

A Twist in the Tale: Narrative Analysis of Learners' Recounts of L2 Turning Point Episodes

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Abstract: This study focuses on the nature and role of turning points in the language learning experience. With the recent application of narrative identity theory to L2 learning motivation, new avenues of exploration have presented themselves. Specifically, the language learner can be perceived as forging their own self narrative, following a trajectory, and heading towards some kind of final destination characterised in terms of their L2 proficiency and L2 use. In the life-course literature, the point at which a trajectory changes in a lasting way is generally referred to as a turning point. Applying dramaturgical coding within an overall narrative analysis approach, the current study examines the L2 turning point episode recounts of a sample of three Japanese undergraduate learners of English. The recounts were found to consist of a three-stage sequence: stepping into the unknown; facing a challenge; revelation and self-discovery. Aligning with the dramatic ethos of the analysis, each of these stages is described in the form of a Director's Note, supported with references to the 'protagonists' original recounts. The paper concludes with theoretical and pedagogical implications, recognising the motivational benefits to be gained from positive L2 turning point episodes and their integration into the learner's L2 narrative identity.

Keywords: L2 turning points, L2 narrative identity, L2 learning experience, narrative analysis, dramaturgical coding

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1. Introduction

A narrative identity view of second language learning presents language learning experience (as both recalled experience and imagined future experience) as a story constructed by the learner (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). In this story, the learner is the 'hero' progressing and struggling along a trajectory towards some final resolution, some final fulfilment of purpose pertaining to acquisition of the second language (L2). The way, however, is rarely straight: At any point along the journey, circumstances may conspire to bring revelation, and that revelation may displace the existing trajectory and lay down a new direction, with a new destination. These turning points represent intriguing sites for investigation of learner identity and motivation. As seismic scene shifts from old ways of being, seeing, feeling, aiming, and acting, into a new vista thereof, turning points represent fundamental changes in identity within a given context and related to a given role. Given that motivation is nested within identity (Oyserman et al., 2011), understanding the circumstances and workings of turning points can be extremely useful for language teachers and learning advisors in terms of facilitating successful, and contextually authentic, L2 learning trajectories among their students and clients.

Since turning points are only fully recognized and interpreted by the learner through a *retrospective* narrative integration, they can only be explored as conceptualizations within L2 autobiographical memory. The purpose, then, of the current study is to present the key L2 turning point experience of three Japanese undergraduate learners of English and apply thematic narrative analysis to their recounts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Turning Points

Arguably a key element of any engaging life story, the general notion of the turning point has been widely studied in the life-

course literature (e.g., Clausen, 1995; Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997; Wethington, 2003) as well as more specifically in the context of narrative identity research, where it is classed as one type of *nuclear episode* (McAdams, 1988, 1993, 2008) or as one type of *personal memory event* (Pillemer, 1998, 2001). Despite its intuitive appeal, however, this notion has resisted precise definition (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). This is because this single term covers a multitude of variation relating to the turning point phenomenon, not only in terms of the event itself but also what led to it and what has resulted from it (Clausen, 1995). Therefore, Rutter concludes that “it makes no sense to view turning points in terms of a unitary set of phenomena” (1996, p. 612). That said, certain key features can be usefully identified. First and foremost, a turning point involves a radical change in identity in a given role: a change in life perspective, in values, and thus a change in life goals (Clausen, 1995; McAdams, 1993). This is why turning points can only be understood in relation to life *trajectories*, since new goals entail the establishing of a new final destination (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). This may be self-evident, but it also emphasizes the fact that turning points can only be counted as such if they entail a clear and lasting change in, a person’s life trajectory (Rutter, 1996; Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997).

Circumstantially, turning points are more likely to occur in situations which feature unexpected elements or elements which contrast significantly with previous situations of that type (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). In other words, the person meets chaos rather than order, and this shakes their existing world-view relative to their role in that situation. It is important to add that the unexpected or contrasting element may not simply be an environmental feature but can also relate to the person’s ability to interact with the environment. In other words, there may be new affordances in the situation (Rutter, 1996) and the person may feel a new sense of agency (Clausen, 1995).

