conscious control (Besley & Peters, 2007). But even though history and power structures shape the way we think, act and react, and have made us what we are *now*, we nevertheless possess the freedom to change the way we are now and become *otherwise* by understanding our own histories:

What Foucault describes with different inflections in all his works are important moments and elements of that history. It is a history that is at once constitutive and contingent: it makes us who we are, but not by necessity. If we understand our history, understand who we have come to be, and understand that we do not have to be that, then we are faced with the possibility of being something else. That is our freedom (May, 2006, p. 123).

However, ethical self-formation does not imply that one can become anything one wishes, regardless of the social and historical context in which one lives and has grown up in (May, 2006, p. 124). Ethical self-formation rather needs to be understood as the freedom to question the historical circumstances that have shaped our lives and how we have come to be, and to nurture a kind of curiosity in ourselves to experiment with how we could be otherwise:

We may question aspects of who we have come to be, but we cannot step outside ourselves, leap from our own historical skin to choose our lives from some vantage point beyond the vagaries of our history and context. To stray afield of oneself is not to recreate oneself out of whole cloth. Rather, it is to experiment with who one might be, to try other ways of being that may turn out to be more tolerable than who we are now (May, 2006, p. 124).

### **Ethical self-formation and (language) learning**

So what does Foucault's ethics and his ideas of ethical self-formation have to say to us as educators, and in particular, how can we use these ideas to rethink motivation? Recently, Ushioda (2009) called for a 'person-in-context relational view of motivation'. The characteristics of such a perspective bear a close resemblance to motivation when theorized through the lens of Foucauldian ethical self-formation:

... real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220).

Ushioda's emphasis on agency and the multiple dimensions of the subject echo notions of ethical self-formation, whereby individuals employ a series of techniques or technologies in order to they shape their relationship to themselves and their interactions with others. Foucault referred to these techniques as 'technologies of the self', "which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" (Foucault, 1997, p. 225). In the

remainder of this paper, we present a vignette of one learner in order to illustrate the potential value of a theorization of motivation that, drawing on Foucault’s four axes of ethical self-formation, takes into account learners’ sense of self, the authoritative discourses and practices that guide them, the practices they engage in, and their future aspirations as language learners. It should be noted that although the axes of self-formation are separated here for analytical purposes, to a large extent the axes interrelate, overlap and mutually shape one another.

**An illustrative example: Wolfgang<sup>1</sup>**

Wolfgang, who majored in Fine Arts and German, was 21 years old, had achieved an advanced level of German proficiency, and was attending a third-year undergraduate German class. Wolfgang had learned German at the Goethe-Institute in Hong Kong for one year at the age of 16. After reaching the intermediate level of learning German, Wolfgang was awarded a scholarship to attend a summer course at the university in Tübingen in Germany and used the opportunity to travel around Germany, Austria and Italy.

Wolfgang described himself as a quiet, introspective, and somewhat idealistic person, an average student, not overly hard-working, who spent only one to two hours per week in learning German, due to other study commitments and the pursuit of personal interests. The latter included listening to classical music, reading and writing on philosophical issues, drawing and painting, visiting art exhibitions and going for walks. The pseudonym Wolfgang was actually his second choice. Originally he had opted for Friedrich due to his admiration of Friedrich Schiller, but as another participant had taken that name, he settled for Wolfgang, reflecting his passion for Mozart’s music and the literary works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang’s case is drawn from a larger study conducted over a year with students at a university in Hong Kong, who were studying German as a third language, having studied English at school. Data was generated from interviews and reflective journals.

*The substance of ethical self-formation: “I always want to understand more of the literature, philosophy, music....that’s for my whole life”*

The first axis, the ethical substance, is interpreted as referring to all those factors that stimulate the learners’ interest to learn German as a third language from the perspective of the self. For example, is learning the language seen as an intellectual challenge, as a practical skill, as aesthetic engagement, or as a stimulus for feelings and emotions?

German was actually the fourth language for Wolfgang, having already learned English and Putonghua (Mandarin), in addition to Cantonese, his first language. Wolfgang was drawn to German in large part because of its associations with classical music, art, and philosophy, which he had first learned about in school. He explained that after having been introduced to Mozart’s music and selected works by Schiller and Goethe, he became curious to explore their literary pieces further on his own outside school.

