University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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The Gendered Face of Language Learning: Saudi Female English Learners' Gendered Selves and L2 Possible Selves in Times of Social Change

by

Ebtisam Arishi

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2024

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Abstract

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L2 vision is understood as language learners' vision of themselves in the future, called L2 possible selves (Dörnyei, 2014). Considering the gap in the literature concerning gender and L2 vision in terms of the conflicting findings among female language learners worldwide, this thesis investigates the impact of gender on L2 vision among Saudi female English learners, focusing specifically on the role of their gendered identities in their future L2 possible selves.

Because of the complexity of the L2 possible selves (Henry, 2015; Mercer, 2016), the study adopts a set of complex dynamic theories combining psychological and sociological perspectives as a theoretical framework in order to understand the complex interplay between gender and future possible selves. Methodologically, and due to the limitations of existing quantitative applications in revealing a comprehensive explanation of the role of gender within the L2 vision domain, the study employs a qualitative strategy using the narrative inquiry approach. It involves six Saudi female English learners, both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Using life history and semi-structured interviews as the research methods, the thematic analysis reveals that the larger gender discourse in their social environment mediated the Saudi female English learners' experiences of English learning, significantly impacting their visualisations of themselves as future English users. The participants created their L2 possible selves through their gendered identities shaped by the gender discourse, in which their current gendered identities cause gendering of their L2 possible selves through their self-concept. Their L2 possible selves were developed by adopting existing gender perceptions, leading the participants to only envision themselves within their identification of themselves as female English learners in their local context.

Significantly, because of the change in gender discourse over time, the participants' gendered identities changed accordingly, creating new gender perceptions within their self-concept. Consequently, their L2 possible selves changed, adjusting to the new gender ideologies. This fluidity of gender caused a multitude of L2 possible selves over time. However, the analysis also reveals that the process occurred intentionally through the participants' agency. Every time the participants shaped a future L2 self, they used their knowledge to evaluate the surrounding gender discourse in order to ensure the suitability of their L2 future identity with the current social conditions and norms.

The study significantly adds to the literature by providing new theoretical insights related to gender and L2 vision at both the social and cognitive levels—as external and internal entities, reconceptualising the L2 vision theory. It also offers a possible explanation of the existing contradictions among quantitative studies based on the analysis of this study. Significantly, the study also offers methodological insights, adding to the existing applications of possible practical ways of obtaining a nuanced understanding of the much more complex relationship between gender and L2 possible selves.

Table of Contents

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Ebtisam Arishi

Title of thesis: The Gendered Face of Language Learning: Saudi Female English Learners' Gendered Selves and L2 Possible Selves in Times of Social Change

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
3. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
5. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
6. None of this work has been published before submission

Signature: _____ Date: 31/ 10/2024

Acknowledgements

It has been a long journey full of different feelings, experiences, and changes. It was not only an academic journey for my PhD project, but a personal journey that has completely changed me. A journey that took me to a world where I went through different battles with sleeplessness, loneliness, faithlessness, and hopelessness. But, with the help of those people who surrounded me, I made it joyfully. I explored, learned, grew, and changed. Without those people, I could not have made it all the way from 2019 until 2024. Thus, I dedicate all my thanks to them.

I thank my supervisors, Dr. Aude Campmas and Dr. Michael Kranert. I thank Dr. Aude for her humanity; her kindness, support, understanding and the words that she always gave to raise my confidence, as well as her valuable academic guidance and advice. I also thank Dr. Michael for adding a lot to my academic intellectuality, his time, effort, and the deep feedback that he always gave to make this thesis strong and persuasive. Without both of them, I would not have accomplished this work.

I thank my family, my dad, mum, and siblings, for all the prayers, the phone calls to check always on me, the patience in listening to my cries and complaints, and the joy they always expressed for my achievements. Specifically, I thank my oldest sister, Fatimah, who has sponsored all my successes since high school until my PhD and never gave up on supporting me.

A special thank, however, for the hidden soldier behind all my battles and winnings, my husband. I thank him for the sacrifices he provided for me to achieve my dreams. For the lonely life he endured living far away from me and his kids, waiting happily and patiently for me to finish my study and go back to him. For all the difficult times he encountered alone,

his sickness and grave of losing his mum. For always pretending to be strong in front of me so I could focus on my studies. For the love, support, and care that I will never forget.

A special thanks also to my two little kids, Rafi and Naya, for being in my life. For the little hands they always put on my shoulders, telling me, "It is okay, Mum, you can do it". For the warm little hugs, they always gave to support me. For the whispers I heard many times about their little plans to joy me and make me laugh when I was down. For the little surprises they prepared, the games they proposed, the movies they picked every Friday night. For always understanding my absence during the day when I studied for long hours in my office, and for being responsible, helpful, and cooperative. They have always been the source of my strengths.

Finally, thanks for the real friends I have in my life who offered support at different levels. Many thanks for the coffees we shared, the places we visited, the laughs and the joyful moments left in my memories.

Definitions and Abbreviations

Context	"The wider ecology of external social and environmental conditions, which are in organic interaction with these learners' internal systematic processes." (Ushioda, 2015, p.52).
Gender Discourse	Gender norms established by the micro social factors which determine hierarchical relationship and rights between genders.
Gendered Identity	Learners' understanding of what is assigned to their gender, received from the cultural knowledge in the social environment.
Agency	Female language learners' capacity to continuously "make decisions and take actions based on their assessment of the constraints imposed by the gender ideologies operating in a particular context and the opportunities afforded by the gendered norms associated with a particular context." (Sung, 2023, p.93).
Self and Identity	Both are defined interchangeably as "a multifaceted, dynamic, and temporally continuous set of mental self-representations. These representations are multifaceted in the sense that different situations may evoke different aspects of the self at different times. They are dynamic in that they are subject to change in the form of elaborations, corrections, and reevaluations." (Talaifar & Swann, 2018, p.2)
Gendered ideal L2 self	A future self-image representing L2 learners' desires and what they ideally want to be.
Gendered Ought-to L2 self	A future self-image ascribed to the belief that someone ought to achieve a certain L2 level to meet expectations and/or obligations.

Chapter 1 Addressing Gender as an Unknown Unknown Issue in L2 Vision Research

L2 vision is conceptualised as "a personalised goal that the learner has made his/her own by adding to it the imagined reality of the goal experience" (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013, p. 455). In the past ten years, there has been a notable emphasis in second language learning research on L2 vision theory, leading to a considerable body of research having been conducted to date. The theory demonstrates that the process of learning a second language is profoundly motivated by how learners visualise themselves in the future, which is referred to as L2 possible selves (Dörnyei, 2014).

Despite the amount of research that has been carried out, however, we still lack an understanding of the role of gender in language learners' L2 possible selves. Since the introduction of L2 vision theory, contradicting empirical quantitative findings among female language students have increased (e.g., Ghorbani & Semiyari, 2024; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020; Martinović & Sorić, 2018; Yashima et al., 2017; You et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2024; You and Dörnyei, 2016). Yet, this issue has not received much attention in the literature and has remained unexplained and incomprehensible, making this gap one of the unknown unknowns in the existing literature. Dong (2012. p.11) defines the unknown unknowns as research "problems that we do not fully understand or that hide underlying problems we will not even know about until we attempt a solution."

Addressing gender as an unknown issue is critical because it is problematic in limiting our understanding of L2 vision that has been questioned lately. Because gender is still neglected within this theory (Al-Hoorie, 2018), the picture of L2 vision is still not fully clear yet, leading researchers to demand more future studies that can enrich our understanding of

this concept (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Hence, if we gain an understanding of gender within this domain, we can provide an explanation of the existing contradicted research and, therefore, expand our knowledge of this theory, significantly adding to the literature. In this thesis, I aim to address the role of gender in L2 vision among Saudi female English learners, attempting to offer rich insights into the relationship between both notions as a contribution to previous studies.

In this introductory chapter, I provide an introduction to this thesis by presenting the motivation to carry out this research, followed by the background of the target area, the rationale for the study, the research aims and objectives, research questions, the significance of the study and finally, the structure of this thesis.

1.1 The Motivation of the Study

When I was an MA student in the United States, I took a second language acquisition class that introduced me to the theory of L2 vision, which had just emerged in the literature at that time. The theory was fascinating to me as it reflected my past experience as a language learner, since my L2 vision to become an English teacher had effectively contributed to my successful English language learning. For a while, I followed the research that aimed to validate the theory in different parts of the world. I was always impressed by the research findings regarding the powerful role of L2 possible selves in motivating language students.

After graduating, I returned to my home country (Saudi Arabia) to resume teaching English at my previous university, which is also my sponsor. Besides teaching English, I also worked as an academic advisor, helping to advise and guide female English students who encountered issues during their learning. During that time, I became interested in feminism, which encouraged me to pay attention to the stories they shared and the issues they faced

as female English learners. Most of the students I worked with had always expressed their fears about their future after graduation, particularly with regards to the limited career choices they faced as women which discouraged them from making an effort in their studies. Some also shared stories about not having any other option but to study English, as many other fields were regarded as only appropriate career paths for men and the cultural norms had dictated their choice. This was despite the fact many had visualised themselves studying subjects other than English.

Linking my interests in feminism and L2 vision, those stories led me to rethink my previous L2 vision from a feminist perspective. Recalling my past learning experiences and my previous L2 vision, I thought deeper about the way I had shaped my future L2 possible self in a context where women used to face more gender constraints. Although my previous L2 vision as a teacher has been achieved, many questions have arisen in my mind. I asked myself: Why was my L2 vision to be an English teacher in an educational setting rather than in any other job in other workplace? Was it the only choice I had at that time because of the limited career options available to me as a woman? Why did I even major in English, despite the fact I had a strong desire to be a surgeon when I was at school? Was this shift in goals based on my internal personal interests or had society around me shaped my future?

All of these questions guided me to search for studies about gender and L2 vision in the literature to understand how gender plays a role in L2 future visualisation. Interestingly, I found that the existing findings are inconsistent across various contexts worldwide. Female students often have a conflicting L2 vision, which had remained unexplained, thus inspiring and directing the path of this PhD project. Being curious about this issue, I was eager to gain a comprehensive understanding of the way female English students' gendered identities contribute to their L2 vision. Therefore, I decided to target Saudi female English students,

due to my knowledge of the gender culture in Saudi Arabia and Saudi women's lives, which I believed would help provide an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the issue.

1.2 The Background of the L2 Vision

The theory of L2 vision emerged as a primary aspect of the L2 self-system model proposed by Dörnyei (2009) as part of L2 motivation theory. The theory has significantly contributed to shifting the field of L2 learning from a cognitive to a socio-dynamic period. The model was introduced as a result of Dörnyei and Csizér's (2002) large-scale study conducted in Hungary. The authors found that traditional models applied to the English as a second language (ESL) contexts did not fit the Hungarian context for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Their study concluded that L2 motivation could be based on learners' self-concept and how they see themselves as language users. These findings led to calls in the literature for the adoption of a self-based approach that could focus on L2 learners' self, which can apply to a great variety of contexts (Ryan, 2009). As a result, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed the L2 self-system, building on psychological self-theories in order to address L2 learning in various contexts worldwide.

The L2 self-system was derived from two self-theories in social psychology: the possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), with a stronger emphasis on the former. The possible selves theory examines a learner's self-concept, focusing on an individual's perception of themselves in the future as their possible selves. Possible selves are made up of images people have of themselves in future situations. These selves embody individuals' goals, desires, ambitions, aspirations, and fantasies, establishing conditions and contexts in the future state which the current self is measured against. Markus and Nurius (1986) distinguished three major types of possible selves; "ideal selves that we would like to become," "selves we are afraid of becoming," and

"selves that we could become" (p. 954). The relevance of the possible selves theory in L2 motivation stems from the fact that by creating contexts where there is an evaluation of the current selves, behaviour is aligned with positive future thoughts (ideal selves) and directed away from possibly negative ones or feared selves (Henry, 2011).

In his theory of self-discrepancy, Higgins (1987) highlighted various future selves and the discrepancies among them. These selves encompass the ideal self and the ought-to self. The first refers to the characteristics that individuals desire to achieve, while the second relates to the attributes that ought to be achieved to meet others' expectations. As a result, the ideal self comprises the individual's dreams, hopes, ambitions, goals, and wishes, while the ought-to self contains responsibilities, tasks, and obligations. These two components affect motivation because, according to Higgins (1987), individuals' actions are motivated by a desire to decrease the distinction between the current self, the ideal, and/or ought to selves in the future.

Building on the theories outlined above, the L2 self-system was introduced, connecting L2 learners to their future world, where they see themselves as language users. The L2 self-system, according to Dörnyei (2005, 2009), comprises three main future self-guides considered as possible selves: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self is a future self-image representing L2 learners' desires and what they ideally want to be, such as becoming a fluent L2 speaker. The ought-to L2 self is a future self-image ascribed to the belief that someone ought to achieve a certain L2 level to meet others' expectations or avoid negative judgements, such as those of families. Finally, the L2 learning experience differs from the previous two components in that it is concerned with the present situation rather than an imagined future. This component focuses on the current learning environment that motivates learners, such as the teacher's influence or

the experience of being a successful learner. According to the model, these three future L2 self-guides can affect the motivated learning behaviours, such as the effort made in language learning.

The central assumption of the model is that when students sense a gap between their present state and their future possible selves, the perceived gap may act as a motivator to close the gap, so they can achieve their desired future selves. Significantly, the most central feature of this model is the visionary element that generates positive emotions toward one's future goal. Thus, L2 vision is seen as a primary aspect, although not the only aspect, in achieving future L2 self-guides or possible selves, as it increases and sustains L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 2018). This is because having a vision greatly increases the likelihood of bringing that envisioned into reality. For Dörnyei and Chan (2013), L2 possible selves are made of mental imagery as a critical aspect. When the imageries become vivid and sensory, they bring the L2 vision, enabling learners to see themselves in lived future situations close to reality.

The introduction of the L2 self-system has attracted many scholars worldwide to evaluate the model's effectiveness, resulting in a considerable number of studies to date (e.g., Alshahrani, 2016; Al-Shehri, 2009; Busse, 2013; Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Lamb, 2012). The majority of the findings across different parts of the world have reported the power of L2 possible selves in motivating language learners. In terms of gender, however, the literature seems to overlook this as one of the most critical concepts in the area of language learning.

1.3 The Rationale of the Study

For decades, the only concern of empirical studies working on gender within traditional L2 motivational theories was which gender was more highly motivated than the

other, which led to consistent findings in the literature that females are more motivated than male students. However, those studies did not attempt to explain why this is generally the case. Therefore, when introducing L2 possible selves as a motivational theory, researchers seemed to take it for granted that female language learners are better in terms of their L2 vision than male students, neglecting to explore gender as a key concept in L2 vision research.

It was not until Henry (2011) paid attention to gender within the dynamics of L2 possible selves and attempted to find answers to why females had the highest motivation, that he explored this in the literature. Consequently, Henry (2011) argued that existing research might be explained in terms of women's L2 possible selves characterised with higher interpersonal and interdependent attributes than males, calling to examine this assumption. This, however, was not the case when the following studies attempted to explain gender in terms of the L2 possible selves, since the findings contradicted those from the previous research, that is, that females are not always better than males regarding L2 motivation. The studies not only contradicted the findings of the previous research, but also contradicted each other, as they were from studies that had been conducted in different EFL contexts in various parts of the world.

As mentioned above, the literature has shown remarkably inconsistent quantitative findings among female English students in many EFL contexts (Henry and Cliffordson, 2013; Hiver and Al-Hoorie, 2020; Martinović and Sorić, 2018; Yashima et al., 2017; You and Dörnyei, 2016; You et al., 2016). Furthermore, the authors have put forward many possible reasons to justify their conflicting findings. This includes age (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020), cultural differences (Martinović & Sorić, 2018), social expectations (Yashima et al., 2017), future career (You et al. 2016), learning commitment (You and Dörnyei, 2016), and

interdependent self-construal (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013). Yet, and despite these assumptions, the existing body of research has failed to offer a nuanced explanation of this contradiction. Therefore, it is worth examining this neglected issue in an attempt to better understand the role of gender in the L2 vision and thus expand our limited understanding.

In his meta-analysis of studies related to L2 possible selves, Al-Hoorie (2018) acknowledged our limited understanding of gender and described it as one of the most neglected factors in the existing research. Researchers even question our understanding of L2 vision theory, arguing that there is still a great deal to know about and emphasising the need to pay closer attention to the role of language learners' context, particularly when studying L2 vision among female language learners (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Accordingly, I assume that an important reason for the existing contradiction in the findings related to female English learners in previous studies is the variation in their culture and the contextual differences in their social environment, since the self-system theory was examined and applied in different EFL contexts worldwide.

Unlike traditional theories that have mainly been applied in ESL contexts where there are few contextual differences, the L2 self-system has been validated and applied in various EFL contexts worldwide, where there are substantial contextual differences. This implies that while the consistency of findings within traditional theories is likely to be because of the contextual similarities among ESL contexts, the contradiction within L2 vision theory is likely to be because of the contextual differences among EFL contexts. Thus, to offer a more nuanced understanding of how gender plays a role in L2 possible selves, I argue for the need to consider female language learners' context and acknowledge the complex and dynamic nature of L2 vision, which strongly interacts with contextual elements.

The emergence of the complex dynamic perspective in this field has made it evident that L2 possible selves are complex systems situated within a context in which they interact with relational social elements (Henry, 2015). From this dynamic perspective, context is seen as a critical mechanism for constructing and altering L2 possible selves. This recognition of the complexity of the L2 possible selves, however, seems to be absent in gender-related research. Although most of the assumptions above have highlighted the role of contextual elements, these elements have been reported as isolated, which conflicts with the dynamic system theory that views factors as relational (Ushioda, 2015). Furthermore, those assumed elements have not been empirically examined, as they have received little attention.

Specifically, little is known about the impact of the larger context, that is, where female language learners live and where they are positioned within a certain gender discourse that produces their identities. Henry and Cliffordson (2013) highlighted the influence of the larger environment on L2 possible selves among female English learners, drawing attention to the role of gender ideologies and norms in the wider context. Consequently, they called for future research across various socio-cultural contexts to examine this issue, which "can help in shedding light on a complex and multifaceted phenomenon." (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013, p.19). Oyserman and James (2011) also discussed the ways in which the larger culture impacts the creation and interpretation of future identities, emphasising the significance of taking cultural diversity into account when attempting to comprehend future identity development.

By adopting a dynamic system approach in this study, I consider the dynamic nature of L2 vision to examine its interaction with gender within the larger context, that is, where learners exist and what are part of, beyond classrooms or any other educational context as

most, if not all, of the existing studies have done. Specifically, I consider the ways in which the concept of L2 possible selves as a dynamic notion functions in relation to female language learners' gendered identities in a society (Saudi Arabia) heavily characterised by a gender segregated culture. I also consider the role of learners' social activities and see how their social behaviours interfere with this interaction between gender and L2 future selves.

Unlike previous studies, I do not attempt to look at the influence of gender on the motivational learning behaviours related to L2 future selves (such as intended effort and achievement), but at the social, motivational behaviours across a broad social level. In doing so, I attempt to provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the L2 vision in relation to gender by explaining its complex nature and construction in the female language learners' context from a dynamic perspective, which has yet to be considered in gender-related studies. As a result of this comprehensive understanding, I also attempt to offer a deeper explanation of the conflicting findings in the literature.

1.4 The Aims and Objectives of the Study

Given the limitations when conducting research regarding the role of gender, the primary purpose of this research is to investigate the role of gender in Saudi female English learners' L2 vision. This study aims to explore how their gendered identities play a role in the construction of their L2 future possible selves and how the latter operate through the former within the larger environment of the learners. It also aims to look at the role of agency as part of students' gendered identities in their L2 possible selves, considering their social interaction with the wider gender discourse. To fulfil these aims, the objectives of the study are:

- To understand how Saudi female English learners visualise their future L2 possible selves as English users.

- To understand how they shape their L2 possible selves in their larger environment where they live and which they are part of.
- To understand how their gender plays a role in shaping their L2 possible selves.
- To understand Saudi female English students' interaction with the broader gender discourse surrounding them and how this interaction affects their L2 future selves.

Applying a qualitative narrative inquiry, the study involves six Saudi female English learners, under and postgraduates, whom I interviewed between December 2022 and March 2023 through both life history and semi-structured interviews as narrative methods.

1.5 Research Questions

The current study addresses the following research questions:

Q1: How do Saudi female English learners envision their future L2 possible selves?

Q2: How do Saudi female English learners construct their L2 possible selves in the Saudi context?

Q3: What is the role of gender in the construction of Saudi female English learners' L2 possible selves?

Q4: To what extent does agency play a role in the L2 possible selves of Saudi female English learners?

Q5: In what ways can narrative inquiry serve to understand the interplay between gender and L2 possible selves among Saudi female English learners?

1.6 The Significance of the Study

This study makes a substantial contribution to the existing L2 motivation research at several levels. Theoretically, it endeavours to address the existing contradicting findings in

the literature on L2 motivation concerning gender and L2 possible selves. It also responds to the call by the existing studies to explore the relationship between gender and L2 possible selves within a larger socio-cultural framework (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013) to expand our comprehension of L2 motivation and illuminate potential significant issues. In addition, it aims to provide valuable insights into how female students studying English visualise their L2 selves in EFL contexts and how it affects their L2 motivation within a large ecological framework. Therefore, it represents a pioneering effort to delve beyond the motivational learning behaviours among genders in small educational settings, digging deeper into the intricate role of learners' gendered identities in their L2 motivation on a comprehensive larger scale that considers more prominent social elements.

Moreover, this study is the first attempt to focus on the L2 possible selves of Saudi female English students, specifically taking into account the influence of their gender. It not only examines how they shape their L2 identities in relation to their gender but also sheds light on the broader gender discourse and its impact on their identity formation and, thus their L2 motivation. This contribution is significant as the identities of Saudi women have not only been largely overlooked in the realm of L2 learning in general, but also, more specifically, in terms of L2 possible selves. Targeting their identities in their context where they are rooted can emphasise the role of a learner's original context, with its unique cultural characteristics that differ from others (Ushioda, 2009).

Yet, there has been a lack of studies exploring identity within local language learning contexts. Vasilopoulos (2015) argued that research on how EFL learners construct their identities within their own contexts and how their unique identities influence the processes of language acquisition remain limited. In addition, despite the growing body of literature on identity and L2 learning in recent years, much of the existing research tends to apply

Western perspectives of identity formation in EFL contexts, which may not be applicable to local settings. As Vasilopoulos (2015) elaborated, when studying L2 learners who are residing in their local environments, Western notions of identity may not help in addressing the complex issues involved in those environments. Therefore, given the unique cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of gender culture, this study adds to our understanding of how female identities are shaped within their local context. It delves into the intricate interplay between their gendered selves and L2 possible selves, where social, cultural, religious, political, and economic factors – as relational dimensions – intersect to influence this complex interaction within female learners. In other words, the study adds to the L2 motivation research by providing an understanding of female language learners' motivation within an ecological framework, discussing how the existing unique ideologies and policies implemented by the larger social and governmental systems interfere with shaping their identities, and thus their L2 motivation.

Empirically, this study stands out as the first to employ a qualitative methodology among gender-related studies that considers contextual factors and integrates complex dynamic theories to strive for a holistic understanding of the role of gender in the L2 selves. In so doing, this research contributes to the body of empirical evidence elucidating how English female students form their L2 possible selves in response to their gender produced in the wider original environment.

1.7 The Organisation of the Thesis

This doctoral thesis is structured in eight distinct chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 contextualises this study in order to offer a detailed description of the lives of the participants involved in this study. It provides readers with a comprehensive understanding of gender discourse and the societal factors that shape Saudi women's

identities and experiences in their local context. In addition, it highlights the multiple gendered dimensions of society and how these dimensions continuously shape gender discourse and, thus, women's identities.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature, discussing L2 vision theory and the significant findings from the empirical research. It also reviews the existing studies concerning L2 future selves and gender to demonstrate the gap in the literature. It emphasises the need to consider gender broadly in female learners' L2 selves by adopting dynamic perspectives.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study, which integrates consistent dynamic interdisciplinary perspectives brought together to address the research problem. Furthermore, it explains how the adopted theories define the key concepts and guide this research regarding perceiving the study, as well as considers the methodological approaches used.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study, giving a detailed description of how and why each methodological step was selected and applied based on the theoretical framework. It discusses and justifies my decisions regarding my philosophical assumptions, qualitative methodology, and the applications of the narrative inquiry with the life history and semi-structured interviews as the research instruments, as well as how each is consistent with my adopted theories.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings and discussions of this study, providing in-depth accounts and interpretations that directly address the research questions. They unveil the complex interplay between Saudi female learners' L2 future selves and gender that are affected by their gender-related experiences and social interactions, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of the L2 vision.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, summarises the key findings of this study, highlighting their theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of L2 vision, specifically gender-based research. It also acknowledges the limitations of this study, offering recommendations for future research at the theoretical and methodological levels.

Chapter 2 Decades of Gender Discourse Change

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

Over the past decades, gender discourse in Saudi Arabia has witnessed a tremendous change influenced by the rapid economic growth of the country. This has caused historical transformations in Saudi women's lives, whose identity has continuously changed in accordance with the different gender discourses. In this chapter, I present the position of Saudi women over the years, which has been shaped by different gender discourses and many intersecting factors that have created gender ideologies. Specifically, the chapter focuses on three different discourses that emerged since the 1980s until today. I selected this specific time because the participants' ages ranged between 21 and 40; some were born in the 1980s, and others in the 2000s. By focusing on gender discourse during these three decades, I aimed to provide a nuanced and detailed description of the whole timeframe the participants have lived through, as it has a more significant impact on their gender identities.

Because gender is one of the many significant components of social identity that interacts with other social categories (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004), I argue in this chapter that Saudi women's identities are continuously (re)constructed through ideological discursive practices that are shaped by various intersecting dimensions, namely religious, political, economic, and socio-cultural factors, that all form gender discourse. The chapter also discusses the status of the English language in Saudi Arabia and Saudi women's English learning in light of these three gender discourses.

2.2 Gender Segregation Discourse: The Closing Doors

Between the 1980s and early 2000s, Saudi women experienced gender discrimination due to traditional gender norms. They were treated as a separate group subjected to gender

constraints and spatial segregation. The identity of women was limited to the domestic sphere, and they were rarely visible in gender-mixed public places. For many years, they relied on their male relatives, who were assigned as providers and protectors of the family, to manage most aspects of their lives. They also lacked equal access to most resources, including employment and economic opportunities. One of the most significant factors that created this situation, among other factors, was the Islamic teachings.

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country governed by Islamic laws, called *Islamic Sharia* in Arabic, which determined the lives of Saudi women for years. In the 1980s, a religious movement called the Islamic Awakening, or Sahwa, appeared and dominated Saudi society as it spread into official institutions, impacted by the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood as a political Islamist (Le Renard, 2008). The Islamic awakening movement caused significant political and social transformation in Saudi Arabia, placing a greater emphasis on restricting women's lives. For example, they promoted a certain idealised image of Islamic women for Saudi women to adhere to, representing them as "the domestic queens" whose role only extended to being a mother and wife (Widodo & Elyas, 2020, p.1020). They believed women's spaces should be limited to the family. the vital unit of society, limiting their role to teaching children, ensuring solidarity among family members, and carrying on cultural and Islamic norms.

Most importantly, they presented women as needing their honour protecting at all costs, seeing gender segregation as a an effective method of doing so. Thus they demanded a strict separation between women and men everywhere across the country and considered any mixing a sin. By doing so, they aimed to distinguish Saudi Islamic society from others and characterise it as unique and morally superior to that of the West, where mixed genders are prevalent (Doumato, 1992). Hence, an important goal they had in maintaining those

ideologies was to keep Saudi women away from the values and priorities of Western women who were portrayed as immoral (Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Mishra, 2007). Accordingly, as Prokop (2003) explained, concerns about Western values resulted in Saudi girls' lives being supervised by Islamic scholars, who aimed to protect the role of females in public life by preventing any kind of Western influence, imposing regulations on them, as well as ensuring the dominance of males, all of which I will explore further throughout this chapter.

While religious ideologies played a significant role in placing these constraints, sociocultural values and traditions also combined to discriminate against Saudi women. Besides religious ideologies, most Saudi individuals upheld and practised the cultural and traditional values that had played a role in creating gender norms in society (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). Indeed, most of the religious ideologies adopted by the Islamic awakening were reinforced by cultural values and not by Islam itself. For example, although Islam upholds gender differences by giving men the upper hand and authority over women, for example by teaching that men should be in charge of financial support, it does not prevent women from participating in public life or holding any position of authority. However, the Sahwists interpreted the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) in a way that fit their orientations. They ignored many sections of the Qur’an, cherry-picking certain Qur'anic verses to prove their opinions and achieve their goal (Pharaon, 2004). Specifically, they wanted to push for a greater emphasis on Wahhabism and its principles embedded in traditional, tribal, and cultural values towards women's roles, which have been rooted in Saudi society since its establishment. To clarify, Wahhabism refers to "Mohammed Bin Abdul-Wahhab's lessons in what he claimed to be the purification of Muslim practices." (Alrebh, 2017, p. 279).

During the formation of the Saudi state, historical alliances were formed affected by the Wahhabi tradition and its ideologies that determined and shaped the status of women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). As Al-Rasheed explained, when forming the Saudi state, the royal family brought together various tribal areas that lacked a common culture in order to create a nation governed by Islamic law under the supervision of Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab. The main objective when creating the state was to create a moral society by promoting religious nationalism (Sian et al., 2020). They placed a significant value on the family, regarded as the central institution of society, with women acting as its primary pillars despite the patriarchal authority of the male members. Therefore, a strong emphasis was placed on honouring women and ensuring their protection as essential individuals in the creation of a pure society. This created "an ideology of order in which women became boundary markers representing the authority of the nation" (Al-Rasheed, 2013, p.38). They used women as a movement for religious revival, appointing them as the protectors of Islamic values, culture and traditions. Consequently, a state with strong historical tribalism was created, where gender order and roles were determined.

Interestingly, despite Wahhabism, women were still not segregated from men as they participated in professional activities outside their homes, specifically when the economic foundation was based on agriculture. Many rural women used to work in the fields with other men, making money from crafts and looking after their sheep and camels outside their homes (Le Renard, 2008). However, when the Islamic awakening movement was established in Saudi society, as discussed above, gender segregation became the focus of the interpretations of the Qur'an, in order to ensure the traditional roles of women were maintained. Women who had worked outside their homes responded to the gender segregation discourse by isolating themselves from public life and covering their whole bodies with a black cloth (an Abaya) in the presence of men outside their homes. In other

words, sex segregation was not rooted in Saudi Arabia, but had been established by the Sahwa.

The Sahwists expanded on the Wahhabism that had put women at the centre of the religious revival, grouping them under a single black cloth and making them the most visible symbol of Islamic nationalism (Al-Rasheed, 2013). At the same time, they also became invisible in public life and isolated in the domestic spheres, where they were simultaneously highly respected, as well as restricted and subordinated, thus reflecting the complexity of the culture. The Islamic awakening's biggest fear was that if Saudi women's roles were taken away from them by other roles, the whole social system would fall apart. They believed that it was only through women fulfilling their roles that they could preserve the family and, in turn, society (Hamdan, 2005). These ideologies created and spread specific gender norms regarding women's roles, expectations, and stereotypes, the foundation of which stood mainly on gender segregation. The norms started to rapidly spread through every organisation in the country, causing a tremendous political and social transformation. Gender obligations and rules were created for women in all institutions around the country, producing a large gender discourse in society.

Politically, the governmental discourse, which involves the policies and laws, legally instituted segregation between men and women in all institutions and social spaces in the country in order to ensure women's protection (Le Renard, 2008). Within all organisations and public places like restaurants, cafés, and so on, a specified separate entrance was created for women, with men only being admitted if they were with their families. The work law also banned mixed workplaces, limiting the options available to women for paid employment while granting official recognition of the possibility that they could work outside their homes (Le Renard, 2008). It is worth noting, however, that the health sector

was the only setting that did not follow the gender segregation policy and where men and women worked together (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). Therefore, there was a negative gender stereotype of women who worked in the health sector as they had to deal with the opposite gender. At the same time, the law gave women access to different public areas where they could engage in a range of activities. For example, instead of interacting solely with family members at home, they could go outside and meet with other women from diverse social groups, backgrounds, and lifestyles in places specified for only women.

Another law was the male guardian policy imposed on all women regardless of their age. Each woman was entitled to a male guard who was in charge of her life, including her decisions. This meant that Saudi women were not responsible for themselves, but were the responsibility of their male relatives. In extreme cases, if there was no male member in their family, women became the responsibility of a male judge (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). In accordance with this law, women were required to obtain consent from their male guardians for a number of everyday activities, such as attending university, applying for and/or having a job, and filing legal documents (Sian et al., 2020). The government also banned women's movement without a relative man, which included their travel outside the country. The ban controlled women's mobility and affected many significant aspects of their lives, specifically those who desired to pursue their higher education abroad (Al Alhareth et al., 2015).

Within the education sector, – the first segregated domain from the 1960s and which remains segregated until now – the religious guidance department supervised girls' education, establishing restricted educational policies as a response to the Islamic awakening's ideologies. Girls' education was the responsibility of the religious guidance department, which considered the purpose of girls' education to prepare women to become

ideal mothers and wives, and also for any jobs suited to their role in society (Hakiem, 2022). The educational policy for girls clearly stated that a woman's mission in life is to be ideal housewife and good mother and that their nature as a carer makes them only suited to teaching and nursing jobs (Al-Bakr et al., 2017).

