

MOTIVATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LEARNING
Students' views on their "ideal L2 selves"

Bachelor's thesis
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<p>Motivaatio on iso tekijä oppilaan taitojen kehittämisessä. Opiskelumotivaation tutkiminen on lisääntynyt viime vuosikymmenten aikana. Vuonna 2005 tunnettu psykolingvistiikan professori, Zoltán Dörnyei, loi teorian, <i>The L2 motivational self system</i>, jonka mukaan omien tulevaisuudensuunnitelmien konkretisointi vahvistaa motivaatiota. Siispä, jos oppilas on tietoinen siitä, mihin hän tulee englantia tulevaisuudessa käyttämään, hänen halunsa oppia kyseistä kieltä kasvaa. Dörnyei’n teoria perustuu mahdollisten omakuvien (possible selves) ja integroivan motivaation (integrative motivation) teorioille, ja se yhdistää halun integroitua johonkin tiettyyn yhteisöön ja kuvauksen omasta tulevaisuuden minäkuvasta.</p> <p>Dörnyei’n teoria on hyvin hyödyllinen tutkittaessa oppilaiden kieltenopiskelun motivaatiota, ja sitä onkin hyödynnetty monessa tutkimuksessa. Yläasteikäisten opiskelumotivaation tutkimus on kuitenkin jäänyt vähäisemmäksi. Jos opettajat olisivat tietoisempia oppilaiden mielenkiinnonkohteista, opetusta voitaisiin kohdistaa paremmin vastaamaan oppilaiden tarpeita.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus hyödyntää kyseistä ajatusta, ja tutkii yläasteikäisten oppilaiden motivaatiota englannin kielen opiskelua kohtaan. Tutkimus toteutettiin essee muotoisena kirjoituksena eräällä varsinaissuomalaisella yläasteella, ja haastatteluun osallistui 17 seitsemäsluokkalaista. Haastattelussa oppilaita pyydettiin kuvittelemaan itsensä viiden vuoden kuluttua ja miettimään, miten englanti hyödyttää heitä koulussa ja vapaa-ajalla.</p> <p>Haastatteluun vastanneista suurin osa tiesi tavoiteammattinsa sekä sen, mihin kouluun aikovat yläasteen jälkeen jatkaa. Oppilailla oli myös näkemys siitä, miten englanti voi heitä hyödyttää sekä koulussa että työelämässä. Suurimpana teemana esille nousi sosiaalisuus. Sosiaalinen media sekä englanninkielisten keskustelujen käyminen niin suomalaisten kuin ulkomaalaistenkin kavereiden kanssa tuli moneen kertaan esille. Tulosten perusteella tutkimusryhmä oli hyvin perillä englannin kielen tärkeydestä sekä siitä, minkä tasoinen kielitaito heillä tulisi olla tulevaisuudessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of motivation is widely used when talking about learning but defining such a vast concept can be difficult. This thesis will use the definition offered by Keller (1983: 389) according to which motivation is a collection of different choices we make in order to end up somewhere or avoid an unpleasant situation. Zoltán Dörnyei also used the definition in question in his theory called the L2 Motivational Self System, which will be utilized in this thesis.

According to Dörnyei's theory, if a student is aware of his or her "ideal self", meaning the vision they have about the person they want to be in the future, their motivation towards language studying is supposed to increase. The L2 Motivational Self System consists of two other theories: Gardner's (1956) theory about integrative motivation and Markus' and Nurius' (1986) theory about possible selves. Those theories will be considered in the next chapter along with some studies carried out using the L2 Motivational Self System.

This thesis will focus on a relatively small research group and therefore the aim of this study is to get similar findings to those of previous studies. The data used in this thesis was gathered using essays written by the research group, which consisted of 17 seventh-graders from a secondary school in Southwest Finland. Students were asked to imagine themselves five years from the interview and consider how and what level of English might be beneficial for them. Then, they were asked to write an essay based on their thoughts. The research method and the method used to analyze the data will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The data will be analyzed using a content analysis, which will be found, along with the study findings, in chapter 4. The next chapter will focus on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and the background theory will be presented. Also, the research question for the present study will be given.

