



Relevance of English language learning in a changing linguistic environment in Iceland: *Proficiency, use and perceptions of young Icelanders*

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The English Language in Europe: Debates and discourses

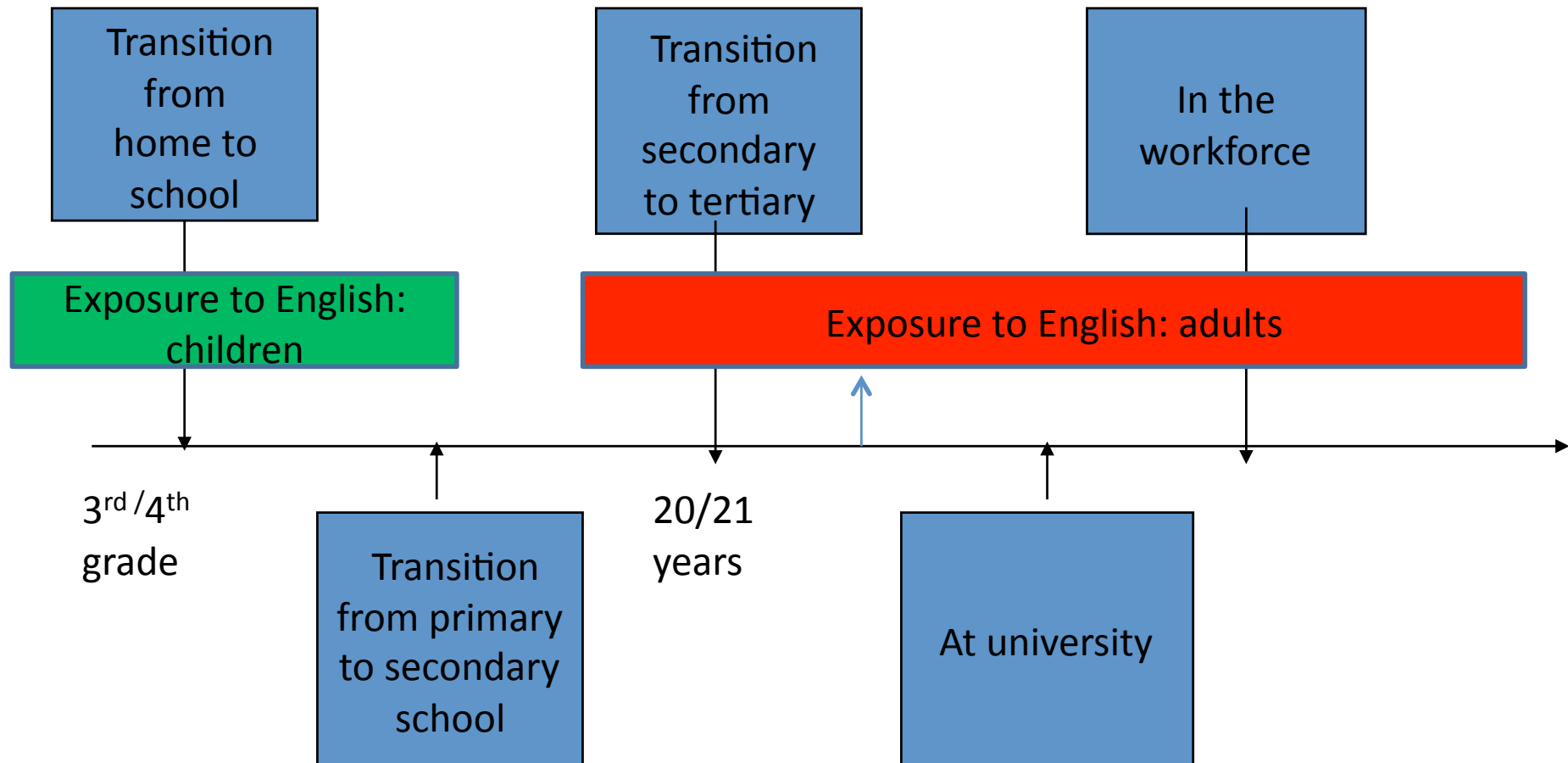
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The English Language in Europe: debates and discourses

English as a lingua franca in Iceland: The Status of English in a Changing Linguistic Environment



Iceland situated in the “expanding circle” (Kachru, 2006)



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Iceland and English: a brief overview

- Population of Iceland 319,000 (*Sheffield 550,000*)
- English at school
 - compulsory from age 10 to age 16 + post-compulsory minimum 2 years
 - minimum requirements for university matriculation (*new national curriculum 2011*) = CEFR level C1
 - Danish and a 3rd foreign language also studied
- English in society
 - subtitled or original version films / TV
 - 2011 book imports from UK and USA = over £3 million





The study: Objectives and research questions

- **To understand better student perceptions of English**
- **To prepare students better for life in a global society**
 - Relevance in foreign language learning: little researched
 - Voices of young learners: little heard
 - Students' identity (present and future) as English users: talked about but little documented
- Main research question:
 - **What characterises perceptions of practical and personal relevance of English studies at secondary school in Iceland?**





Research question 2

- a. What view of **future L2 self** do English language learners (aged **18-20**) at secondary schools in Iceland have, and what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and future L2 self among learners?
- b. Does the L2 self of young people (aged **22-24**) in Iceland match their earlier view, and, **in retrospect**, what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and L2 self among young people after leaving school?