The autobiographical nature of turning point phenomena makes them susceptible to “retrospective bias and even to falsification” (Clausen, 1995, p. 367). On the other hand, as McAdams points out,

the veridicality of turning point memories, including the degree to which the event in question was actually instrumental in effecting the change, is not as important as the rememberer's attempt to apply autobiographical reasoning to recollected episodes (1988). Exploration of this process of *autobiographical reasoning* can reveal the nature of identity and goals formation, especially since goals influence both the encoding and retrieval of autobiographical memories, and goals themselves are based upon autobiographical knowledge (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Applying Pillemer's (1998, 2001) notion of *personal memory events*, it is through their continual recollection that turning points, and the closely related *originating events*, "continue to focus and fuel the pursuit of new goals" (Pillemer, 2001, p. 127).

2.2. Turning Points in L2 Learning

Based on the above review of turning point research, the relevance of this phenomenon in the context of the language learning experience, specifically in terms of learner identity and motivation, should begin to be apparent. Taken from an L2 motivational self system (L2MSS) perspective (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), turning points represent motivating (or demotivating) elements within the L2 learning experience (as L2 autobiographical memory). Moreover, the mechanism of motivation relates to the fundamental interconnection of the L2 learning experience and future L2 self-guide components of the L2MSS: Essentially, L2 turning point events can change (or establish) future L2 self-guides, whether ideal L2 selves or ought-to L2 selves (Pigott, 2019), and therefore have significant and lasting impact on a learner's language learning motivation. As vivid and emotionally charged images steeped in self-relevant and self-guiding symbolism, L2 turning points, as with originating events, "energize, motivate, and inspire long after the initial occurrence" (Pillemer, 2001, p. 127). Integrating turning points into the L2MSS gives possible L2 selves a concrete grounding in the L2 learning experience as L2 autobiographical memory, and thus helps to provide a global coherence to the learner's L2MSS, linking recollected past, actual present, and

imagined future.

Despite the implications of turning points for identity and motivation, very few studies have studied their occurrence in the context of language learning. A notable exception is Pigott's (2019) excellent paper, which analyzes interview data from a small sample of Japanese undergraduate students. Pigott identified two major effects of significant incidents: *Anagnorisis*, an immediate revelatory event, and *narrative incorporation*, in which the remembering of the initial anagnorisis continues to drive learner identity and motivation (2019). In other words, there is already evidence that language learners engage in autobiographical reasoning to construct aspects of identity. At the same time, the examples given do not point to the change in life trajectory that is entailed by a turning point event. As a progression of this research on turning points in L2 motivation, the current study takes a slightly different approach by eliciting written accounts of turning points and attempting to trace any new trajectories from those events. In other words, evidence will be sought for the hypothesis that L2 possible selves can be rooted in, and energized by, L2 turning point events.

3. Methodology

To explore the L2 turning points of a small sample of Japanese learners of English, a narrative inquiry approach was chosen. Concerned primarily with how people make sense of their experiences in narrative form (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), this approach seemed especially appropriate for an investigation of a process itself consisting of “remembering, reasoning, and narrating” (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 749). In this case, the participants were prompted to recount their L2 turning point experiences in written form. Once collected, these texts were subjected to thematic analysis, using dramaturgical coding (Saldaña, 2016). This process is explained in detail below.

3.1. Participants and Setting

The three female participants in this study were all first-year

undergraduate students at a medium-sized university in central Japan. As such they were all in the period of emerging adulthood, marking a time of heightened identity exploration (Arnett, 2000), and thus placing greater potential importance on past turning point experiences. While they belonged to three different Departments (English; International Education; Childhood Education), all three were enrolled in a one-semester English-through-Drama elective course run by the researcher as teacher. Their level of English proficiency ranged from 410 to 600 on the TOEIC IP test, which all three had recently taken on entering the university (roughly equating to an A2-B1 range on the CEFR, according to Educational Testing Service, 2019). To maintain participant anonymity, pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher and applied to this report.