Therefore, the Department of Religious Guidance designed a curriculum to prepare women for teaching and nursing, while the male curriculum aimed to prepare boys for other roles lsuch as engineers and doctors. In short, they created ideologies for what was professionally acceptable for men and women based on their gender roles. Accordingly, university majors were opened on this base. The choice of subjects open to women to study at university were very limited as the jobs that would naturally come as a result of studying some subjects were thought to be incompatible with sex segregation practices (Alshalawi, 2020). Furthermore, although they could study humanities and the sciences, these were taught with the view that they would become teachers and pass on their knowledge to girls in the gender segregated schools.

In addition, religious scholars permitted the education of girls under specific restrictions. High walls and backup screens encircled girls' schools and universities, with male guards stationed outside the buildings and assigned to keep an eye on the girls and ensure they remained within the building until their fathers or brothers came to pick them up (Hamdan, 2005). Inside the buildings, female students also had to follow rules regarding their appearance and behaviour, ensuring they complied with the appropriate Islamic and cultural behaviours, such as the compulsory long skirts (Le Renard, 2008). In 2002, because of the heavy restrictions placed on female students by the Department of Religious Guidance, the government made the decision to eliminate this department and transfer this responsibility to the Ministry of Education (Hamdan, 2005). This, however, did not eliminate

many of the restrictive policies, as most educational institutions continued to demand female students to behave in a certain manner in alignment with the Islamic teachings.

During the Islamic awakening, the economically strong oil industry contributed to encouraging the practice of gender segregation and women's roles as wives and mothers. That is, the increase in male salaries made it possible for them be the sole breadwinners and it became unnecessary for females to work. This was in contrast to the women in rural areas who had worked in agriculture. Thus, women at home became a symbol of wealth and moral superiority (Van Geel, 2012). Although, women's reliance on their male relatives for financial support contributed to distancing them from professional participation, a large number of educated urban women began to demand more job opportunities from the government.

These religious, political, educational, and economic factors played a role in transforming those gender ideologies into a culture that tended to over-protect women (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Socially, society prevented any kind of interaction between unrelated men and women unless a male family member was present. In addition, women could only go to work and leave their homes when accompanied by a male guardian. They were also expected not to be concerned about any form of body representation, sexual orientation, or liberalism because these were considered sinful. These socio-culture traditions were strictly followed within the family and were the most influential in women's lives due to the patriarchal system within the institutions.

Because family was the core unit of society, marriage was highly valued, and women were encouraged to marry in order to perform their assigned social roles. Thus, parents would reinforce gender norms and assign roles to their children from early childhood (Almalki, 2020). Parents raised their daughters to be virtuous, devout, modest, educated, comfortable in their finances, and committed to their families, while men were

raised to be assertive, responsible, and unemotional (Almalki, 2020). Daughters who rebelled against showing these characteristics or crossed certain lines related to gender norms such as talking to men who were not relatives could bring shame on their family and may affect the reputation of their tribe. Also, the idea of women as a symbol of family honour led to women being treated a certain way inside their homes. In addition, in many families, TV channels were prohibited to prevent the transformation of any Western values to the women in the home (Van Geel, 2012).

Conservative tribal culture, specifically the patriarchal system, also affected women's position in Saudi society (Aldossari & Calvard, 2021). Because of the traditional belief that tribal families are the original residents of Saudi Arabia, they are very attached to the traditional values, specifically in terms of gender. Unlike non-tribal women, certain expectations were placed on tribal women regarding their behaviours, who to marry, and what kind of educational paths and jobs were acceptable for them to obtain, in order to protect the reputation of women within those families (Samin, 2019). Tribal and non-tribal women can be identified by factors including their surnames and where they live. This means that, despite gender constraints, not all women faced the same constraints as different families from different regions held slightly different beliefs regarding women's roles and expectations depending ontheir social class.

The intersections of gender and social class are complex in Saudi Arabia. Social class, which is deeply embedded in the economic system (Block, 2013), is one crucial factor that determines the level of constraints that women around the country face. It distributes unequal resources among women and determines the power relations, facilitating some women's lives and constraining others.

For instance, wealth plays a significant role in shaping gender roles. Women from wealthier families often have more flexible gender roles, enjoying greater social and physical freedom. Their economic status allows them to travel more frequently, have access to private transportation, and encounter less strict interpretations of cultural norms related to gender segregation. They also have the freedom to join private educational sectors and prestigious fields or choose to stay at home, supported by their family's wealth. These women can also engage in political and social organisations and have greater access to power structures, contributing to public opinion and the women's rights movement.

However, those from middle- or lower-income backgrounds might experience greater mobility limitations due to less accessible resources and cultural norms. They have less freedom to travel alone or engage in public life unsupervised by their families. They have limited educational choices as well as job opportunities as most of them belong to more conservative families who value traditional gender norms. They also have less influence on politics and society because it is difficult for their voices to be heard within the gender constraints they face. This, however, is not always the case since many upper-class families outside the royal family are more conservative than middle or lower classes, particularly in upper-class tribal families, who care too much about their daughters' reputations (Hakiem, 2022).

It is worth noting that despite the gender constraints that existed as a result of this gender segregation discourse, Saudi women were not passive or victims but went through different battles in their quest to regain their rights. Most educated women from the upper class stood against the gender rules, calling for more freedom and opportunities to better their lives (Van Geel, 2012). They were not only fighting local gender discourse and the patriarchal system, but also Western imperialism as well, which represented them as veiled

victims of Islamic laws (Mishra, 2007). The gender constraints facing women lasted until the era of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, who took power in 2005 and who made a huge effort to shift the position of Saudi women, although some minor changes had taken place before that. Primarily, the King brought women's rights into the discourse, implementing significant rights for women and opening public debate for other rights to be negotiated.

2.3 Women's Rights Discourse: The Opening of a Few Doors

Promoted for global and economic purposes, the government under King Abdullah took action to address the gender gap and grant women rights. The King made a considerable effort to increase women's education and employment opportunities alongside men, allowing women to participate in activities outside the walls of their home. In 2005, he launched the King Abdullah Sponsorship Programme, which to this day allows female students to study abroad in Western countries while being fully funded by the government (Elyas et al., 2021). The programme has helped many women to pursue their education abroad in various fields and gain graduate and postgraduate degrees. It has also given them access to different ideas, cultures, and educational systems.

More importantly, the King opened various universities offering women new subjects to study in many regions around the Kingdom. This included the Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University, the largest women's university in the world, with faculties for the arts, sciences, and medicine (Alotaibi, 2020). Since 2015, Saudi women have been able to study a further twenty-two subjects, including journalism, interior design, accounting, business administration, marketing, finance, and computer engineering (Hamdan, 2017). He also established the first co-educational university in 2009, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, which is considered one of the most prestigious universities in the country. The expansion of women's education has played a fundamental role in gradually

changing patriarchal tribal beliefs. In short, society has been persuaded to support women in pursuing their education and careers both locally and globally (Hamdan, 2017).

Regarding employment, the King made significant changes to reinforce women's economic participation. He established a policy called the Saudisation policy, which aimed to replace foreign workers with unemployed Saudi nationals. The policy demanded that sectors ensure that at least 30% of their workforce consists of Saudi nationals. This policy has helped to increase Saudi women's employment and economic activities outside their homes (Sian et al., 2020). He also established different training programmes with financial support to prepare women for many sectors in the Saudi market. Between 2009 and 2010, women made up approximately 15–18% of Saudi Arabia's workforce in the public and private sectors (Elyas et al., 2021). As a further step toward gender equality, it became law to pay women the same salary as men in every job without exceptions (Hamdan, 2017).

Furthermore, he allowed women to participate in the government from 2011, permitting them to take part in municipal council activities and election campaigns and appointing some women as members of the Shura Council (Alotaibi, 2020). As Alotaibi explained, for the first time in the Kingdom's history, the King appointed thirty women to attend the National Consultative Council and appointed other women as deputy ministers and university presidents. Since then, a few women have been appointed to senior positions in governmental agencies, academic institutions, and community organisations.

These modest steps toward women's rights certainly help many women, particularly the elite and open-minded, educated women, to access public spaces and enter the workforce, whilst also carrying on their social duties as mothers and wives at the same time. Although many women did not benefit directly from these new rights because of traditional gender norms, the government discourse helped them by encouraging debate about

women's rights in society. This, in turn, provided many women with a voice to stand up against restrictive cultural norms and laws.

During this period, women's progress in gaining more rights was very slow, as gender segregation was still highly valued by both the government and individuals. It remained an obligation in most institutions, hindering women's capacity to access public spaces where men and women could socialise together (Al-Rasheed, 2013). It was not easy for most Saudi people to shift the deeply rooted attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs related to gender segregation that had been reinforced over time. Most of them resisted this emerging debate about women's rights and were committed to upholding traditional norms, specifically gender segregation. Therefore, it was left for families to either take advantage of opportunities presented or resist them.

For example, teaching was still considered the most desirable career for many girls as gender segregation practices were still applied in schools, while jobs in medical fields were still undesirable to avoid gender stereotypes. Al-Khunizi et al. (2021) stated that due to cultural values, some Saudi families prevented their daughters from working in hospitals even after the reforms, and many girls feared the idea of not being married. Thus, some girls had been forced to drop out of medical school in order to marry due to their male relatives' belief that being a doctor was an inappropriate occupation for a respectable woman (Al-Khunizi et al., 2021).

In addition, because of male domination, women who entered the healthcare workplace faced discrimination in term of placing them in higher positions, due to their assigned domestic duties as moms and wives (Alotaibi, 2020). Some men still believed that women were incapable of holding such positions and that they should have taken care of their children and family members and doing house chores. In other words, despite the

governmental discourse about women's rights, traditional values still hinder women's advancement, specifically in the workforce.

It was not until the era of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and his son, the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, that these strict gender constraints were greatly reduced. Expanding King Abdullah's efforts, the Crown Prince's Saudi Vision 2030 has made a tremendous change in women's lives at every level, as it recognises their essential role in improving society and ensuring it thrives. In short, this vision for the future has contributed to empowering Saudi women, shifting their social position from being subordinates to one of power.

2.4 Women's Empowerment Discourse: The Opening of Every Door

The Saudi Vision 2030 is a national development plan that was launched by the Crown Prince in 2016 for the future of the country. The Vision aims to accomplish comprehensive national development in many areas by utilising natural resources and human and economic capacities in order to create "a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation" (Alghamdi et al., 2022, p.149). The main goal is to make the Kingdom ready for the transition from an oil-based economy to a more knowledge-based one, prioritising educational and economic opportunities in line with the demands of the labour market.

One of the critical steps towards accomplishing sustainable development and a better society, according to the Vision, is to empower women, who make up over half of the population. Thus, much of the Vision's focus was on women, leading the government to make various changes at different economic, social, and cultural levels, thus simplifying women's contribution to the growth of the country (Alessa et al., 2022). That is, the government looked at the labour market with a particular emphasis on overcoming the

social challenges that the labour market's development faced, which included the culture of women's participation. The government concluded that the lack of women's participation was a result of the conservative culture that encouraged women to stay at home and be carers for their families (Alotaibi, 2020).

Accordingly, the implementation of the Saudi Vision 2030 brought the ideologies of moderate Islam and Saudi First nationalism, which aimed to eliminate the extremely conservative religious nationalism founded on Wahhabism (Eum, 2019). To discourage extremism and encourage moderation, the government implemented a number of strategies, such as appointing moderate scholars to the Council of Senior Scholars, re-interpreting the Islamic teaching to grant women their rights inherent in Islam, reviewing the legal guardianship issue, and easing restrictions on sex segregation in public spaces.

Following these political ideologies, new governmental policies emerged, opening various doors for Saudi women. One of the key steps was the repeal of the guardianship law, allowing adult women to take responsibility for themselves, thus facilitating their mobility both inside and outside the country, allowing them to pursue their education abroad. The government also granted women the right to drive, attend football matches, participate in athletics, and pursue more professional careers (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Notably, the government also allowed women to hold leadership positions in various areas.

Alotaibi (2020) explained that, in accordance with the Saudi Vision, three prominent financial roles were given to Saudi women. These positions were not merely limited to national ones but to global ones as well. Examples of these included Princess Reema Bint Bandar Al Saud, who was appointed as an ambassador to the United States; lawyer Jood Al Harthi, who was appointed as political affairs officer at the Executive Office of the Secretary General of the UN in New York; Einas Al Shahwan, who was appointed as an ambassador to

Sweden and Iceland; Amal Al Moallimi, who was appointed as the Kingdom's ambassador to Norway; Haifa Al Jadea, who was appointed as ambassador and head of the Kingdom's mission to the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community; and, among others, Nisreen bint Hamad Al Shibel, who was appointed as the Kingdom's ambassador to Finland.

As a result of this huge shift in the Saudi culture, women empowerment discourse became a popular topic discussed in official media channels, governmental organisations, and social media (Elyas et al., 2021). Saudi society also started normalising the mixing of genders, allowing women to exist in public life. Many Saudi women who were previously obligated to be invisible and remain within their private spheres started to become increasingly visible participants in public life, holding various positions. Nowadays, Saudi women hold positions of medical doctors, college and university deans, CEOs of banks, artists, fashion designers, journalists, photographers, filmmakers, and IT specialists (Elyas et al., 2021).

This, however, does not mean that Saudi women have gained complete freedom. The governmental strategy for enhancing women's opportunities towards modernisation has not entirely shifted social norms, as religious and cultural values remain significant features of the society (Aldossari & Calvard, 2021). For example, adherence to Islamic teachings, a key part of Saudi culture, is still regarded as essential by most Saudi individuals. In addition, because of the value of family, patriarchal control still persists in many families, playing a prominent role in girls' lives. The tribal traditions also still limit women's access to particular fields of study or professions where the genders are mixed, as tribal families are much more concerned about women socialising with men compared to their non-tribal counterparts.

Thus, most tribal women still tend to choose roles in gendered segregated workplaces to meet tribal expectations.

In a recent study on academic women in Saudi Arabia, Hakiem (2022) revealed that the current increase in the number of female faculty members in Saudi universities is not a result of the promotion of gender equality in terms of employment. Instead, it is because of the lack of employment opportunities for most educated tribal women outside the educational sector, which is viewed as the only appropriate workplace by tribes due to the gender segregation policy that is still practised in education. This means that gender segregation is still valued by some families as a way of protecting their daughters, and some women continue not have complete authority over their lives because of gender norms that still exist and are practised despite changes in these over the years.

The next section explores the status of English in Saudi Arabia, including how it was challenged and how it gained value among Saudi individuals affected by cultural norms and gender ideologies. In addition, it presents the traditional challenging factors that hindered Saudi women from learning English, as well as the ones that motivated them to learn it.

2.5 English Language and Women in Saudi Arabia

2.5.1 The Status of English Language

Following the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia and the subsequent Western investment in the oil industry, English became recognised as an important language to acquire. Despite this recognition of its status, however, it was not until recently that English began to gain a high status among Saudi individuals, enhanced by the economic growth of the country (Faruk, 2013). Initially, when English was introduced as an important foreign language in the Saudi education system and institutions, members of society raised their

concerns about the idea of westernising Saudis, causing resistance towards the English language (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

The concern about introducing Western values through the spread of English led one religious scholar to caution Saudi young people against learning or speaking the "language of the infidels" (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p.131). Thus, some Saudi individuals resisted learning it, holding the belief that acquiring English could impact their Islamic values. There were also concerns about the loss of the Arabic language and, thus, the traditions and culture. Many people believed that maintaining Saudi Arabian identity, culture, and society depended on preserving the Arabic language as it is the language of the holy book of Islam (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Consequently, some people who linked the widespread use of English to the spread of Western values were not motivated to learn English (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

On the other hand, some were encouraged to learn English since Islam encourages followers to learn languages as a tool to spread Islam worldwide. Thus, many students started studying English in schools and universities for this purpose. However, they could not fully access Western culture through the English curriculum. According to Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013), one of the key goals of teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia was to improve students' language proficiency, so they could spread and convey Islamic teachings to various parts of the world. As a result, the English curricula committee in the Saudi educational system eliminated any references to Western cultures, behaviours, or customs such as coeducation, dating, or alcohol consumption (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

In addition, public school students could only take one English class a week from the middle school until high school. Those studying English undergraduate programmes at university were required to take many Arabic courses to ensure they maintained their Arabic and Islamic identities while they learned English. In the last decades, however, these fears

have almost vanished due to global and local demands for the English language as part of the growth of the country.

In the last decade, the country's adoption of globalisation policies has increased the use of English, creating a tremendous shift in English education towards a knowledge-based economy (Faruk, 2013). Furthermore, English language is now taught to children from the age of six. The number of universities has also increased from eight to 36, with each having an English department. Every educational institution, whether public or private, has an English department and an English centre, as English is sometimes required for some university courses where it is used as the language of instruction (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). English has also become the medium of instruction for all university majors in higher education (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Furthermore, a foundation year with intense EFL classes has started to be required, in which Students are required to attend weekly English sessions between 16 and 20 hours (Barnawi, 2019). In addition, most institutions and organisations have started to demand English as an important language for employees. Gradually, English has become the language of technology, business, science, and commerce, gaining a high status among Saudi individuals (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

As a result of the country's aspiration to be among the top 10 countries in the world, English has become more highly valued than ever (Mustafa & Alghamdi,2020), including in the workplace. Many sectors in the Saudi market now require English language proficiency, and it is a key to obtaining many employment opportunities. It is required for higher education, global communication, business, and trade, among others, leading most Saudis to now believe that English is the most highly prestigious language needed for ensuring they have a future career. This ideology has contributed to the massive growth in

the number of Saudi students enrolling in various English-language colleges at educational institutions (Barnawi, 2019).

Although English is the only foreign language that has been introduced to the Saudi educational system, it is worth mentioning that other foreign languages are also available, enhancing the multilingualism and culturalism in the country. The continuous shifts in the country have attracted and brought immigrants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds who reside there bringing other foreign languages to the country (Lahiani et al.,2024). For example, the economic growth led to the hiring of a large number of skilled workers and professionals from different countries from around the world (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This is in addition to the number of refugees who have come from other countries seeking safety and peace (Alsharif et al., 2020). These people have brought different cultures and languages, causing language diversity among their community members. This includes languages like Tagalog**,** Somali, Bengali, Urdu, and numerous other South Asian, African, and Southeast Asian languages (Al-Rasheed, 2010). In other words, although English has the highest status, the country's ambition toward growth has moved the country from being a monolingual society to a multilingual one.

In addition, as a result of the rise of digital media, Saudis are now exposed to a variety of languages from all around the world, fostering linguistic diversity among them. As researchers found (e.g., Alnofaie, 2018; Payne & Almansour, 2014), Saudi young people's access to media has allowed them to acquire additional languages that are not used in their local environment such as Korean, Japanese, and Turkish, which they have been exposed to through television and streaming services. Kan and Won (2020) found that Korean and Turkish TV series shown across the globe have spread their language and culture worldwide, including to the Middle East. Currently, these series are watched by thousands of young

Saudi individuals, motivating them to acquire other languages (Aljammazi & Asil, 2017; Berg, 2017).

2.5.2 Women and English Language

Traditionally, the authority of males over women hindered the entry of some Muslim women into English language programmes due to their religious beliefs regarding the fears of westernisation (Rida & Milton, 2001). However, some women were able to do so using their Islamic knowledge to argue against those traditional beliefs. Many young Saudi women were able to study English, justifying their choice by the Islamic teachings that encourage Muslims to learn different languages. Scholars (e.g., Alwedinani, 2017; Mustafa & Alghamdi, 2020) have explained that part of Saudi women's agency is to use their religious knowledge to negotiate with the patriarchal system, justifying their actions using Islamic knowledge to convince male family members who could not challenge the Islamic teachings. As a result, families could not prevent their daughters from learning English in schools and universities despite social concerns.

While many Saudi girls and young women could enrol in various English programmes, they could not gain many benefits from learning English at that time, despite its global significance, due to gender segregation. That is, English did not play a great role in Saudi women's lives as it did not open the same doors for them as for other women around the world. Because of the assigned gender roles and the conservatism of society, most English students in the past ended up becoming English teachers at schools, as this was the only acceptable job available to women. For many who did not have the opportunity to find a job as an English teacher, being unemployed and staying home was the only option left for them.

However, in line with the expansion of English and the increase of women's education within women's rights discourse, Saudi women have been increasingly able to access English programmes at educational institutions. Even those who have not registered for English programmes have still received materials in English, since most of the college and university subjects, including engineering, business, management, civil aviation, and technology have been delivered in English (Barnawi, 2019). Over the years, the acquisition of English has helped many Saudi women expand their career opportunities, continue their education in English-speaking countries, have a voice and express their identity when communicating with different people worldwide (Alsuwaida, 2016; Ammar, 2018).

The recent recognition of women's role in society, specifically in terms of economic growth, has made English more valued than ever among women. Due to the Saudi Vision 2030, English is now required in most sectors, and it plays a significant role in opening up various employment opportunities for women. For them to compete with men and to prove themselves qualified in the Saudi market, women need English to be hired or promoted. Nowadays, young women make up nearly two-thirds of all students in English language schools, indicating a growing trend in Saudi women becoming proficient in the language (Mustafa & Alghamdi,2020). Furthermore, there is an increasing number of women seeking new careers that differ from traditional ones and that require English. According to recent statistics from the Saudi Ministry of Labour and Social Development, the number of women working in the private sector increased by 566%, from 90,000 to 600,000 (Mustafa & Alghamdi,2020).

Therefore, the emergence of gender discourse has not only affected Saudi women's position in society, but also the knowledge and attitudes toward the English language and women’s opportunities to learn it. In other words, Saudi women's identity and English

language are interconnected and deserve investigation to gain further insight into the role of gender in English learning, and this study contributes by exploring the relationship between L2 vision and gender.

2.6 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter explored the lives of Saudi women over the last years and examined the status of the English language and women's experiences learning it. The chapter showed the contribution of various intersecting dimensions in creating women's identity in society and how, through these dimensions, the concept of gender has become dynamic, fluid, and complex in Saudi Arabia. In other words, the intersection of these dimensions has contributed to a continuous reconstruction of gender in Saudi society, making women's identities subject to constant change.

This makes a place like Saudi Arabia fertile ground for developing the understanding of how gender and L2 possible selves from dynamic perspectives that can make more sense in this kind of context with robust social changes that have constantly shifted gender throughout history. Considering the social transformations that have taken place over the decades, this study situates the female language learners involved in this study within a longer timescale to capture the nuances and complexities related to their L2 possible selves by considering social change. It is valuable to observe the interaction of their L2 possible selves with gender changes and look closely at how they are developed through social conditions. According to Henry (2015), the longer timescale is likely to capture the dynamics that occur within the L2 possible selves over time. To do so, I applied a historical approach, which will be discussed later in the methodology chapter.

In the next chapter, a description of my research context is provided, I then present a review of the existing studies related to gender and L2 vision in the following chapter to identify the gap in the literature. By reviewing and analysing previous studies, I demonstrate the need to investigate the notion of gendered identity as a missing self in the existing research.

Chapter 3 The Missing Self

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In this literature review chapter, I aim to review the existing studies related to gender and L2 possible selves in order to identify the gap in the literature, in which there is a contradiction among the findings across various EFL contexts. I argue in this chapter that the notion of a gendered self, or identity, shaped by the wider context surrounding female English learners is absent from the literature, and is therefore likely to be the reason behind this contradiction.

To do so, I first start with an introduction to L2 possible selves, providing an overview of the theory of L2 vision introduced by Dörnyei (2009). Subsequently, I present the related empirical research that has contributed to bringing context as a critical theme to the field. For decades, the dominant traditional theories in L2 learning isolated language learners from their context. However, Dörnyei's resistance to those approaches through his L2 vision theory sparked a trend to explore this in the field, so that now the role of context is viewed as playing a critical role.

In the following sections, I review the contradicting studies related to gender and L2 possible selves, followed by an analysis of the empirical studies in the Saudi context. I do so to demonstrate the need to explore female language learners' gendered identities on a larger scale, proposing a new line of thinking that includes new theoretical approaches and methodological implications.

3.2 L2 Vision Theory

L2 Vision is defined as "a personalised goal that the learner has made his/her own by adding to it the imagined reality of the goal experience" (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013, p. 455). It is the representation of someone's experiences of his/her future goal through imagery (Dörnyei, 2014). To differentiate between goal and vision, Dörnyei (2014) provided the example that if someone's future goal is to be a doctor, he can imagine himself practising this goal by envisioning it. Therefore, the natural sensory component involved in the vision makes it different from the goal (Dörnyei et al., 2015; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Further explanation of this distinction is also given by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014, who explained that "unlike an abstract, cognitive goal, a vision includes a strong sensory element: it involves tangible images related to achieving the goal" (p.10). This makes the vision stronger than the future self goal in affecting and sustaining L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 2018).

Dörnyei (2018) also explained that the strength of having a vision lies in its natural capacity to bring reality into the future world. That is, the tangible images and senses involved in the future possible selves share the same emotions and thoughts of real-life situations, enabling individuals to create a reality in which they see, hear and live their future selves through imagery (Dörnyei et al., 2014). In Dörnyei and Ryan's (2015) opinion, when these images are vivid and detailed, individuals are strongly engaged and pushed to achieve their goals. Consequently, there is a belief that language students with richer future images of themselves are more highly motivated than those whose self-images are limited (Dörnyei, 2014).

An L2 Vision is crucial because it enhances individuals' current engagement and activity. Dörnyei and Chan (2013) emphasised that the intensity of L2 motivation is determined by students' capability to create mental imagery that forms their vision and,

thus, maintain their L2 motivation. When language learners have a positive vision of themselves, such as an ideal L2 self, they will have positive emotions to push them to engage in their learning and thus succeed as language learners (Munezane, 2015). This is because when individuals have a sense of the discrepancy between their current selves and their envisioned selves, they are motivated to travel the distance and close the gap between the two (Higgins, 1987). As a result, researchers currently view language learning motivation "as a function of the language learners' vision of their desired future language selves" (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013, p. 437), which generates the ideal L2 selves followed by motivated learning behaviours (You et al., 2016).

In support of the theoretical discussion, empirical research has assessed the significance of the L2 vision and has found that learners' vision has a significant impact on their learning-motivated behaviours, and thus improve their language learning processes and outcomes. In terms of proficiency, for example, Zhang et al. (2024) investigated the direct and indirect relationships between English language proficiency and motivation. The sample included 189 students not majoring in English who used the structural equation model. The results revealed that English language proficiency was strongly influenced by the learners' future L2 selves, specifically the ought-to self. In this case, it was learners' commitment to achieving their future career goals, which may have stemmed from external pressure.

Fathi and Hejazi (2024) also explored the relationship between the ideal L2 self and foreign language achievement. A questionnaire was completed by 452 English language learners from several branches of a language institute using convenience sampling. Using structural equation modelling, the results revealed that learners' ideal L2 self, or their image of themselves as competent and proficient EFL users in the future, was directly and positively related to their language achievement.

Interestingly, the critical role played by L2 selves is not limited to classroom learning behaviours but expands to include the broader social behaviours of language learners. Dörnyei (2014) illustrated that while L2 vision plays a vital role in diverse motives within language classes, it also impacts the lifelong process of language learning, where people's social behaviours are directed by their future L2 vision. Thus, as Dörnyei explained, the idea of having an L2 vision provides a helpful lens to focus on the larger picture of the persistence that is needed to guide one to ultimate language attainment, since daily realities of language learning are influenced by various facets of the learner's personal life.
Here, I would like to emphasise again that this study considers the broader motivational social behaviours beyond the classroom that are associated with an L2 vision, considering the larger contextual factors.

Empirical studies on L2 vision have drawn attention to the significance of contextual factors in which learners' surrounding environment interplays in shaping their L2 future selves. They have shed light on critical sociocultural dimensions and their role in future language identities. These factors included parental help and support, social class, socio-economic factors, geographical location, and political ideologies.

3.3 Contextualising L2 Possible Selves

Liu (2024) conducted a study to examine the relationship between parental investment and language learners' L2 Motivational Self System. The study employed a questionnaire and interview involving 1,424 senior high school students and their parents from eleven schools in China. The analysis found that parental investment has an impact on learners' L2MSS s, which was found to work as a mediator for the formation of L2 motivation. The study also highlighted the role of social class as a key factor in how parents' social status affects the kind of investments made in their children's language learning.

This study is aligned with Iwaniec (2018), who highlighted the role of socio-economic status in the future of L2 selves. Her research investigated how a school's location and parents' education affected the motivation of 15-year-old English students in Poland. Her study involved 599 students who completed a questionnaire. The results showed that both school location and parental education influence language learning motivation, causing differences in their L2 motivation, including their ideal L2 self. Students from rural schools and those whose parents have a lower level of education were less motivated than their urban counterparts and those whose parents have a higher level of education.

Yousefi and Mahmood (2022) also found the role of graphical locations in the construction of the L2 selves. Their meta-analysis study aimed to examine the influence of the L2 motivational self-system on language learning, as well as scrutinise the links between it and the factors that moderate its effectiveness. Their meta-analysis incorporated 17 published studies, featuring a total of 18,832 language students. By calculating effect size, the analysis revealed that there were large effects in terms of the ideal L2 self among Asian countries and North America but a medium effect for European countries.

Rosiak (2023) examined the motivation of a minority language, Welsh, among Polish immigrants in the UK from the L2 motivational self-system model. His qualitative study involved 39 participants who were interviewed. The results found that language ideologies toward Welsh language in relation to the surrounding political circumstances played a significant role in the participants' language motivation. With their desire to gain social cohesion with the local people and obtain social and cultural capital, they were motivated to learn Welsh for its economic values in the wider socio-political context.

Overall, the above studies, along with others, have yielded important insights about the role of context as an emerging theme in L2 motivation. However, each study highlighted

the significance of particular contextual elements as isolated, which conflicts with the complex systems theory recently acknowledged in the field of L2 motivation. The primary premise of this theory is that language learning involves the interaction of multiple interconnecting socio-cultural elements (see Larsen-Freeman, 2012). By focusing on a certain social element, most of these studies conceptualised L2 possible selves as static constructs, neglecting to explore the complexity and dynamicity of this concept.

Henry (2015) criticised the literature, highlighting that while original theories in which L2 possible selves stemming from the possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) or self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987) admit the dynamicity of these concepts, the research tended to treat them as fixed. However, he argued that L2 possible selves are dynamic and susceptible to change, as they are affected by the surrounding multiple social dimensions and situations. Recently, empirical evidence has confirmed Henry's arguments (e.g., Ghorbani & Semiyari, 2024; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; You & Chan, 2015), attracting our attention to the need for employing complex perspectives when studying the L2 selves in order to comprehend their complexity (Teimouri, 2017).

This is primarily problematic in studies related to gender, since the majority of studies interested in this area often overlook the dynamic nature of this aspect. Interestingly, while research within the original possible selves theory admits the relationship between gender and possible selves in light of the complexity of the latter (e.g., Knox, 2006), existing studies related to gender and L2 possible selves neglect this complexity, treating learners' L2 selves as stable by lacking the implication of dynamic approaches, thus leaving the picture of gender blurry (Al-Hoorie, 2018). The existing inconsistency among empirical studies has even made it worse by complicating the picture of gender within the possible selves theory, which in turn makes it demanding to look at this issue through a complex lens.

In the following section, I present these studies and show how existing studies lacked empirical considerations of the complexity of L2 selves and how such limitation has led to a lack of understanding of female learners' identities within their wider contexts. By doing so, I argue that existing implications are problematic in that they separate the female English learners from their context, directing scholars' thinking of L2 possible selves as fixed, thus ignoring the interplay between the wider gender norms that shape female learners' identities.

3.4 L2 Possible Selves and Gender

With the introduction of the L2 self-system, Henry (2011) re-assessed the literature on gender, finding higher L2 motivation among females than males, and thus seeking reasons behind this remarkable difference. Drawing on the L2 possible selves perspectives, he assumed that the differences among genders may lie in the construction of learners' possible selves, in which women are more concerned with interdependence and interpersonal relationships, increasing their L2 motivation. Following Henry's assumption, further studies have examined the role of gender in L2 selves, revealing, however, a contradiction within the literature through inconsistent quantitative findings.

While some studies have found no gender differences in some contexts like Iran, Sweden, Korea, and China (such as Ghorbani & Semiyari, 2024; Henry & Cliffordson, 2013; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020; Yao et al., 2024; You & Dörnyei, 2016), others have found them in other contexts like Croatia and Japan (Martinović & Sorić, 2018; Yashima et al., 2017). There has also been conflicting findings among studies that employed the same procedures by replicating other studies in a different context, such as You et al.'s (2016) study conducted in China and its replication in Korea by Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2020.). While the former found gender differences, the latter did not find any. Another example is Henry and Cliffordson's

(2013) study in Sweden and its replication in Japan by Yashima et al. (2017). While the former found no gender differences, the latter did find them. In order to justify these conflicting results, the authors assumed different factors to be behind this conflict. These factors included growth mindset (Yao et al., 2024), age (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020), cultural differences (Martinović & Sorić, 2018), social expectations (Yashima et al., 2017), future career (You et al., 2016), learning commitment (You and Dörnyei, 2016), and interdependent self-construal (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013).