Maybe I first heard that music and philosophy in Germany are very famous. Then, because I had some time to spare, I went to a bookshop and I...read those books. And later I found German literature is also quite good, and later I discovered my favourite author who is also from Germany....and it’s Schiller. Maybe... because I like the character..... of this man.

These German thinkers increasingly occupied him and he began to explore the works of Schiller and Goethe in more depth on his own. Parts of his ‘self’ seemed to have been increasingly engaged by the philosophical ideas of these two German thinkers and writers as he read more. In particular, he was drawn to the works of Schiller, who became Wolfgang’s favourite author after he concluded that parts of his ‘self’ corresponded with aspects of Schiller’s personality, as represented by the thoughts and values expressed in his works. The fact that favourite author was

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from Germany and wrote in German prepared the ground for Wolfgang’s engagement with the language. Whilst still at school, Wolfgang began to learn German at the Goethe Institute in Hong Kong, as a means to pursue his childhood dream to learn more about German literature, philosophy and music:

To understand more of Germany....that’s been my dream ever since I was a child. (...) I always want to understand more of the literature, philosophy, music, well....I think...that’s for my whole life. Maybe another 18 or 20 years....I always want to learn more about Germany.

Wolfgang’s interest was not just intellectual; his attraction to the ideas of German artists was enhanced by their interest in aesthetics. His interest thus reflected aspects of himself he wished to develop and which he believed he shared with his idols:

They (Goethe and Schiller) are searching for beautiful things, that’s our common interest and ...as I know they are both interested in Greek and Roman artworks and culture, and they also want to see the rise of German culture.....that’s what I’ve learned, but the way is quite different. I think Goethe is more empirical, and Schiller is more abstract.

We can see that Wolfgang’s relationship with German extends far beyond a cognitive engagement with the linguistic systems of the language, or a concern with what learning German can do for him in terms of asserting a right to be heard. It could be argued that the notion of integrative motivation captures what we see in Wolfgang’s relationship to German. However, we would argue that this places the emphasis on the learner wishing to fit into the new language-culture, whereas ethical self-formation allows us to highlight how Wolfgang sought to use German to transform particular aspects – intellectual and aesthetic (and as we will see below,

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3 ethical) – of himself, i.e. his ethical substance. In pursuing this project, his ideals guided his goals  
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5 in learning German, acting as an authority source, which is the focus of the following section.  
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10 *The mode of subjection: “I want to link the function of art to society”*  
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12 The second axis, the mode of subjection, encompasses all the reasons why the learners decided to  
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14 learn German by focusing on the values and beliefs they attached to learning German as a third  
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16 language. For example, learners might see their language learning as developing their intellects,  
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18 enriching their aesthetic sense, enhancing their employability, and/or improving their social status  
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20 and symbolic capital.  
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24 As noted already, Wolfgang was very impressed by the ideas and ideals of German poets,  
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26 thinkers and writers of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, ideals, as manifested in art  
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28 and aesthetics, for Wolfgang were not merely decorative: in his view, conduct in line with idealist  
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30 values was equivalent with morally correct behaviour, which he framed in terms of fighting  
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32 injustice, the unaesthetic, and mediocrity and promoting solidarity.  
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37 I link what I am learning to what I can do to this world...I want to link the function of art to  
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39 society. And that's why I like Schiller. Schiller can use his art to do something in his society.  
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42 Although he is an idealist, his is doing it for arts, but the art works he created can arouse  
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44 people's sympathy and brotherhood.  
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48 It is worth noting that Wolfgang did not only want to serve society in altruistic fashion; like his  
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50 hero Schiller, he also wanted to be respected by others, to win sympathy, as well as to promote  
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52 'brotherhood'. To Wolfgang, learning German and immersing himself in German culture  
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54 provided a means of linking these regulatory aesthetic and ethical ideals. Wolfgang's idealistic  
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56 image of Germany and the Germans was confirmed (rather than being modified or even  
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undermined) during his stay in Germany. He reported how much he was impressed by the rule of ‘reason’ in Germany, as opposed to Hong Kong where utility was the governing virtue.