3.2. Journal Writing Task

As an integral part of the English-through-Drama course in which the students were enrolled, they were required to complete a journal entry recounting a turning point event in their language learning history. The prompt for the turning point writing task required the students to describe a vivid memory from their English learning history, and if possible one that represented a turning point, “especially in terms of [their] motivation for, or attitudes or feelings towards learning and using English.” Given a word-length of roughly 400 words, the students were asked to complete the task for homework prior to the following week’s class. The total corpus for the current study came to 1249 words. To enable the reader to understand the data analysis approach more clearly, each story is first presented *in vivo* below. Line numbers have been applied by the researcher to allow for referencing in the subsequent discussion of the study’s findings.

3.3. The Stories

Akari:

1	English makes me change the world. Today, I am going to share with
2	you my best memory of using English. Three years ago, when I was a
3	first grade in high school, I went to America for school trip. This is my
4	first trip to foreign countries. I spent great time with my host family. But
5	at first, I could not communicate satisfactorily. I was very nervous and I
6	had no idea what I should talk about. But my host sister. Margaret
7	made me relax. She spoke to me very friendly. She said, "Hey, how's it
8	going? Nice to meet you. We had been looking forward to meeting you."
9	You can't imagine how I relieved by this word. My host family was very
10	kind to me. I could not speak English but they tried to understand what
11	I wanted to say. They spoke English slowly and convey messages with
12	gestures so that I could understand their conversations. On the weekend,
13	they took me to the church. It was a valuable experience. I was
14	surprised how they believed in Christianity. They sang hymns and I was
15	moved. After that, we went to McDonald's. My host father said "Let's
16	order by yourself." I wanted to do so I tried. But the more my turn
17	approached, the more I was getting nervous. I was not sure whether I
18	could tell him clearly. Finally, it was my turn. I tried to speak loudly and
19	clearly, showing pictures. Finally, I did it! I was very happy to get
20	hamburger. It was best I had ever had. The next day, I went to school
21	with my host sister. I joined some class. I was surprised because
22	American students was actively involved in saying their opinions. After
23	class, some students spoke to me. I was very happy to talk with them. In
24	addition, one of them used Japanese. I made great friends. After lunch,
25	we had welcoming ceremony. I and Japanese students were to do
26	performance. My group was dance. Our turn was getting to close, we
27	were getting nervous. But teacher told us "I knew how hard you had
28	practiced. You could do it. Just enjoy! "This word made us relax and we
29	could do best performances. I cannot forget applause after our
30	performance. Rest of the day, I went to the party , cooked with my host
31	mother, watched movies and talked. Everything was new to me and I
32	enjoyed it. If I had never learned English, I would not experience these
33	valuable things. English made me change world. I am sure that I will
34	experience many things, using English through my life. Thank you for
35	reading.

Mami:

1	I chose both of positive and negative experience of learning and using
2	English in my life. So, I'm going to explain about it. The experience is
3	school trip in Canada when I was in the second grade at high school. At
4	first, I was filled with anxiety. Also, I wasn't able to communicate with host
5	family and classmates in school so much from nature shyness. But, I
6	decided to talk to people around me actively little by little. Because I
7	wanted to overcome a shy and speak many local people more and more.
8	The local people was very kind, especially cashier at supermarket and
9	clerk of ice cream shop always said, "Hello! How are you?". So, I felt
10	warmth of people in Canada. Thanks to such people, I knew a pleasure of
11	communication in English. Moreover, I felt importance of telling my mind
12	and idea to counterpart through conversation with host family every day.
13	Also, I played the game in school during school trip. (A rule of the game :
14	one person explain a word by using sentence. Then, others guess what the
15	word is.) I was able to make the base of communicate in English. And,
16	there are many students from various countries. I enjoyed to talk with
17	them, too. However, I experienced a lot of hard things. First. I became
18	homesick, so I wanted to go back Japan many times. Second, environment
19	was differ widely. For example, meals, temperature and so on. So, it took
20	me long time to accustom that situation. Next, in Japan, I can rely on my
21	parents. But, I had to almost things by myself. So, I came to appreciate
22	parents. After all, I felt a language barrier difficult to overcome. Especially,
23	the situation what I have an idea but I can't tell so much because of a
24	language barrier was very tough for me. However, all of hard things are
25	effective in my life. Before I go to Canada for school trip, I don't English
26	so much. But I felt curiosity of speaking and learning English, so my
27	motivation raised. This school trip became my important turning point.
28	And, thanks to this trip, my feeling connect with confidence what I want to
29	improve my English skills. Also, I felt the Japanese proverb "You never
30	know till you try" so much . Everyone feel anxiety at first, but to try is
31	very important and valuable. Through this trip, I want to study abroad
32	during I am university student.