Although some of these justifications assumed the role of some contextual elements, learners' gendered identities were neglected. Specifically, the authors neglected to explore the larger context of where their female language learners participating in their studies lived. In all of these studies, the goal was to examine which gender had the better future vision and how the content of those visions affected the language learning motivational behaviours. None of them paid attention to how and why those L2 selves were shaped differently in the research context, despite the interplay between those selves and the larger environment shaping learners' gender identities beyond educational settings.

Consequently, a key issue in the existing research is missing, namely the female English learners' gendered identities in the wider sociocultural research context, which may affect who they are and what future possibilities are available to them. The fact that gender assumptions differ from one context to another could be the key reason why female learners visualise themselves in the same way in one context and in a different way in another, as shown in the studies above. It is likely that the female participants visualised themselves based on the potential opportunities typically available to them, as determined by their society, regardless of whether they were equal or not in terms of gender. Henry and Cliffordson (2013) admitted that their findings may have been different if they had conducted their study in a context where there was a lack of gender equality, highlighting

the importance of the larger gender discourse, as that impacts the distribution and an individual's access to resources. Drawing on psychological self-theories, they believed that gender equality in Sweden was likely to be the reason why their female participants shared a similar future vision to their male participants. They explained that female learners are likely to incorporate gender norms into their future selves, causing differences in their L2 selves. That is, Swedish female English learners' self-concepts resulting from the environmental conditions, which include the normative roles and expectations in the social and cultural context, impacted the development of their future language identities as a response to those norms.

Interestingly, when looking at studies from the Saudi contexts related to female English students and L2 possible selves, the results of such studies become evidence for the authors' claims. Although those studies did not target the role of gender at all, my analysis of those results showed how the female English students involved in the studies incorporated the surrounding gender norms into their L2 future selves. In the following section, I present and analyse these studies to demonstrate how the participants' gendered identities interplayed with the development of their L2 future selves affected by the wider gender ideologies in the Saudi society.

3.5 Saudi Female English Learners' Possible Selves

Al-Otaibi (2013) carried out a study on Saudi EFL learners' L2 vision, focusing on the role of L2 possible selves in Saudi female English learners' motivation while majoring in English. She applied a mixed-method approach in the form of a questionnaire and interviews. Her analysis found that L2 possible selves played an essential role in the participants' English learning, particularly the ideal L2 self. She also found that most of her female participants shared an L2 vision for themselves as English teachers. As the author

explained, this was because teaching is the plausible and favoured future career for most Saudi women and is the easiest career for them to pursue.

Knox (2006) argues that gender norms could impact the future possible selves, in which those who have strong traditional gender roles combined with their self-identification are less likely to develop their possible selves. That is, for those, particularly girls, who come from families with clear, strict gender roles, their future selves may be limited (Knox, 2006; Lips, 2007; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Al-Otaibi's findings represent the role of gender norms and expectations in Saudi society, where teaching in the educational domain used to be the expected career for most Saudi females due to the gender segregation policy applied in the Saudi educational system (Hodges, 2017). Responding to those expectations, her participants developed their L2 selves as English teachers, visualising themselves teaching in a gender-segregated setting. When comparing this study with another that studied the L2 vision among Saudi female and male English students, such as Assulaimani (2015), it becomes clear how gender norms interplayed with her female learners' L2 selves.

Assulaimani (2015) carried out his study to examine the impact of the three future self-guides on L2 learners' achievement in Saudi Arabia. The study involved a mixed-method approach in the form of questionnaires and interviews, which involved 360 English university students (225 males and 135 females). Unlike the female learners in Al-Otaibi's (2013) study above, his qualitative data showed a variety of ideal L2 selves among his male participants, such as musicians, novelists, and writers. The quantitative data showed that his male participants created visions of themselves more than females, making them more motivated to learn the L2 compared to females, contradicting previous research on gender and L2 motivation (Henry, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2011; Ryan, 2009). Overall, his analysis revealed no social or cultural impact on his participants' L2 vision. I claim, however, that it was the Saudi culture, and principally the gender norms, that played the most crucial role in revealing

those results and that his data had shortcomings and was insufficient because female voices were absent from his study. As the author acknowledged, female participants were excluded from the qualitative interview due to gender segregation in the Saudi educational system.

Assulaimani's findings reflected Saudi cultural norms at the time when Saudi males dominated society and had more varied career options than Saudi females (Reda & Hamdan, 2015). The range of opportunities available to men caused the variation in the male participants' L2 vision. In contrast, the limited career options for women caused by the gender norms only allowed Al-Otaibi's female students to shape their L2 selves as teachers since most Saudi women were not allowed to work in mixed-gender settings at the time.

In a more recent study, Altalib (2019) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia to investigate Saudi L2 learners' possible selves in English for specific purposes and English for general purposes. The study included 4,043 participants (1,990 males and 2,053 females) studying different subjects at university, namely medicine, applied medicine, engineering, computer sciences, basic sciences, law, education, and humanities (such as English, Arabic, and Islamic Studies). The focus was to examine the relationship between the participants' ideal and ought-to L2 selves and the type of English course. Using a quantitative approach, the researcher found females from medicine and engineering majors had more ambitious visions of their ideal L2 self, which was not the case among females from humanities (including English), who had the less ambitious visions of their ideal L2 self.

According to Lips (2004, 2007), differences in gender possible selves play an essential role in selection of academic choices, and in turn, career choices, as a result of gender expectations. In Saudi Arabia, some females continue to have limited choices compared to other females because of their families, social class, and expectations. They usually major in humanities, including subjects such as English, to ensure they can have a future career in a

gender-segregated workplace, namely educational institutions. In contrast, those who are not restricted to a gender-segregated workplace are free choose their preferred subject of study, such as engineering, medicine, and law, enabling them to have more ambitious L2 selves than those who adhere to social obligations. Therefore, no matter which L2 selves were created by the participants of the studies mentioned above, they were fostered by the surrounding norms, whether encouraging or not, thus impacting the ambition of their L2 selves. Knox (2006) stated that whether the future possible selves are restricted or not, they are developed based on the gender norms that exist in people's environments. Considering these factors, I believe that in order to better understand L2 selves in relation to gender, it is important to understand why female learners chose to study English in particular, what affects their choices, and how these factors influence their future visions of themselves.

The studies above indicate that female language learners shape their future L2 identities based on the possibilities open to them as female in their environment and by the culture. In short, they either expand or limit their future L2 vision based on existing constraints. Indeed, there is a great deal of research showing that gender possibilities interfere with men's and women's future identities. Oyserman and James (2011) explained that individual perceptions of what is suitable or desirable for men and women are shaped by cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles and that this has an impact on the kinds of possible selves that people imagine. They further explained that for this reason, men and women typically have different aspirations and goals based on societal norms. Lips (2007) also demonstrated that men and women incorporate gender norms into their future selves, developing them in ways they see themselves and others see them, in which opportunities are offered based on social norms.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine gender and L2 possible selves holistically to understand the connection between L2 selves and those gender norms surrounding

learners. Recently, Ghorbani and Semiyari (2024) found that the ideal L2 self is developed and changed based on gender, and therefore have called for those studying this to utilise a dynamic complex framework to observe how female language learners develop their L2 possible selves as a response to the surrounding gender culture. At the same time, this indicates the vital role female learners' agency has when analysing their interaction with gender affordance and constraints that construct their L2 selves discursively.

3.6 Discursive L2 Possible Selves and Agency

Higgins (2011, p.10) elaborated that discursive L2 selves "are often imposed on learners, due to dominant discourses, othering, or hegemonic processes, but learners can and do choose to resist these ascribed positionalities, developing subject positions based on their projected visions of who they are". Production of L2 selves is the result of constant negotiation between the self and the other, facilitated by language learners' agency, resistance, and discourses. Through their interaction with the dominant gender discourse, language learners can meet expectations and obligations by creating specific L2 possible selves. They can also challenge gender ideologies that can limit or hinder their L2 selves by resisting gender constraints like stereotypes, biases, and inequalities in their social environment. Either way, they use their knowledge and awareness to assess existing conditions that result in them developing their future L2 possible selves (Henry, 2015).

Higgins also highlighted how the discursive construction of L2 selves is affected by aspects of learners' perceptions, such as the way they see themselves, the language ideologies they hold, and their social identity negotiation. It is also affected by the intersection of relational identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, and the power dynamics. Higgins provide further information on the nuanced ways in which people's experiences with discourse are influenced by their diverse identities in social contexts. In

other words, he found that language learners' identities and the perceptions they held in their self-concepts were constructed and negotiated in response to the dominant gender discourse and social interactions that greatly influenced the formation of their L2 selves.

Similarly, Miyahara (2014) illustrated that L2 selves are generated as language learners continuously have social experiences within a discursive space. Miyahara highlighted that language learners shape their future selves as they interact with social elements in the social environment affected by the discourse and as they learn the language and negotiate with others. Thus, Miyahara highlighted the importance of considering past, present, and future language learning experiences when examining L2 selves through transformative, developmental, and temporal social processes.

Furthermore, in highlighting the role of agency in the future possible selves, specifically its dynamics, Oyserman and James (2011) elaborated that future selves are not fixed but fluid, revised and amended based on contextual affordance and constraints. Through social interaction, learners can develop their future selves based on social conditions, encouragement, support, and feedback for identity negotiation and development. According to Hoyle and Sherrill (2007), future selves are chronically activated constructs, which also reveal how people perceive their current selves and how they approach or avoid particular behaviours. Lamb (2009, 2013) also pointed out that English learners' agency can greatly affect the creation of L2 future selves through learners' interaction with social constraints. In his studies, he took into account the ways in which learners' agency and the development of their L2 possible selves are influenced by sociocultural elements that can either support or limit their agency, impacting their sense of empowerment and the range of goals they have for their future.

Whether all these agentic considerations interfere with L2 selves related to gender, however, is a question yet to be addressed. I considered female language learners' agency to be a crucial part of their gendered identities, believing that it plays a vital role in the development of their L2 selves and their dynamics through learners' responses and resistance to social constraints. Such considerations, however, require me to bring sociological perspectives to this study in order to analyse learners' agency. Ushioda (2009) drew attention to the significance of social theories when considering L2 selves dynamics as they help position learners as agents in their context and contextualise language as a social action through the interaction between agency and social structure.

Sociological theories can help us to understand the precise nature of societies and identities, identify the relationship between learners and their social environment, and address the process's complexity. In other words, sociological theories allow learners as agents to be positioned in their context, addressing the relationship between them and the multiple social elements "in which they act a relationship that is dynamic, complex, and non-linear" (Ushioda, 2009, p.218). They also offer frameworks for comprehending complex and dynamic issues by examining the interactions between people, groups, institutions, and the larger social structures where gender assumptions are embedded (Smilde & Hanson, 2018).

Thus, they shed light on the institutional dynamics, historical foundations, and cultural meanings that influence social phenomena over time by placing the complex issue within their socio-historical framework. Significantly, because I consider the complexity of gender besides the L2 selves, sociological perspectives allow for analysing concepts of context, gendered identities, agency and L2 selves as dynamic elements. As noted in the last chapter, the dynamism of Saudi society, and thus gender, offers continuous possibilities for women,

causing a constant change in their identities, as well as their continuous interactions with social constraints.

Nevertheless, taking these aspects into account causes me to reject the existing implications of the quantitative procedures seen above. Such implications make it difficult to consider these dynamic issues and examine the salient contextual factors related to gendered identities and agency. Quantitative methods can be limiting when exploring social factors in greater depth compared to qualitative methods, which are more concerned with context and dynamic relationships. In short, since the nature of the quantitative procedures cannot fully consider the dynamicity of issues, they fail to investigate the interplay of social dimensions as well as learners' interaction with possibilities and constraints. In other words, I strongly believe that the lack of qualitative data in the literature is likely to have created a limited understanding of the role of gender in learners' L2 vision, as they have a greater capacity to fully shed light on complex issues.

3.7 Quantitative Strategy as a Limited Approach

Until recently, the studies on L2 possible selves tended to use quantitative procedures, primarily self-reported questionnaires, in which different variables are listed. This heavy reliance on self-reporting measures aimed to reach learners' mind since individual differences are not directly visible, but their consequences are (Ushioda, 2020). Of course, no one can deny the great contributions these quantitative studies have made to our knowledge of the L2 possible selves to date. However, the explanations given are yet to adequately explain these selves in different settings and contexts (Ushioda, 2009), specifically when applying complex dynamic system theory, which has emerged as a critical theory in the field.

The emergence of the dynamic approach in the subject of L2 possible selves has caused a discrepancy between existing theory and empirical research. Yet, although L2 selves have been acknowledged to be dynamic, the empirical studies intensively apply statistical measures that tend to treat this concept as fixed. According to Henry (2015), adopting a dynamic approach requires incorporating previously used quantitative procedures. According to Henry, these quantitative procedures deal with future possible selves as stable constructs, calculating the gap between present and future selves through numerical ratings given by respondents. Thus, the complexity and the dynamicity of these concepts become neglected within these procedures. This is because capturing context and complex systems cannot be achieved through a list of variables. However, as Dörnyei (2020) argued, when individuals are at the core of analysis, taking a quantitative approach results in the context being separated from the individuals involved, even when the focus is on the relationship between the two concepts.

In addition, Ushioda (2009) argued that the quantitative approach cannot fully explain the "complexity and idiosyncrasy of a person's motivational response to particular events and experiences in their life" (p.219). Instead, it attempts to group learning behaviours into common characteristics rather than recognising the uniqueness of a person's particular meaning-making in their sociocultural contexts. In other words, when dealing with complex systems, adopting a quantitative approach cannot provide a clear picture of those complex systems, since it does not deal with social phenomena as interrelated components. It also does not consider the interconnection between systems such as context, gender, agency and L2 selves.

In addition, as well as its inability to examine complex issues, the quantitative approach has also been critiqued for not providing nuanced findings due to the extensive focus on a single variable. In his meta-analysis study, Al-Hoorie (2018) found that some of

the quantitative results reported in the literature lacked the inclusion of other significant variables. His study included 32 quantitative studies of 32,078 mixed-gender language learners which had been published between 2009 and 2017. The results revealed that all three components of L2 possible selves were found to be correlated with a particular variable, namely intended efforts, while other significant correlations were found to have been dropped. He further explained that the exclusive focus on one variable as a major criterion in questionnaires failed to comprehensively capture L2 possible selves, suggesting the use of other variables. Significantly, the author found that the role of gender appeared to be a neglected factor within those studies. He also argued that there is still a need to comprehend how L2 learners visualise themselves in the future in relation to their gender, emphasising a shift in current implications. In this research, therefore, I considered investigating the impact of female English learners' gendered identities on their L2 selves through the implications of a qualitative strategy guided by my dynamic perspectives that I adopted in this study.

3.8 Conclusion of the Chapter

The present chapter outlined the area of interest, giving background about the theory of L2 vision and related studies. It also presented a set of studies that brought context as a significant theme to the field. The chapter also presented studies related to gender and L2 selves in order to identify the gap in the existing research, pointing out the need to consider female learners' gendered identities within the wider social environment, in which they interact with social dimensions as agents. It also emphasised the need to integrate sociological perspectives and to shift the existing quantitative applications to provide a nuanced comprehension of the interplay between gender and L2 selves.

Reviewing the literature led me to conceptualise the research problem as complex, considering the L2 selves and gender as both dynamics involving themes of context and agency. At the same time, dealing with dynamic variables can be challenging as it may lead to the emergence of a multitude of elements, potentially taking this study away from its focus. Therefore, to manage this issue, I carefully selected a theoretical framework with consistent theories, combined with dynamic psychological and sociological perspectives that could guide my understanding of the complex interplay among different dynamic components and, thus, manage the focus of this study. This is presented in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Bridging Psychological and Sociological Worlds

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework underpinning this study, which consists of a number of dynamic theories that integrate psycho-sociological perspectives. The chapter starts with the person-in-context theory, which is concerned with positioning language learners in their sociocultural context. The following theory discusses the dynamics of L2 possible selves and how they interact with environmental conditions. Then, the chapter discusses the theory of conceptualising language learners as a complex system who carry interconnected complex elements within themselves. The last two theories, which include structuration and gender as a social structure, are concerned with human agency. They focus on individuals' interaction with social factors and constraints as well as the dynamic process embedded.

By linking these theories together, I demonstrate how these theories offered me a framework for conceiving and understanding this study, as well as for defining the variables and key concepts. I also demonstrate how they guided me in terms of my methodological considerations and applications.

4.2 The Person-In-Context Theory

Traditionally, scholars exploring language learning have addressed individual differences as distinct and static characteristics, thereby separating the context from the language learners. However, the introduction of the notion of the L2 self has sparked a debate in the literature, raising questions about the role of identity, especially in light of English's status as a global language and the spread of world English varieties. Consequently,

researchers (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ushioda, 2009) have endeavoured to reconceptualise the field by considering notions of context, identity, and the L2 self as interconnected components, thereby expanding our understanding of language learners' identities.

One of the most notable perspectives that has contributed to shifting the field is Ushioda's (2009) Person-in-Context Relational View of Motivation, which has advanced our understanding of identity as a relational and contextual element that involves multiple social facets interacting with the language learning process including L2 possible selves. Her approach has shifted the focus from individual differences as isolated dimensions to the dynamic interplay between the learner and the socio-cultural context, recognising the influence of social and cultural factors on learners' identity formation.

Ushioda (2009) proposed her person-in-context approach, arguing for the need for a theory that treats language learners as actual people rather than theoretical abstractions. As she argued that the traditional mainstream positivist research that relies on psychological measurement methods has created abstract models of mental processes and behaviours. In addition, it deals with individual differences as distinct and static characteristics, grouping them based on common characteristics. That is, statistical procedures used for eliciting individual differences lead to conclusions regarding the normal distribution of specific features within a given population, as they only focus on the mean values of traits that group language learners who share certain characteristics.

As a result, these procedures have caused the depersonalisation of language learners, separating them from their context, which has taken the field away from focusing on the unique individual differences or what she calls "the differences between individuals" (Ushioda, 2009, p.215). This is because they tend to treat the social and cultural context as a

stable variable that exists outside of the learner. Even those who adopt the role of context and rely on learners' perceptions still make a distinction between learners' mental world and the external context surrounding them, distancing scholars from considering "the dynamic complexity of personal meaning-making in a social context" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 217). Within these procedures, learners are only dealt with as receivers in their context, presenting them as individuals who have no control, which causes a lack of understanding of their inner mental world and how they, as agents, interpret and interact with the socio-cultural environment around them.

The central point behind her approach is to concentrate on learners' agency, their role in their context, and their relationship with the contextual elements. As Ushioda described, it is not only the context that acts on learners, but also learners act on their context, as both shape, respond to, and adopt each other. Language learners are contributors to shaping and acting upon their context, in which they become an integral part of developing linguistic interaction through their participation in the "dynamic physical, historical, social, and cultural context within which the interaction is taking place." (Ushioda, 2015, p.47).

The person-in-context approach pays great attention to the complexity and the nonlinear interactions between the various contextual components, which are the source from which learners naturally develop their selves. The approach, then, calls for positioning language learners as real individuals who are "necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts" (Ushioda, 2009, p.216), in which they "bring uniquely individual identities, histories, goals and intentions and who inhabit complex dynamic social realities" (Ushioda, 2011, p.18). Positioning learners as individuals existing in a particular context is essential since language learning is only one part of their identity.

Ushioda (2009, p. 220) summarised her person-in-context theory, explaining that:

"I mean a focus on 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".

Shedding light on L2 possible selves, her theory outlined that L2 future selves are naturally developed based on social events and life experiences because of the interplay between learners and context. The interrelations between learners and context can form their L2 selves because their current selves and imagined future selves continuously interact with each other. This interaction occurs up to the level that learners are enabled to communicate with their transportable identities, involving themselves in visualised L2 interaction with other people, where they integrate their sense of selves and their relation to the world. However, according to her, this occurs within the boundaries of their current interests, as well as social circumstances.

Considering this complexity of L2 possible selves, she believed that adopting her person-in-context approach is necessary to consider the complex relationships between contextual elements, as it helps researchers explore the complex ways in which language learners' identities are shaped and reshaped through their interactions and experiences in social and cultural settings. However, because of the nonlinear and co-adaptive complex relationship between learners and their context, and the organic evolving change within this relationship, she suggested adopting a dynamic theoretical framework that allows for "capturing holistically the complex processes that take place within learners and between learners and their socio-cultural environments" (Ushioda, 2015, p.47).

Consistent with her approach, I present in the following section the dynamics of possible selves as another theory I adopt in this study, showing how the integration of both theories guide and inform this study.

4.3 The Dynamics of L2 Possible Selves (DPS)

In his theory of the dynamics of possible selves, Henry (2015) explained three aspects of the dynamicity of L2 possible selves. These aspects are changes to attractor states, system connectedness, and timescales. The first aspect, changes to attractor states, entails the changing nature of the L2 selves despite their resistance to change. That is, although the system of the L2 selves may be anchored and stable, its change is likely to continuously occur because of the flow of learners' thoughts and actions over time, which causes the flexibility of the overall system despite its resistance to change.

The second aspect, system connectedness, considers the link between the integral components of the system and those of other systems. The dynamicity of L2 possible selves does not occur in isolation but through their connection with other systems. It includes the idea that L2 possible selves are a dynamic system that interacts with various other dynamic cognitive systems within the language learners, particularly the system of self-concept. As human beings, language learners always structure self-relevant information from previous experiences, creating a system of beliefs about themselves, which mediate the internalised process, both "intra-and interpersonal", thus representing the self as the "knower" as well as the "known" (Henry, 2015, p.89).

More importantly, because the self-concept changes constantly, it causes the change of the L2 possible selves over time. Language learners receive new knowledge through their social engagements, changing their self-representation based on the knowledge they receive

and the cognitive process of that representation. Such a change interacts with the future L2 possible selves, causing their change. Therefore, it is impossible to adopt approaches that centre on the self-concept as a singular entity when explaining shifts in motivated behaviour. Rather, the focus needs to be placed on the active self-concept as it exists at any given moment in time, referred to by Henry as the activated self-concept.

Seen in this light, Mercer (2011) argued that adopting a complex systems approach entails rethinking the self-concept as dynamic in order to better understand language learners' self-system more holistically. She believes that the complexity of learners' beliefs is likely to cause this complexity of learners' L2 selves. In other words, L2 possible selves are integral components of constantly evolving self-knowledge and self-concepts. Therefore, Henry (2015) advised that it is crucial to look at the learners' overall self-concept and the effects of key components from other systems operating and activating learners' cognition, which influence their L2 self. He also highlighted the importance of balancing the background (such as learners' self-concept and knowledge) and the foreground (L2 selves), allowing the former to be continuously dynamic while focusing on the dynamicity of the latter.

The third aspect of Henry's framework is the timescales. The changes in self-concept operate based on timescales. Learners' self-concept can evolve over time in a way that depends on the period of time. Although shorter timescales may cause rapid shifts in their self-concept, a more stable trajectory can cause shifts on longer timescales. This makes the self-concept both stable and flexible and responsive at the same time. Given that, when considering the dynamicity of the L2 selves and their changing nature, it is critical to consider the timescale as the core of the self-concept dynamic. Whether this is over a long or short timescale depends on the researchers' interests and the focus of their study.

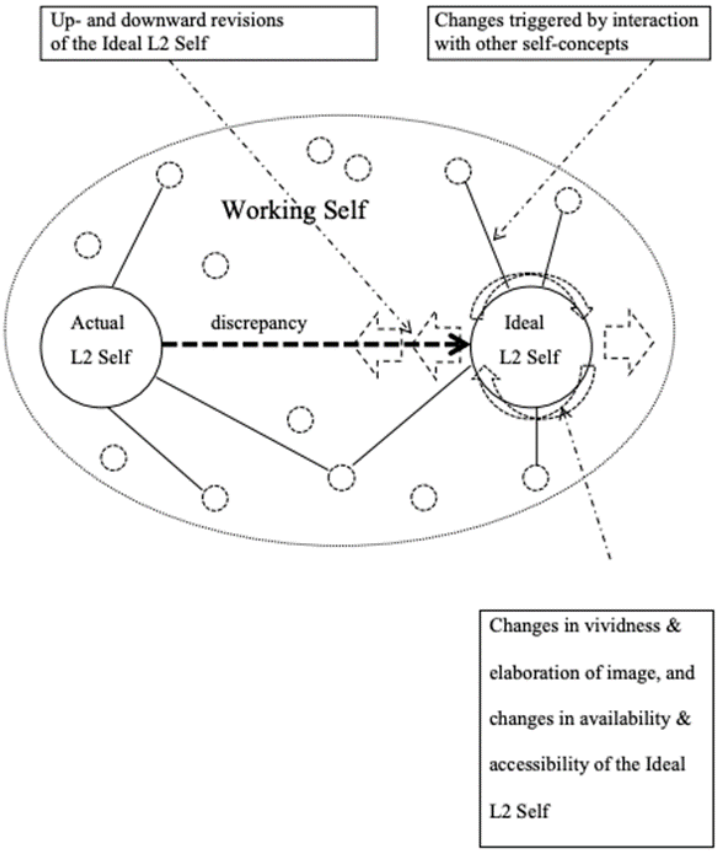
Within these three aspects, Henry emphasised two important processes that determine the dynamicity of L2 possible selves, specifically the ideal L2 self: their revisions and changes through the interaction with other L2 selves. Building on the original possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986), he pointed out that L2 selves are situationally structured. As learners experience various situations over shorter or longer timescales, they are likely to change their future L2 selves, because they are sensitive to those situations. Exposure to different social situations brings new thoughts and information to oneself, which may include new opportunities through the language learning experience. This new knowledge, according to Henry, gives learners a sense of the gap between their current and future selves, allowing them to re-assess their circumstances and chances of reaching their future selves, causing its revision and, thus, its change.

In this sense, the activation of L2 selves occurs because of the activation of the working cognitive system of learners. A change in every L2 self is a result of a change in the actual or "working self-concept", in which the former can remain stable without the latter (Henry, 2015, p.90). Therefore, as Henry argued, considering the dynamic of L2 possible selves requires considering the dynamicity of the current self-system, as well as the continuous environmental changes in which the former occurs.

Furthermore, according to Henry, the power of L2 selves is situationally determined, particularly its availability and accessibility (how easy it is to imagine it and to bring it to awareness), because its power is dependent on the activities being performed, as well as the learners' mindset at that point, making the operation of L2 selves changeable from one time to the another. However, according to Henry, this does not mean that a change in L2 selves is always positive because a learner's view of what they could potentially become can

increase or decrease depending on their assessment of their ability to reach a certain future desired self.

While there is a chance for learners to continue increasing and updating their ideal L2 selves, due to their evaluation of positive circumstances, they tend to decrease it to fit the reality when the circumstances are not encouraging. As Henry explained, when learners notice signs that their path towards their ideal selves is not going according to plan, they may begin to question the reliability or possibility of their ideal selves. As an alternative, less desirable, but potentially more realistic view, ideal L2 selves might end up seeming more alluring as a result of these observations, whether implicitly or explicitly. This downward revision process, according to his framework, "involves changes in the mental imagery of future use, shifting the ideal self closer to the actual self, thereby reducing the discrepancy to a more manageable level." (Henry, 2015, p.87). This revision process is illustrated in the diagram below.



The Dynamics of Possible Selves (Henry, 2015, p.92)

While the complex dynamic approach is undoubtedly a powerful paradigm in L2 possible selves, it has raised multiple issues for future research. For example, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) raised questions about whether learners could have multiple desired selves besides the relationship between the ideal and ought-to L2 selves, sharpening their focus on the internalisation of social influence. In their view, since an individual's self-image is generated socially and emerges through a continuous interaction with the surrounding environment, there is still a need to understand whether the desired self is an ideal "fully owned by the learners" or ought-to self "imposed on learners by others" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 352). They also wondered if L2 possible selves can change because they appear robust and created over time. Assuming that they change, they questioned the source of this change that causes considerable self-development. Although some of these questions have been empirically addressed in recent years, such as the change and fluidity of

these selves, as seen in the last chapter, their internalised complex process remains unclear, leaving a great deal yet to be discovered.

Recently, Dörnyei (2020) have discussed several challenges of understanding the complexity and dynamicity of L2 possible selves, dedicating an entire chapter to the notion of L2 vision in his book. He raised the issue of the changing nature and the accessibility of future self-images that has not been yet addressed in the research, arguing that to our knowledge, learners can constantly reformulate and revise their L2 future selves, however, we do not know yet how these selves can be accessed. He also highlighted the issue of the transformation of future selves and the internalisation process that occurs in their alteration, which has not been touched on in the literature. One of the solutions he provided is to consider integrating Ushioda's person-in-context approach with the complex dynamic systems theory to address these complex issues due to the compatibility of these two theories. According to him, this is specifically important when considering the interaction between L2 selves and social conditions, in which learners play a vital role.

Therefore, I integrated the person-in-context approach and the DPS theories in this study in order to understand the complex nature of L2 possible selves, specifically in relation to gender. I employed the person-in-context approach by considering the multiple relational social factors and their interconnection with learners' identities and L2 selves. From the theory's perspective, I positioned my participants as people who are situated in a specific sociocultural and historical context, where their language learning and identities are relationally linked to their context, interacting dynamically with their future L2 possible selves. I also adopted the DPS theory by dealing with L2 selves as complex and dynamic systems that interact with social elements. Notably, while I focussed on the dynamics of L2 selves, I also considered exploring their self-concept and its fluidity as a key aspect in

understanding the complexity of the L2 vision, which includes learners' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and awareness.

At the same time, however, the integration of these two theories in the research seems to be problematic, particularly in defining the term context. In her chapter on the "Context and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory", Ushioda (2015) discussed what to consider as a context when adopting her person-in-context approach from a complex perspective. She asked two important questions when considering that if we deal with each learner as a person-in-context who is rooted in their sociocultural and historical environments acting and participating in shaping those environments through their interaction, "how do we differentiate meaningfully between learners and context when examining these evolving interactions?" and "how do we deal with psychological and historical elements of the evolving context that are internal to the learner, such as memories and experiences?" (p.48). The second issue she raised concerns defining the "external, internal, and temporal boundaries of 'context' that may be relevant to the analysis of a particular learners-context ecosystem." (Ushioda, 2015, p.48).

To deal with such issues, she called for viewing context to be regarded as an external notion internalised in the learners, in which external and internal systems interconnect and interact dynamically within the learners. To achieve this, however, she emphasised the need to conceptualise *the complex system* as the language learners, as they consist of multiple interplaying dynamic systems interacting with one another. Adopting this theoretical perspective in this thesis, I describe in the following section the conceptualisation of the complex system as the language learners, defining the term context through this conceptualisation.

4.4 The Complex System as the Language Learners (CSLL)

Conceptualising the complex system as the language learners entails multiple considerations. Firstly, there is an interplay between external and internal elements that exist inside the language learners. As Ushioda (2015) explained, while context may be understood as environmental features that are external to the language students, these features are internal to the learners in that they interact dynamically with other internal complex systems such as the language process, self-concepts and identity.

An example she gives is the different social identities of the learners located within their self and identity systems. These identities are developed in relation to the external social environmental elements, interacting at the same time with other internal systematic elements. In this sense, there is a co-adaptive relationship between the internal and external processes, making identity a notion that shapes and is shaped by the "shifting relations and the social networks" (Ushioda, 2015, p.51). Therefore, depending on the focus of researchers, context may refer to the existing external contextual elements surrounding learners, either in a smaller social setting such as classrooms or "the wider ecology of external social and environmental conditions" in which those external elements "are in organic interaction with these learners internal systematic processes." (Ushioda, 2015, p.52). In other words, as Mercer (2016) suggested, while context can be external, it is integral, located within the learners' self, and is what she called a context within them. As Mercer demonstrated, while context forms individuals' sense of themselves, it is also formed through their sense of themselves. Through their presence and social engagement, language learners shape the nature and structure of any context, but their sense of self is also established and defined by their interactions in the context (Mercer, 2016).

Secondly, conceptualising the complex system as the language learners also entails the interconnections among various systems located within the learners, which is alignment with Henry's framework above. Within language learners, there is an "interconnected web of systems" (Mercer, 2016, p.19). Each single system of the web can also contain other integrated systems. An example is the system of context internalised in the learners' self-system which encompasses multiple sociocultural elements that consist of systems of cognitions, emotions, and motives. In this sense, any system under investigation must be dealt with as part of larger interconnected systems.

Thirdly, each system must be dealt with as a dynamic itself. Concepts of context, self-concepts, agency and L2 self are all dynamic, and any change that occurs in one system can cause a change in other systems in the web (Mercer, 2016). A change in the external context, for example, can interact with other internal elements, causing a change in the current self, thus the L2 self. This means that there is no core sense of the self, as our selves are constantly socially re-constructed through social experiences and interactions (Mercer, 2015), implying that a multitude of L2 selves emerge over time through this constant dynamic interaction.

Finally, therefore, it is crucial to consider the existence of different selves that emerge as a result of the external context. In this light, Mercer (2014) conceptualised the self as a network that has no boundaries because it is opened and subjected to continual change over time, affected by developing relationships and conditions that constantly influence one's self-concept. It is "a series of nested systems of self-constructs that differ in size as well as timescales of their dynamism and are interconnected with different types or levels of the contexts" (Mercer, 2015, p. 140-141). As a result of this complex interaction, various selves emerge over time, in which each self is constructed differently depending on its relationship

with the external context and how it is internalised, as well as the type of timescales in which its construct functions (Mercer, 2016). This conceptualisation of the self as a network of relationships prompts the idea of reimagining the self, due to the ongoing dynamic relationship among personal and relational components (Mercer, 2016). Therefore, and based on this complex conceptualisation of the notion of the self, in this thesis, I defined the self and Identity interchangeably as "a multifaceted, dynamic, and temporally continuous set of mental self-representations. These representations are multifaceted in the sense that different situations may evoke different aspects of the self at different times. They are dynamic in that they are subject to change in the form of elaborations, corrections, and reevaluations." (Talaifar & Swann, 2018, p.2).