2 THE IDEAL SELF IN STUDYING ENGLISH

Imagination is a concept that is often disregarded in language studies. Education usually focuses on the student's knowledge at the moment instead of thinking what kind of knowledge they will need several years later. However, in 2009, a well-known professor of psycholinguistics, Zoltán Dörnyei, along with Jill Hadfield, invented a theory concerning language students' ideal selves. This theory considered the students' own visions of who they will be a certain amount of years later, and what kind of language will be useful for them at that point of their lives.

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System is based on Gardner's (1956) theory on integrativeness, and Markus' and Nurius' (1986) theory on possible selves. In this section, those two theories will be discussed along with Zoltán Dörnyei's theory about The L2 Motivational Self System. Dörnyei's theory will be applied in the present study.

2.1 Integrative motivation

When it comes to as complex a concept as motivation, it might be hard to define. However, Keller has offered a comprehensive definition to motivation, which will also be used in this thesis. According to Keller (1983: 389), "motivation refers to the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in this respect."

The concept of motivation can be reduced even more. Since this thesis focuses on students' ideal L2 selves, it is beneficial to establish the concept of integrative motivation (i.e. integrativeness). Integrative motivation makes one want to learn a certain skill in order to belong to a certain community. For example, one needs to learn to sing before they can join a choir. In other words, one wants to integrate into that specific community. Considering this thesis, integrative motivation is seen as a desire to learn an L2 in order that a student can communicate with the members of that community and express themselves freely using the language in question (Dörnyei 2009: 22). Gardner has done a great deal of research on this subject (Gardner 2001b, Gardner 2005).

2.2 Possible selves

Aristotle has said that "there's no desiring without imagination" (Modell 2003: 108). In order for us to have motivation and will to fulfill our goals we need to have some level of

understanding about what it is we strive to be. When we are able to imagine our possible future, we are more likely to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. Markus and Nurius (1986) have utilized the benefits of imagination in their theory about Possible selves. The three sectors of possible selves are called the ideal self, the ought-to self and the feared self (Markus and Nurius 1986: 954). The idea of possible selves theory and its connections to Dörnyei's the ideal L2 self-theory will be established below. The ought-to self and the feared self will be covered only briefly given that they are not used in Dörnyei's theory and are therefore of little relevance to the present study.

The ideal self is everyone's own vision of what they would like to become, in other words the best possible scenario. It can vary according to situation (Markus and Nurius 1986: 954). For example, in school one might want to become an engineer, whereas on spare time one might want to become a professional football player. One's ideal selves do not necessarily exclude one another, and it is normal to have multiple ideal selves. The ideal self is usually seen as someone successful and creative (Dörnyei 2009: 12).

The feared self is the opposite of the ideal self. It is the worst possible scenario where one could, but does not want to, end up in (Markus and Nurius 1986: 954). According to Dörnyei (2009: 37-38), knowing exactly what we do not want to happen makes us work harder to get what we want. For secondary school students this might work as a very efficient tool. However, this thesis does not aim to study students' feared selves, thus leaving space for future research.

The ought-to self, which is the third sector for Markus & Nurius' theory, is a possible self that is restricted by someone else (Dörnyei et al. 2014: 20). It is still constructed by ourselves, but it contains aspects we might not want to have but believe we should possess. On secondary school level the ought-to selves are very common. It is generally stated that approximately 10-15 years old people are extremely receptive to environmental influence. For this reason, it is quite essential to learn to recognize the differences between one's ideal and ought-to selves.

Integrativeness, the concept that was established above, has a lot to do with the ideal self in this thesis as well as in this field of research more generally. In order for secondary school students to construct an ideal L2 self they need to have some level of desire to integrate into the society speaking that language. For example, if a student wanted to join an American online book club he or she would have to learn English. One very important aspect with ideal selves is that they are usually seen as "future self-guides" within research (Dörnyei 2009: 12). That is to say the ideal self needs to be realistic and possible to reach in the given timeline. Regarding the present

study, it would mean that the ideal selves the students construct for themselves need to include some level of accessibility.

The following section focuses on Dörnyei's theory about the ideal L2 self which is known as the L2 Motivational Self System, combining it with the concept of integrativeness and Markus and Nurius' Possible selves theory.