Satsuki:

1	I came from the countryside where there are few foreign people, so I
2	never felt that English is very important. I had thank that English just
3	for speaking. I need not speak English, so I had learned it just for
4	entrance exam. My turning point was when I was in 12th grade. I was
5	studying hard to prepare for entrance exam. Then woman arrived at my
6	English teacher. I do not like her at first because she was a strict person.
7	If someone fall asleep in her class, she got mad. We were afraid of her.
8	Besides she speaks English fast like native English speakers. She was
9	60years old and her husband is a foreign person. I could not understand
10	her English, so I was sulking. During her class I was studying other
11	subject secretly because her class was boring for me. But one day, her
12	lecture changed my mind. I was studying world history that day. It was
13	my favorite subject. The class of that day is about the United Kingdom's
14	history and culture. the English teacher teaches world history as well as
15	English. The history of United Kingdom is very difficult to understand
16	because there's so many dynasties. Unusually I listened her story
17	carefully. Her story was very easy to understand because it was based
18	on her real experiences. She has traveled U.K. many times, so she could
19	told us things that she had seen reality. Her story was super exciting
20	and fired my imagination. She told us the shape of the breads, foods,
21	music and so on. I often felt like I was walking in the United Kingdom.
22	And I got the high score at the exam of world history owing to her
23	lecture because I could understand flows of history or went to her
24	lecture. In addition, I learned some rules and traditions in U.K. From
25	this experience, I was interested in English. Learning foreign languages
26	is not only for speaking. We can learn more than words when we study
27	languages. We also learn a lot of rules. We can learn what kinds of
28	greetings to use in different situations. For instance, we use formal and
29	Informal greetings in English. In China, a traditional greeting is "have
30	you eaten today?". Even talking about greetings, we can communicate
31	more easily and misunderstanding.

3.4. Thematic Analysis of the Turning Point Texts

Having uploaded the journal texts to Nvivo 12 (MacOS), a stepwise analytical approach was followed: reading and note-taking; initial coding; and second cycle coding. Dramaturgical coding (Saldaña, 2016) was chosen as the principal coding strategy, due to its good fit with a narrative identity theoretical focus and especially turning point episodes. Applying the metaphor of drama to real life situations, dramaturgical coding highlights the key elements of that drama: *Objectives (OBJ)*, *Conflicts (CON)*, *Tactics (TAC)*, *Attitudes (ATT)*, and *Emotions (EMO)*. This coding framework was then extended to include other key elements of the situation: *Set (SET)*, and *Influential People (INP)* (Honeyford & Serebrin, 2015). Dramaturgical Coding can thus be a powerful tool for understanding the human experience, allowing “multidimensional insight into some core drives of being human” (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, p. 220). In terms of the specific application of dramaturgical coding to recounts of L2 turning points, the following parallels were noted in its favour.