Empirically, however, all the above considerations within the CSLL can be misleading, specifically when considering all of the interconnected elements located inside learners. Indeed, Ushioda (2015) cautioned that when conceptualising the complex system of language learners, researchers must make decisions regarding what to include and exclude among the contextual elements in order to keep their research manageable. To determine what is relevant or not, she advised paying attention to the salient elements in the target social setting, and giving a detailed analysis of them, as well as the integrating elements. To achieve this, she suggested exploring learners' own perspectives in order to identify the critical and relevant contextual aspects, thus limiting the multitude of elements. This, however, implies that it is not the context that researchers need to investigate and describe but learners' own interpretation and meaning of related contextual aspects that they bring (Mercer, 2016). Furthermore, Mercer stressed that researchers need to avoid having pre-assumptions about the influence of context on learners' selves and pay attention to their interpretations from their own first-person perspectives.

Another recommendation given to manage this complexity in research is to determine the target self-constructs, whether existing or evolving constructs, depending on the focus and the context of the study (Mercer, 2015), echoing Henry's recommendation above. When studying the L2 self as a dynamic system, Henry advised that researchers identify their target system, its focal components, as well as the other operating systems simultaneously and their links with the focal system (Henry, 2015). He also advised balancing the background and foreground systems, giving the L2 selves a greater focus.

Therefore, in this study, and in view of the recommendations outlined above, I viewed the participants as a complex system in which external and internal elements interplayed dynamically within them and interacted with other interconnected systems. In defining context, I viewed context as a set of external elements internalised into learners' self-systems. Specifically, when exploring the role of gender in the L2 selves on a broad level beyond language classrooms, I defined context as "the wider ecology of external social and environmental conditions, which are in organic interaction with learners' internal systematic processes." (Ushioda, 2015, p.52).

To identify key contextual elements, I also aimed to examine my participants' own perspectives, turning my lens on what they raised as important contextual factors to them. Thus, I considered giving a voice to my participants to allow me to identify the contextual parts located within their systematic process from their own points of view. I looked at the key contextual components they raised, the interaction of those components with other internal systems and the interaction of their L2 selves with these interconnected components. I also considered the fluidity of all the systems I examined in this study, including gender, context, identities and their changing nature over time, as well as the multitude of selves. At the same time, I placed my focus specifically on L2 possible selves as

a target construct, dealing with the other fluid systems as backgrounds, which helped me understand the interaction of this concept with gender.

As noticed in all the theories presented above, the key aspect of the scholars' thinking of their dynamic approaches is the agency of selves that establishes language learners' own understanding of the world and their surroundings, which are seen as not being entirely controlled by their context. The core of the theories centres on learners as actors in their context who have distinguishing features such as their reflexivity and the capacity to choose among a variety of options based on their self-knowledge and awareness. Therefore, because language learners' agency is the central idea behind all the theoretical perspectives adopted above, I integrated sociological theories with the perspectives above to help me analyse learners' agency more thoroughly, thus providing a nuanced understanding of their social activities within their social environment.

In fact, Ushioda, in her person-in-context theory (2009), called for the integration of her theory with multiple theoretical perspectives to obtain in-depth insights specifically in relation to L2 possible selves. As she stated, "By integrating a range of relevant theoretical frameworks to inform our analysis of interaction processes relational contextual phenomena, we may enrich and diversify our understanding of how motivation shapes and is shaped through engagement in L2 related activity and the engagement of identities and engagement with possible selves." (p.225). Although she did not place one theory over another, she drew attention to the significance of social theories that could help position learners as agents in their context, particularly theories that help contextualise language as a social action through the interaction between agency and social structure. This is because her approach centres primarily on "the intentional agency of real people embedded in an intricate and fluid web of social relations and multiple micro-and-macro-contexts." (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.354). The theory is mainly concerned with the dynamic process that

entails learners being assessors and knowledgeable of social conditions, in which they see themselves as future language users based on their knowledge. All of these ideas within her theory led her to believe in the potential contribution of integrating her approach with a sociological perspective to obtain in-depth insight.

Therefore, I employed two social theories in this thesis that align with her person-in-context, namely, the DPS and the CSLL. I adopted the structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and gender as a social structure theory (Risman, 2004) as complementing theories since the latter originated from the former. While Giddens discussed human agency on a broad level, Risman placed her focus mainly on agency in relation to gender, which is the focus of this study. In alignment with the theoretical perspectives above, both theories agree on key concepts that exist in the preceding theories, such as the non-linear relationship between people and their context, in which external elements are internalised into them, shaping their identity constantly through dynamic interactions. Both theories also believe in the dynamics of contexts as a result of dynamic internalised processes of knowledge. Giddens saw social systems as constantly replicated and changed because they exist in people's thoughts, who act based on those thoughts. Risman also theorised that gender is a dynamic social structure in which people interact continuously with their societies based on internalising cultural knowledge. She also viewed both gender and agency as dynamic fluid systems located within individuals, similar to the other theories outlined above. In the following sections, I introduce these two theories with an explanation of how they function with the theories above in a consistent way and how they informed and guided this study.

4.5 The Structuration Theory

Giddens' structuration theory (1984) argued against theories that are not concerned with humans' reflexivity and their interpretations of their own lives. He aimed to shed light on how people and society interact interdependently, in which they continually influence and shape one another. Since social structures are not contrary to agency but rather necessary for it, Giddens rejected individualism and the deterministic conceptions of social structure that were widely accepted in social sciences. In his theory, society is neither solely the result of people's actions nor is it an outside entity that controls people's behaviours. Instead, society is seen as a continuous process that is developed from human interactions and behaviours. While social structure acts on individuals, individuals also act on their social structure, reproducing and transforming it through their acts.

Giddens viewed structures as laws, standards, and tools that direct behaviours in society and create social systems that are unstable, conflicting, and somewhat overlapping. Such structures, in his view, are acknowledged in social systems and in people's thoughts, in which those structures are constantly replicated and changed by individual behaviour, making them fluid. Consequently, the term structuration, according to the theory, suggests a dynamic historical process. It combines structure and agency to provide flow, continuity, and the potential for structural change. When agents utilise the various rules and tools available to them in their systems, they reproduce or modify the structural principles that initially arranged their actions. Social systems are formed when people participate in regular activities and continue to interact with one another over time. While people use structures to interpret their social environment and set their behaviour, they influence the replication or modification of those structures by their behaviours.

In this regard, Giddens used the term 'duality of structure' to describe this constant interplay between people and structures. The duality of structure suggests that human behaviours are both enabled and constrained by structures as they either facilitate or restrict human actions. Understanding this idea is essential to comprehending how social systems are dynamic and how agency shapes them. Giddens' theory simultaneously permits notions of constraining and enabling, demanding that institutional embeddedness be addressed to comprehend social activity. He also rejected the sense of constraint applied in traditional social theories, arguing that structure is made up of more than just the unequal distribution of resources and the power of ideological dominance. Instead, the structure provides the means for action as well as the guidelines that direct it, making it both constraining and enabling. Consequently, the theory makes a balance between the function that actors play and their constrained choice of a historical and social context in which they find themselves.

Despite people's limited control over their actions, they enable the formation of social structure through the application of established values and norms reinforced by societal acceptability. People generally exhibit a high level of consciousness in terms of both discourse and practice, in which they have the capacity to articulate the motivations behind their actions. They are more aware of their practices than they realise, and they continuously assess and modify them to suit their goals, despite the fact they may not always be clear. Actors are able to make decisions that might ultimately prove to be successful because of their conscious activities. Therefore, in Giddens’s view, the social structure directs people to act despite the existing constraints in their society, enabling them to follow or reject social obstacles.

In this sense, individuals generally have control and power over their lives even with social constraints, allowing them to make decisions; however, they are not entirely free

decisions. According to Giddens, agency is strengthened by having control over resources, which can refer to material aspects like wealth or symbolic aspects like education and social status. Peoples' control over resources is expressed by adhering to or refusing those resources or rules that make up the structural characteristics of social systems, where there are general system principles that mandate structures. Within the framework of structuration theory, rules encompass not only legally mandated practices, but also informal routines, habits, procedures, or conventions. The more structural resources someone possesses and the more rules they are able to negotiate, the more agency they have. As a result, power comes from resources.

In this light, Giddens defined power as the capacity to shape the laws and resources that govern social behaviour. He positioned people as agents capable of creating and preserving social systems, intervening in the outer world, and rejecting such influence. In this sense, being an agent entails having the ability to employ a variety of casual powers, such as the ability to influence others, making actions dependent on a person's ability to alter an existing social situation. When agents are no longer able to influence events or when they are no longer powerful, they do not exist (Giddens, 1984). However, in Giddens's view, this power is only enhanced by people's awareness and knowledge. That is, it is an action carried out by agents when they have the knowledge of a specific result or quality of that act. This knowledge of the outcomes is what pushes individuals to pursue particular behaviours, either following or resisting social constraints.

In this study, I dealt with female English learners involved as agents, conscious and knowledgeable of the surrounding circumstances and the way they managed their situations. I positioned them as powerful individuals who had the ability to control their situations, either by meeting or resisting rules, and who intentionally assessed, acted on, and

negotiated with the available resources. I also viewed them as powerful despite the social constraints in their environment, considering their conscious interaction with social systems and their acceptance and rejection of norms.

The methodological implications of structuration and duality could appear intimidatingly comprehensive. Specifically, structuration requires us to engage deeply with the present while simultaneously understanding the past, whereas duality implies giving equal weight to both structure and agency. In terms of analysis, Gidden drew attention to both, analysing behaviour, which involves actors utilising their structural regulations and resources in their social interactions, and institutional analysis, which focuses on comprehending the institutional contexts over time. Therefore, aligned with my claims in Chapter 2, I considered the historical process of learners' identity, taking their past and present into account to examine their social behaviours in relation to their future L2 vision. In terms of analysis, while I focussed on their behaviours, I also considered comprehending the institutional contexts and their change over time to obtain an in-depth analysis of learners' interaction with social dynamics and understand how their L2 selves developed through this process.

While Giddens highlighted the interplay between agency and social structures, the process, according to Risman (2004), is driven by one's sense of his/her gender in society, leading people to interact with their social structure in accordance with their surrounding gender constraints. In the following section, I present Risman's theory, drawing also on Block's (2013) social class theory to help me analyse my data, since Saudi Arabia gender policies are mostly based on the economy, as outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

4.6 Gender as a Social Structure

Employing Giddens' structuration framework, Risman (2004) provided a feminist understanding of gender from this sociological perspective in order to examine the dynamicity of gender. She built her theory on Giddens' idea of the recursive relationship between humans and social structure and their simultaneous formation of each other. She employed his view of the capacity that people have in their society, their reflexivity and interpretation of their own lives, as well as the establishment of social structures through human activity rather than uncontrollable forces. She also adopted his perspective that people follow structure for their own purposes and that they are not trapped in their social structures since they act within various possibilities. Therefore, her gender as a social structure theory considers the ways in which the structure of gender limits individuals and their agentic choices, while also giving them possibilities at the same time. She also posited that the limited possibilities that people choose from are what shapes and reshapes gender structure over time through their continuous choices. In addition, she put forward the notion that societal structures influence individuals' behaviour and their social interactions, enabling the change of their gender over time.

Accordingly, gender in Risman's theory is not viewed as a system of an individual trait but a system of social relationships and hierarchies that organises and shapes the lives of individuals. According to her, gender is deeply rooted in societal structures, norms, and expectations rather than being exclusively about personal identities or behaviours. It is a system consisting of various relational components, including micro and macro levels, that construct gender in a society. These levels interact dynamically with gender, constantly shaping the gendered self of individuals as they are internalised and located within their self-system, resulting in the multitude of gendered selves over time, which aligns with the theories above. In this sense, gender is a dynamic notion that interacts with other systematic

elements and changes from time to time through complex interactions. Therefore, as she clarified, "We need to build a full picture of the complexity of gender as a structure. We need to use empirical research to study the alternative strength of individual selves versus cultural expectations versus organisational design, as explanations for particular questions, or moments in time, or particular dependent variables." (p.32).

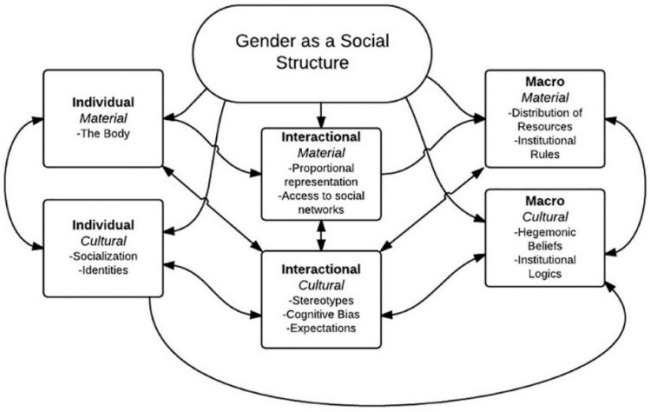
Her theory of gender as a social structure encompasses three levels of analysis: individual, interactional, and macro analysis, which are intertwined in shaping the structure of gender. The individual level is concerned with the development of the self and the cultural internalisation that shapes possibilities, options and constraints for people creating their gendered selves. This includes one's understanding of what is assigned to his/her gender, which comes from cultural knowledge and is as an external element. The received internalised knowledge includes informing individuals about their gender expectations, gender stereotypes, and gender roles established as gender norms. These historically established norms dictate how people need to act in accordance with what they believe to be their gender. Clearly, this level of the theory is consistent with the theory of conceptualising the complex system as the language learners. Both theoretical perspectives agree on the interconnection between the external and internal world, in which contextual elements are internalised into one' self-system.

The second level, the interactional level, involves the material conditions that form expectations and stereotypes in societies, which determine people’s actions. At this level, men, typically holding privileged positions and positions of power, while women frequently experience marginalisation. According to Risman, this level is connected to the individual level above because people interact with others based on their gender perceptions, which are received and internalised from their cultural knowledge. She stated, "Every time we encounter another human being, or even imagine such an encounter, the expectations that

are attached to our sex category become salient to us and whether we meet such expectations or not, we are held accountable by ourselves and others" (p.32).

The third level, the macro level, is concerned with the larger systems and the institutional domains that form the ideology of gender, in which resources are distributed unequally. The economic system, for example, generates identities and experiences for individuals, distributing inequality and power relations among people in a society (Block, 2013). Block provided a nuanced analysis of how identities are deeply embedded in the economic system. Intersecting with other macro socio-cultural factors, economy-based politics reinforces specific expectations, privileges, and disparities contributing to shaping social order, in which men and women shape their conception of who they are through their understanding of their position in society. It also affects their life opportunities, including language learning. He emphasised that language learners are categorised into specific social classes, which affects their access to resources, opportunities, and the types of L2 language identities they develop. Language learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds can have more possibilities of learning languages from multiple sources, such as the opportunity to travel abroad and being exposed to varied linguistic environments, compared to those from the lower social class who may have limited access to language learning and materials. Because larger systems supported by government and law are dynamic and constantly change depending on the global political situations, language policies, practices, and ideologies are not static but shift as laws and policies-based economics shift.

According to Risman, all three levels in her framework interact with one another within individuals, socially shaping and reshaping gender through dynamic interrelations, as presented in the graphs below.



Gender as a Social Structure (Risman, 2018, p. 31)

Within her analytical framework, Risman places her focus on the agency of individuals, which is at the core of her theory. She argues that within this recursive relationship among the three levels, people act on these levels, reforming and modifying the structure of gender. That is, people are not trapped by their social structure, but they act within various possibilities regardless of their limits. It is always feasible for people to resist gendered expectations and stereotypes as cultural components, enabling them to modify gender structure through their reactions. Although both women and men are frequently forced into different social roles, they do occasionally choose gendered pathways within their imagined possibilities, leading them to meet or resist gender norms, depending on their personal interests.

They can resist not only gender norms, but also other ideologies in the social environment, such as language ideologies. Block (2013) argued that despite structural constraints established by the macro levels, people have agency in their language practices in bilingual or multilingual contexts and deal with their linguistic identities in complex ways influenced by their socioeconomic status. He investigated how students could learn a language to challenge or negotiate the identities enforced by their social order. Depending on learners' class position, language learning may enhance or challenge social inequalities. In addition, while learners may challenge dominant language ideologies, they may preserve others.

This is because people, in general, have the ability to make decisions and choices even when the surrounding constraints are constantly structuring their identities. Within the limitations people face, they try to make the best decisions for themselves, changing their identities over time through their actions. Risman suggested that gender identity change would not occur without people's agency, making them producers of their gender through their dynamic social interaction. At the same time, Risman denied that people have free will, standing on Giddens' perspective that the function of social context, norms, and power as a source of constraint would go unnoticed if agency were to be defined solely in terms of free will. Agency comes from one's position in a society that gives individuals choices; however, it imposes barriers caused by culture, religion, law, economic systems, traditions, assumptions, family and other relationships that shape regulations, ideologies, possibilities and people's sense of themselves.

Adopting this theory in this research, I viewed gender as a social construct (re)produced by the external context internalised in the language learners, establishing perceptions about themselves as females in their self-concept, thus creating their gendered selves. In addition, aligned with my considerations above, I also considered the existence of a variety of gendered selves due to the dynamicity of gender, resulting in a variety of self-concepts that produce identities constantly. Furthermore, I considered the interaction of L2 selves with the various gendered selves that emerge over time. Similar to the theories above, I also considered the fluidity of agency as all other target systems in this study. In this regard, I defined agency in this study as female language learners' capacity to continuously "make decisions and take actions based on their assessment of the constraints imposed by the gender ideologies operating in a particular context and the opportunities afforded by the gendered norms associated with a particular context." (Sung, 2023, p.93).

Overall, applying dynamic theories as a framework for understanding the target issue not only deepened my conceptualisation of the research problem as dynamic, but also influenced my decision to adopt a dynamic methodological approach. The intricate ideas about nonlinearity, situatedness, embeddedness, emergence, social interactions, adaptation, fluidity, and interconnections all call for the employment of narrative inquiry as an intertwined approach with the complex dynamic systems, which plays a vital role in revealing complex processes, including those I considered and adopted above. In the following chapter, I discuss my employment of narrative inquiry as a dynamic approach in alignment with my theoretical framework.

4.7 Conclusion of the Chapter

This chapter provided a set of interdisciplinary consistent theories I applied as the theoretical framework of this study. The framework positioned language learners within their context as active participants engaged in a continuous interplay with their social environment. This interplay revolved around interconnected external and internal elements that shaped learners' identities and future L2 selves. In addition, in alignment with the theoretical framework, the chapter elaborated on how the theories methodologically underpinned this study, guiding my methodological considerations and application of the narrative inquiry as an approach intertwined with the complex systems. I discussed how the nature of narratives as a complex and dynamic approach can facilitate examining complex systems, arguing that using narrative as a complex and dynamic methodological approach would enable me to apply my complex theories at the practical level.

However, I did not only intend to apply the narrative inquiry as a complex methodological approach, but also design a whole complex dynamic methodology, from the research philosophy to the strategy to the approach to the methods to the practice, all of

which adhered to my complex theoretical framework above. I did so in order to make the whole research methodology consistent with my theories and thus build a solid theoretical stance for my methodological choices and applications. I also did so to ensure that I put forward my complex theories, making them visible in an effective and sufficient way. In the following chapter, I present my dynamic research methodology, providing detailed descriptions and justifications for each of my methodological selections. I also explain and justify the research procedures, as well as present my dynamic roles as a reflexive qualitative researcher.

Chapter 5 A Dynamic Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

Guided by the theoretical framework introduced in the previous chapter, the present chapter outlines the research methodology underpinning this research. It demonstrates how my dynamic theories fully guided the dynamic methodological stances I adopted from the philosophy to the strategy, to the approach to the methods. It also outlines the entire dynamic research process, from data collection to analysis to interpretation.

The chapter starts by introducing the research philosophy, describing how each adopted theoretical perspective has influenced my choice of social constructionism as a philosophical stance. The following section explains my position as a researcher and the way I manage the subjective nature of my study. Following that, the chapter moves on to present the methodological considerations, including the research strategy, approach, methods, and sample, justifying each one of these considerations. The following sections describe the research procedures, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, explicitly communicating all my research practices in order to make them visible to the reader. Finally, the last sections present the validity and reliability of this study, which discuss my pilot study, thick description, and ethical considerations.

5.2 Research Philosophy and Paradigm

Primarily, there are two critical assumptions of research philosophy that must be considered in research: ontology and epistemology. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ontology addresses the nature of reality, while epistemology is concerned with how reality is known and what is accepted to be knowledge. They explained how these philosophical assumptions are often employed through different interpretive frameworks called research

paradigms, defined as a set of beliefs that direct the practice of any research. These beliefs often guide the selection of specific stances and methods to be adopted in research. They also inform investigators about what must be studied and accomplished and how findings can be interpreted (Bryman, 2016). In this research, I took the position of social constructionism, its ontology and epistemology guiding the process of this study. In the following section, I present the social constructionism paradigm in detail and how it was carefully selected in accordance with my theoretical framework that fully guided this selection.

5.2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism rejects the traditional view of knowledge as being non-reflexive in nature, adopted by positivists. It takes a critical stance towards the taken-for-granted knowledge about the social world and human nature (Galbin, 2014). In addition, it holds the ontological position that there can never be a final truth or one true account of social issues. Realities are local and multiple, produced by human interactions and practices in their society. Since there are many different versions of events and things that emerge over time, there is no definitive answer to questions related to human nature and social phenomena (Burr, 2015).

Social constructionism considers truth to be a product of a specific historical period and cultural location. It maintains that it is the historical processes of interaction and negotiation between social groupings that create our understanding of the world. That is, people actively create their conception of the world and their place in it through language and social interaction, in which aspects of history, culture, and power dynamics interplay in this process (Burr, 2015). Since knowledge is socially created, reality varies over time and space.

In addition, social constructionism pays attention to the ways that our shared language shapes and creates experiences and perceptions, reflecting the views of the prevailing groups. From the perspective of this stance, identities like gender are socially produced by cultural and social discourse. They are constructed and understood in a dynamic manner throughout space and time, in which the institutional and organisational patterns of a social structure are reflected in what it means to be a male or female (Burr, 2003). Because of social dynamics and power relations, marginalisation occurs in systems, practices, and situations influenced by social dimensions. Thus, epistemologically, knowledge is created by social, political, economic, and cultural factors established over time (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022).

Social constructionism's epistemology provides the foundation for the construction and embodiment of knowledge in a critical paradigm towards a reality shaped by economic, social, and political values that socially form discourse. As a social construct, discourse allows people to create knowledge among themselves, and it is tied to their interaction with their social environment (Braun & Clark, 2022). In terms of research, this means that theory is what is brought from the analysis and supported by the data as well as the theoretical knowledge that demonstrates the claims.

While there are different versions of social constructionism, moderate social constructionist approaches go beyond the traditional ones that focus on the construction of reality within a particular contextualised discourse, in which participants position themselves in conversations to suit a specific purpose (Willig, 2021). Unlike those approaches, the moderate approaches go on to seek connections between the discursive construction of a localised reality and the wider socio-cultural context within which it takes place. They do not concentrate on the current discourse given by people in a specific localised text but

construct a reality outside the original text, considering the larger picture of various micro levels of social aspects like culture, society, organisation and laws (Willig, 2021). Specifically, they expand their interest to look at the larger culture and the dominant wider discourse surrounding people. They believe that within a particular larger discourse context, society is the result of human interactions, which can be both enabling and constraining (Gemignani & Peña, 2007).

In this sense, the notions of the self and identity within this stance are socially constructed within a larger discourse that positions people in societies. Thus, for constructionists taking this approach, "the notion of ideology and its analysis are crucial to understanding discourse as the origin of the social construct" (Gemignani & Peña, 2007, p. 280). Undoubtedly, because this study considers the wider social environment and the dominant discourse, I took the stance of this moderate perspective, which informed my approach to conducting the data analysis and interpretation and is explained later in this chapter. By taking this stance, I was able to look closely at the discursive development of the selves, including L2 possible selves, their dynamicity, and the consequential social behaviours.

My decision to adopt social constructionism as the research philosophy was not a decision that I made quickly. I went on a journey before I began to believe in its appropriateness for my study. In the following section, I explain the process I went through that led me to choose social constructionism and how I came to think of it as the most effective paradigm for the nature of this complex study.

5.2.2 Finding My Way to Social Constructionism

Despite the fact that my theoretical framework fully informed my choice of social constructionism, I did not initially consider this paradigm. Prior to undertaking the data collection, I conducted a pilot study (explained later in this chapter) to ensure the validation of my research tool. When I entered the field, I held a constructivist stance, believing in the notion of L2 selves as a psychological aspect constructed through language learners' personal experiences. However, after immersing myself in the data I obtained from the study, I shifted my stance. The data showed that the language learners I had met constructed their L2 selves through their interaction with their social environment and the larger gender discourse surrounding them. Accordingly, I re-thought my research, causing me to explore sociological perspectives, although I was still not thinking of social constructionism.

After reflection, I developed my theoretical framework (as explained in the last chapter), which was carefully informed by my data. Spending time developing and navigating through my dynamic theories allowed me to engage deeply with them as I endeavoured to fully understand their perspectives. The further I dug deeper into my theories, the more social constructionism I found embedded in them; it was presupposed in my theoretical framework. Specifically, at the finalisation stage of writing my theoretical framework, I realised that each dynamic theory I brought to this study is at the heart of this paradigm. In the following paragraphs, and to justify my philosophical choice and stance, I discuss how each dynamic theory I adopted in this study informed my understanding of the need for applying this paradigm by demonstrating the strong consistency of those theories with this paradigm.

As indicated in the last chapter (See Section 4.2), the person-in-context theory suggests that there is an interrelationship between the L2 self, identity, and context where language learners live and are part of. The theory suggests that context is integral to learners' identity and that learners play a vital role in the language learning process, as they act on their context and interact with social elements (Ushioda, 2009). Thus, as mentioned, the theory emphasises positioning learners as individuals existing in particular cultural and historical contexts that are relational to their identity and self, as well as considering the specificity of time and space. In social constructionism, people are seen as integral to their context. It takes the same view that humans are integral to cultural, political, and historical development situated in a specific time and place, in which their psychological processes, like identity and self, are shaped in social and temporal contexts across cultural boundaries (Galbin, 2014).

DPS theory (see Section 4.3) discusses the notion that the L2 selves are dynamic concepts that constantly interact with the social conditions surrounding learners, causing their change over time as learners' awareness and knowledge develops (Henry, 2015). One of the most significant features of social constructionism stands on the dynamicity of societies that causes changes in individuals' selves over time. Burr (2015) explained that within social constructionism, social conditions within which people construct themselves differ and transform from time to time and from one place to another, making our identities and selves subject to constant flux.

In this sense, and in alignment with the CSLL adopted in this study (see Section 4.4), social constructionism seems to conceptualise people as a complex system in which societies as external systems are internalised into them, interacting with their psychological processes as internal systems. Similarly to the CSLL, social constructionism places an emphasis on the

complexity and interconnectedness of various dimensions that people have within their communities, in which their psychological world continuously interacts with those dimensions (Burr & Dick, 2017). Thus, consistent with the theory, social constructionism sees humans' internal world as susceptible to change over time, as they always respond to social dimensions and their transformation. Both perspectives appreciate the selves as being situated within time and space while constantly undergoing dynamic development influenced by one's understanding.

Regarding structuration theory (see Section 4.5), the main core of Giddens's theory, as mentioned, is the interdependent relationship between people and their societies, in which both re-shape each other continuously, recognising the role of people in constructing their societies. Giddens maintained that while social structure acts on individuals, individuals also act on their social structure, reproducing and transforming it through their acts. In social constructionism, societies are not an objective reality independent of their people. Instead, they are generated and maintained through individuals' practices (Galbin, 2014). Every organisation originates from human activity, specifically from the way people interact with each other and from the ongoing reconstruction brought by their knowledge, beliefs, and ideas.

Finally, regarding gender as a social structure theory (see Section 4.6), the theory demonstrates that people's gendered identities are produced by their societies through the surrounding gender discourse. As discussed, gender discourse as cultural knowledge internalised in people's self-system provides people with an understanding of what is appropriate or not. Because of the changes in the discourse over time, gendered identities are dynamic and fluid, as people receive new gender knowledge from the emerging

discourse. At the same time, the theory demonstrates that people are social actors who produce their society through meeting and resisting gender constraints.

In social constructionism, discourse is the heart of this paradigm. It takes the position that people construct their identities and position themselves in their societies within a discourse that constructs individuals based on power (Burr & Dick, 2017). This includes gender discourse that places women and men in a particular position by providing them with specific perspectives on the world and an affordance of what is acceptable or appropriate from that subject's position (Burr, 2015). People's interactions with their surroundings, their reactions to social conditioning, and the constraints and boundaries they experience are created by other people's interpretations and meanings according to this paradigm. At the same time, it also holds the stance that although an individual is subject to gender discourse, he/she is "a psychological, agentic subject who acts" on the discourse (Burr, 2015, p.226). It views discourse as maintained or changed by people's practices in societies through their knowledge, beliefs, and ideas that guide their acceptance and resistance of discourse (Galbin, 2014). Thus, social constructionism believes that gender identities are multiple and are formed and distributed across different versions of discourse due to the dynamic nature of societies in which people interact (Burr, 2015), which is also consistent with Risman's idea.

In short, both the theoretical framework and social constructionism take a dynamic stance, believing in dynamic complex relationships, their interconnectedness, the ongoing state of selves, the role of human agency, and the mutual co-relationship between selves and contexts, as well as the impact they have on each another.

A key characteristic of social constructionism is that reality is solely interpreted and understood by humans. Because knowledge is contextualised, situated, and mediated by the

viewpoint of the knower, the generated knowledge is built on the subjective views of the researcher. (Braun & Clark, 2013). Therefore, researchers' beliefs, values, and interests, as well as the environment in which they conduct their research, all influence knowledge and cannot be eliminated from the process. Therefore, because of its subjective nature, it is demanded that social constructionists be held accountable for their own reflexivity (Burck, 2005). In this research, I carefully considered my reflexivity, not only because of my social constructionist stance, but also because of my position as an insider researcher, which also required an acknowledgement of my subjectivity. Thus, before I move on to discuss and justify my research strategy and methods, I discuss my position and my chosen ways of applying reflexivity.

5.3 My Positionality

Insider research refers to studies in which scholars do research with individuals, communities, and identity groups that they are also part of (Gelir, 2021). In this research, I positioned myself as an insider researcher who was a member of the research context, acknowledging my subjectivity and admitting the influence of my own personal, cultural, and historical experiences on my interpretation of the data. As a Saudi female researcher, I share the same language, culture, society, religion, gender, and nationality as the female participants involved in this study.

Positioning myself as an insider researcher was very helpful in this study. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argued that the full membership position grants researchers a degree of legitimacy. It escalates participants' engagement and allows their complete acceptance, thus facilitating more open communication with researchers. As a result, it can enhance the depth, honesty, faithfulness, and authenticity of the data. Furthermore, it is useful in simplifying the research projects in various ways, as the researcher has knowledge about the

issue and the participants. It also allows the researcher to build rapport with the participants more easily, making them comfortable and engaged, thus minimising the harm (Cormier, 2018). More importantly, because this study addresses Saudi females' gendered identity, which is a sensitive issue, being an insider researcher was beneficial when studying such a sensitive topic. Aléx and Hammarström (2008) pointed out that in feminist qualitative research, participants may perceive interviews as a kind of abuse regardless If the researcher's intentions are good. As a Saudi female insider researcher with a shared identity, experience, and characteristics as the participants, the participants could feel more comfortable and open to expressing their gender identity and sharing their experiences as female language learners in their local context.

In this study, being an insider researcher allowed my participants to engage in gender-related issues, as they were able to perceive me as someone who could relate to their stories. In general, during the interviews, the participants felt comfortable talking to me, which I believed was because of my insider position. I also sensed that their awareness of us sharing common characteristics as Saudi women helped them to perceive me as someone who would not judge or reveal their stories outside the scope of my study. They expected me to know most of the issues they mentioned and the nature of the culture in Saudi Arabia. They frequently used phrases like "you know the life here" [Tahani]; *"as you know", "of course you know what I am talking about", [Maram]; "I think we have both experienced similar situations", [Haifa'a]; "Of course, you remember that" and "otherwise, you and I would not have been able to be at the University of Southampton at this time" [*Nawal]*.*

However, this does not mean they had decided to fully reveal all the details of their stories to me during the interview. Rather, they told those stories as a result of my interaction with them to produce those stories. During the interviews, I perceived

every interviewee as an active subject who modified and mediated reality during the interview process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). As a result of this collaborative interview process between both of us, their stories developed new and detailed meanings (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I believe that concentrating on the interview process rather than their outcomes was essential in order to allow my participants to report, defend, and justify their stories, including their controversial identities. I wanted to give them the space to reflect on their stories and, thus, draw on significant themes. It also allowed me to examine the responses that varied and contradicted others to ensure I obtained multiple perspectives related to the issue being examined. That is, I did not participate in the interview process simply as a listener who took notes and recorded answers. Instead, I played a significant role in the interview process, by listening carefully and providing guidance and direction to the interviewees.