2.3 The L2 Motivational Self System

When the ideal self is combined with the concept of integrativeness it creates the basis for The L2 Motivational Self System. The system in question is a theory that was created by Zoltán Dörnyei in 2005 (Dörnyei 2009: 9). The theory aims to give a better understanding of students' motivation towards studying an L2, i.e. second language.

The L2 Motivational Self System is made up of six different steps:

1. Creating the vision
2. Strengthening the vision
3. Substantiating the vision
4. Keeping the vision alive
5. Operationalizing the vision
6. Counterbalancing the vision

The different steps in the theory in question were made to be a whole and all the steps complement each other. However, only the first step is useful regarding the present study, so all the other steps are explained below only very briefly.

One of the most important aspects with respect to The L2 Motivational Self System is explicitness and achievability. Therefore, the theory itself is made up of steps that are easy to follow in order for the student to get the most benefit from it. At the moment the L2 Motivational Self System is not being utilized in school very much but it would be beneficial for students if the teachers could integrate it to their lesson plans. The first step is to create the vision, which is the ideal self. According to Dörnyei (2009: 33), constructing the entire vision from the beginning is nearly impossible. Therefore, the student should be offered some kind of assistance or guidance. The teacher can offer one point the students should focus on, for example career, future family or free time.

Having a clear vision of what one wants to strive towards is not enough to increase one's studying motivation. After constructing the ideal self, it is essential for a student to follow the next steps of The L2 Motivational Self System. By strengthening, substantiating, operationalizing and counterbalancing the vision as well as by keeping the vision alive a student enforces and clarifies his or her own vision. However, as was mentioned earlier, the present study focuses solely on the first step, which is creating the vision.

2.4 Previous studies using the L2 Motivational Self System

Dörnyei's theory is proven to be very useful in the field of second language learning research and it has been utilized in several different studies. One of those studies was carried out by Ryan (2009). His study took place in Japan where he studied a group of individuals who studied English as their L2 and how they viewed the concepts of ideal self and integrativeness. Ryan's study included 2379 students with English as their L2 from nine different educational institutions in Japan.

The study had two purposes. Firstly, test the concept of ideal self in an environment that was not familiar with the concept. Secondly, study the concept in a Japanese context. Dörnyei himself had executed a similar study in Hungary in 2006 and Ryan used his study in Japan as a continuation for Dörnyei's study. The study itself was carried out using a questionnaire, which was executed in two parts. The questionnaire included 100 questions about different forms of motivation, such as ideal self, self-confidence and attitudes towards learning English. The findings of the study included that the ideal self was found to have very strong relations with motivation. Also, Ryan's study showed that being social and using the language in everyday life is very important when learning a new language.

The study executed by Toivakka (2010) focused on Finnish high school students and their conceptions of their ideal selves. The study was carried out using a questionnaire that included 45 statements about the participants' opinions about English and their conceptions of their ideal selves. The questionnaire was answered to by 97 high school students (52 first-year students and 45 third-year students) from two different Finnish high schools. According to the findings, the participants were aware of what they want to do in the future and their opinions about English were positive.

As has been pointed out, the L2 Motivational Self System is very useful when considering the motivation of a second language student. There is a considerable amount of research (Vakkari

2013; Dörnyei et. al. 2006) done using the L2 Motivational Self System but very little of that research has been directed to secondary school students. Therefore, the present study focuses on Finnish speaking English students on secondary school level. The research question of this thesis is:

1. What kinds of future language users do secondary school students see themselves as with respect to The L2 Motivational Self System?

The purpose of this thesis is to study secondary school students' ideal selves so that English education could be directed better to correspond to students' needs. The next chapter will focus on the methods that were used to collect the data.

3 METHODS

The data used in this study was gathered in a small secondary school in Southwest Finland. The research group consisted of 17 seventh graders, both girls and boys. Students were given a permission form that was signed by themselves and their parents. The students were asked to imagine themselves after five years and consider what kinds of English users they would want to be. The students wrote their answers on paper as an essay. There was no time limit or word count given so the participants were able to focus on the content of their text rather than a certain length. The essay writing process took place in a class room during an English class in the spring 2018.

In the essay writing situation, the purpose of the study and the future use of the data was explained first. Then the research group was asked to walk around in the class room and greet other students in English. This way the students were given a change to get ready for the writing. Also, this way the situation was made to be somewhat less formal, so the students would feel less nervous.