First, turning points, due to their inherent relation to trajectories, necessarily involve *objectives*, whether held, lost or gained by the protagonist. Meanwhile, just as *conflict* in drama represents a challenge for the protagonist to overcome as a precursor to personal transformation, personal *conflict* can be a key factor in turning point episodes. Whether as an obstacle to one’s existing objectives, or a more fundamental shaking up of one’s worldview, conflict can generate the strong emotional responses required to break out of existing motivational schema and establish new trajectories. This combination of objectives and conflicts necessarily prompts and directs *tactics*, i.e., purposeful action or strategies, as the protagonist attempts to make sense of the situation, make order out of chaos, deal with new challenges, and seize new opportunities. Underlying this tripartite interplay are the protagonist’s *attitudes* and *emotions*. Attitudes, used here, includes a broad range of cognitive elements: values, beliefs, and perspectives. These elements therefore have a direct influence on the protagonist’s objectives, but are also liable to transform in the face of conflict.

Not merely the physical counterparts of attitudes, emotions are arguably the most fundamental indicators of the protagonist's position. Beyond simply observing that turning point episodes are intrinsically emotional, it may be argued that those emotions indicate progress towards, or deviation from, the protagonist's objectives (cf. Peterson, 1999). Thus, for example, the experience of overcoming a challenge to one's objective releases a sense of joy or relief. Finally, all five of these dramaturgical codes interplay with the *setting* in which the protagonist finds themselves, whether it be at the most immediate spatial level of a classroom for instance, or broader levels such as school, or society. And these settings are usually inhabited by situationally relevant *influential people*. In other words, an understanding of the setting and influential people in a protagonist's turning point episode is essential to make sense of how their objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and emotions, combine to bring about that turning point.

To provide the reader with a concrete view of dramaturgical coding in action, here is an example of the first cycle coding of Akari's story:

SET: Study abroad homestay / INP: Homestay family >> ATT: Sense of novelty >> OBJ: Desire to make contact >> CON: Struggling to communicate / EMO: Anxiety >> INP-ATT/TAC: Kind/Reaching out >> TURNING POINT >> EMO: Relief >> TAC: Meeting the challenge/ Speaking up >> ATT: Sense of agency

Employing forward slashes and double arrowheads to indicate narrative concurrence and progression respectively, this representation highlighted how the participant characterised themselves both in terms of their internal state and how that state related to their action and interaction in the turning point episode.

Based on the first cycle coding, underlying themes were then identified as essential features of the turning point recounts. This was achieved by distilling key themes from within each head-code set (OBJ, ATT, etc.) while concomitantly identifying prevalent

connections and processes between head-code sets across the three stories. As will be presented in detail in the Results and Discussion section below, three themes were identified, interlinked in a narrative cycle: *Stepping into the unknown, facing a challenge*, and *revelation and self-discovery*. Stepping into the unknown was essentially rendered from analysis of the SET and INP head-codes and the role of unfamiliar settings and relationships in ‘opening the door’ for turning points to occur. The unfamiliarity of the settings and their inhabitants was seen to express itself in a conflict (CON) related to L2 learning and L2 use, and more deeply to the participants’ conceptualization (ATT) of the L2, and thus their L2 related objectives (OBJ). In all three stories the protagonists were then seen to engage in various strategies (TAC) in response to the challenges, but eventually emerge from their challenges with a new perspective and attitudes (ATT) related to L2 learning and L2 use, and this shift in perspective was, in varying degrees of specificity, paired with new objectives. Meanwhile, each of these three stages were marked by clear changes in the protagonists’ emotional responses (EMO).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Since the data used in this study consisted of learner texts written through participation in an elective but credit-bearing undergraduate class, every attempt was made to ensure that the students enrolled in the class did not conflate participation in the class with participation in the study. Such a conflation would risk the students feeling pressured into participation in the study in order to obtain a higher grade or even credit itself. Therefore, it was only *after* their grades had been confirmed that the students were informed of the research study and invited to give their consent for the use of their data for research purposes (via a specially constructed participant consent form). Meanwhile, this research design received ethics approval from both Macquarie University as well as the university where the data was collected.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the drama of L2 turning points is re-presented in triptych, each panel detailing a key sequential theme in the participants' L2 turning point experiences, as identified in the dramaturgical coding analysis. The format in which the results are presented follows that of a *director's note*, the guide often found in a theatre program and designed to help frame the performance that the audience are about to watch. Harms (2017) outlines how a director's note is formulated in the context of educational theatre:

As a facilitator, I gather all the students in the company together and begin with the following questions: "Why is it important that we tell this story? What message, idea, or question do you want the audience to come away with? What message, idea, or question do you think the author wanted the audience to come away with?" We synthesize our answers into one key idea and begin to obtain supportive evidence by identifying where this message, idea, or question is brought up in the show. (Harms, 2017, para. 6)

Similarly in the current study, the director's note presented below takes the reader through the dynamic progression of the drama of the L2 turning point. The outline of each act is enhanced by extracts from the participants' recounts, to capture the original vividness of the turning point memories.

4.1. Act 1: Stepping into the unknown

In this act, we find the protagonists thrust into a foreign environment, perhaps literally abroad in a faraway land on a high school study abroad trip (Akari & Mami), or perhaps more figuratively 'abroad', in their own high school classroom (Satsuki). In any case, they suddenly find themselves beyond the edge of their *map*, their existing conceptual representation of the world around them, complete with its 'dramatis personae', 'stage directions', and

'scripts'.

What leads these protagonists into the unknown? Sometimes the step into the unknown is purposeful, the act of the *Exploratory Hero* (Peterson, 1999), but sometimes it is thrust upon the actor by the demands of the situation (Satsuki), a *reluctant* exploratory hero therefore, whose only choice then is how to *re-act*. For those studying abroad, the protagonist's Objective, is to get to know new people and new cultures, but nested within a desire to become a more complex version of oneself, capable of a richer life experience; in Mami's words, to "overcome a shy and speak many local people more and more" (line 7) But there is also a more fundamental Objective of increasing one's agency, one's empowerment, by placing oneself in a challenging scenario, one that by its very nature demands the exercise of new skills; even the mundane task of ordering lunch in a fast-food restaurant: "I want to do so I try" (Akari, line 16).

Two of these explorers find themselves a world away from the controlled confines of their high school English classroom. Instead of being surrounded by their peers, they stand alone in a new and exotic world peopled by equally new and exotic strangers, strangers who speak a language somehow familiar and yet somehow distant. Instantly their senses are assaulted by the novelty of their environment, eliciting excitement and anxiety in equal measure, in response to the equal potentiality of desirable and undesirable outcomes.

And yet this drama need not take place in a faraway land: With a 'casting' change, any local setting can quickly flip from familiar to foreign in an instant. In Satsuki's case the action stems from meeting her new high school English teacher—Japanese, yet married to a foreigner and with experience of living in the UK.

As with the study abroad setting, the sense of the unknown shakes the actor out of their routine perceptions and behaviour, presenting new choices, new possibilities—marked by a feeling of excitement—but also presenting new challenges, new threats—marked by a feeling of anxiety, and in Satsuki's case, combined with a sense of rebelliousness:

Then woman arrives at my English teacher. I do not like her at first because she is a strict person. If someone fall asleep in her class, she gets mad. We are afraid of her. (lines 5–7)

4.2. Act 2: Facing a challenge

These new challenges, and hence threats, center around the protagonist's capacity to cope with new circumstances, new information, new relationships, new demands. In the case of our protagonists, they are expressed most in relation to their Objective of communicating in English. When the moment comes to connect through dialogue, conflict strikes, the Objective interrupted: They cannot make sense of the L2 stream washing over them, or at the very least they cannot express their own messages in English, this conflict self-described as "a language barrier" (Mami, line 22). Sometimes the anxiety even strips them of the very ideas to express: "I am very nervous. I have no idea what I should talk about" (Akari, lines 5–6).