Although there are advantages of being an insider researcher, I am also aware of the drawbacks this position can bring. Researchers' over-familiarity with a context and their prior knowledge about the issue can lead them to take things for granted, accepting their incorrect assumptions as correct, thus decreasing the trustworthiness of the research (Unluer, 2012). Indeed, Creswell (2007) warned insider researchers to be aware that their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences might influence how individuals make meaning of their surroundings. Being aware of this issue, as well as my awareness of my constructionist stance, I applied reflexivity to manage and systemise my subjectivity as an insider constructionist researcher, which I explain later in this section.

Although I considered myself an insider researcher belonging to the same community as my participants, I also positioned myself as an outsider, which affected my views and the research process. To clarify, I sometimes found I was an outsider in terms of the participants' culture, despite the fact we both belong to the same community. This is

because, at the time of collecting the data, I had spent the previous ten years outside Saudi Arabia (between the US and the UK) for educational purposes. Therefore, I was sometimes surprised by the stories, specifically elements related to the change in gender culture in the country, that the participants shared, although I was aware of this shift. Because I had not personally witnessed or lived with through those changes while studying abroad, I was not fully aware of the new gender culture taking form in my own society that they described in their stories. Therefore, I shifted my previously held view of myself as someone knowledgeable of my participants' culture and the research context to someone who was less knowledgeable and seeking more information to obtain the full picture of the participants' lives. I also changed my views on the participants themselves, which affected my research. Based on my personal experience as a woman who had lived under very strict gender rules in the past, I first viewed all of my participants as women who had experienced some degree of gender inequality which had impacted their English learning experiences. For this reason, my theoretical lens was based on intersectionality theory. However, after hearing about the advantages and high status that my participants enjoy as a result of the recent reforms in the country that I had not personally experience, I shifted my lens, viewing them as women who have advantages and are enjoying a high position in their society.

From these insider and outsider positions, I took on multiple roles in various situations in addition to my fixed role as an Arab, Saudi, Muslim female. Since my study involved participants from different generations and at different levels of education (PhD English students and undergraduate English students), I identified myself differently in each group. With the postgraduates, I identified myself as a PhD student, to connect with them on the same level. As they told their stories, drawing on their teaching experiences in their home country, I also identified myself as an English teacher. I sometimes also presented myself as a wife and mother to encourage them to engage further when they told stories about their

children and family life. I also identified myself as a single mother in the UK when talking to those in a similar situation. On the other hand, I did not play the role of a PhD student or a mother when talking to the undergraduates, as they were all young single students. Rather, I identified myself as an English student like them to reduce the power relations and give them a sense of belonging.

Because positionality in research requires reflexivity, I carried out this study from a reflexive position, which required me to be aware of the participants' cultural, political, and social surroundings, as this could influence the research process. Patiño-Santos (2019) defines reflexivity as "giving a systematic account of the kind of questions we ask and the approaches to collecting the data, the analysis of which will allow us to answer our initial questions, questions that might be modified by the contingencies of the fieldwork and analytical process" (p.214). Reflexivity is a set of ongoing various procedures that researchers use to critically question, analyse, assess, and determine how their subjectivity and environment affect their research procedures. In this research, I practiced reflexivity by showing my dynamic role as a researcher, delivering my continuous reflections on the whole research process from theories to practice. In this thesis, I present the principles I followed, the decisions I made, the rationale behind my methodological choices, data collection, analytical procedures, and my method of interpreting the data. I also show all the practical shifts that took place and my reasons behind such shifts. In short, I deliver my constant methodological awareness throughout this chapter in order to maintain the validity and trustworthiness of this research.

This, however, is not an attempt to be neutral because it is impossible to be neutral from the knowledge I have gained from this kind of subjective study. Patiño-Santos (2019, p.214) stated that "research is not a neutral act, but the product of the social relations and practical conditions under which we conduct our fieldwork". I applied reflexivity in an

attempt to explicitly articulate and acknowledge my subjectivity, clearly communicating the influence of my own personal, cultural, and historical experiences on my interpretation as a value I brought to my study. Patiño-Santos (2019) demonstrated that reflexivity is significant because interpreting the complex everyday activities of the people under study requires the researcher to draw on their own cultural and interpretive capacities.

After discussing my position and reflexivity, I move on to discuss the research strategy I chose for this study in the following section. In the last chapter, I made it clear that my methodological orientation is qualitative, criticising the existing quantitative research. In the section below, I expand on my justifications for choosing a qualitative approach, describing its consistency with my dynamic theoretical and philosophical stance.

5.4 Qualitative Approach as the Research Strategy

Lune and Berg (2017) defined qualitative research as an approach that "seeks answers by examining various social settings and the groups or individuals who inhabit these settings" (p.15). In their view, this approach examines the way people organise themselves and their environments, as well as how they make meaning of their surroundings "through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth" (p.15). Qualitative research takes the interpretive position that knowledge is heavily influenced by the interpretation and views of individuals in their social settings, making the truth varied and subjective. The central idea behind this kind of research is understanding people's views and interpretations of the world as a critical element to comprehending social phenomena, helping to examine individuals' interpretation of their experiences, the meaning of those experiences and how they form the world around them. Hence, it allows researchers to gather rich, detailed information about people's experiences, viewpoints, and meanings, enabling them to undertake in-depth investigations of complex issues (Lune & Berg, 2017).

In contrast, unlike the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach takes a positivist stance that there is a single truth that can be assessed through scientific methods (Lincoln et al., 2011). It is believed that the study of social reality should follow the same principles and methods as the natural sciences, that is, that there is ultimate objectivity (Bryman, 2016; Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, reality exists independently from the researcher and those being researched.

Until recently, the field of L2 motivation has been widely influenced by quantitative procedures that have taken a positivist stance, isolating learners from their context (Dörnyei, 2020). Although those procedures can adopt context-relevant variables, it cannot shed light on individuals' motivational perspectives or experiences, nor can it provide a comprehensive understanding of how these aspects evolve in dynamic interaction with external social-environmental forces (Ushioda, 2020). Specifically, as Ushioda illustrated, with the emergence of the dynamic system theory in L2 motivation and the shift towards a more contextualised approach, the quantitative strategy fails to address complex systems with their focus on non-linear, adaptive, and unpredictable organic systemic change processes, as that conflicts with these perspectives (Henry, 2015). Because the approach requires the belief in a singular truth, it directs researchers to view variables as fixed rather than as fluid, considering context as a stable distinct environmental variable and a potential predictor of motivation.

Although researchers have attempted to develop alternative statistical procedures to deal with such complexity (e.g., Piniel & Csizér, 2015; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2016), they have yet to offer a holistic perspective on the real-life experiences of language learners as individuals situated in specific socio-historical, cultural, and physical contexts, with complex social and personal histories that affect their future orientations (Ushioda, 2020). Significantly,

considering the highly subjective nature of the L2 self and how learners perceive their current and future possible selves, it would seem more challenging to accurately capture this highly subjective nature through predetermined response choices adopted by positivists. For example, due to the complexity of societies that shape those selves, quantitative methods are limited to exploring the power structures and ideologies deeply embedded in contextual and relational processes, as well as the relational dynamics through which motivation develops and naturally arises in a given societal complex social structure (Ushioda, 2009).

These limitations of the quantitative methods have led to various calls in the literature for more qualitative research in order to gain more insights into L2 motivation related to L2 self and identities (Al-Hoorie et al., 2021; Lamb et al., 2019). Qualitative research in L2 motivation offers a comprehensive view of language learners' lived experiences, taking into account their socio-historical, cultural, and physical contexts, as well as the complicated individual and social histories that shape learners' current motivations and future goals. In terms of theory, qualitative methods are more helpful because they allow researchers to better define the constructs through a grounded exploration and understanding of them in relation to local individual realities and perspectives.

As well as its appropriateness for the aim of this study, the use of a qualitative strategy fits perfectly with my theoretical framework due to the incredible harmony between both. The person-in-context approach adopted in my study was developed based on "a situated, qualitative, interpretive approach, viewing motivation as part of the individual learner's thought processes" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 55). Ushioda's theory mainly focuses on the non-linear relationship between context and language learners, arguing for the need to locate learners in their particular context. Her argument originates based on qualitative perspectives that adopt the same exact stance. While she emphasised

locating learners in their specific context, the qualitative data "are seen to be produced in particular contexts, by participants who come from, and are located within specific contexts." (Braun & Clark, 2013, p.21). Furthermore, as qualitative methods shed light on social phenomena in the wider historical, sociocultural, and institutional contexts, making them effective in understanding the complexity of the possible L2 selves (Mercer, 2016). Thus, the theory cannot be applied from a quantitative perspective, while it is developed from a qualitative perspective. As I explained in the last chapter, this is because quantitative research does not go deeply into the interconnected relationship between context and individuals, even when it considers this relationship (Dörnyei, 2020).

In addition, viewing context as integral to language learners' selves and identities from the stance of the CSLL theory demands an in-depth understanding of the interconnected complex systems located within learners. This deep understanding of context as a relational component of their self-system can only be achieved through the adaptation of qualitative orientations (Mercer, 2016) since quantitative methods consider contextual elements as isolated rather than relational. More importantly, as I pointed out earlier, in order to achieve this deep understanding, one of the research goals was to give my participants a voice to express the contextual factors that existed within them. This voice could only be granted to my participants through the application of a qualitative strategy, as that strategy offered participants the opportunity to share their understanding from their first-person perspectives. This helped in preventing me from having any pre-assumptions I might have imposed on my participants regarding the influence of context, as I claimed earlier, and directed me to examine what they expressed in their own voices.

Furthermore, considering the fluidity of the issues focussed on by my dynamic approaches, I was able to address them sufficiently by employing qualitative procedures,

which would not have been the case with a quantitative approach, as it tend to deal with issues as fixed (Dörnyei, 2020). Unlike the quantitative position that views reality as independent, qualitative research can adjust to the dynamics of both social and psychological constructs, which include identities such as L2 selves. It also helps researchers to comprehend learners' lived experiences as fluid, identifying the ways in which social factors and organisations (re)create meaning and sense.

With respect to agency, built on the co-relationship between language learners and their context and the dynamicity of societies and identities, the sociological theories I employed call for the use of qualitative procedures. This is because quantitative methods do not fully address the dynamic relationship between people and their societies and fail to explore human agency in any great depth. In contrast, a qualitative approach allows for the comprehension of the "dynamic interaction with local social and contextual processes" and learners' social engagements, which allows them to produce "these evolving contextual and relational processes through their own reflexivity and agency" (Ushioda, 2020, p.668).

Moreover, because I focussed on gender in this study, I decided a qualitative approach would be preferable, since that approach has the capacity to offer rich and in-depth data to gain insights into gendered identities. For decades, the qualitative approach has effectively contributed to gender research, particularly studies interested in females (see Hesse-Biber, 2014). The unique contribution of qualitative methods to gender research is their ability to shed light on crucial sensitive issues by giving voices to women involved in the research. In addition, they provide a platform for marginalised groups, such as female learners, to share their experiences and perspectives. As Smilde and Hanson (2018) contended, the qualitative approach "can reveal the complicated and reciprocal processes through which assumptions about gender and sexuality guide interactions, become

embedded in institutions, and differentially affect life chances." (p.334). It also allows for power structures and gender imbalances to be revealed through the examination of how gender functions within social structures, institutions, and power relations, in which issues of equality and access to opportunities and resources can affect present and future selves.

Qualitative methods play a crucial role in observing the construction, negotiation, and contestation of gender norms, roles, and expectations within particular cultural contexts, communities, and institutions. They also enable researchers to delve into the mechanisms by which gender is expressed, experienced, and interpreted in response to social factors, bringing to light the historical, social, and cultural issues that shape L2 self dynamics. Through the collection of different viewpoints and voices, for example, qualitative methods enable scholars to critically examine gender stereotypes and presumptions, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of gender identities, as well as the fluidity and variety of gender experiences. As Smilde and Hanson (2018) elaborated, a qualitative approach is ideal for considering dynamics and examining gender as layers of practices, discourses, histories, and identities that both form and are formed by social elements. It, thus, sheds light on the intricate and mutually reinforcing processes by which assumptions regarding gender shape social interactions, become institutionalised, and have varying effects on life possibilities.

More importantly, unlike quantitative methods that may overlook the interactions between gender identities and other social identities, as well as the distinct psychological and social components that exist within this intersection (Rafael et al., 2009), qualitative methods make it easier to examine how gender intersects and is mutually constitutive with other social identity categories, like religion, economy, and class, and investigate. It also enables researchers to understand how these different dimensions interact with perceptions of gender and shape forms of privilege and discrimination that affect future identities. In short, qualitative methods can reveal the detailed, hidden, complex process of gender in the

learners' environment, making them a suitable choice for examining gender in future L2 selves.

Given these reasons, I chose a qualitative strategy as an ideal approach for considering these complex dynamic systems and examining the different layers of practices, discourses, histories, and identities that both form and are formed by social elements. By incorporating participants' perspectives through qualitative methods, this study can offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the target phenomena, including the various ways in which learners negotiate and make sense of complex issues.

Moreover, using a qualitative strategy is also consistent with my social constructionist stance. It is commonly known that social constructionism is an approach brought from the qualitative school and, thus, it takes an interpretive perspective. Aligned with this school, constructionists focus on how individuals perceive an object or event and the meaning that they attach to it. They are interested in people's perspectives of events, the experiences and meanings they apply to given situations, as well as the context surrounding participants adopting the exact stance of qualitative strategy.

In terms of the research approach, I chose narrative inquiry for designing this study because it has a theoretical and practical focus on the motivational experiences, impacts, and histories that affect students' formation of identities and their vision of the future (Ushioda, 2020). In the following sections, I discuss the narrative inquiry approach, describing the careful decision I made to apply it as a data source, followed by a presentation and justification of the narrative methods I chose for collecting the data for this study.

5.5 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is defined as eliciting individuals' life stories and using them as research data, a source for data analysis and reporting findings (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The main element of this approach is individuals' stories, as participants share their lived experiences and how they make sense of their experiences. The foundation of the narrative lies in the idea that human experience is essentially a story, and that people are storytellers who live out stories (Norton & Early, 2011).

Narrative inquiry has been shown to be a useful tool in L2 research related to language learners' identities (e.g., Benson et al., 2013; Chik, 2014; Giroir, 2013; Simon-Maeda, 2011). This method helps to comprehend how identities are formed and the ways in which the language learning process interacts with various social identities and their formation (e.g., Coffey, 2010; F. Gao, 2011). It helps address how intricately L2 learning and motivational behaviours interact with learners' identities as complex, multiple and in progress (Norton & Toohey, 2011), concerning their agency in which learners are enabled and constrained in their social environment (Norton & Early, 2011).

Specifically, narrative inquiry is increasingly seen as a more insightful approach to studying the identity of gender and understanding both male and female language students' experiences, their thoughts and feelings, their relations with others, as well as the way they discursively create their perceptions (Higgins, 2010; Kutuk, 2023; Pavlenko et al., 2001). It sheds light on how gender ideologies interfere with language learning experiences. Sung's (2023) narrative study, for example, revealed how gender ideologies and expectations affected female L2 learner's experiences and how their investment in the L2 were affected by their negotiation of gendered and imagined identities, in which the participants' gendered agency moderated the impact of gender ideologies on L2 investment. The study

showed the intricate interactions among L2 investment, gendered capital, gender ideologies, and gender identities. Similarly, Menard-Warwick (2004) also used narrative inquiry to investigate the relationship between learning an L2 and gender identities among immigrant women. The narrative data helped the researcher to see how language learning was influenced by how the learners in the study reacted to the gender ideologies that existed in their original context, where they came from, and which were placed on them by their communities and families. In discussing this result, Menard-Warwick argued in favour of narrative methods for comprehending learners' perspectives on their own learning trajectories across many cultural contexts with different gender expectations.

Because of the complexity of gender in terms of its intersection with other social identities, narrative inquiry can also highlight this complex intersection. In their narrative study, Milani and Cashman (2024) found that gender and sexual orientation are interconnected with other identity categories such as age, race, ethnicity, and social class among multilingual learners. Therefore, because gender is a multifaceted system of discursive practices and social relationships that are differently created in different local contexts (Norton & Pavlenko,2004), narratives provide a language-based approach for constructing complex identities and their relationship with the language learning processes.

Besides its focus on the uniqueness of gender identities, narrative inquiry also focuses on comprehending how larger social, historical, and institutional narratives within a given time and place shape and enact individual story experiences. As social artefacts, narrative inquiry teaches us as much about the culture and society of storytellers as their stories contextualise them in their particular context (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). This is in alignment with Ushioda's person-in-context theory. Also, considering the notions of contexts, identities and selves as relational according to her theory, narrative inquiry is an approach that always

brings context as a relational part of one's identity. As Barkhuizen et al. (2014) demonstrated, narrative inquiry is the only approach that accesses the lived experiences of language learners over time in various contexts and settings, bringing identity and context together as major relational themes, thus shedding light on language learners' inner world and their identity in its context. This is due to the high capacity of this approach to situate the language learners in a specific sociocultural and historical context, observing changes in social conditions over time and the influence of these changes in many parts of their lives, including language learning (Murray, 2009). In short, the approach can help reveal the multiple relational elements and the complexity of the target issue, since stories are not personal but complex and relational, best describing who individuals are in the present and the future.

Narratives are integral to complex systems, and they emerge from those systems. By telling stories, people illustrate the systemic behaviours that are inherently complex and emergent. This complexity lies in its association with society, time and space, which brings the relationship components into people's experiences and their future possibilities (Norton & Early 2011). When learners tell their stories, they express places where the actions occur, placing them in the wider sociocultural and political contexts with reference to the timeframe when those actions happened (Barkhuizen, 2008). When doing so, researchers are able to analyse stories in relation to the past, present, and future. Stories address the changing conditions over time and how changes impact aspects of language learners' lives, incorporating the past, as well as changing times, places, complex mental states, and the ways in which they behave and live.

Considering the CSLL theory, narrative expression seen from a psycho-socio-analytical view symbolises both conscious and unconscious cultural, societal, and personal beliefs and

processes. It examines both the inner and the outer worlds of historically evolving persons-in-historically-evolving situations, with a focus on the unexpected interaction between the dynamics of the inner and outer worlds (Dewart et al., 2020). It makes it possible to access lived experiences that extend across boundaries between the individual and society and encompass the past, present, and future.

Notably, as I attempted to understand the context, as internalised in the female language learners (whom I dealt with as a complex system), from the participants' own perspectives, it became evident that narrative inquiry allowed them s to define contextual elements in ways that were relevant to them, thus aligning with this theory. This is because one of the distinctive features of narrative inquiry is its ability to capture the context of the language learners' experiences and their own interpretations of what is contextually important to their learning (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Therefore, the stories allow the role of language learners' context of their language learning to be understood. In this sense, the narrative approach offers a great deal of insight into the decisions that people make throughout their lives and how those decisions change over time, clearly expressing their selves and agency.

Narrative inquiry is also aligned with the social constructionism paradigm applied in this study. There is harmony between both in terms of their stance toward reality, the significance of discourse and social contexts, and the construction of identities. Both see reality as a social product created through social interaction. They emphasise the meaning of experiences that people have either in their reality or imagination rather than focusing on identifying an objective truth. Because of the dynamic of relationships and interactions, reality is dynamic from both lenses due to the continuous change in meanings, and thus the nature of reality.

Within both, reality is also constructed through discourse and social interactions. Both consider discourse crucial in determining how we perceive and interpret the world, in which social and cultural environments play a vital role in determining this interpretation. In terms of identity, it is also constructed according to both stances. In social constructionism, identity is socially constructed and shaped by discourse and social interactions. Through narrative, identity is also shaped by the stories we tell others about ourselves, in which we shape and reshape our identities.

Given the above, I recognised that narrative inquiry could be helpful in bringing my theoretical and philosophical stances into implications, providing a thorough and rich understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between gendered identity with its related motivations and behaviours and L2 vision. It is because of the characteristics of narrative as an effective tool that allows the relationship between learners' identities and their L2 vision to be revealed, through the integration of their thoughts and imagination in an incredible way (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). It enables exploring how contexts, identities, and L2 selves are mutually constitutive and influence one another. This exploration allows for a more holistic view of language learners as individuals living in a particular socio-historical, cultural, and geographical context with complicated social and personal histories that influence their current motivations and goals for the future (Ushioda, 2020). It is, therefore, through the narrative approach that I was able to position my participants as a person-in-context, deal with them as a complex system, and observe their social performances and L2 future orientation in relation to their gender.

Narrative inquiry is consistent not only with my dynamic stance shown above, but with the methodological practices as well. Daiute (2014) provided a comprehensive explanation of the practical dynamicity of narrative in research. She pointed out that narrative is a social

process that not only involves people narrating their stories, but also integrating it with different perspectives of other individuals and experiences. It allows narrators to deal with a social structure to define themselves and the meanings of their surroundings. In this context, Daiute defined narration as the interplay between actors who share perspectives in social and political processes in which stories change as a result of constant feedback loops, interactions, and emergent systemic features. Stories adjust to the shifting conditions and shape the actions of those involved in the system, which enhances their overall dynamics and development. Thus, it is a cultural practice for retelling events and conveying their significance.

Storytelling is embedded in cultural settings and reflects the dynamic interaction between personal experiences and larger cultural frameworks. The storytelling process is influenced by contextual elements such as institutional norms, power dynamics, and social inequality. Cultural norms, values, and beliefs play a role in storytelling and add to the variety of stories both within and between cultural groups. Comprehending these contextual dynamics is crucial to carrying out ethically acceptable and culturally aware narrative research. In other words, narrative inquiry does not only access the lives of the participants, but also the researchers and the ongoing relationships between both. This dynamic exchange shapes the narrative process, influencing the content and meaning of stories.

Because narratives are co-constructed through dialogue and interaction between storytellers and listeners, as well as shaped by a dynamic process, Daiute insisted that narratives call on researchers to be aware of their practice, their own words and the worlds of the people they are working with. Since interviewees are guided by situations, power relations and expectations more than their knowledge about the target issue, they should be

sensitive to the dynamicity of narratives, specifically when examining sensitive issues like gender.

One example that Daiute provided is the examination of gendered identity, specifically role and discrimination. She suggested that because these topics are sensitive, researchers should avoid mentioning direct words like discrimination or gender roles but elicit them indirectly by asking participants to answer from a female perspective. She argued that, in this way, the interviewee can express their ideas by drawing on diverse situations. In this study, I was aware that as well as my consideration of the adopted dynamic theories, I was involved in a dynamic process during the interviews, placing emphasis on my reflexivity as a way of paying attention to these issues. I was also careful when designing my interview questions, ensuring I remained sensitive to the issue of gender as the focus of this study.

Analysing narrative data is also dynamic. According to Daiute, scholars participate in a continuous process of interpretation and reasoning, revisiting and reinterpreting their interpretation of the data. In order to foster the emergence of insightful perspectives and interpretations, Daiute advised researchers to approach analysis with reflexivity and flexibility, which I adopted in this study and demonstrate in the analysis section of this chapter.

Narrative inquiry has three different forms: written, oral, and multimodal narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). This study employed oral narrative, which is defined as a spoken form of narrative that investigates individuals' experiences orally. In the field of L2 language learning, oral narrative is concerned with the experiences of language learning through interviews, which is one of the most common methods used in oral narrative. I hold a social constructionist view, believing that knowledge is constructed . Conducting interviews is one of the most effective ways to construct knowledge, as knowing occurs

during socially negotiated processes. This is because interviews serve as places of social interaction where the interviewee and interviewer collaborate to produce ideas, facts, views, details, and stories and create knowledge (Wicaksono & Zhurauskaya, 2020). Also, as I intended to give a voice to the learners in my study, I regarded interviews as the ideal method, since they could create a space for the participants to express their ideas. In addition, they allowed me to ask follow-up questions to fully understand their stories.

In terms of research methods, I applied the life history interview to gain insights into the language learning history of the participants and their social experiences, which also allowed me to understand the concepts of identities and agency. As a complementing method, I also applied a semi-structured interview to investigate their future L2 vision, all of which are explained and justified in detail in the following sections.

5.5.1 Life History Interview

Barkhuizen et al. (2014) identified different approaches to narrative interviews. They emphasised that in narrative inquiry, the life history approach is the most common narrative interview that addresses the history of language learning as a "long-term language learning experience" (p.17). In the area of language learning, a life history involves the retelling stories of the learner's language learning history, as well as their experiences as a language learner in their social environment (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

In Chapter 2, in which I outlined the changes in gender discourse that had occurred in Saudi Arabia over the last few decades, I made it explicit that my objective was to position my learners within a long time scale. The reason for this was to observe the dynamic of their L2 future selves during a period of tremendous historical transformation. In light of this, I selected the life history interview as a research tool, as it is ideal when focusing on the

particularity and complexity of real-life experiences and historically located subjectivity. Life history interviews focus on investigating an interviewees' life histories, lived events, and individual meanings in their sociohistorical context. It takes narrative inquiry further by going beyond narrative accounts and situating stories in a broader context (Murray, 2009).

Murray elaborated on this in his study, stating that a life history interview locates stories into "cultural, political, familial, educational, and religious spheres", among others, which cannot be separated from the surrounding interesting social factors (Murray, 2009, p.27). He applied the life history approach when studying Japanese students who were learning English in their home country. Collecting their language learning stories, the author noticed that although life history research usually focuses on certain aspects of individuals' lives, it was hard for him to separate the participants' life history from the surrounding sociocultural contexts. As he explained, using the life history approach required him to gain "knowledge of the social, cultural, and even historical contexts in which they are situated" (p. 47). Undoubtedly, this feature of life history was an appropriate tool to help me apply my theoretical and philosophical perspectives and bring them into practice due to its alignment with them, which I demonstrate further in the following paragraphs below.

The life history approach, by its nature, brings components of context, identity, and people to the table as relational, which is consistent with the person-in-context theory. When learners are asked to narrate their language learning history, they invariably include contextual, situational, and cultural components as relational parts of their stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). In addition, the life history approach centres on the relationship between people and the wider social structures they are part of and situates stories of personal experience in their wider social and historical context (Bathmaker & Harnett,

2010). In this sense, it emphasises broader sociocultural processes, historical contexts, and the uniqueness of people in a specific history.

In an expansion of Ushioda's person-in-context, Al Hoorie et al. (2021) argued that to gain an in-depth analysis of Ushioda's framework, language learners need to be positioned in history, so that their identity in relation to their context, which involves capturing their past, present and future in their historical social and cultural context, can be investigated. Explaining their definition of history, they cited Donato and Davin (2018, p. 458) that "the history of a single human being and is situated in relation to one's sociocultural and historical circumstances and the tools that have been derived from one's involvement in situated social practices that are currently used to mediate and regulate mental functioning". The ability of historical events to bring relational components centres on the format of stories as a whole life narrative. Habermas et al. (2023) explained that stories stored in people's memories are expressed in a whole-life format. In addition to the detailed accounts of certain incidents, narrating a life story brings out individuals' long-life chapters, summarising longer periods and describing their relationships and how people's selves evolved and developed.

More significantly, life history interviews serve as an effective tool for comprehending social shifts and the complexity of individuals' lives by examining the events that have led them to this point in time (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010). They enable researchers to track the progression of social changes over time and their effects on people's lives, which can assist in examining the complex and dynamic nature of language learners' selves, as well as any interactions that may arise between their selves and social changes. Furthermore, they provide an understanding of how identities evolve as a response to social changes and how they are distributed through various locations and times (Middleton & Hewitt, 2000). To

clarify, a life history interview becomes a tool that the storyteller can use to create a sense of self or identity, giving the interviewer a deeper understanding of the interviewee's complex world. As a researcher who is interested in understanding this complexity, it was essential to use this historical approach to access my participants history and the historical events that developed their identities. By doing so, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of who they were in the past, who they are in the present, and thus, who they will become in the future.

Moreover, by conceptualising the complex system as language learners, who internalise external context within them, I could understand the integration of context within their identities and selves through their life history by looking at their past, present, and future articulated in their history. Indeed, Mercer (2016, p. 24) pointed out that "We cannot meaningfully make sense of our learners' selves without understanding the contextual (past, present and future) components of their self-system and the meaning that those have for the individual, with an awareness that this open to change". In short, stories are characterised by being internalised and ongoing and can integrate the reconstructed past and envisioned future, creating a sense of coherence and purpose in people's lives (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Taking language learners' agency into account in this study, a life history also deals with life as lived and, thus, considers the relationship between individuals and larger structures in which both interact with one another (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010). It shows how a language learner constructs their own identities over time, how their identities are shaped by larger social understandings, and how societies structure their agency (Coffey & Street, 2008).

Specifically, it informed my understanding of how the female learners involved in my study interacted with the social and cultural environment. Life history interviews are considered particularly relevant to feminist studies that aim to place an emphasis on the subjective experiences of women in their society (Harding, 1987). A life story is a crucial instrument in giving a woman a voice, as it empowers her to share her experiences in society, specifically in the case of marginalised women in society (Norton & Early, 2011). By sharing their stories, women effectively unveil their gender experience and viewpoints, bringing the relationships between them and society and the construction of their gender. It can also place their social arrangements within the larger discourse, highlighting the unique characteristics and constraints as they are currently organised (Brickell, 2006). It also enables the analysis of how gender is perceived and organised in their social and historical context, changes, and their interaction with social factors and norms.

More importantly, because I positioned the female language learners in this study within a long timescale that witnessed changes in gender discourse over the years, as explained in Chapter 2, it was possible to examine the complex interplay between gender and L2 vision through learners' stories. Turina (2018) contended that the complexity of narratives intricately linked to historical comprehension offers valuable perspectives on how stories influence our understanding of the past and our understanding of complex phenomena. Because stories shape our perceptions of the past, we can use them to interpret historical events influencing collective memory and identity, thus making stories a tool for creating and rewriting historical narratives over time. In short, historical accounts are part of dynamic, networked systems that interact with people, societies, and larger historical contexts, resulting from and adding to the complexity of historical processes. Therefore, I strongly believed that it was through the language learners' life histories as an identity project that I could examine how the female language learners involved in this study

could develop their gendered identities in their social environment and how this construction of gender could impact their future L2 vision. In addition, I believed they could highlight the way gender functions in social interactions, relationships, and practices, how an L2 vision is developed through these complex processes and how it interacts with the broad gender discourse and constraints. All of these enabled me to closely analyse the social elements and learners' interaction with those elements, using them as a background to understand L2 future selves, in terms of their development and amendment.

Furthermore, it is evident that exploring the participants' life histories was in line with my social constructionist position. The fundamental idea behind this position, as previously stated, was to place people within a specific historical context while taking into account the dynamics of Saudi society. The life history interviews could, therefore, fully satisfy these requirements given their capacity to place individuals in historical context and analyse the dynamic nature of their social conditions and identities.

I applied the life history interview by compiling a list of questions, which are presented below.

1. Can you briefly tell me about your English learning experience?
2. When did you first start learning English?
3. How did you learn English?
4. Can you tell me more about why you choose to major in English?
5. Can you tell me whether you were encouraged or discouraged in your decision to study English? Why?
6. What are the benefits or goals you want to attain from learning English? Why?

The aim of these questions was to elicit the language learning experience of the participants from the past to the present. Specifically, they were designed to match certain

constructs in my research objectives (see Section 1.4). These constructs included understanding the role of gender and agency. It is essential, however, to mention that during my interviews with the participants, these questions were followed up by various other questions depending on the answers the interviewees gave. For example, when they brought up significant memories that included influential people or turning points, I followed up with how and why questions to extend their response and thus obtain more detail. These follow-up questions included examples such as "I would appreciate it if you could tell me why your family did not want you to study English".

As a complementary narrative method to the life history interview, I also selected a semi-structured interview to obtain an in-depth understanding of the future L2 vision and to dig deeper into aspects articulated in their life history interview.

5.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

In oral narrative, the semi-structured interview is the most common method used by researchers due to its flexibility in following up participants' responses by going back and forth to seek clarification (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). What guided my selection of this complementing method was my pilot study. Initially, I had only planned to conduct the life history interview, by asking about the participants' language learning history and aspects of their identity and L2 vision. Thus, I piloted my study on this basis, however, I realised the difficulty of eliciting detailed information about the learners' context, identity, and future vision by only conducting one interview.

I found that the data elicited about the language learning history needed more space to be fully expressed because they were interrupted by other interview questions I had prepared. I also found that my participants' answers involved many different interesting thoughts that needed to be expanded on and clarified. Although I did ask some follow-up

questions, there were many points they raised during the follow-up interviews that needed clarification, particularly related to their identities.

Notably, the most significant factor that led to me adding the semi-structured interview was that my participants found it exhausting to talk about their experiences and then answer further questions about their vision, as this took from 60 to 90 minutes, which I had not anticipated. Thus, I believed adding a semi-structured interview could help in ensuring my participants did not become exhausted or come to any harm. I came to believe that while the life history interview would allow my participants to express their language learning experience in greater depth, the semi-structured interview would provide me the opportunity space to elicit information about their future L2 vision and accessing their identities in more detail.