After the warm-up exercise, a short text was read to the students (see Appendix 1). The text encouraged the students to imagine themselves five years later. After that, students were given a paper and asked to write down their ideal self, regarding the level of English they believe is useful for them. Some assisting questions (see Appendix 2) were offered so the students would have something to write and as few empty papers as possible would be returned. However, the data included one answer sheet that could not be utilized in this study because it was not answered to properly. Thus, the complete number of answers analyzed is 16.

Using an essay as the research method was proven useful. It gave a big number of answers in a short period of time. Also, the participants had a little bit of time to reflect on their answer as opposed to an interview. A questionnaire has been a very common research method in the previous research on motivation. However, I wanted the participants to be able to write more than just yes or no answers and be able to describe their ideal self and therefore the essay was the most suitable method.

4 THE IDEAL SELVES AND LEARNING ENGLISH OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

In this chapter, the results are presented and the analysis will be done. The data will be analyzed from four different angles: use of social media, education and career, travelling habits and free time hobbies. Each of these angles are examined from the point of view of English use. At the end of this chapter, the results will be discussed in relation to what they tell about the students' ideal selves and they will be linked to The L2 Motivational Self System.

As was clarified in the previous chapter, the participants wrote about their future ideal self and not the present moment. Therefore, the findings will give an image about the participants' use of English in their future and not the present moment.

4.1 Social media and different social aspects of L2 use

Most of the participants mentioned that they use English with their friends or with a foreign friend online. The desire to continue this habit in the future was expressed as well. Social media was mentioned many times and one participant brought up talking to a friend via Snapchat. The research group seemed to be very social given the fact that different social aspects (face-to-face conversations, social media etc.) ended up being the most important one for the participants.

What was interesting in the responses was that face-to-face conversations were mentioned more often than using social media. Usually, one might think that teenagers nowadays would prefer online communication to being present in a conversation. However, the results from this study stand against that as talking face-to-face with friends was mentioned eight times while using social media and talking English online was brought up only three times (from which one participant used an expression "online games" and it is assumed that it involves other players).

The results show the significance of different social aspects in learning English. Social media has been proven to support the language learning process and the results of this study showed that secondary school students find face-to-face conversations in English helpful when developing their L2 speaking skills.

4.2 Future careers and studies

The participants were asked to consider their career goals while writing their answer. However, it was surprising how many of the participants had such a clear image of their future careers. 11 out of 16 students said that they know their career goals. Three participants said that they were not sure, and two participants did not mention anything about their future career.

The most popular career options were an athlete or a lawyer, which were both mentioned two times in total. Other careers were an English teacher, a pediatrician, a chef, a baker, a police officer, an animal attendant, a gardener and a pilot. Those careers were mentioned once each. In addition, one participant mentioned wanting to work in a metal workshop but did not specify the exact job title. Also, one participant said they want to work as a “workman” (fi.”työ-ukko”).

The answers regarding the participants’ studies were quite divergent. High school and trade school are two of the most popular learning institution options for the students who participated to the study. The distribution of the learning institutions mentioned can be seen in Figure 1. Five of the participants said they will study in high school (fi. lukio) in five years. One participant wants to study in trade school (fi. ammattikoulu) and two participants want to study either in high school or in trade school. Three of the participants did not mention any kind of education at all and five participants did not mention any specific learning institution but used words such as school or studies.