In another version of this drama, the protagonist might descend into hopelessness and depression, but not in this genre. This genre is marked by the intervention of an influential and supportive *other*. While the L2 learner justifiably takes center-stage in their own turning point episode, with language learning and use being a social endeavour, it is hardly surprising that all the recounts featured *supporting actors*, quite literally: significant others who are credited with contributing to the learner's turning point. When the protagonist is reaching out into the unknown, these are the host family members, teachers, or parents, who reach out to meet them, to help them cross the chasm of anxiety towards a new sense of L2 self. Thus, Akari's host family "make me relax" (line 7), by initiating conversation, speaking slowly, using gestures, and "[trying] to understand what I want to say" (lines 10–11).

And thus it happens: an idea expressed, an idea comprehended, but most importantly a reaching out into the chaos of the unknown, calling its monstrous bluff. And with that the fear starts to lose its grip, thinning like mist before the sunrise, and a new day begins.

However, not all challenges relate to actors *willingly* reaching out

into the unknown. Sometimes a challenge can be a more fundamental challenge to the actor's existing representation of their L2 learning trajectory. As we have already seen in Satsuki's case, her trajectory is challenged by the arrival of her new English teacher: "She was 60years old and her husband is a foreign person. I could not understand her English" (lines 8–10). Satsuki's pattern of studying English purely for the university entrance exam is disrupted by what at first glance appears to be an 'anti-hero' - someone so opposite to her, in terms of age, overseas experience, and most immediately in terms of her high levels of spoken English proficiency.

...so I am sulking. During her class I study other subject secretly because her class is boring for me. (Satsuki, lines 9–11)

Satsuki's initial response to this anomaly is thus to express both a refusal to play by the 'new rules of the game', and at the same time a sense of injustice at the teacher's refusal to play by the existing rules of the game (cf. Hardecker et al., 2021). For her part, the new teacher, whether consciously or not, reaches out to Satsuki: "But one day, her lecture changed my mind" (lines 11–12).

Thus, Satsuki is challenged once again, with a vision of English very different to the exam-oriented version she is used to: a vision with much broader both temporally and spatially. But this time threat has transformed into promise; the teacher whose foreign experience had seemed so alienating is now valued for her "real experiences" that serve to make her story, and by extension a life-enriching vision of English, accessible and inviting. And Satsuki embraces this vision, her positive emotional responses ("super exciting", "fired my imagination", lines 19–20) marking her first steps towards this new and emerging Objective.

4.3. Act 3: Revelation and self-discovery

Whether by recognizing their successful negotiation of the L2 communication challenge that faced them, or, as in Satsuki's case,

being captured by an indelible image, their perspective has shifted, and the actor has acquired a new Objective, along with a new and expanded sense of agency, a revelation of increased competency. For some protagonists this might be a specific Objective, for example a new study-related perspective:

Through this trip, I want to study abroad during I am university student. (Mami, lines 31–32)

Or it may entail a new view of the L2 and affordances from its mastery:

We can learn more than words when we study languages. We also learn a lot of rules. We can learn what kinds of greetings to use in different situations...we can communicate more easily and misunderstanding. (Satsuki, lines 26–31)

I will experience many things, using English through my life. (Akari, lines 33–34).

These new perspectives perform a key role in the L2 turning point narratives: They provide not only deeper but also more lasting meaning to those episodes, beyond the limitations of their factual existence. They provide ongoing direction and motivation to the protagonist's L2 learning endeavours, as well as a grounding to help resist the obstacles that will inevitably arise from time to time. The settings of these episodes also play their part by providing visual detail to ideal L2 self imagery. Even in Satsuki's case, the imagery of UK life, though mediated through her teacher, is sufficient to transport her there virtually.