I prepared for the semi-structured interview with a list of questions that aimed to match the constructs in my research objective regarding understanding the way that learners visualise themselves and the role of their gender in constructing their future L2 selves. The questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do you think the English language is important in Saudi Arabia?
2. In your opinion, who benefits the most from English in Saudi Arabia, men or women? Why?
3. Can you tell me how English is particularly important for women?
4. How can English help you become important in your society?
5. To what extent do you think the widespread use of English in Saudi Arabia has affected Saudi culture and society?
6. How does it apply to you?
7. How do you see yourself as an English user in the future?

8. In what ways do you see yourself using English in the future?
9. In the past, how did you use to see yourself as an English user in the future?
10. Can you describe how you feel toward these visions?

Similar to the life history interview outlined above, follow up questions were also used during the interviews to extend the participants' answers. It is worth noting, however, that the questions in both interviews presented above were the last edited version, since I made a few changes to the initial questions during the data collection process. This will be explained later in the data collection section. At the same time, despite the changes I made, I attempted to maintain their goal of answering my research questions in accordance with my research objectives.

When discussing the approaches and methods I selected and justifying my choices, I believe it is also essential to present my research design, including the sample, data collection, analytical procedures and interpretation. I explain these procedures in the following sections, giving a rationale for each one of them. First, I discuss the research sample, describing its type and selection method, as well as provide background about my participants. Following that, I discuss the research procedures, explaining how I gathered my data, why I did what I did, how I analysed it, why I analysed it this way, how I interpreted it and why I interpreted it this way.

It is worth mentioning, however, that while I present these procedures separately in different sections below, they did not occur separately. Indeed, Creswell (2007) stated that within the context of qualitative research, processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation are related steps that take place simultaneously with one another. This was the case for this study, as the data collection, analysis, and interpretation were interrelated

and occurred simultaneously throughout the research process. This is shown in the following sections.

5.6 Research Sample

5.6.1 Sampling Method

As I mentioned in the introduction chapter (Section 1.1), enhanced by my knowledge about gender culture in Saudi Arabia, I decided to target Saudi female English learners for the purpose of obtaining rich knowledge about the target issue. Thus, my sample can be described as a purposive sample. "When developing a purposive sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some groups to select subjects" from these groups (Lune & Berg, 2017, p.39). Furthermore, they use reasonable judgement in choosing locations that will assist in purposefully inviting individuals and in achieving the research goals.

The strength of purposive sampling lies in its ability to select cases that provide detailed information for in-depth analysis, therefore, offering unique insights into the issues under investigation. This approach prioritises information richness over representative perspectives, as it aims to build a comprehensive understanding based on the most extensive evidence available, rather than making generalisable statements. In essence, the goal of purposive sampling is to address issues creatively and persuasively by selecting the best, most comprehensive, relevant, wide-ranging, and abundant data available to produce deep insights and understanding.

Although I chose my sample purposively, I thought deeply about their appropriateness to my study, which encouraged this choice. Considering my theories, I came to believe that the target sample would be very effective in serving the purpose of this study. Firstly, I

thought of them as those who are inherently part of the Saudi context, as they were born, lived, and rooted there, which enabled me to situate them in their local context. Secondly, because they have witnessed various social changes in their society, specifically in terms of gender, I believed them to be a valuable group to enrich my understanding of the complexity and dynamicity of L2 vision by analysing those changes. Thirdly, due to the emergence of different gender discourses, they were also able to enrich my understanding of the role of agency in their L2 vision by examining their interaction with different gender discourses and how it impacted their L2 visualisation. Fourthly, my knowledge of my identity as a Saudi female and how gender is shaped in the Saudi society through various social elements (e.g., culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, family, tribe, and social class) enabled them to be positioned in the larger environment when considering the relational contextual elements and their identity. Finally, due to my rich experience of being a Saudi female who was born, raised, and learned English, as well as witnessed various gender discourses over decades, in Saudi Arabia, I believed that this rich knowledge could enrich my understanding of the role of gender in the L2 selves of those in this group, as I was able to draw on my knowledge and experiences when making sense of the data. Cross and Madson (1997) pointed out that understanding one's self requires knowledge of how the self is produced in social contexts where there is a domination of gender norms, as well as how the self and functions in directing suitable responses in situations when gender-appropriate behaviour is expected. At the same time, I was aware that this knowledge should not affect the data analysis through the form of any kind of projection.

5.6.2 Sampling Strategies

Initially, I decided to target a group of Saudi female English postgraduate students in their thirties, examining their L2 vision in the past and the present and understanding how

they constructed their L2 selves over time. However, my pilot study led me to rethink this decision. In the pilot study, the two postgraduate participants I met frequently referred to social changes, which made me believe that adding a group of female English undergraduates could provide greater depth to my study given the considerable age gap between both groups (almost two decades). I believed that targeting two groups who had been born and grown up surrounded by different gender discourses could help me gain an in-depth and rich understanding of the complexity and dynamicity of the L2 vision.

Therefore, by choosing two different groups, my goal was to observe and compare how different Saudi female groups, the under and the postgraduates, construct(ed) their L2 future selves at different times. At the same time, my goal was also to examine and compare the L2 selves among the members of the postgraduate group, as they had had richer experiences in terms of living and being positioned in different gender discourses compared to the undergraduates. In other words, while I examined and compared the L2 vision between the two distinct groups, I did the same with the postgraduate group as a type of data triangulation. Doing so enabled me to deepen my understanding of the role of gendered identity in L2 vision and establish whether the latter as a dynamic concept is affected by the former.

Having made the decisions described above, I also recognised the importance of maintaining an equal number of participants in each group. At the same time, I aimed to ensure variation among all of the participants regarding age, tribes, regions, and university level to enhance the rigour and validity of my research design, thereby obtaining a more comprehensive understanding. To achieve this, I developed a specific sample selection method that targeted learners with these diverse characteristics. As Lune and Berg (2017) suggested, researchers often opt for purposive samples after conducting field research on a

specific population. This ensures that the research addresses specific categories of people with distinct characteristics. In the following section, I outline the approach I used to find a sample that encompassed these varied categories.

5.6.3 Sampling Selection Approach

To obtain participants, I designed an invitation for participation survey through Microsoft Forms (see Appendix A) in both English and Arabic. I translated the survey from English to Arabic to ensure that my participants fully understood the purpose of the study and their rights. The form included three sections: a participation information sheet, a consent form, and the survey. To complete the third section of the survey, the participants had to confirm their understanding of the participants' information sheet on the first page and sign the consent form in the second section by ticking the assigned boxes. Thus, the participants could not confirm their participation until they had read about the study and signed the consent form.

The survey included demographic questions such as their name (first and last), gender, age group, region, major, university level and contact information. I asked for their names to ensure that my participants were from different tribes, which I could ascertain from their last names. As I explained in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), family and tribes play an essential role in Saudi society, and they are crucial features of the gender culture there. I also asked the participants to state their gender to ensure all of my participants were female. Concerning the age group, I wanted to find participants of different ages, as this was one of my key goals in this study, as explained above. I also asked participants to state the subject they were studying at university to ensure they were all English students. As described earlier in my analysis of the literature (Section 3.4), it was necessary to understand why they had chosen to study English, in particular, as part of the agentic choices they make in relation to their

gender. In addition, I asked for their regions since gender constraints vary based on the area someone lives in in Saudi Arabia, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2). Regarding the university level, the aim was to have a variation among the participants. Finally, and importantly, I asked for their contact information in order to contact them at a later date to arrange the interviews.

5.6.4 Access to the Participants

After my study was approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee at the University of Southampton, I began seeking participants. To obtain English undergraduate students, I emailed the survey to the head of the English Language department at the university where I used to work, which is also my sponsor. The email included an explanation of the purpose of my study and my desire to obtain a number of English students. I asked her to distribute the survey, which was in a link form, among the students and send it on to other English departments that she may know of at other Saudi universities, which she agreed to do.

Although I only needed a very small number of undergraduate students, I did not recruit any participants for days. I re-contacted the head of the department to ask her remind the students to fill out the survey and to also provide me with some email addresses of those in other English departments at Saudi universities. I also contacted my previous colleagues in the department and asked them to distribute the survey among their students. While waiting for responses, I decided to approach some postgraduate students at the University of Southampton to save time.

Approved by the ethical committee, I sent the survey directly to the postgraduates requesting their participation using their university email addresses. I was able to easily make contact with them easily, as they were studying the same PhD programme as me

and because I knew many of them through the WhatsApp groups where most Saudi PhD students gathered to discuss academic and research topics. Fortunately, most of them responded to the survey in a very short time. They also replied to via email and WhatsApp, asking me if I wanted them to distribute the survey to other people they knew.

My discussion with the postgraduates led me to think about their students in Saudi Arabia, as the postgraduate students were technically Saudi English teachers. I thought they might help me obtain some undergraduate participants in Saudi universities since I had not receive any responses at that point. Therefore, I requested that they distribute the survey to their English students and their colleagues, who might also be able to assist me. Doing so helped me to obtain a good number of undergraduate students in a few days. However, because most of the responses I received were from a particular area, the centre of Saudi Arabia, I contacted some postgraduate students I knew at the University of Southampton who came from different Saudi regions and asked them to send the invitation survey to their students and colleagues there, which helped me to finally access a satisfactory variety of participants.

Following this, I selected six of those who had responded to the survey (three postgraduates and three undergraduates) based on their variation in identity. I randomly selected participants of different ages and from a variety of different families, regions and university levels for each group. For example, when I selected an undergraduate from the west of the country, I automatically excluded any other undergraduates from the same areas. At the same time, I attempted to ensure her variation from the other selected undergraduates in terms of her last name, age, and university level. I did the same while selecting all of the other participants. In the next section, I introduce my selected participants, giving detailed information about them.

5.6.5 My participants

The postgraduates

The postgraduate students were PhD students in their second, third and fourth years at the University of Southampton. They all had a scholarship from the Saudi government to continue their study in the United Kingdom and were majoring in English (applied linguistics/ELT). They had learned English in Saudi Arabia and taught it for years in Saudi higher education. They were from different regions in their country, namely the south, middle and west of the country. They were all born in Saudi Arabia, had lived there, and planned to return to work there after finishing their PhD.

The postgraduate students were all Muslim and spoke Arabic as their first language. They were aged between 38 and 40, and had all been born in the 1980s. Over the last four decades, they have witnessed various governmental changes through the years, living under different rulers, and have observed a great deal of social change. They witnessed all of the gender discourse explained in Chapter 2, starting from the gender segregation discourse to the women's empowerment discourse of today. Their details are presented below under pseudonyms.

Nawal

Nawal was a 40-year-old Saudi woman when I met her. She was born and lived in the middle of Saudi Arabia, and she is from an upper middle class family. She has observed many social changes since she was a child. Although she observed the traditional gender culture when she was young, she had the privilege of having open-minded parents, as her parents had lived in the USA for a period of time. This has a positive impact on her gender experience. In terms of English, because her father had completed his higher education in the USA, her exposeure to English began when she was a child. She started learning English from her family members, namely her brothers and dad, who frequently spoke in English

frequently at home. She received her BA degree in English in Saudi Arabia and studied for her MA in applied linguistics in Canada. After graduating, she worked as an English teacher at one of the Saudi universities in the middle area, obtaining a scholarship from her university to complete her PhD in applied linguistics in the UK. When I met her, she was in her second-year. She was also a single mother of two girls whose first language was English, and second language was Arabic.

Maram

Maram was a 39-year-old Saudi woman when she participated in the study. She was born and lived in the south of Saudi Arabia, and she was from a conservative, middle class family. She received her BA in English literature in Saudi Arabia, as well as her MA in applied linguistics. After graduating, she also worked as an English teacher at a university in the south of Saudi Arabia. She obtained a scholarship from the university to complete her PhD in the UK. When I met her, she was a third-year student in applied linguistics/ELT. She was also married and had a little boy who had been born during her PhD study and who spoke English as his first language.

Haifa'a

Haifa'a was a 38-year-old Saudi woman. She was born and lived in the west of Saudi Arabia, and she was from a lower middle-class family. She grew up with conservative parents, particularly her mother. She is the oldest in her family and was the first female in her family, including her extended family, to enrol at university. She received her BA in English in Saudi Arabia and received her MA in TESOL from a Canadian university. She also worked as an English teacher at a university in the west of Saudi Arabia, where she was also given a scholarship to complete her PhD in applied linguistics in the UK. When I met her, she was a fourth-year PhD student. She was also married and had no children.

The undergraduates

The undergraduate students were university students majoring in English at different Saudi universities in the middle, west and south of the country. They were in their second, third, and fourth years at university. They were all Muslims and spoke Arabi as their first language. They were aged between 21 and 22, having been born in the 2000s. They were raised at the beginning of the era of King Abdullah, who became the King in 2005. This means that they were raised at the time of women's rights discourse and therefore they grew up with the current women's empowerment discourse. They had all benefitted from the huge shifts in women's status since childhood. Their details are provided below under pseudonyms.

Shahad

At the time of conducting the study, Shahad was a 22-year-old woman. She was born and lived in the south of Saudi Arabia. She was from a middle class family. She had a very encouraging family who supported most of her choices as well as her English studies. When I met her, she was in the fourth year of the undergraduate English programme.

Asala

Asala was 22-year-old woman. She was born and brought up in the west of Saudi Arabia, and she was from an upper class family. Due to her father's job as a diplomat, he has worked in different parts of the world with different Saudi embassies. As a result, from the age of five years old until she was 14, she travelled every summer with her family to visit her dad. Therefore, she acquired most of her English while abroad during those visits, learning from the English-speaking friends she made as well as from her dad, who speaks English fluently. She also learnt English from the maid who used to work at her home. When she was an adult, she also learned more English during her travels to the USA, where her sister studied. When I met her, she was a third year undergraduate English student.

Tahani

Tahani was 21-year-old Saudi girl. She was born and brought up in the middle of Saudi Arabia, and she is from an upper-class family. Her parents are educated; her father studied translation and linguistics, and speaks English. Therefore, she learned English from her family as well as from the maid working in her house. She also learnt English during her visit to the UK, where her sister studied. Despite coming from an upper-class family, her family was also conservative in terms of maintaining the traditional Saudi culture. At the time of the interviews, she was a second-year undergraduate English student.

After choosing my participants, I contacted them for data collection purposes. However, before arranging to do the interviews, my initial goal was to build a good rapport with them.

5.6.6 Building Rapport with the Participants

For researchers undertaking interviews from a constructionist standpoint, familiarity with the participants is a necessary component of every interaction. It is also a critical part of the data collection process and analysis (Wicaksono & Zhurauskaya, 2020). Wicaksono and Zhurauskaya (2020) contended that constructionists deal with interviews as a socially situated event in which the interviewee and interviewer actively shape each other's participation rather than dealing with it as a neutral research instrument. In this sense, both parties are inseparable and cannot be divided as they collaboratively contribute to creating the knowledge. Therefore, because knowledge is created through this co-participation, a rapport between the two is needed before conducting any interviews.

To contact my participants, I sent them an email introducing myself to them and thanked them for their willingness to participate. I also asked them if they had any concerns

or questions about the study. I included my phone number in the email in case they found it a more convenient way to communicate (I did so because emails are not widely used by Saudi students outside the educational domain). Following my email, all of them contacted me through WhatsApp using the telephone number I had given them. While some expressed their pleasure in being part of the study, some asked me to provide more details about the nature of my study, which I did.

During our conversations on WhatsApp, I noticed that when I introduced myself to the undergraduates, they were amazed by my educational status and the fact I had a scholarship to do my PhD in the UK. They told me that pursuing their education abroad was one of their greatest dreams and that they had planned to study their MA abroad when they graduated. At that point, I realised that this might be an excellent opportunity to offer my assistance if they needed advice about studying abroad. They were very thankful because they were curious to know many things regarding pursuing their MA education abroad. For days, I received different voice messages from them asking questions such as how to obtain an academic offer, what the requirements are to do an MA, and how to find trustworthy academic services, among others. I responded to all their questions by sending back voice messages with answers to their inquiries.

In addition, while we chatted, they told me that it was mid-term exam time at their universities. They shared this information because they had all asked to do the interviews after finishing the exams. Once again, I thought this might be another good opportunity to help me build a relationship with them. I offered my assistance if they needed any explanation or clarification regarding their English courses during their exams. They were pleased about this offer. During their exams, I received different requests for information about semantics, syntax, and literature, which I tried to answer as best I could. Without

asking them to do so, every time they finished an exam, they sent me a message telling me how their exams had gone. As the days passed, they seemed comfortable talking, laughing, and sharing things with me. They even started telling me about other aspects of their lives beyond school, including sharing stories about their relatives who studied abroad in the UK and asking me about people they knew in the region where I lived in the UK. Similarly, I shared memories from my experience as an English student at university in Saudi Arabia, which they loved to hear about.

Concerning the postgraduate participants, when they contacted me by phone, I asked them individually to meet in a coffee shop because we lived in the same city, Southampton, unlike the undergraduates who lived in different areas of Saudi Arabia. Although I already knew them as we had studied on the same PhD programme, I did not know them very well, as they were at different stages in their studies from me. I had only met them a couple of times during workshops, seminars, and other Saudi festivals at the university. Thus, I needed to build more of a relationship with them. When I met them, it did not take much effort to do so since we had met previously. We quickly engaged in interesting conversations, sharing our academic interests and stories of our teaching experience, our families, and our children.

Once I had developed a good relationship with all my participants, I knew that it was the right time to arrange to do the interviews with them and begin collecting the data.

5.7 Data collection Procedures

I contacted the participants, informing them of my desire to begin doing the life history interview. The interview was arranged collaboratively based on the availability and suitability of each participant. After scheduling the time and space with them, I met them

individually between December and January 2022-23. I conducted the interview online through Microsoft Teams, sending an invitation link to their email and WhatsApp phone number prior to our meeting. I attached a soft copy of the participation information sheet and the consent form (see Appendix B) with the meeting invitation link. Although they had already gone through the participation sheet and consent form when they responded to the invitation for the participation survey, I wanted to ensure that they fully understood the purpose of my study and their rights, and thus to ensure their full agreement on the research processes before we started.

At the beginning of the interview, I asked them if they had any questions and whether everything was clear to them up to that point. I also gave them the choice of answering in their preferred language, either in English or Arabic. All of them wanted to do the interview in Arabic, except one, who preferred to speak in English. The length of the interview was around 45 minutes. With their agreement, the interview was audio-recoded for data analysis purposes.

During the initial stage of the interview, some changes to the interview procedures were made in an attempt to address some issues that arose. Roulston (2011) explained that in qualitative research, it is common for interviews to go differently than expected and that researchers must constantly address these issues as they come up. When I started doing the interview (particularly with the first two interviews) three unanticipated issues arose.

The first issue was related to the first version of my interview questions. The interviews were conducted online, and on some occasions there were issues with the internet connection which resulted in the participants not clearly understanding my questions. Therefore, I changed the way I asked the questions by providing more explanation. However, in doing so, I felt as if I was directing and restricting

their answers. As a result, I decided to modify all of the questions to ensure they were clear enough for the participants, limiting the amount of explanation I gave them in order to give them the space to express their own perspectives with no constraints.

Another issue was that I asked the first interviewee questions that I did not ask the second interviewee. This was because the latter provided answers to some questions before I had the opportunity to ask them. As I noticed that, I crossed those questions out on my notes to ensure I did not ask them later as the interviewee had already addressed them. This issue led me to realise the significance of my role as an active listener and the importance of paying more attention to the participants' words, leading me to think about strategies to increase my active listening with the other participants.

Also, despite the rapport I had built with my participants prior to the interview, eliciting information from them was more complex. One of my participants answered my questions in very short sentences. This was very challenging to me because the aim of my questions at that stage was to obtain rich and in-depth information about her English learning history. To encourage her to elaborate, I briefly attempted to share some of my experiences as an English learner without any attempt to impose knowledge on her. I told her about my experiences at the university where I had studied for my Bachelor's, which was the same university my participant was attending at the time of the interview. Fortunately, this helped encourage her to tell me about her experiences. As a result, I devised some techniques to overcome this issue in the following interviews, whch included preparing some follow up questions and thinking about ways to create a good interview atmosphere to encourage their participation.

After taking all these issues with first two participant into consideration, I was able to conduct the following life history interviews smoothly with the other participants.

After I finished interviewing all of my participants, I transcribed their data, looking thoroughly at them. As I read the transcripts, I took many notes about the significant elements they had mentioned, and which needed more elaboration. I highlighted them because they were very relevant to my research questions, and I needed to address them further. Thus, I prepared some follow-up questions to dig deeper into those aspects. A week later, I conducted a follow-up interview seeking more details with most of my participants, who did not provide more information related to certain vital concepts. These interviews were also recorded and added to the original transcripts.

After finishing this phase, I took steps to prepare for the next phase, the semi-structured interview. Reflecting on my practice above, I revised and amended the interview questions based on the previous challenges I had encountered, thus minimising any issues that might arise. I was able to build a sense of what was going on at this time, realising and anticipating potential issues. After finishing the revision and amendments to my interview questions, I re-contacted the participants to arrange for the semi-structured interview.

The interview took place between February and March 2023. Similar to the first phase, I conducted the interview online through Microsoft Teams, sending an invitation link to their email and WhatsApp phone numbers prior to our meeting. At the beginning of the interview, I asked them if they were happy to continue to participate and whether they had any questions at that stage. I also gave them the choice to answer in their preferred language, either in English or Arabic, and all of them continued to talk in the preferred language they had used during the previous stage. The length of the interview was also around 45 minutes, which was the same as the first interview. I also made an audio recording of their interview for data analysis purposes.

Preparing well for that stage, however, did not mean it went without any issues. Specifically, I faced a few challenges regarding my interview questions with the first interviewee. Although I had designed and reviewed the interview questions carefully to protect my participants from being negatively affected, I noticed that the word '*woman*', which was included in most of my questions, provoked a reaction in my interviewee. I sensed that every time I asked her a direct question about her as a woman (e.g., How do you think English can help you be an important woman?), she felt insecure, as I seemed to give her the impression that I was looking at gender issues. Therefore, I decided to exclude this word from the following interview questions, which worked very well.

Another thing I realised while talking to the same interviewee was that some of my initial interview questions (e.g., How can English help you be an important woman? Can you tell me how English can help you be in a high position in your society or your future career?) led to the same answers. When I asked her the second question, she referred to what she had already said in response to the previous question, saying something such as " as I said before", and sometimes only slightly expanding on her previous answer. Accordingly, I abandoned some of my questions to avoid any repetition. This was a good decision because it minimised the number of the questions and, thus, gave my participant more time to express her thoughts. Fortunately, working on these issues made the following interviews with the other participants go smoothly.

After finishing the interviews, I transcribed the data, adding them to the transcripts of the previous interview as a whole data set for each participant. As I transcribed them, I highlighted some answers that required follow-up interviews for clarification. Later, I conducted some follow-up interviewees, transcribing and adding the participants' additional

answers to the whole data set. At this point, I felt that I had obtained enough detailed information, and thus, no more interviews were needed. This, however, was not based on data saturation – defined as information redundancy – because reaching that point was not my goal at this stage. Rather, it was based on the dynamic role I had played in the process in terms of taking notes, following up with the interviewees, and transcribing my data, which gave me the impression that I had obtained sufficient detailed and in-depth information related to my research questions. Data saturation was not prioritised during my data collection due to my belief that it can be achieved during the analytical and interpretive procedures and the deep engagement with the data rather than during the data collection process.

In support of my belief, Braun and Clarke (2019) argued that "meaning is not inherent or self-evident in data, that meaning resides at the intersection of the data and the researcher's contextual and theoretically embedded interpretative practices – in short, that meaning requires interpretation." (p. 210). To clarify, the number of interviews in which the theme is apparent cannot be directly linked to a prediction of the data saturation point because the meaning and the meaningfulness of a theme originate from the dataset and the interpretation process. This is because themes are not isolated entities but parts of a larger story that are meaningful in connection to one another, similar to codes that are situation-dependent and that originate from the specific context in which they are articulated. Accordingly, I aimed to seek data saturation through the analytical and interpretive procedures, as explained in the following section, rather than during the data collection process.

5.8 Data Analysis Procedures

Regarding narrative inquiry, Barkhuizen et al. (2014) explained that there are two primary forms of analysing narrative data: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. In narrative analysis, researchers use stories as a way of analysing non-narrative data, focusing on the language of the narrative and how it is produced, which aligns with the traditional approaches of social constructionism mentioned above. In contrast, in the analysis of narratives, researchers focus on the stories as a whole and go beyond the text or the narrative language to consider the content of those stories. This is in alignment with the moderate approaches of social constructionism I adopted and with my theories. Thus, I chose to the latter as the appropriate analytical method for this study.

Within the analysis of narrative, the data is usually analysed either by content or thematic analysis as standard analysis procedures in qualitative research. In this study, I chose thematic analysis as a way of analysing my narrative data. This involved coding the narrative data, classifying extracts, and restructuring them into thematic headings (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). I selected this approach due to the flexible nature of thematic analysis, which helped deal with the complex perspectives I held in this study.

From my social constructionist stance, my goal was to construct reality and produce knowledge from the participants' own perspectives. Similarly, through my adopted theories, I also attempted to understand the complexity of L2 selves from my participants' own perspectives, by relying on the salient contextual elements they bought to the data, as described earlier. All these considerations prepared me to be open to any theories that emerged data during the analysis, thus enhancing my choice of thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis enables research that might be theoretically complicated to be conducted because it works with all kinds of theoretical frameworks. I

realised the importance of this analytical approach to facilitate my understanding of any complexity that may emerge and help me access various elements in the data.

In terms of the coding , there are two kinds in thematic analysis, namely deductive and inductive coding. The former refers to the coding determined before the analysis, while the latter refers to the coding that originates from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). While the latter would have served my purpose of focusing on the elements brought by the participants without having any prior assumptions, I combined the two coding approaches. I made this decision because I could not separate between the two during my analysis. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2012) indicated that there is no way for researchers to be completely deductive or completely inductive. As they explained, “It is impossible to be purely inductive, as we always bring something to the data when we analyse it, and we rarely completely ignore the semantic content of the data when we code for a particular theoretical construct (p.58-59). In the following paragraphs, I explain my rationale for doing so as part of the detailed analytical procedures I present below.

Commonly, there are six phases undertaken when analysing data thematically. These phases are familiarisation, coding, generating the initial themes, developing and reviewing the themes, refining, defining and naming the themes, and writing the analysis (Braun & Clark, 2022). Although the authors explained these phases as parts of the analysis phase, I naturally applied them earlier. As I mentioned above, I did not start my data analysis right away after finishing my data collection, but at the very initial stages of my data collection when making notes. This meant that I had already built an understanding of my data during the interviews and transcription process, when I spent time thinking about potential codes and themes. However, considering these six phases after collecting the data helped me improve and strengthen my initial analysis and delve deeper into my data. Interestingly, the

application of these six phases in my analysis was not a linear process. Instead, I went back and forth between these phases during each stage of my data analysis.

My analysis went through different stages. I began with the hard copies of the transcripts, before moving on to the soft copies, and later to the MAXQDA version (analytical software), in which each stage witnessed a thorough, deep reading of the data. I did so intentionally due to the nature of my study. That is, from my social constructionist stance and because my analytical task is subjective and situated in nature, I was aware that a thorough reading of my data was needed in order to produce knowledge constructed by my participants' understanding of the surroundings. Given my stance, I explain in the following paragraphs how I went through each stage, repeatedly applying the six phases.

After collecting my data, I transcribed all of the interviews, combining the transcripts of the two interviews in one document for each participant. This strategy was to help me visualise the data for each participant and create a timeline for every story from the past to the future. After combining the transcripts, I printed a hard copy to read so I could familiarise myself with the data. I did so because I am the kind of person who engages more with hard copies compared to electronic versions, as I feel closer to the things in my hand. This was also to allow me to distance myself from the screen and read my scripts in multiple spaces, including in the university library, coffee shops, waiting rooms, from my bed, and in my kitchen, as I moved around a great deal during my day. It was also more convenient in terms of taking notes as my thoughts developed constantly.

After spending a considerable time reading and re-reading, I prepared myself for the coding process. Initially, I decided to go with the inductive approach of coding as it seemed best suited to my study and consistent with my stance. Thus, I took the following guidelines into serious consideration: 1) avoiding having any prior assumptions while coding, 2) coding

all segments related to my research questions and not only certain ones that my assumptions might influence, 3) being critical while reading my data by asking critical questions and taking note of my thoughts, 4) preventing myself from becoming excited when finding an interesting coding close to my theoretical understanding. I made these decisions to avoid being biased, picky or selective of any pre-determined assumptions in my head, which is what Braun and Clarke (2022, p.54) refer to as "cherry picking", as doing so results in poor analytic practice.

Based on the decision above, I started the initial stage of coding by making notes on the scripts (see Appendix C). I went through the transcripts as a whole, labelling relevant events, sentences, and phrases and making notes about my first impressions. I labelled the similarities and the frequent events that were mentioned in many places in the transcripts, as well as the things that were explicitly acknowledged to be important for the participants. This included codes like the significance of family, educational policies, governmental law, among others, which were grouped under a theme named 'the formation of gendered identities through social institutions'. Because I was avoiding being biased or picky at this initial stage, I ended up with too many codes under many different themes on the manuscripts.

However, during this process, I made a big shift in my coding approach, as I noticed two key things. Firstly, because it was not possible, as a human being, to completely erase any theoretical perspectives from my head during the coding, I noticed that there was a strong connection between my theoretical perspectives and my data. Secondly, relying mainly on the participants' words restricted my lens from going beyond the texts and kept me at the surface level. I realised that being at this surface level of coding, also called semantic coding, contradicted my goal of obtaining richer analysis. It also contradicted the

social constructionist stance I had adopted, which is concerned with the larger picture beyond texts. For as Braun and Clarke (2022, p.54) stated, going beyond explicit texts during thematic analysis is a significant feature of constructionist research.

At the same time, I did not want to bring and impose any assumptions I may have, either intentionally or unintentionally. Therefore, I decided to shift my coding approach, adding the deductive approach to allow me to go beyond the explicit data. This is also referred to as latent coding. However, to maintain my goal, this did not mean making any pre-determination or prior codes. Instead, although I completely relied on the explicit data, I used my theoretical understanding to interpret their meaning. This decision to integrate both approaches caused me to re-read and modify my previous codes.

While I kept some important codes, I deleted others, creating new ones that were relevant to my theories, such as codes related to the theories of agency adopted in my study. I also created codes such as gender constraints, assessing existing possibilities, and challenging gender roles. In addition, I combined some of the previous and new codes, , which resulted in me amending my themes as well. For example, based on the emergence of new codes that included more social factors, like social class and economic factors, I integrated these codes with previous codes related to contextual elements. Thus, I broadened the previous theme from 'the formation of learners' gendered identities through social institutions', changing it to 'the establishment of gender discourse through micro social dimensions', so that it work fit with all the emerging codes. Then, I grouped all the other updated codes under their suitable themes in a way that would answer my research questions.

Subsequently, I began using the soft copy versions of my transcripts on my computer to see the coding on the screen. I transferred all the coding I had done on the hard copies to

the electronic versions by adding comments on the right margin of the document (see Appendix D). Seeing my data on the screen helped me to make some further amendments to some of my coding as I engaged with the data deeply. Because some themes were similar, such as ‘the formation of L2 possible selves through gendered identities’ and ‘the relationship between gender and L2 possible selves’, I moved some codes from their previous theme to another, which resulted in placing them under a different theme.

Later, I uploaded these versions to analytical Software, namely MAXQDA, (see Appendix E). I did so to view and revise all of my work in a convenient way. Specifically, I used the MAXQDA for two reasons. Firstly, I could choose to use it in Arabic, which was the main language used by most of the interviewees. Secondly, using this software helped me to organise the large amount of my data, see the bigger picture of the analysis and view the themes more easily. Using MAXQDA was very beneficial because it resulted in me creating some new codes grouped under a newly developed theme, which was very relevant to my study. For example, it allowed me to create a theme regarding the dynamicity of L2 possible selves, which provided a deeper analysis of the data. Also, as I engaged more with the data and they became more meaningful to me, I re-named most of my themes. For example, I changed the theme of 'the formation of L2 possible selves through gendered identities' to 'gendering L2 possible selves'. I also re-named the theme of 'the relationship between gender and L2 possible selves' to be 'the dynamicity of L2 possible selves through gendered identities.' Finally, I re-named the theme of 'the establishment of gender discourse through micro social dimensions' to 'the influence of gender discourse on shaping the English learning experience'.

Once I had completed the analysis, I began writing about it on a separate document. This step, however, took me back to another phase of the analysis, in which I re-did the whole process above.

When I wrote about my data, I started questioning the understanding that I had acquired during the previous processes of my analysis. I could see some contradictions as well as observe some interesting aspects that I had not considered previously, which were very related to my research questions. As a reflection, I went back to the work I had already done, including my notes, hard copies, my initial coding, and the whole data set, and though carefully about my theories. Although I had previously used my theories to understand the meaning of my data, I listed all my theoretical considerations on paper at this time to better understand them. The list included the theoretical guidelines I had made for myself, such as: 1) locate the participants in their social context, 2) consider the larger socio-cultural aspects, 3) consider the relationship between their identity and their context, 4) observe any social changes and their consequences on the participants' lives, and thus their L2 vision, 5) look at their interaction with the gender discourse and social conditions…etc. Furthermore, I reflected on the data I had found surprising and decided to be more open-minded as I went through my data. Thus, when I re-read the data on this occasion, I was able to see the relevance of some of the data I had previously discarded because I thought they were irrelevant. Consequently, I labelled them and put them under the relevant themes that I had already developed. I also labelled the unexpected data, combining them with other existing codes. This process helped in bringing other significant sub-themes together with those under a previously developed theme, namely 'the powerful role of agency in L2 possible selves', making it the biggest theme in the analysis. In short, the writing process was another important stage of in the data analysis, as it was during this phase that I amended most of my codes, combining some and allowing for important ones to emerge. This process

helped me connect the dots in my data, combining all my thoughts and, thus, bringing a stronger sense of their meaning and deepening my understanding of them. At this point, I felt I had reached the point where I had obtained data saturation. Indeed, it took seven months to complete this interpretive process. I believed that my analysis was deep, detailed, and sufficient to answer my research questions.