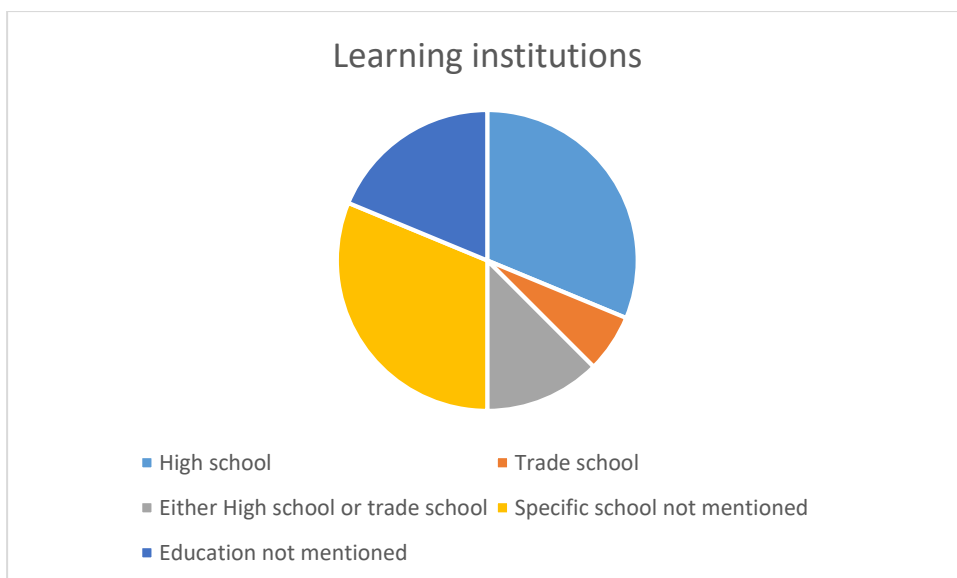


Figure 1 Learning institutions mentioned

It can be said based on these findings that some teenagers are very well aware of their interests and have a clear vision in mind regarding their future jobs. It should nevertheless be mentioned

that the research group for this study was quite small and it would be interesting to see how the result would change if tested with a bigger group of teenagers.

Most of the participants mentioned using English during their future studies or at their work. Also, the commonness of English as a language was mentioned several times. This indicates that teenagers know which skills are valued during their future education and working life. In addition, knowing where one wants to study after secondary school is beneficial as it gives some knowledge of what level of English skills will be expected.

4.3 Travelling

Most of the participants said that they want to travel in the future. Five of the participants said that they love traveling or they mentioned many countries they want to travel to. Seven participants said that they might be interested in traveling. This category consists mostly of those who do some kind of sports and said they will travel with their team to different tournaments abroad. One participant mentioned not wanting to travel at all and three participants did not say anything about their opinion on travelling.

The most popular travel destinations were United Kingdom (mentioned six times), France and Spain (both mentioned three times each). Other travel destinations were Thailand, Estonia, Sweden, Greek, Bulgaria, Holland, USA, Japan, China and Italy. Thailand and Estonia were mentioned twice and the rest were mentioned once each.

Before the interview, it was expected that the participants would be extremely excited to travel in the future. However, the results did not support that assumption. Only 29% of the participants addressed that they enjoy traveling. This finding might have something to do with the small size of the research group. For that reason, it would be interesting to see how the results would change if tested with a larger group.

4.4 Free time and hobbies

The participants were asked to consider how they would use English on their free time in five years. The most popular hobby that was mentioned was a sport (volleyball, basketball, athletics and dance). In addition, drawing, painting and singing in English were also mentioned. Those participants that had a sport as their hobby wrote about talking English to their teammates or their coach. Also, tournaments abroad were brought up.

The second largest free time activity was social media or conversations with other people. Five participants mentioned conversations with friends, either with their foreign friends or talking English with their Finnish friends. Four participants wrote about talking English with their teammates or their coach. Talking to someone on social media was mentioned three times. Playing games online and using social media were both mentioned once each.

It can be seen in the results that free time activities including social media have a big part in learning English amongst teenagers. One participant wrote: "I have talked in English to an Indian on Snapchat and it is very nice. Everything doesn't have to go right, they understand pretty well, at least they have until now." Many participants mentioned that they hope their habit of talking English with friends will not change.

The participants were able to connect English to their free time more than to school and studying. Even though using English in school was mentioned in almost every paper, the majority of all the answers dealt with how the participants will use English outside of school.

4.5 Summary: Students' ideal selves

Someone's ideal self consists of so much more than just his or her education and career plans. However, that is the focus of the present study and for that reason the participants' ideal selves appear quite career oriented. It is important to consider students' ideal selves, at least in primary and secondary school levels, so that teaching could be directed towards the kind of an English that will be beneficial for the students in the future. The study showed that the participants have a somewhat clear image of who they will be in the future as well as what level of English will be beneficial for them.

Based on the findings the participants' ideal selves were very social. As discussed earlier, the participants want to have conversations face-to-face as well as online and they consider using the language to be an essential part of their learning process. Most of the participants expressed an interest towards travelling and mentioned using the L2 abroad. One participant talked about wanting to find a new friend when they travel.