She tells us the shape of the breads, foods, music and so on. I often feel like I am walking in the United Kingdom. (Satsuki, lines 20–21)

As mentioned above, the power of these ideas is enhanced by the

concurrent sense of agency, a sense marked by positive emotional responses, since it indicates progress along the new trajectory:

I am not sure whether I can tell him clearly. Finally, it is my turn. I try to speak loudly and clearly, showing pictures. Finally, I do it! I am very happy to get hamburger. It is best I have ever had. (Akari, lines 17–20)

Thanks to this trip, my feeling connect with confidence what I want to improve my English skills. Also, I feel the Japanese proverb “You never know till you try” so much . Everyone feel anxiety at first, but to try is very important and valuable. (Mami, lines 28–31)

5. Conclusion

The current study has explored the L2 turning point episode recounts of three Japanese undergraduate learners of English. Though dramaturgical coding analysis, a sequential representation emerged of L2 turning point recounts consisting of three stages: Stepping into the unknown; facing a challenge; revelation and self-discovery. Aligning with findings from the life course literature (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997), the turning point episodes from the current sample all emerged from settings with lesser or greater degrees of novel and unexpected features. These features, contrasting greatly with the learners’ usual environments, represented not only new information, or more pertinently, new possibilities and affordances to broaden and complexify the learners’ conceptual framing of their L2 learning endeavors, but also, in most cases, new challenges which required of the learner a degree of courage. The successful negotiation of these challenges, notably with the support of significant others, injected the learners with a new sense of agency, which again fits with findings from life course research (Clausen, 1995). Coming out of the turning point episode, the reframing of the learners’ L2 identity gave them a new L2 learning trajectory. Nor was this reframing of their ‘map’ a purely

cognitive phenomenon: While the Ideal L2 Self image provides motivation in the form of an attractive goal and generates a sense of longing to achieve that objective, the sense of agency derived from the turning point episode helps turn that objective from just a pipedream to a more realistic project worth expending effort on.

While this study presents cases of positive L2 turning points, it nonetheless echoes the findings of recent studies regarding the significant role of context and agency in mediating language learning motivation in study abroad contexts (Du & Jackson, 2021; Fryer & Roger, 2018), especially in terms of learners' reassessment of their ideal L2 self: Immersion in novel and unfamiliar contexts alone do not bring about positive L2 turning points and trajectories; of equal importance is the learner's response to the new context, specifically their willingness to take risks in engaging with it, or their rejection of it in favour of the familiar.

6. Bridging Theory and Practice: Practical Advice for Language Teachers

As functions of L2 autobiographical memory, positive L2 turning point episodes, then, are not simply records of historical events, nor simply stories even: they are representations of key self-accomplishments, key landmarks in the narrative self-identity, and they help the L2 learner make sense of their language learning process beyond the immediate 'chalk face' of studying or using the L2. This is important because, as Pigott (2019) pointed out, recalling turning point episodes can motivate the learner to persist even when the 'chalk face' is proving uninspiring or insurmountable. This then begs the question of how teachers can harness the power of these turning point episodes towards enhancing motivation and achievement. As one of the most common significant others, especially in settings where the L2 is learnt as a foreign language, the L2 teacher can support students both in terms of facilitating positive L2 turning point experiences and maximizing their motivational power once integrated into the learner's L2 narrative identity, via L2 autobiographical memory:

- *Help your students to make regular forays outside of their comfort zone and into their zone of proximal development:* For example, bring guest speakers into the classroom who can share their experiences with L2 use, thus giving the L2 a rich and tangible reality beyond the course textbook, and glimpses of possible L2 trajectories that they might wish to follow.
- *Be the best possible L2 learner role-model you can be:* Share your own experiences, your own L2 journey, and embody what you would have your students strive towards.
- *Reach out to your students:* Enable, scaffold, stimulate, challenge! Broaden their horizons, facilitate revelation and self-discovery—temporally and spatially. Provide them with a multi-layered experience of the L2 which will make their own step into the unknown, their own risk-taking, worthwhile.
- *First impressions last:* Use your first meeting with a new student cohort to lay the blueprints for positive L2 trajectories, most immediately in terms of classroom interaction norms.
- *Remember that students do not need to go abroad to experience a turning point!*

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