I think action is only controlled by the utility, in Hong Kong, and if they do something respectful to you then maybe it’s only because of the utility. But I think the German culture, maybe they think they have to do it because it’s reasonable, it’s according to reason.

As a result he referred to Germany as his second home:

I feel that Germany is my ...second home? (laughs) (...) I find the German culture quite... suitable for me. (...) I think the people are very idealistic, not as practically minded as Hong Kong people.

Wolfgang’s choice of ‘home’ as a metaphor is revealing, since ‘home’ can refer to the place where one was brought up as a child or the geographical location where one lives, but it can also refer to ‘a spiritual sphere of desire or longing’; this sense ‘home’ can be read as a response to ‘a need to secure the sense of who we are when our spatial location can be seen as compromising that security’ (Woodward, 2002, p. 49). Wolfgang’s construal of his first home as utilitarian, materialistic and vulgar led him to construct a second home which, so long as he subjected himself to its purported values, might enable him to transform himself into the kind of being he wished to become. In Bourdieuean terms, he wished to confer on himself a mark of distinction, albeit one conceived in Euro-centric, colonially inflected terms. However, in addition to the construction of values and ideals, such ethical self-formation requires engagement in particular self-practices. These practices are the focus of the following section.

*Self-practices: “One can feel the great spirit of the poet”*

The third axis, the self practices, addresses the practices learners engage in when learning or using the language. In the context of learning German, such practice might include listening to German language radio, communicating with German friends online, or reading German literature.

Wolfgang attraction to German philosophers and thinkers, particularly Friedrich Schiller, manifested itself in extensive reading of their work, either in the original German or English and Chinese translations.

Today I read Schiller’s play. The play is called “The Robbers”. Before, I had only read his poetry and his last play “Wilhelm Tell”. “The Robbers” is not so difficult and one can feel the great spirit of the poet in this text. What do you need to do to fight a tyrant? Never do anything unjust, otherwise you become evil yourself.

For Wolfgang, reading Schiller’s works was not only an activity for practicing his German but also a self-practice through which he could create a world in which he could sense the ‘spirit of the great poet’. As we saw above, combating injustice and resisting mediocrity formed significant aspects of Wolfgang’s mode of subjection. Reading Schiller’s works, along with those of numerous other German philosophers and writers, such as Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Kleist, Mann and Zweig, provided Wolfgang with a discipline and a routine through which he strived to realize his intellectual ideals, which went beyond mere communication:

I regard English as an important tool for me to communicate with people around the world.

Yes...but I regard German as a tool for me to pursue my intellectual dream, or goal.



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In striving to shape his self through particular practices, Wolfgang was nothing if not focused and determined: in addition to immersing himself in the works of German philosophers and thinkers, he also devoted time to listening to classical music written by German-speaking composers such as Schubert and Mozart:

I am listening to some music because many classical songs are written in German for instance the songs by Schubert....also the opera such as Mozart’s opera... This is an activity for listening but I am also reading the texts of the music... I can understand a little and there is also an English translation. I listen to it once per week, sometimes more sometimes less.

Wolfgang’s musical preferences reflected the classical and early-romantic ideals of his ‘intellectual dream’. Listening to Schubert, who composed music for some of Goethe’s and Schiller’s works, and Mozart, that apogee of classical balance, are central practices in the task of furthering his spiritual and intellectual development, thereby bringing him closer to realizing his ultimate goal or telos.

***Telos: “to become a full human being”***

The fourth axis, the telos, looks at the ultimate goal or purpose for which the language is being learned. For example, is the language being learned to achieve wider intellectual or aesthetic goals related to their ‘selves’, or for pragmatic purposes, or a mix of both, or for providing the individual’s life with a new purpose and direction.

Wolfgang’s telos consisted in a permanent quest to fulfill his potential for aesthetic and ethical development, whilst serving others. He described this ideal self in various ways at different times but always with a common theme of interlinked self- and other- transformation:

To become a better man who can make this world a better place, has always been my objective in life.