The final version of the themes included the following: 'the influence of gender discourse on shaping the English learning experience', 'gendering L2 possible selves', 'the dynamism of L2 possible selves through gendered identities', and 'the powerful role of agency in gendered L2 selves'. The latter became the main theme, consisting of other sub-themes, which included the following: 'gender discourse as constraining and enabling', 'agency and knowledgeability in L2 possible selves', 'empowering gendered L2 possible selves', and 'the multitude of gendered L2 possible selves'.

5.9 Data Interpretation

Although my final interpretation emerged after devoting a huge amount of work to analysing the data, my interpretation was not a distinct stage that appeared later in my analysis. As I indicated earlier, all of the processes were integrated and happened simultaneously. My attempts to make sense of the data started at the beginning of the data collection process, from the interviews until the last phase of my analysis, including the writing process. However, my interpretive orientation shifted as a result of my engagement with the data and the continuous decisions I made as I reflected on my practice, which resulted in a tremendous development of my initial interpretation.

As explained above, my initial coding started with a data-driven approach and shifted later to include a theory-driven one as I noticed the connection between my data and

theories. This led me to shift my interpretive orientations from being descriptive to being more theoretical and interpretive. Thus, in reporting and discussing my analysis in the following chapters, I took a theory-driven approach, interpreting my data through the lens of the adopted theories.

However, to combine the deductive and inductive approaches, I relied on the data extracts, as these had come from the participants' mouths, treating them analytically. That is, I used data extracts to provide a detailed theoretical analysis of the data rather than using them to provide a description of them. By doing so, I became aligned with the social constructionist stance I had taken at the beginning of this study to help me understand the complex phenomena under investigation. As Braun and Clarke (2022) explained, constructionists tend to inform their analysis through existing theories as it helps them to enrich and broaden their understanding of complex issues.

Additionally, guiding my analysis by the adopted theories, I also applied an integrative approach in the following chapters, integrating the findings and discussion chapters together in order to gain a deeper insight into the subject. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2013) emphasised that when there is a strong link between research and existing theories, the integration of these works very effectively, as it helps scholars extend and develop their analysis.

In the final sections of this chapter, I discuss the principles I considered as a qualitative researcher in order to make this study rigorous and trustworthy.

5.10 The Principles Employed to Ensure the Quality of this Study

In qualitative research, there are four major criteria that can help researchers in making their studies rigorous and trustworthy. These criteria include credibility, transformability, dependability, and conformability (Richards, 2009). In terms of credibility,

which refers to the credibility of research findings, I applied different approaches to ensure the credibility of my findings. As seen above in the analytical section, the substantial length of time spent on my data and the many processes I went through allowed me to engage with my data deeply, leading me to data saturation and thus helping me to interpret my data thoroughly.

Additionally, triangulating the data using multiple theories when analysing and interpreting my findings helped me increase the accuracy of my findings. It allowed me to look at the complex issues in this study from various angles and gain a deeper understanding. By bringing various perspectives, I was able to gain a holistic understanding of my data, considering multiple dimensions within a comprehensive socio-environmental framework, revealing societal, institutional, interpersonal, and individual factors in an interconnected manner, thus providing consistent interpretation (Tracy, 2010). Another triangulation that I applied was the comparative analysis of my data. As mentioned above, I analysed the data of two different female groups from different ages who had witnessed different gender discourses, comparing between their L2 possible. At the same time, I analysed and compared the L2 selves within the group who had had richer experiences—the postgraduates— to increase the trustworthiness of my findings.

Transferability, which "requires researchers to describe the research design, context, and conditions so well that the readers can decide for themselves if the interpretations apply to another context with which they are familiar" (Brown, 2004, p. 495), was also applied in this study by offering a detailed description of the context at different levels. I provided detailed and rich description of the methodological context as well as the local context where the participants lived, which would help readers assess the applicability of such a study in another context.

In regard to dependability, defined as any methodological shifts or modifications that take place in the design as the study progresses (Brown, 2004), I delivered all the methodological changes I made clearly to the readers. This includes all amendments that occurred during all the stages of this study, from data collection to analysis to interpretation. I not only described these shifts, but also provided a clear, detailed justification of the amendments to give my readers the full of picture of the context of my study.

Finally, I also applied confirmability in this study by presenting most of the data I interpreted and making them available to readers (Richard, 2009), as will be seen in the following section. In all of my interpretations, I provided numerous extracts from the data as articulated by the participants, thus representing their voices clearly.

5.11 My Pilot Study

As I have mentioned many times throughout this chapter, I conducted a pilot study prior to beginning the data collection phase. The pilot study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Southampton. The aim of the pilot study was to ensure the validity and reliability of my research method, specifically my interview guides. Initially, I planned to conduct a life history interview and I devised 15 questions about aspects of the language learning experience, context, identity and future L2 vision.

After devising the questions, I contacted a group of Saudi female postgraduate English students at the University of Southampton to test them. I sent them directly to the participants using their university email address, inviting them to participate in my study voluntarily. Two students responded to my email. One student was in her first year of the applied linguistics PhD programme, and the other one was in the third year of the same programme.

The participants had the chance to learn about the study through the participation information sheet sent to them before the interview. They also signed a consent form in which they agreed to the processing of their data collection. Each participant was interviewed online for around 60-90 minutes, and the interviews were audio-recorded. The students responded to different questions, including follow-up questions. After two weeks, follow-up interviews were conducted, which involved asking participants for more details about some of their responses during the main interviews. Later, I transcribed the data manually, read the transcriptions multiple times to become familiar with them, and then analysed them. As I had reflected on this process, I decided to make many amendments to the research plan.

The study helped me assess my research tool, prompting me to use another tool as a complementary one. I concluded the study with the idea that having one research tool, the life history interview, would not meet the purpose of my study. During the interview, I felt it was challenging to elicit information about language learning history, identity, and future L2 vision at the same time. This is because when I read the transcripts, I noticed that the responses did not sufficiently answer my research questions. For example, the responses related to their language learning history were insufficient, more time was needed for them to expressed themselves before I moved on to the next question. Similarly, the students' answers revealed many different interesting thoughts that needed expanding on and clarification. Although follow-up questions were conducted, there were many answers that needed further expansion, particularly the responses related to the learners' identities. Moreover, since the interview contained many different questions, it was exhausting for the participants to answer all of the questions in one hour. It took them time and effort to answer the various questions I posed on a range of different subjects, most of which required follow-up questions. As a result, I decided to employ two phases of data collection,

namely a life history interview and a semi-structured interview, with each having a different purpose, as explained above.

Besides assessing the research tool, the study helped me reflect on my practice. When I came to do the interviews, I expected the participants to speak in English. However, at the beginning of the interview, they asked me if they could have speak Arabic. They told me that speaking in their first language would be more comfortable for them unless I needed them to speak in English. This made me decide to ask the participants of my main study to speak in their preferred language and reassure them that it was not an important matter for me as a researcher. More importantly, when I read through the transcripts, I noticed that they had raised interesting topics related to my research questions, and I had not even noticed that when they mentioned them. I realised that thinking about so many things during the interview, such as the next questions, participants' previous answers or writing notes, had prevented me from fully paying attention to the participants' words. Thus, another decision I made was to learn how to be an active listener and use these skills during my data collection so that I would not miss any important data.

Furthermore, the pilot study guided me to refine and develop my theoretical perspectives. Initially, for example, I did not seriously consider social theories in my study. However, the data showed that the participants socially constructed their L2 possible selves based on their surrounding context and their interaction with society. This also brought the concept of agency as a crucial issue into my study.

The pilot study also guided me to consider undergraduate learners as another group in my study. As I said before, the data included a great deal of information about the social changes that have taken place in Saudi Arabia over the last few decades. It showed that those changes significantly impacted the participants' English, their identity and their future

vision. As a result, I believed looking at two groups who lived in different social conditions would enrich and contribute significantly to my understanding of L2 vision as a dynamic concept. Additionally, although I initially decided to include eight participants, I decided to reduce the number of participants to six due to the large amount of data I obtained. I felt this number was realistic when considering the research timeline.

Finally, analysing the data I obtained from the pilot study informed my approach to analysing the main study, as I gained knowledge of the possible ways to deal with the data. The analysis gave me a space to draw conclusions on what had been effective or not, as well as what helped me understand the subject and what prevented me from doing so.

These reflections on the pilot led me to refine my focus and think about the decisions I needed to make, and thus enabled me to clearly justify my procedures for the main study.

5.12 Ethical Considerations

Considering research ethics is one of the most significant factors in ensuring the credibility of qualitative research. I carried out this study ethically by applying various ethical steps.

Regarding the research procedures, I did not begin any procedure until the Faculty Ethics Committee at the University of Southampton had approved it. In addition, as explained previously, the participants were fully informed about the entire data collection process through the participation sheet and the consent form before they even responded to my invitation survey. They even had the opportunity to look at them again before the data collection process commenced, as mentioned above.

In terms of confidentiality, I ensured all of the participants' confidential information provided, including their personal information, consent forms, transcripts, and audio records

were kept securely. They were stored on the University of Southampton and OneDrive servers, protected by a strong password. Similarly, other documents, such as the hard copies I printed for analysis purposes, were shredded after the end of the analysis stage.

Notably, I consciously showed the participants respect and care, closely collaborated with them, and placed value on their shared experiences. When I designed my interview questions, I was aware of the sensitivity of the topic of gender, and so I addressed my questions carefully to avoid upsetting them during the interviews. I relied on my understanding of what could be acceptable or appropriate in general, but particularly in the Saudi context. I also attempted to be respectful and polite and not direct when asking the questions. More importantly, I showed respect for their stories and those mentioned in their stories, such as their parents, family members and university staff.

Through my continuous reflection on my ethical practices, I ensured that this study did not harm the participants. An example of this is the changes I made to the interview questions when I noticed one participant's sensitivity to the word 'women'. I took responsibility for any unpredictable moment that might make them feel insecure, ensuring tbat that did not happen to the best if my ability. During the analysis, I also prioritised the participants' words and their points of view rather than relying on my words. As I explained, I used the theories outlined above as the basis for interpreting their words rather than putting words in their mouth. In short, I granted them ownership of their stories.

Importantly, I was cautious from the beginning that the commonalities between us should not have influenced the analysis through my own projections, which could have led to incredible findings. I expressed my awareness of my positioning informing readers about my perceptions toward myself and my participants besides my roles in the study.

Finally, my commitment to my continuous reflection was not only to protect my sample, but also to protect my entire practice from dishonesty or bias. I took responsibility for continuously reflecting on my integrity and practices in the form of the constant critiques shown throughout this chapter.

5.13 Conclusion of the Chapter

Unlike the existing quantitative research on gender and L2 vision, this chapter took another direction by adopting a dynamic qualitative approach, adding to the literature a thorough understanding of the subject from a qualitative perspective. In line with my dynamic approaches, the chapter outlined the research methodology, providing an explanation and justification of all the methodological choices and steps undertaken in this current research. The first sections started with an explanation and justification of my methodological considerations, which included social constructionism, the qualitative strategy, and the narrative approach, as well as the selected research methods and samples. The following sections discussed and justified the methodological procedures I undertook, which included the data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

By adopting a different methodological approach, however, the methodological goal of this thesis was not to provide an accurate answer to the existing research or to convince readers that there is only one way gender affects L2 vision. Rather, from my social constructionist stance that views knowledge as multiple dependent on the context, my methodological goal was to broaden the possibilities of understanding the complexity and dynamicity of L2 vision by considering female language learners' interactions with the wider social environment and the dominant gender discourse. In other words, by reporting and interpreting my findings in the following chapters, I attempt to foster the integration of a

different perspective from the Saudi context through the knowledge I obtained from the data, which could have been different in another context with a different gender culture.

Chapter 6 L2 Possible Selves as a Gendered Concept

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The present chapter reports and discusses key findings related to the following research questions:

- How do Saudi female English learners envision their future L2 possible selves?
- How do Saudi female English learners construct their L2 possible selves in the Saudi context?
- What is the role of gender in the construction of Saudi female English learners' L2 possible selves?

The analysis indicated that gender strongly influenced L2 possible selves and their dynamics among the female participants of this study. As revealed, the broader gender discourse which shaped the participants' gendered identities in the Saudi society formed their English learning experience, thus affecting their L2 possible selves. According to the analysis, the participants created their L2 possible selves based on their gendered identities, incorporating existing gender ideologies in their L2 future selves that became gendered because of this incorporation. The analysis also reveals that due to the dynamics of gender in Saudi society, the participants (re)constructed gendered L2 future selves based on the available gender discourse, indicating the dynamic interaction between both identities, gender and L2 selves.

Drawing on the theoretical framework employed in this study (the person-in-context, DPS, CSLL, and gender as a social structure), I present and discuss in this chapter these findings supporting them with data from the participants. The chapter begins with the presentation and discussion of the influence of gender discourse on shaping the participants'

English learning experience, before moving on to explain how the participants shaped their L2 possible selves through their gendered identities. The following section reveals and discusses the dynamic relationship between both concepts.

It should be noted that the extracts quoted in this chapter and the following one are either originally in English marked as (Unedited) or translated from Arabic to English marked as translated (TR). In the latter case, the original Arabic version is also provided.

6.2 The Influence of Gender Discourse on Shaping the English Learning Experience

In the life history interview, the participants expressed their English learning history from childhood until the time of the interview. As they told their learning story, they orientated themselves with significant contextual themes, drawing on their social position, the nature of their society, the features of the social environment, their relations with others, and the surrounding social conditions, while also highlighting the significant role of gender discourse in their English learning experience. Their orientation to these significant topics was a result of their engagement in the interview process, during which they modified and mediated their stories, developing and elaborating meanings relevant to the research questions. As illustrated earlier, the collaborative process between us allowed their stories to introduce and build on important issues.

As the analysis reveals, the participants were positioned within a certain gender discourse surrounded by established gendered ideologies that were determined by various macro social elements. As a result, they shaped their gendered identities through the existing gender discourse, which crucially impacted their English learning experiences. In the following section, I present the English language learning experience of the postgraduate English learners, followed by the undergraduates' experience in the subsequent section. I do

so to illustrate how each group shaped their English learning experience through a different gender discourse.

6.2.1 The Postgraduates' English Learning Experience

During the interview, the postgraduates oriented themselves to various traditional challenges they witnessed as female English learners. Here, before I move to report these challenges, I refer to my positionality in Chapter 4 of this thesis (see Section 5.3), which I believe encouraged the postgraduate participants to share their personal stories below. It should be noted that these stories may seem sensitive to readers. As I explained previously, the participants were aware that I was an insider researcher rooted in and part of their society and shared most characteristics with them as a Saudi female individual. Also, as we studied on the same PhD programme at the University of Southampton, they were aware of my approximate age and that I was of the same generation, thus living and witnessing the same conditions they had experienced, specifically in terms of gender constraints. This allowed them to more freely share those experiences with me. This awareness was evident during the interview, in which they seemed to have a sense of my belonging to their stories. They used inclusion phrases such as *"as you know", "of course you know what I am talking about", [Maram]; "I think we both experienced similar situations", [Haifa'a]; "Of course, you remember that " and "otherwise, you and I would not have been able to be at the University of Southampton at this time" [*Nawal]*.*

Frequently, the postgraduates described various situations they had faced as English undergraduate students. For example, Haifa'a talked about the time when she had enrolled in the English undergraduate programme, describing her family's reaction to her choice to major in English, as below. She also recounted the way she was treated as an English student at the university where she studied English.

Haifa'a (TR): "I was the first one in the family who studied English. They asked me like, 'Why you enrolled in English?' 'Do you see yourself as better than us?' 'Why English?' I mean my family, you got it. It is like 'Why study English and not Arabic?', and 'Why don't you study our language?'. Other than that, the restrictions were at the university. She [the security guard at the main entrance of the university] told us we were impolite English students, and she left us [standing] outside the building, inspecting our nails, skirts, hair, and everything. She yelled at every girl and said we were arrogant and did not understand anything."

"انا أكبر وحدة كنت ما في احد يعرف اللغة الإنجليزية. انا اول وحدة في العيلة تدخل جامعة وانا اول وحدة في العيلة ليش تدخلي انجليزي؟ بتشوفي نفسك علينا يعني اهلي فاهمة؟ ليش انجليزي؟ يعني ما تدخلي عربية ليه ما تدخل لغة لغتنا ونعرف ايه يعني وغير كذا كان الاضطهاد في الجامعة والله كانت تقول انتو يا بنات الانجليزي غير المؤدبات وتفتشنا تخلينا عند الباب برا وتفتش اظافيرنا وتفتش تنانيرنا وتفتش شعورنا تبي تفتش كل شي. تقول شايفين نفسكم وتهزئ وكانت كل بنت تعطيها تهزيء انت اللي شايفين نفسكم اكيد ما تفهموا."

As pointed out in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), religious ideologies created by the Islamic awakening (explained in detail in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2)) were the most influential factor that established religious ideologies among Saudi individuals at that time. This involved rejecting Western practices seen as anti-Islamic (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Thus, religious scholars made a considerable effort to protect Saudi women, whom they considered representatives of Islam, from Western feminism, restricting their lives through Islamic supervision in public life. Prokop (2003) explained that the concern that Saudi women would become westernised resulted in women being supervised by Islamic scholars, who aimed to protect women's roles in public life by preventing any kind of Western influence and imposing regulations placed on them.

The tendency to protect women from Western values was practised in every institution across Saudi Arabia, including family and educational institutions. This created a negative attitude toward English, which was seen as a threat to the Saudi culture according to the dominant religious ideologies. Thus, as I described earlier (Section 2.5.1), some Saudi individuals resisted learning English because they believed that acquiring it would impact

their cultural and Islamic values (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Accordingly, when Haifa'a was learning English at university, there were concerns from others surrounding her that westernisation might affect her negatively. Specifically, because she was studying English, her family and the staff at the university feared that she would lose her local identity by imitating Western women while learning their language.

Her choice to study English as a university major was a surprise for her family members due to those ideologies. Thus, because they did not support her choice, they advised her to study Arabic instead of English in order to maintain her religious and cultural beliefs. Interestingly, because she did not meet their expectations, her family seemed to be concerned with her crossing the boundaries of the determined Saudi hierarchy to gain power. That is, by unexpectedly choosing to study English, her family thought she was attempting to assert her power and saw herself as superior to them.

The concern with following Western values was also the main reason why the security guard inspected her and the other English students. As she described above, the security staff at the university (in the west of Saudi Arabia) where she studied English treated her with suspicion and contempt, continuously checking her appearance before she entered the university campus. As demonstrated earlier (Section 2.2), Islamic scholars had traditionally supervised girls' education in order to ensure the preservation of women's social roles (Al-Bakr et al., 2017). They established policies within female educational institutions, including the way girls dressed and behaved, which had to comply with Islamic teachings (Hamdan, 2005). Therefore, the security staff wanted to check if Haifa'a and the other English students presented themselves as Western girls in terms of their hairstyle, the length of their nails, and the kind of clothes they wore. From my experience as a Saudi female English learner of the same generation as Haifa'a, Saudi female universities typically imposed rules on students prohibiting trousers, short shirts, short skirts, short haircuts (like

boys), and certain hairstyles on campuses. When it came to the English students, these rules were strictly enforced, since the students were more being exposed to a Western language and culture. As an English student, I was more regularly inspected compared to my peers in other departments. I was stopped on several occasions because some of my clothes and hairstyles were seen as inappropriate.

Nevertheless, it is essential to mention that those negative stereotypes about English students did not deter girls like Haifa'a and me, or any of the other postgraduate students presented in this chapter, from studying English at university at that time. As I showed in Chapter 2, although Saudi women accept gender norms, some were able to negotiate the patriarchal system, including their parents by using their knowledge of Islam (Alwedinani, 2017). That is, they justified their choice to study English by highlighting the Islamic teachings that encourage the learning of languages to spread the religion. As a result, because males could not challenge Islamic teachings they extremely valued them, many Saudi families could not prevent their daughters from enrolling on English programmes.

What encouraged them to negotiate with their families was the limited options they had in terms of university majors. As described earlier (Section 2.2), the Department of Religious Guidance, which was in charge of women's education at that time, created policies regarding what was professionally acceptable for men and women based on gender roles. Accordingly, university majors were opened on this basis, limiting educational options for women in order to protect their gender roles. Universities did not offer women the majors that were thought to be incompatible with sex segregation practices (Alshalawi, 2020), such as engineering, law, and journalism, among others. Instead, there were limited to studying the humanities and science majors, which led to teaching positions in gender segregated schools.

Similarly, Nawal also described the situation when she was a young English undergraduate student and how those around her reacted to her learning English:

Nawal (Unedited): "I was looked at by some people from the society as a person who is learning the culture of the non-Muslims, learning how to be Western, westernising myself, and learning a language other than the language of the Holy Qur'an, which was to them Haram [a sin]. And I did hear some people saying 'Oh my God! She's learning English, she knows how to speak English, so she must not be a Muslim'. It's stupid, but this is how people used to think back then. [They said] 'She doesn't sound like us when she speaks in English'; 'She might forget everything about Arabic'; 'She might forget everything about all [our] culture and about customs'. And I remember a funny thing. I remember my brother-in-law. He used to call me and give me a nickname referring to the fact that I speak English the way that I do. And he used to call me 'the mother of Samantha'. I know this is funny, but it refers to Smith as an English family. He said, 'No one from the Arabic world is going to marry you, and you're going to marry someone from the West'. And he used to say that jokingly, but it did affect me for a certain period of time… there was a lady who was saying, 'You should marry someone who either has memorised the holy Qur'an or works in a mosque' because learning English apparently will make me an atheist or make me Christian."

From the quote above, it is evident there were concerns from people around her about losing her identity as a Muslim girl, which placed her in challenging situations with others. Because people around her were rejecting Western culture, they explicitly questioned her religious beliefs, giving her a sense of exclusion and non-belonging. As an English user, she was viewed as someone who was doing something anti-religious when studying English, which was believed to be a sin (Haram) by some. They accused her of being non-Muslim, questioning her faith and thinking that she had relinquished her values and roots by speaking English. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) described traditional concerns about the dominance of the English language led religious scholars to caution Saudi young people against learning or speaking English, referring to is as the "language of the infidels" (p.131.). As a result, some people linked English with being a disbeliever, which led those surrounding Nawal to question her Islamic values. They believed that Nawal had adopted Western values by speaking English and acting like a Western girl with her English accent. Within her family, there was a concern about her losing the opportunity to marry as she acted Western.

Specifically, her brother-in-law warned her that no Arab man would be interested in marrying her as long as she acted Western.

This kind of exclusion expressed by Nawal is a form of othering. Within the framework of patriarchy as a socioeconomic and political system, the status, power, and authority of a woman in relation to a man are determined by others in society as a dominant group, including male members, in which women become "other-directed" (Cooey, 1990, p.10). This entails that in relation to a man as self, a woman becomes other. Her cultural meaning as a symbol of power represents the alienation of a man from himself; she serves as a mirror for whatever he rejects or devalues about himself. Because the social roles determined for Saudi women at that time seemed to contradict Western feminists views of women's social roles, learning English gave some Saudi men a sense that Saudi females who adopted Western culture may reject their assigned social roles and follow Western females' lifestyle; possibly making them more powerful and difficult to control. Consequently, those men viewed English female learners as less desirable as future wives since they threatened their dominance and power as males.

In the case of Nawal, she was seen as a potentially less desirable wife for other Arab Muslim men from his brother-in-law's perspective. He jokingly told her that she might marry a Western man, which is religiously unacceptable for Saudi women, as marrying a non-Muslim man is a sin, which Nawal explained hurt her. He effectively gave her no options regarding marriage, neither a Saudi man nor a Western one, which probably caused her to believe that her future life might be difficult without being married, since marriage was and remains highly valued. Almalki (2020) stated that marriage is highly regarded in Saudi society, as result of the predominant ideologies that value family as the core unit of society, and where women perform their assigned roles as wives and mothers. Women are expected to marry a Saudi man because they are prohibited from marrying a non-Saudi man, and any

rejection of marriage is seen as unusual because it is believed that women will eventually need a man in their lives to establish a family and perform their social roles (Al Alhareth et al., 2015).

Interestingly, as 'othered', Nawal was advised to marry a religious Muslim man to make it obvious to others that she had not changed or abandoned her religious beliefs and, thus, rid herself of the Western ones before she converted to Christianity or became an atheist. Again, this represented the dominance of males, who were believed to be the guides of society, directing any women they believed to be misbehaving. It is worth mentioning, however, that because of the shift in these ideologies and the fluidity of gender discourse, all of the postgraduates were married, and two of them had children.

Another issue that Nawal also mentioned was the limited access to English TV channels which hindered most female English students' access to televised English learning resources, as described below:

Nawal (Unedited): "We didn't have Internet. The TV channels were limited to Channel 1 and Channel 2, so the exposure to the language was very, very minimal, and most families were not allowing their kids to watch Channel 2, which was an English podcast, for numerous reasons, whether it's culture, whether it's religious, whether it's because they are afraid that they will forget the Arabic language… I think my parents' experience in the States kind of opened them up to other cultures, and they always wanted us to kind of be the best of what we could be. There were some restrictions when it came to females. I mean, they were not able to do this, not able to do that in comparison to males, but in general, no one told me not to watch Channel 2 because what's in it? There were times when they would just request me not to play the music so loud because back then, music was not widely accepted by society, and they were just afraid that the word [would] spread that music was played in our house."

Because of the negative beliefs about Western feminism, as Van Geel (2012) explained, TV channels broadcasting in English were not allowed in most Saudi houses to prevent any transfer of Western values. As Nawal recounted above, this made it difficult for other female English students of her generation to watch channels in English. In her case,

however, because of her parents experience living in the US, she was not forbidden from doing so. Here, her social class had an impact on her gendered identity, giving her a privilege in comparison to other Saudi female English students of her generation. As I explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis, due to the complexity of Saudi culture in terms of gender, gender constraints differed among Saudi women based on factors such as social class (Le Renard, 2008). However, although her parents allowed her to watch the English channel at home, they asked her to lower the music volume when she played it so other people would not judge them. This is because the music was not religiously unacceptable in Saudi society, thus reflecting her parents' concerns about stereotypes despite being highly educated.

Furthermore, similar to Haifa's experience, the university in central Saudi Arabia where Nawal studied her English undergraduate programme also had certain educational policies aimed at English students, which affected her learning experience. As she describes below, although she enrolled in the English programme, it was compulsory for English students to also take Arabic classes.

Nawal (Unedited): "When I was in Level 7 in my undergrad, I went to her [the dean] saying that I was complaining about a couple of things. I was assigned as a spokesperson for the department, and I was complaining to her about certain practices in teaching and certain issues in the curriculum. Everything has to be in Arabic, and I told her that it came to my attention that we are taking Arabic courses like Criticism and Literature, and in other colleges, they are given [taught] in English, but in our department, they are in Arabic. And we are required to have a certain level of writing in Arabic formal language or the classic[al] Arabic. And we are supposed to know how to write with the movements and punctuation in Arabic. Otherwise, we will lose marks on the exam, and in class, we are supposed to communicate with the instructor in formal Arabic. And she said yes, that was my decision because you guys are speaking or learning English, and I don't want you to forget about [your] Arabic, and that's why we decided that."

The main goal behind this policy was to maintain students' level of Arabic, as well as their identities. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) indicated that when English spread into Saudi society, many people claimed that maintaining Saudi culture depended on preserving the

Arabic language, as it is the language of the holy book of Islam. These concerns contributed to the integration of various Arabic and Islamic courses into English programmes in an attempt to maintain and protect English female students' traditional identities and roots. Again, these many fears and concerns about them losing their Arabic identity and language are indicative of the postgraduate students being 'othered' by society. As othered, they were obliged to preserve their culture, the Arabic language, and their Arab identity in order to uphold the cultural norms in a society where the dominant groups, who seemed to own and represent the Saudi culture, determined and governed the image and representation of women. As culture guardians, religious scholars directed the postgraduates' identities within educational institutions by embedding the Arabic language into their curriculum, controlling how and what they learned in the English department. They assigned the postgraduates a compulsory role as servants to those Islamic ideologies which had been created by the Sahwists, the most powerful religious group in society at the time.

In fact, by looking at all of the quotes above, it is clear that the religious discourse was the reason for all of the challenges the postgraduates faced, and it had a powerful influence on their identities. This is because the religious discourse at a macro level is "deeply gendered, with beliefs about male privilege and agency, and female nurturance built into the rules and the cultural logics that accompany regulation" (Risman, 2004, p. 32). This, however, does not mean that it shapes gender by itself as a singular dimension. Instead, as Risman explains, it interacts with various other elements, since all aspects of the social structure are intertwined with gender, placing individuals in a specific position within their society. As seen in the quotes above, societal, familial, and educational domains, affected by the religious discourse, all interplayed in shaping the postgraduates' identity, affecting their English studies, which is in alignment with Ushioda's person-in-context (2009). Ushioda

insisted that contextual factors as relational components play a role in shaping learners' identity as a critical component in their language learners' experiences.

It was not only those social dimensions that intersected with religion, but also politics that affected the postgraduates' English learning experience as well. For example, as described below, Haifa'a faced a challenge when trying to obtain permission from her mother to travel to Canada to pursue her MA after she had graduated from the English undergraduate programme.

Haifa'a (TR): "My mum was very strict in terms of having a scholarship. She said, 'Why? You are a girl, are you crazy? You are a girl, what is wrong with you? What happened to your mind?'... My mum refused [to let me go]. She said there was no benefit to me travelling and asked me to go find another teaching job in a school, and I told them [her family] 'I am getting a scholarship now to go to a different world, and you are telling me to get back into this shell? No! I want to go abroad'. But my mum did not think this way. She said 'You are going to learn immoral things'. She was afraid…she would have a heart attack because my dad allowed me to travel. My mum was not against education, but she followed the norms, like, how could she allow her daughter to go abroad."

" امي كانت جدا صارمة من ناحية الابتعاث وزي كذا. ليش؟ تقولي انت بنت. انتي هبلة انتي بنت. يعني ايش فيك؟ ايش صار بمخك؟. عني امي ليش اعترضت، ما لها داعي السفرة هذي ما لها داعي خلاص دوري لك وظيفة في وزارة التعليم. لين قلت لهم انا دحين رايحة بعثة ورايحة عالم مختلف تقولي لي ارجع للقوقعة. لا ابغى اخرج. امي بس ما حسبتها زي كذا ان امي تقول تتعلمي الفلتة يعني انها خايفة. أمي اللي بتنجلط كيف ابوك يسمح لك، كيف انت بنت كيف، يعني ما هي ضد التعليم بس ضد العرف كيف بنتك تطلع برا."

As described in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2), the male guardian policy was legally imposed on all Saudi women, including the postgraduate students, at the time. Women were banned from moving around, including travelling abroad, without a male relative's permission (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). This law, which required women to obtain permission from a male relative and also be accompanied by a male relative as they moved around outside the home, not only restricted their freedom of movement, but also had a major significant impact on their educational opportunities. For example, it hindered the postgraduates from pursuing their education in English abroad, as they needed a male member to accompany them. In

addition, this law created a negative stereotype toward women who demanded to travel alone.

Therefore, it is not a surprise that Haifa'a's mother refused her request to travel to another country alone. Her mother was concerned about how people in Saudi society judging her for allowing her daughter to travel to the West, where mixed gender spaces are the norm. She was also afraid that the Western culture would impact her daughter negatively in terms of converting her to Western culture and abandoning her principles and roots. This was likely due to the gender segregation discourse common at the time, which placed greater importance on separating women from men (Widodo & Elyas, 2020). For those who did break these rules, they were negatively stereotyped as being unsuitable future wives and mothers. This is evident in Nawal's example below.

Nawal (Unedited): "Back then, there was this stereotypical idea that if a woman works in a place where there are men and women, she's not going to be desired by other men [that men won't want] to marry her, because she's working in a place where there are men and female[s] at the same time. It's a cultural thing. So, for them, working with males means that you will cross certain boundaries. It means that you are not going to be a good wife, and you will not listen to your husband. So, from the beginning, no one is going to propose to you because you're working in a co-ed workplace."

Due to the value placed on marriage in Saudi Arabia, many families prevented their daughters from integrating with men to prevent their daughters from being stereotyped and, thus, to protect their reputations. As Al-Khunizi et al. (2021) stated, Saudi families prevent their daughters from socialising with men because society views women who deal with men "with some disrespect"; thereby, men become uninterested in marrying them (p.109).

According to the analysis, however, all of these constraints formerly faced by the postgraduates have started to decrease over the years. Specifically, with the emergence of the discourse around women's empowerment, which is part of the Saudi Vision 2030 (see

Section 2.4), the postgraduate participants have gained more control over their lives and obtained power and access to resources. Drawing on Risman's gender theory (2004), gender is a changeable and dynamic concept because the social structure offers individuals continuous possibilities concerning their gender order, which causes its constant change and dynamicity.