Most of the participants were extremely aware of their career plans and they wrote about becoming a lawyer, a professional athlete or a police officer. However, all the participants were not as aware and they mentioned not having thought about their dream jobs or not being sure

of what they would like to do in the future. But, with that said, all the participants wrote about using English in some way in their future.

5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the results are discussed in relation to previous research. I will also consider how well the analysis answers to the research question: What kinds of future language users secondary school students see themselves as with respect to The L2 Motivational Self System?

The topics of the previous studies (see Chapter 2) that utilized Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System did differ slightly from the present study. Ryan's study was executed in a considerably larger environment and therefore the present results cannot be compared directly with that study. The central findings of Ryan's study were the connections between one's ideal self and the feeling of motivation. Something similar can be seen in the present study. Even though the participants were not asked to include their perception of motivation in their answer, four participants mentioned that they are motivated to learn English and they hope their motivation will not decrease after five years.

Toivakka's master's thesis had many similarities with the present study. Toivakka's study concentrated on Finnish high school students' ideal selves. The purpose of the study was to find out if high school students have clear visions of their own future and how first-year students differ from third-year students. The present study focused solely on one age class and that leaves a space for future research at secondary school level as well. Despite the differences between Toivakka's study and the present study there were some similarities such as the positive views the students had towards their ideal selves as well as studying English. The participants in Toivakka's study understood the importance of English and, like the participants in the present study, were able to set goals for themselves that would benefit them in the future.

As successful as the study was, some difficulties were expected. The main restriction was the fact that there was no possibility to pilot the interview due to the fast schedule. While analyzing the data it was noticed that some aspects could have been clearer if the interview would have been tested and modified before executing it. Secondly, a major aspect that was brought up in the study was being social and having conversations in the L2. Even though the findings of this study revealed a lot about secondary school students' social media habits it was not the main purpose of this study. Furthermore, participating in a study might have been somewhat unfamiliar for the majority of the students and it could have affected their answers.

In the future it would be interesting to dedicate an entire thesis for secondary school students' social media use and study topics like students' own views of the effect social media has on

their language skills or how spoken language increases L2 students' skills and motivation. This area of study could be supplemented also by doing a study with a bigger group of teenagers. Then, the findings could be generalized more. Existing studies regarding the L2 ideal self - theory concentrate on high school and university levels, therefore it would also be interesting to see how the theory could be introduced to primary school students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Imagination exercise

The script was taken from the book *Motivating Learning* (2013:27) but for the sake of suitability, it was modified slightly.

“Kuvittele itsesi tulevaisuudessa, noin viiden vuoden päästä.
Olet opiskellut englantia, ja osaat sitä suhteellisen sujuvasti.
Kuvittele itsesi. Kuinka vanha olet?
Miltä sinä näytät?
Mitä sinä teet? Olet varmaan koulussa, mutta teetkö jotain työtä siinä ohella?
Pidätkö elämästäsi? Miksi?
Miten englantia on sinulle hyödyksi? Oppitunneilla, harrastuksissa?
Matkusteletko? Englanninkielisiin maihin? Missä tilanteissa käytät englantia?
Tilaatko ruokaa? Varaatko hotellihuoneen?
Nyt kuvittele itsesi, silloin viiden vuoden päästä. Sinä puhut jollekin englantia.
Mikä tilanne se on? Onko se englannin oppitunnilla toiselle suomalaiselle? Onko se välitunnilla vaihto-oppilaalle? Onko se ulkomailla jollekin vieraskieliselle?
Mistä te puhutte? Millaisia asioita pystyt sanomaan? Miltä se tuntuu, että pystyt ilmaisemaan itseäsi englannin kielellä? Ja miltä se tuntuu, että keskustelutoverisi ymmärtää sinua?”

Appendix 2. Assisting questions

Missä olet viiden vuoden päästä? Koulussa? Töissä?

Miten englanti on sinulle hyödyksi? Koulussa? Vapaa-ajalla? Ulkomailla?

Matkusteletko? Mihin maihin? Puhutko englantia? Missä tilanteissa?

Tiedätkö unelma-ammattiasi? Miten käytät englantia siinä työssä? Erikoissanasto
yms.