Background

- Relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, 2005)
 - context and understanding; *cognition geared to relevance*
- Motivation in second language acquisition
 - Gardner & Lambert (1972); Higgins (1987); Dörnyei (1998, 2005, 2009); Ushioda (2001, 2009); Kormos (2002, 2008)
 - complexity and dynamism (Larsen-Freeman, 2008)
- **L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005)**
 - **Ideal L2 Self/ Ought-to L2 Self / L2 Learning Experience**
 - researched and supported, e.g. Hungary, China, Iran, Indonesia
 - considers motivation to study a **non-compulsory** language
 - emphasises **future** goals and fears





Dörnyei's model and Iceland

- Iceland's situation is different
 - **historical** access to English (especially since WW2)
 - **present** use of English by students, not merely anticipated use
 - **daily** exposure, not merely in classroom
 - a **compulsory** subject at school
 - “youth culture English” **versus** school English
 - a **high level of proficiency** needed for university / work
 - English not a “**foreign**” language
 - “the use of English permeates all levels of society” (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010)





Methods

- 38 interviews in Icelandic (40 participants)
 - “semi-structured” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009)
 - one-to-one, anonymous, 23–58 minutes
 - transcribed verbatim (24 hours, 19 minutes; 1080 pages)
- Participants from Reykjavík area, N. Iceland, S. Iceland
 - 16 at secondary school, aged 18-21 (10 male, 6 female)
 - 13 at university, aged 20-28 (5 male, 8 female)
 - 11 in employment, aged 21-24 (5 male, 6 female)
- Analysis
 - Elements from Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009)