Wolfgang saw his learning German as assisting him to access culture, art and literature through which he saw himself grow and mature. Culture, art and literature enabled Wolfgang to experience different perspectives of the world constituted a significant aspect of his telos:

To learn more...to become a full human being. A full being.

Nevertheless, although German was the vehicle for Wolfgang's attainment of his telos of becoming 'a better man' and a 'full being', he ultimately sought to transcend the limitations of any particular language or culture and, in Kantian fashion, create a 'global', 'universal' identity:

I want to be a global citizen and have a global identity. And that's why Kant applies to me. Because I've read an article about his philosophy and he is agitating for the global identity, the universal identity.

But in order to reach out to his telos to transform himself and become a universally conceived 'better man', Wolfgang regarded it as necessary to live in an environment that supported him in his quest. For Wolfgang, Hong Kong constituted to Wolfgang the opposite of his idealised world and he was convinced that he could only accomplish his telos by immersing himself in an environment that supported his self-formation.

There are so many vulgar words in Cantonese. (...) I find if one stays too long in one place, one learns a lot of bad things. One has to go to a different place to study and to live, and then ... one can find a different kind of life.

Wolfgang wanted not only to psychologically but also physically immerse himself in a society that he believed lived according to the principles and values he regarded as the basis for his self-formation. It was as if he wanted to rid himself of ‘all the bad things’ he associated with his homeland Hong Kong and expose his mind and body to a new environment where he could transform himself into a better man based on reason. Yet Wolfgang was aware that financial security was important if he wanted to dedicate his life to ‘improving himself’ through the means of art and philosophy, and hoped that an academic career could reconcile his spiritual goals with the more mundane demands of day-to-day life. His learning German thus assisted him in achieving his telos, by nurturing his spiritual life, whilst also providing him with the practical skills to pursue a career. To facilitate this trajectory, Wolfgang intended to return to Germany to study fine arts and literature after graduating from university in Hong Kong and eventually succeeded in securing a graduate place in a German university, thus taking an important step towards his self-formation into a ‘better man... a full human being’.

**Conclusion**

As noted in the introduction, motivation has typically been seen in either individual-psychological terms, as a characteristic of the learner’s individual mind, or, as in Norton’s (2000) theory, as a as a form of sociopolitical resistance. The case of Wolfgang offers insights into the potential value of another perspective, in which learners see their learning in relation to a number of dimensions. From the perspective of ethical self-formation, learning links learners’ individual agency with the social constraints and enablements of context, whilst balancing their aspirations for the ideal with the demands of the practical and envisioning their learning occurring across temporal and spatial dimensions. For learners like Wolfgang, learning offers scope for becoming “self-reflective intentional agent, inherently part of and shaping her own context” (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218, cited above). It provides a means to transform themselves in multiple domains –

intellectual, emotional and spiritual; it answers a call to navigate life's multiple and constrained challenges according to particular guiding values; it acts as an incitement to engage in particular disciplines and practices as a means to adhere to these rhythms; and it provides an avenue for the pursuit of an ultimate goal for being and becoming in this world.

Returning to the notions of ontological enhancement and engagement with otherness touched on in the introduction, we can see how these can be related to the four axes of ethical self-formation that have framed the analysis in this paper. We can see how Wolfgang, dissatisfied with the person he found himself in Hong Kong, sought to immerse himself in German thought, culture and language "so as to appropriate it and penetrate its sense of otherness" (Peterson, 2008, p. 913) as a means of extending himself. This can also be linked to Lundie's arguments about motivation in relation to ontological enhancement, the latter involving desire, choice, and will, and distinguishable from narrower conceptions of motivation by its non-necessary, identity-changing and direction-providing characteristics (Lundie, 2009, pp. 544-546). Through learning German, Wolfgang did not only – or even – aim at increasing his utilizable skill-set or his capacity for social integration in the target language community, as per cognitive theories of motivation, nor did he seek to bolster his claims to recognition in the target language society, as per investment theories of motivation. Rather, he saw learning German as a practice by which he might express and enhance his individuality, by living in accordance with ethical and aesthetic values that he perceived to be in sharp contrast to those prevailing in his community. Learning German was a means to assist him to live differently and to be – and continue to become – a different person.

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