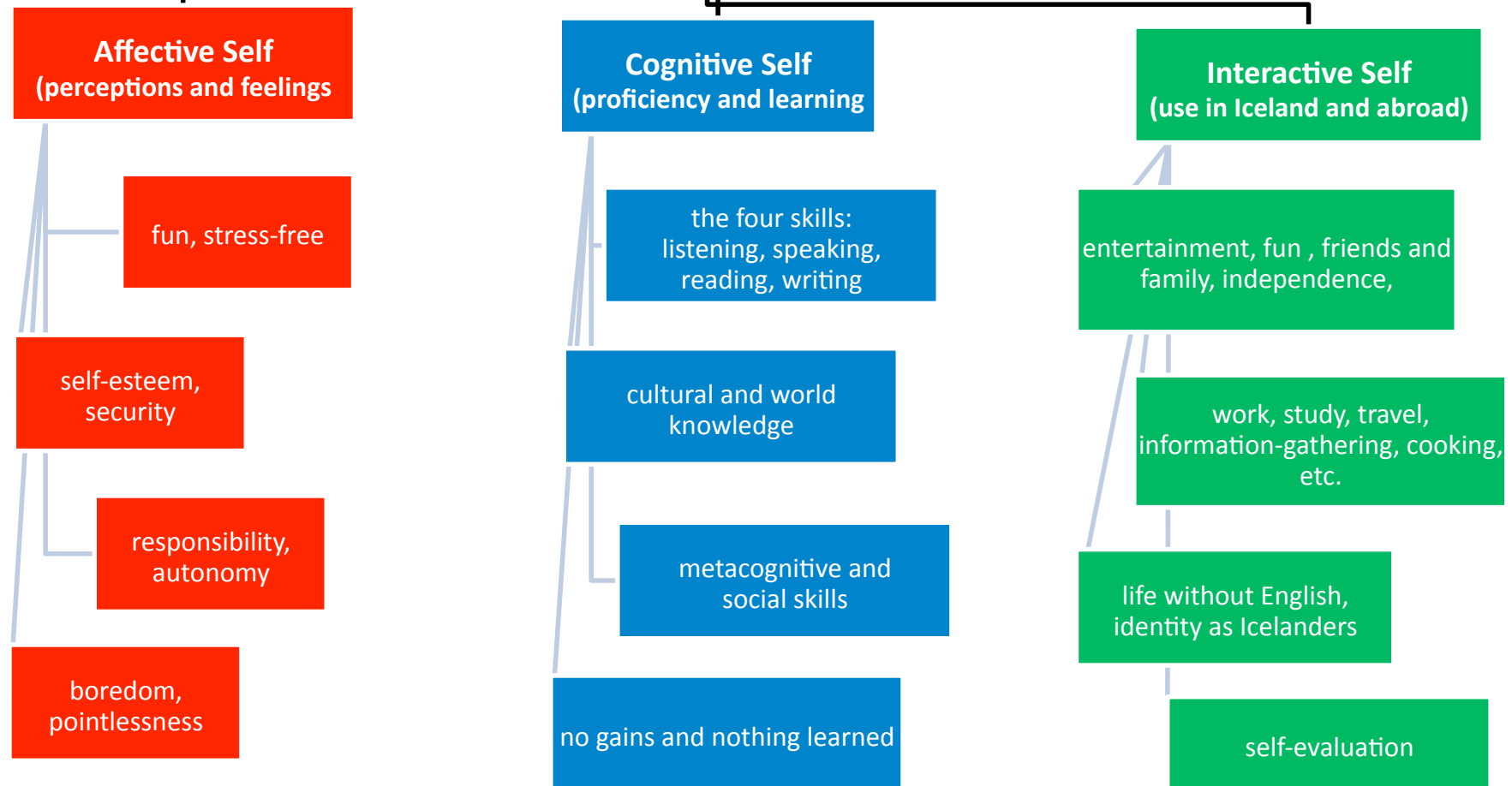


Coding categories from analysis

- **Affective Self** (feelings in the English classroom)
 - *fun, stress-free*
 - *self-esteem, security*
 - *responsibility, autonomy*
 - *boredom, pointlessness*
- **Cognitive Self** (learning in the English classroom)
 - *the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing*
 - *cultural and world knowledge*
 - *metacognitive and social skills*
 - *no gains and nothing learned*
- **Interactive Self** (using English in Iceland and abroad)
 - *entertainment, fun, family and friends, independence*
 - *work, study, travel, information-gathering, cooking, etc.*
 - *life without English “very far from my reality”, identity as Icelanders*
 - *self-evaluation*



The Relevance of English at Secondary School: perceptions, proficiency and use





Affective

- *... quite high grades without having to be studying all the time* Linda, university
- I really enjoy it Soffía, school
- *... a really beautiful book, ... one of the few books that you almost cry over* Jakob, employment and university
- *There are quite a lot of people who speak English in France, of course not very well* Addi, school





Affective

- *... you learned that you could learn more* Bára, school
- *I got my father to help me* Bogi, school
- *I could have studied better* Agla, university
- *... being at school wasn't at all unpleasant; it's just that when you're 16, 17, 18 you can't be bothered with it*
Tinna, employment
- *I slept through it and it was so boring and I didn't learn anything and I didn't understand anything* Egill, employment





Cognitive

- *... she helps us with pronunciation, so that helps me a lot with my singing* Soffía, school
- *All at once I was able to get through a lot text in a short time* Edda, school
- *English literary works that I might otherwise not have read* Bjarki, university
- *... an article about medicine ... I'm going to study medicine* Birna, school
- *you have to keep on going steadily over the semester* Bogi, school





Cognitive

- *It's helped me tremendously to get this vocabulary and to understand more than before and be able to express myself better ... more ways to say the same thing, whatever I want to get across* Birna, school
- *Because it's nicer to talk right and people pay more attention to you if you talk right. ...Someone makes mistakes when he's writing, then he's stupid or an idiot. He doesn't know what he's talking about, that's how it is, you know. I don't want to be the idiot who's always making mistakes* Vala, school





Interactive

- *...obviously I watch movies, and I read on the Internet. That's in English of course* Orri, university
- *... if you go abroad you can get by completely if you know a bit [of English]* Soffía, school
- *...his girlfriend is from Germany and she only talks English, so we always talk English with her* Birna, school
- *... all kinds of materials to do with work that you have to read in English* Baldur, employment





Interactive

- *... for me, it's simply my second language... actually it wouldn't make much difference if I was working abroad* Lilja, employment
- *I'm doing four courses and in three of them all the books are in English* Linda, university
- *...my whole lifestyle and study and everything...English is very important for me...I think I need it almost as much as Icelandic* Bjarki, university





Icelandic and English

- *English is fine, but, you know, it's a completely different language. We shouldn't spoil our Icelandic with English...then Icelandic will just disappear... They're not the same language, and English, you know, rather hang on to Icelandic - there are so few people who speak it* Rósa, university





Perceptions and paradoxes

- Bogi, school

Nobody understood it, the teacher wasn't good enough... [Was it too difficult?] No, he didn't teach it well enough...

– I don't find English hard...

- Rósa, university

...the teacher expected too much.. we pointed it out and she took one book out...obviously saw that we couldn't read so terribly fast...

– [about her level of effort on a scale of 1-10] Around two ... It was fairly easy...





Perceptions and paradoxes

- Bjarki, university

...when you're reading a textbook and there's some French saying ... you don't quite get it, you don't follow, because it's something the author obviously assumes the reader will understand, but you don't, in spite of thinking that you're pretty good at English

- Egill, employment

... the English I use here at work and English in general are quite different





Conclusions and questions

- Iceland's linguistic situation is different (also of other countries in Northern Europe)
 - Can the L2 Motivational Self System that Dörnyei presents be **expanded** to include Iceland (and these other countries)?
 - Do daily exposure and use (however limited) give a **skewed perception** of L2 Self?
 - Do students gain receptive but not productive skills? At **B1/B2**?
- English has relevance for all young Icelanders
 - How can schools make use of this relevance to provide the **C1 proficiency** that students need?
 - How can schools help **all students** find **some relevance** in school English?





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