This was highlighted by Nawal when she talked about the recent repeal of the male guardianship policy, which has helped the female postgraduates to travel alone and pursue their higher education in English abroad without the need for a male member to accompany them.

Nawal (Unedited): "Nowadays, we have more freedom to pursue our dreams. Otherwise, you and I would not have been able to be at the University of Southampton at this time. We are now, give or take the decision makers of our own lives."

However, while the emerging gender discourse has reduced previously constraining gender norms, the emerging flexible norms continues to shape the participants' language learning experiences. This is clear when looking at the English language experience of the English undergraduate participants whose have had fewer boundaries, as a result of the improvement in women's rights and empowerment for their generation.

6.2.2 The Undergraduates' English Learning Experience

From the data, it is evident that the undergraduates have experience different social circumstances compared to the postgraduate students due to the rapid changes that have occurred in Saudi Arabia in the last years. The undergraduate students were born at the beginning of the gradual cultural shift that started in the era of King Abdullah, which has resulted in particularly remarkable changes in Saudi women's status (see Section 2.3). They were also raised during a time of significant changes in gender equality within Saudi Arabia,

witnessing reforms that the government and people were ready for as a consequence of the different societal shifts over the years.

For example, Tahani mentioned that she learned English through various technological tools when she was young and that she had access to English TV channels and applications, as explained below:

Tahani *(TR)*: "I learned English when I was five years old...I loved songs like Twinkle Twinkle [Little Star] and [programmes like] Barney. I started in 2013 in the last two years of primary school. There was an application called Kik that was for chatting with young girls, and my friends and I always changed our status. I mean, I kept changing my status in English, such as I feel happy, and I feel sad. I was expressive when I saw my friends writing things as their status. This was the beginning of my English learning. I wrote tweets. I started writing my status in my Kik, I went to watch Nickelodeon. I loved Victoria. I watched it on the MBC 3 channel. I loved watching those things. Their language was exciting, very exciting, and there were also movies on this channel that I watched every Thursday and Friday afternoon."

"تعلمت انجليزي من عمر خمس سنوات... كنت أحب أغنى تونكل تونكل وبارني... بديت ٢٠١٣ شوفي الابتدائي اخر الابتدائي اخر سنة سنتين. كان فيه تطبيق اسمة كيك كان للشات للبنات الصغار. كنت اناوصحباتي في تغير الحالة حقتك. يعني انا ظليت اغير الحالة اشعر بالسعادة اشعر بالحزن كنت مرة معبرة لما اشوف صحباتي يكتبون اشياء فكنت وقتها عرفتي بديت من هذا المجال. بديت أني اكتب. اكتب تويتات اكتب في الستاتس حقتي في الكيك. او اروح اشوف نيكالوديان. أحب فيكتوريا. كنت على ام بي سي ٣ كل ظهر خميس او جمعة ما اتذكر ,كان يجي موفي حق اطفال يعني كان انجليش وعليه دبلجة. كنت مرة أحب يعني اشوف هذي الاشياء. لغتهم كانت ممتعة. كان مرة ممتع وأحب اتفرج كنت دايماً انتظر الخميس والجمعة."

Faruk (2013) argued that the global and local demand for English in the growth of the country and the revolution of women's education at that time led to the recognition of English as a significant language in society. As a result, the concerns about spreading Western values in society were no longer regarded as a major issue compared to before, thus making the gender constraints more flexible than before. People started welcoming the Internet, TV channels, music, and other electronic devices, in which the Internet was widely used, specifically during for the undergraduates' generation. They had access to media and technology, including various applications and TV channels. They were also able to listen to music that had become widely acceptable by that time, which had a positive effect on their

language learning by offering them multiple English learning sources, unlike the postgraduates above.

They also mentioned that they were able to travel outside the country easily and thus, they were exposed to the English language abroad. Asala and Tahani below, for example, indicated that they used to travel to other countries where they used their English. They had the chance to visit Western countries to visit their sisters, who had scholarships and studied abroad on their own. These opportunities helped them integrate with native English speakers and practise their English.

Asala (TR): I travelled, I went and came back. My sister studied in America. I mean, we used to go to [visit] her, and that was in high school… What also helped me the most is that my father was a diplomat outside Saudi Arabia. I used to go to him every summer, and I made friends at the age of five and six. We were very close, and we were together almost every day. So, I learned... After China, we moved to Malaysia. My father worked at the embassy in Malaysia, and I had to speak English because Malaysians speak English. Four years after China, we were in Malaysia. I learned and started practising English more. I mean, I did practice the language mostly in summer... I travelled, I went and came back, but I didn't acquire the English language. I mean, the thing that I learned the most from was school and also from movies… My sister studied in America. I mean, we used to go to her, and that was in high school."

" يعني اسافر واروح واجي . اختي كانت تدرس امريكا. يعني
كنا نروح لها وهذا بالثانوية. اللي ساعدني اكثر انه والدي دبلوماسي في برا السعودية كنت كل صيف اروح عنده وعندي
علاقات صحبات بعمري ست سنوات خمس سنوات صرنا يعني مرة قراب وكل يوم احنا مع بعض
وتعلمت ا ختي كانت تدرس في امريكا. مم يعني كنا نروحلها وهذا بالثانوية. نروح مم بعد الصين انتقلنا الى ماليزيا يعني و
الدي صار يشتغل بالسفارة في ماليزيا وبرضو كنت مجبرة اني اتكلمانجليزي لانه ماليزيا يتكلمون انجلش كلهم. أربع سنوا
ت بعد الصين احنا بماليزيا تعلمت وصرت امارس اكثر يعني ما كنت امارس اللغة الا في الصيف اكثر شيء."

Tahani *(TR):* "My sister had a scholarship in Brighton, near London, and we used to travel to her for a short visit from time to time and stay with her. My mum did not know English, and I knew. I mean, frankly I was okay in English. My mum used to ask me what they said and asked me to translate for her. She asked me 'what did she tell you?' and 'What did he told you?', 'Ask him this', 'Tell him that', and 'Ask him about this'. So, I noticed that I was translating between Arabic and English. I liked it, and I said to myself I must enter the translation field."

"اختي كانت مبتعثه في برايتون لندن، قريب من لندن. وكنا دائما نروح عندها زيارات خفيفة كذا كل فترة.. كنا نروح عندها نقعد. فانا ماما ما تعرف انجليزي. وانا كنت اعرف يعني وانا صراحة اوكي... كانت ماما دائما تقول لي وش تقول؟ ترجمي لي وش تقول؟ وش قالت لك؟ وش قال لك؟ اسأليه كذا علميه اسأليه عن كذا فلاحظت اني صرت بين العربي والانجليزي. ماما يقول كذا، هي قالت كذا وكذا. فلاحظت انه كنت اترجم. قلت واو مرة ممتع لازم ادخل ذا المجال. يعني مجال الترجمة."

As young women, the undergraduates grew up during the current major cultural transformation of Saudi society, as a result of the Saudi Vision 2030 policies, which contributed to expanding their possibilities by removing the previously strict policies placed on women, specifically the guardianship policy. This repeal of the policy allowed them to access multiple spaces and move easily both inside and outside the country without the need for a male chaperone.

Significantly, what enhanced the undergraduates' English learning experience was their social class. The data shows that they were raised in a upper class family, as a result of their parents' educational background or job positions, particularly in the case of Asala, whose father was a diplomat. The fact they come from the upper class is also reflected in their stories when they mention their maids, who helped raised them when they were children, and how they communicated with them in English, as described in the quotes below.

Asala (TR): "I listened and talked to our maids at home."

"اسمع اتكلم مع العاملات عندنا في البيت."

Tahani *(TR)*: " I used to love singing and talking with the Filipino maid, my babysitter, who used to speak English with me."

" كنت أحب اغني يعني كانت الناني حقتي فلبينية فكانت تتكلم معاي انقلش."

Referring to Van Geel (2012) in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the revolution in the oil industry increased the national wealth of the country, raising salaries and thus improving people's lives. Thus, some families from the upper and middle classes started bringing employing housekeepers in their homes to assist with household chores and childcare (Al-Jarf, 2022). This economic factor benefited Tahani and Asala above, as it expanded their access to resources and ability to travel, allowing them to acquire English from their maids who spoke English as well as travel abroad, where they could practise the language. Here, class as an additional dimension interplayed with the participants' gendered identity, giving these two participants increasing learning opportunities compared to others from different generations and the lower classes. According to gender as a social structure theory, the structure of class in society intersects with gendered identity, distributing unequal chances among people (Risman, 2004).

In addition, unlike the postgraduates, the undergraduates also described how they had more freedom to choose their university majors themselves and that their families had supported their choices. For example, Shahad and Tahani mentioned that they had chosen to study English with no pressure to change their major from their families.

Shahad (TR): "My family encouraged me, but others did not. I mean, they were shocked, wondering why and how I had registered to study English language. They said you are supposed to register for other majors in applied sciences."

" عيلتي دعمتني بس البعض لا. يعني انصدموا ليش دخلتي اللغة الإنجليزية؟ وكيف دخلتي؟ المفروض تدخلين تخصص ثاني في العلوم التطبيقية."

Tahani (TR): "My family was happy. Thank God, no one said anything. It was the other friends who asked me why I was majoring in English because everyone now knows English…Look, I am not very close to my relatives, so they do not know much about me. But when they ask me, for example, what I study, and I tell them that I study English and translation, they look

down at me with a little bit of contempt. Do you want me to tell you why? Because they see English as very easy subject that everyone can learn now. ”

"اهلي كانوا مرة مبسوطين. الحمد لله ما أحد قال شيء. كان صاحباتي البعيدين مو القريبين. ليش تخصصتي انجليزي؟
كل الناس الحين تعرف انجلش. شوفي انا مو مرة يعني نطاق الاقارب يعني ما يعرفون اشياء كثيرة
لكن لما اقول لهم مثلا يسألوني مثلا ما شاء الله ايشدخلتي في الجامعة اقول لهم لغات وترجمة تحسين يواجهون شوي
شوي استحقار. ما في اعجاب كثير. تبيني اعطيك سبب؟ هم يشوفون
ان مثلا تخصص لغات وترجمة او اللغة الانجليزية
يشوفون انها سهلة جدا وان كل احد يقدر يتعلمها."

From the quotes, it is clear that they did not seem to have any issues regarding gender stereotypes in terms of working with the opposite gender. Their families did not expect them to enrol in specific majors because there were many majors open to them to choose from, including those that could lead to them working in mixed-gender workplaces. They were even encouraged to apply for emerging majors in order to expand their future opportunities. Interestingly, English was socially perceived as a less desirable university major and there was a negative social perspective toward it as an old-fashioned university subject, as described in the quotes.

Because of the traditional gender segregation ideologies and stereotypes, most English students in the past ended up becoming teachers at schools as the career options available to women were limited then. However, as a result of women's rights discourse (see Section 2.3), the revolution in education has led to a total of twenty-two subjects becoming available to women of that generation to study at university. The variety of subjects include journalism, interior design, accounting, business administration, marketing, finance, and computer engineering (Hamdan, 2017). This has led to the perception that those with an English degree are limited to becoming schoolteachers. Therefore, those surrounding the undergraduates did not want them to limit themselves in terms of their future careers, when

so many other subjects that could open many doors for them were available to study. In other words, the social change at the macro level provided the undergraduate participants with encouraging norms that enabled them to have some control over their lives and be independent. However, this does not mean that gender norms disappeared or that the norms no longer impacted them. Despite the improvement in norms, the undergraduates' experiences were still shaped by them. As women, they were acting based on the opportunities determined by the surrounding discourse, which offered them encouraging choices and a degree of freedom.

However, the data also showed that despite these opportunities, the undergraduates were still surrounded by social norms that were important to them as Saudi individuals, and which they adhered to. Asala, for example, mentioned that she was obliged to adopt traditional values and her religious principles prevented her from adjusting to those shifts, as explained below:

Asala (TR): "As you know, I am from an environment that is neither very closed nor very open. We are very average. When thing became more open here, or for example, specifically in Riyadh, I was convinced of my principles, a believer in my religion, and was extremely attached to them. I have limits that I cannot cross. I mean, this is for myself not for my family. So, this openness has not affected me negatively. What is happening right now is not interesting to me because I used to live abroad and I've witnessed this openness, so it has not affected me. I have already seen it before, and I am aware that it is wrong, and my religion and principles do not allow me to do these things, so I will not do it, and I will remain attached to my rules and principles."

" انا زي ما تعرفين انا من بيئة يعني مو منغلقة مرة ولا منفتحة مرة. احنا متوسطين جدا. لما صار الانفتاح هنا او مثلا تحديدا بالرياض مثلا اه انا مقتنعة في مبادئي مقتنعة في اه في مم اه ديني اه متمسكة جدا فيهم. عندي حدود ما اقدر اتعداها. اه يعني عشان نفسي قبل انه يكون عشان اهلي مثلا فما اثر علي انه بشيء سلبي انه انا أصلا يعني اللي قاعد مو شيق الحين يعني عرفتي انا كمان متعودة اني عايشة برا وكذا. فانا متعودة على هذي الاشياء. متعودة اشوف كذا يصير اشياء. فما اثرت يعني. اللي خلاص انا شايفتها من قبل وعارفة انه غلط وديني ما يسمح ان انا اسوي كذا او مثلا مبادئي فما راح اسويها واتمسك بقواعدي ومبادئي."

According to the social theories adopted in this study, while societies do provide individuals with choices, these choices are often constrained by gender assumptions embedded in the culture, religion, and institutions that shape the realm of possibilities (Giddens, 1984; Risman, 2004). Despite the shift in norms in Saudi Arabia, these shifts did not erase the features of Saudi culture, and thus, the undergraduates were not entirely free from social obligations, as significant cultural factors still played a role. Because of those obligations, Asala felt dissatisfied with the emerging discourse despite her coming from an upper-class family, having travelled to different countries with her father in his role as a diplomat, and being exposed to different cultures. As she described above, she believed that the opening of Saudi society and the normalising of mixed public spaces conflicted with her religious principles and beliefs. Her environment and family, which she considered "average", seemed to hold traditional ideologies passed down by previous gender discourse. Thus, she could not fully adopt the existing norms because she still had limits that constrained her.

As I demonstrated earlier (see Section 2.4), the process toward gender equality in Saudi Arabia has been very complex as gender norms remain strongly rooted in society. Thus, they were still practised in most institutions, hindering some women's capacity to access public spaces where men and women socialise together. It was still not easy for most Saudi people to shift their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs attached to their deeply rooted gender norms, which had been reinforced over time. Therefore, like Asala, most of them resisted the emerging discourse related to women's empowerment and became more committed to upholding traditional gender roles and identities. The commitment to these obligations also applied to the postgraduates, who also talked about their views on various cultural aspects they were committed to despite the change in women's status. In other words, while all of the participants in my study had recently begun to enjoy a higher status

because of the Saudi Vision 2030, they were surrounded by social constraints established by various relational macro factors, which remain critical features of the culture.

Significantly, these macro factors did not affect my participants' learning experience as external entities. Instead, they had been internalised into their self-system, creating knowledge and perceptions about themselves as self-concepts (Mercer, 2014) and interacted with other elements at the micro level. Drawing on the CSLL, while context may be understood as the environmental features that are external to the language student, these features interact with other internal complex systems such as self-concepts (Ushioda, 2015). In the case of my participants, the existing gender discourse created by multiple external factors had been internalised into their self-concept, creating gender perceptions, thus producing their gendered selves. As a result of these gendered selves that had been produced, the participants created their L2 possible selves that interacted with the former. As a result of this interaction, the existing gendered selves caused the gendering of future L2 possible selves which adopted existing gender norms perceived in their self-concept.

6.3 Gendering L2 Possible Selves

As explained in the methodology chapter, following the life history interview, I conducted a complementary semi-structured interview to ask the participants about their future L2 vision. For all of the participants, I asked the following questions: How do you see yourself as an English user in the future? In what ways do you see yourself using English in the future? How did you use to see yourself as an English user in the future?

Through a comprehensive analysis of both interviews, I was able to delve into the profound ways in which the participants envisioned themselves as L2 users. I did so by analysing their past and present visions of themselves project into the future, that is, how, in the past, they imagined themselves in the future and how they now imagine themselves in

the future. The life history interview, which functioned as an identity project, shed light on how the participants constructed their gendered identities, based on their language learning experiences. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, provided a unique insight into how those constructed identities profoundly influenced their future L2 possible selves.

Analysing the data obtained from the postgraduates, I found that they formed their L2 possible selves in educational settings when they were young. For example, when they were English undergraduate students at university, Maram and Haifa'a visualised their L2 future selves as English teachers with a doctorate teaching in the English department at a university.

Maram (TR): "I used to envision myself as someone teaching in higher education and of becoming a doctor there."

"كنت اشوف نفسي كشخص يدرس في الجامعة ويصير دكتور هناك. "

Haifa'a (TR): "The girls advised me to teach in universities, not in schools, and the idea came to my mind, and I said, oh God! Yeah, yeah. I thought about it and said why not to become a doctor in a university, you see? They were the ones who helped me create that future vision of me because I did not have that direction at first."

"البنات قالوا لي اشتغلي في قطاع الجامعات ما تشتغلي في المدارس. فطن في راسي قلت والله اي والله. انا قلبتها براسي قلت ليه طيب مااصير دكتورة في الجامعة شفتي؟ هم اللي بنوا لي التصور انا ما كان عندي توجه أصلا."

According to Risman's theory (2004), the macro levels of a social structure interact with various elements at the individual and the interactional levels, in this case, shaping the women's understanding of themselves in relation to their gender. As Risman explained, gender ideologies established at the micro levels in a given society are internalised into

women's self-system, allowing them to create perceptions and beliefs regarding their assigned gender and social position, thereby developing their gendered selves. These perceptions include the established norms such as the typical roles, expectations, and stereotypes that direct women's interactions to be socially accepted and appropriate to their gender, as well as their future actions. That is, women can only act within their imagined possibilities, making it impossible for them to do anything outside the boundaries of those imaginations.

In the quotes above, the gender ideologies created by the macro levels in relation to the gender segregation discourse were internalised within the participants as self-concepts, creating their perceptions and understanding of themselves as women and, thus, producing their gendered selves. Accordingly, their L2 possible selves as a dynamic notion interacted with their gendered selves, responding to the participants' perceptions about themselves as females (Henry, 2015), which included being prohibited from mixed gender spaces. As a result of this interaction, the postgraduates created gendered ought-to L2 selves (selves that meet obligations), in response to the gender segregation discourse, narrowing their L2 vision down to female-only settings, specifically educational institutions where gender segregation is practiced. In this sense, their gendered ought-to L2 selves were constructed in response to the existing gender norms they recognised. In the case of Haifa'a, although the other girls, her classmates, helped her to shape her L2 self as an English teacher in higher education, her previous vision had been to teach in school as a gender segregated workplace, responding to her knowledge about her availabilities. This result is in alignment with my analysis of Al-Otaibi's (2013) study (see Section 3.4). As I showed, in her research, Al-Otaibi found that most of her Saudi female participants shared L2 vision for themselves as English teachers. Although she justified her results by explaining that teaching was a plausible and favoured future career

for most Saudi women, I argue that this was due to the influence of gender discourse on her participants.

For the undergraduates, they expressed a variety of L2 visions located in different future spaces, unlike the postgraduates. Shahad, for example, visualised herself in politics, as described below.

Shahad (TR): "I envisioned myself speaking English in a political conversation. I do not have the idea that a girl should have a certain job or a limited thing that she must be committed to. That might be the case for other people, but my family does not have a problem with this and supports this idea. The options are open to me. I am not limited to a specific thing, nor do I limit myself to certain things. The most important thing for me is to find something I love.

"اشوف نفسي متحدثة لغة انجليزية في الخطابات السياسية.ما عندي ذا الشي يعني ان البنت لازم يكون عندها وظيفة ا و حاجة محددة هي تلتزم فيها. في يعني في ناس لكن بالنسبةللاهل اهلي لاما عندهم اي مشكلة. بالعكس يدعمون ذا ال شي. مفتوحة الخيارات ابدا مش محيزني على حاجة ولا انا محيزة نفسي على شي. اهم حاجةاحصل شيء انا القى نفسي فيه. "

Similar to the postgraduates, and despite their differences, the gender norms created for undergraduates and attached to their gendered selves also contributed to shaping their gendered L2 possible selves. The recent changes in women's positions and women's empowerment discourse had been internalised in them, giving them the idea that they were not limited to certain future spaces. As seen above, as a female, Shahad did not believe in limiting herself to a specific thing and she expressed her belief that she had many options available to her. In addition, she was encouraged by her family to independently choose her career path. Having these perceptions within herself, she formed a gendered ideal L2 self (selves that meet personal desires) in accordance with those perceptions. Her knowledge of the current expectations of women fostered this future identity in the political field, which is typically as a male-dominated profession.

Tahani and Asala also visualised themselves as representatives in an embassy abroad, as detailed below.

Tahani (TR): "I see myself as a representative of my country abroad speaking English with English speakers… I always ask my mother. I always talk to her. I see my friends, for example, and one of them asked her father if she could be a lawyer, and her father said no because she would shout in front of men. So, I asked my mother if she was thinking the same way as those parents. She said no! Women only shout for the right things in court. My mum always tells me that if I respect myself and do not do anything wrong, I have nothing to be afraid of."

"اشوف نفسي ممثلة لدولتي بالخارج اتحدث لغة انجليزي من متحدثين اللغة ... انا دايما اسأل ماما ممكن دايما اتكلم معها انه اشوف صحباتي مثلا وحدة تقول ابغى اكون محامية ويجي ابوها يقول لها لا انت بتصرخين قدام الرجال. فكنت اسأل ماما اقول انت تفكرين كذا تقول لا المرأة ما تصرخ الا في الحق في وقت المحكمة ووقت الاشياء ودايما كلمتها تقول اذا انت محترمة نفسك وانت ما سويتي شي غلط ما عندك اي شي تخافي منه."

The undergraduates created their L2 selves based not only on their perceptions and understanding of the norms encouraged, but also on their awareness of the economic resources they had based on their social class, which facilitated their travel to different countries. Here, the findings of this study support researchers who have previously linked social class with the development of L2 possible selves. Kormos and Kiddle (2013) found that ideal L2 selves are associated with social class, in which those from the upper social classes have a stronger ideal L2 self than those from lower, lower-middle and middle classes. Lamb (2012, 2013) also highlighted in his research that students from upper and middle-class families who are open to the world or have global interests tend to have higher ambitions than those from the lower classes, allowing them to develop stronger ideal L2 selves.

Looking at the examples above, the undergraduate learners shaped their gendered ideal L2 selves enhanced by their assessment of the encouraging conditions surrounding them, which enabled them to perceive themselves as capable of achieving their desired L2 selves. According to the DPS theory, the power of the ideal L2 selves centres on the

encouraging surrounding conditions that facilitate its availability and accessibility through revisional processes that make them imaginable. The knowledge they had of their self-concept regarding their social conditions enabled them to evaluate their future possibilities, creating their L2 selves through those evaluations. This revisional process not only occurs internally at the cognitive level but can also occur externally through negotiation with significant others, such as parents, regarding the possibilities available due to gender constraints. As in seen in Tahani's example above, she continuously checked with her mother about the possibilities available to her in the future. She asked her mother about her stance on women's integration with men in the workplace. She wanted to assess whether her mother held the same beliefs toward gender expectations as her friends' parents. Zentner and Reaud (2007) explained that girls are more concerned with their parents' opinions when it comes to their future identities because they tend to question whether those identities are appropriate for the social context or not. In the case of Tahani, because of the high level of authority Saudi parents have over their daughters, she wanted to be assured that her future identity was acceptable and would fit her mother's perceptions as a significant, influential person.

Overall, the activation of the L2 possible selves among all of the participants, either gendered ought-to or ideal L2 selves, occurred through the interaction between their L2 possible selves' and the participants' gendered identities. This was because they responded to whatever gender knowledge they had about themselves in their self-concept as both individual and social constructs (Iwaniec, 2014), which enabled their evaluation of the existing gender conditions at the time. Their future L2 selves interacted with the gender knowledge the participants had about themselves as female English students in the local context, which included roles, expectations and stereotypes perceived and recognised in their self-concept. This is because future L2 possible selves are naturally developed based on

the perceptions that exist in the learners' actual or "working self-concept" (Henry, 2015, p.90).

What I found remarkably interesting was the continuous, dynamic interaction of their L2 possible selves with the participants' gendered selves and how they were changed and amended based on the dynamicity of gender through the self-concept. In other words, the change to the L2 possible selves was caused by the continuous change in the participants' gendered identities and their perceptions about themselves.

Above, I showed how the participants shaped their L2 possible selves through their gendered identities, while the following section reports and discusses the findings regarding the continuous dynamic interaction of the L2 possible selves with the gendered identities of the participants through their self-concept, which resulted in a change to the L2 selves over a long period of time.

6.4 The Dynamism of L2 Possible Selves through Gendered Identities

In the methodology chapter, I made it clear that one of my research goals was to analyse and compare the postgraduates L2 vision due to their rich experiences in terms of observing different gender discourses over decades. This was to deepen my understanding of the complexity of L2 vision in relation to the dynamicity of gender in Saudi society.

Interestingly, in response to the interview questions regarding their L2 vision in the past and present, the postgraduates expressed different L2 possible selves over time. For instance, while Maram used to visualise her L2 self in an educational setting when she was young, as described above, she had a different vision as a postgraduate. She saw herself in a leadership position in administration abroad, as detailed below.

Maram (TR): "I see myself as an empowered woman in a leadership position in the future, even in an external administration… I will be a leader in the field of business."

"اشوف نفسي في المستقبل امرأة متمكنة في منصب قيادي او حتى في ادارة خارجية... راح أكون قائدة في مجال البزنس"

Similarly, Nawal also shifted her previous L2 self as an academic translator to one in tourism. She wanted to contribute to the development of her country by welcoming people, both males and females from everywhere and helping to open the country to others, as detailed below.

Nawal (Unedited*):* " Well, no one can deny that, nowadays, we do have more opportunities, we have a stronger role in what we're doing, and we have a say in what we're doing more than what it was. Let's say ten years ago, as someone who has lived the before and after. In Saudi Arabia, I would say that, nowadays, we are in more control of our lives and more control over what's going on around us. We are heard, not to the extent that we are 100% heard by everyone in the country for certain reasons, but we are heard by the government, which is the most important unit in the country…We are now, give or take, decision-makers of our own lives. Because now we're open to tourism and internal internationalisation, we are welcoming people from different nationalities around the world to come and work in Saudi Arabia, and because, you know, we have what is called residency cards. So, we're attracting a lot of people from outside of the country, something that we haven't had in the past, we were not doing in the past. I think because of everything that's going on right now, because we are more open to the others, I think I will have better chances of helping with this openness, the change of minds and mindset of the whole country."

According to the analysis, the postgraduates developed different gendered selves over time since, they faced continuous social changes in terms of gender discourse and women's position. While they had witnessed constraining norms due to the gender segregation discourse, they also witnessed other discourses, including women's rights discourse and women's empowerment discourse, impacting their identities over the years. Drawing on the gender theory in this study, because gender is changeable due to the changing nature of societies, various gendered selves emerge over time and develop from the new perceptions received from social changes.

When gender discourse at the macro levels changed, the postgraduates were exposed to new cultural knowledge about emerging gender norms. This knowledge was internalised

into their self-concept, leading to the formation of new perceptions about themselves and, consequently, the development of a new gendered identity. Their change in identity prompted a re-construction of their previous L2 self, producing a new future L2 self that aligned with the new norm. This is because, according to the CSLL, all systems within the learners, including context, identity, and L2 self, are dynamic and susceptible to change through ongoing development. Any change that occurs in one system can trigger a change in the others (Mercer, 2016). The increasing opportunities for Saudi women and the reduction in constraints made the postgraduates internally aware of these possibilities, enabling them to transform their previous L2 possible selves from a solely female space to a mixed-gender space. Thus, while Maram created a gendered ought-to L2 self as a female English teacher in the past, she shifted her future self to another ideal L2 self in a leadership position in an administrative position abroad. As seen in her quote above, she no longer limited herself to educational settings where there was gender segregation. Indeed, she even expanded her vision to working abroad, where genders continuously mix. This shift in her L2 self was a result of the dynamicity of her gender and the change in Saudi norms.

Similarly, although Nawal had developed a gendered ought-to L2 self as a translator in the past, it was expanded to an ideal L2 self in tourism, reflecting a personal desire. As she clearly said, she had been encouraged by the social changes in terms of women's status that had reduced gender constraints. She explicitly expressed the power she obtained from existing discourse, which had altered her previous L2 self from a gender-segregated space to a mixed one. In this case, and similar to the undergraduates above, the postgraduates created gendered ideal L2 selves enhanced by the emerging, encouraging circumstances, which reflected their continuous assessment of the social conditions affected by the contemporary gender discourse.

Consequently, their L2 possible selves interacted continuously with gender and related beliefs due to the dynamicity of the latter. As gender changed due to contextual change, gender perceptions changed, creating a new gendered identity that caused the transformation of the L2 possible selves, which met the new gender ideologies in the self-concept. Henry (2015), in his DPS theory, illustrated that language learners dynamically structure self-relevant information from previous experiences, creating a system of beliefs through their social engagements. When there is a change in their self-representation based on the knowledge they receive and the cognitive process of that representation, such change interacts with the future L2 possible selves, causing them to transform. In this case, any change to the L2 possible selves results from a change in the actual or current self-concept, in which the former can remain stable without the latter (Henry, 2015). This suggests that without changes in gender belief that recreate gendered identities, L2 possible selves are likely to be stable. This means that the dynamic of the self-concept as a function of timescales (Henry, 2015), which receives continuous gender information, is the engine of the L2 possible selves' dynamism and transformation among female language students. When shifts took place in their self-concept, their L2 possible selves transformed, as the emerging and acquired information allowed the revision of their possible selves, and thus their transformation.

This finding aligns with Mercer (2011), who in her longitudinal case study found that it is the dynamicity of the language learners' self-concept that causes the complexity of their self-system. According to her data, language learners' system of beliefs is highly complex, dynamic and subject to change in response to various situations and individual experiences. Their beliefs frequently undergo alterations to accommodate contextual circumstances, adjusting and changing over time and in different situations mediated by different self-related processes. Furthermore, in her study, she argued that the self-concept of language

learners is multifaceted and interconnected, making it dynamic, formed at multiple levels of specificity and context-related across various domains. Extending on her argument, I argue, based on the results of this study, that this complexity of the self-concept is what causes the complexity of L2 possible selves, and that it needs serious consideration when considering L2 selves.

Overall, the findings in this chapter support the theoretical assumptions made about the dynamic nature of L2 possible selves. As theorised, a change in the external context can interact with other internal elements, causing a change in the current selves (Henry, 2015; Ushioda, 2015), making no core sense of ourselves socially re-constructed through social experiences and interactions, thus resulting in a multitude of L2 selves emerging over time through this constant dynamic interaction (Mercer, 2016).

Empirically, the findings in this chapter agree with scholars interested in gender and L2 possible selves who have justified their quantitative findings as the influence of various macro contextual factors, such as learners' environment (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020), cultural differences (Martinović & Sorić, 2018), and social expectations (Yashima et al., 2017). They also agree with other quantitative empirical studies that have targeted other issues related to L2 possible selves (e.g., Csizér & Galántai, 2012; Islam et al., 2013; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013; Lamb, 2012; Taguchi et al., 2009). Each study highlighted the significance of a particular contextual element, such as family, social class, or social background, as seen earlier in the literature review chapter. This study, however, expands on these existing studies by bringing all those suggested factors as relational components that affect the creation of L2 possible selves because they are all integral to learners' identities and cause the continuous shifts of possible selves. With respect to the transformation of L2 possible selves, the study also agrees with many researchers (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; You & Chan, 2015), who have argued that L2 possible selves are dynamic in nature and that they change

from time to time. However, once again, this study expands on those studies by providing a nuanced understanding of the internalisation process occurring in relation to L2 possible selves, which is a crucial part of their dynamicity, that is still missing in the literature (Dörnyei, 2020).

Uniquely, in contrast to the existing literature, my application of a qualitative strategy has significantly contributed to this expansion of knowledge. This approach allowed me to delve into the different layers of gender discourses and various relational social elements through history that shaped learners' identities, revealing the dynamic interaction between L2 possible selves and the local contextual processes. Specifically, it was through the participants' stories as narrative data that I was able to examine how they developed their gendered identities in certain historical discourses within specific norms and ideologies. It was also through their stories that I was able to closely observe those identities as dynamic constructs that resulted from the ongoing social interactions throughout their life and how, through this dynamicity of their identities, they produced and reproduced their future L2 possible selves.

6.5 Conclusion of the Chapter

The present chapter reported and discussed the findings related to the target research questions. It showed how the participants had socially shaped their gender through the available gender discourse that mediated their language learning experience. It also showed how the participants formed their L2 possible selves in response to their gendered identities and how their possible selves became gendered through their interaction with gendered identities. The chapter also demonstrated the dynamic relationship between both concepts, in which changes to the participants' L2 possible selves occurred over time due to the fluidity of the participants' gendered identities.

Such changes were observed because of the length of the timescale considered and applied in this study. As demonstrated, it was through their life history, which included a longer timescale, that I could observe the alteration of their L2 possible selves over time. Hence, I argue in this conclusion that a fundamental flaw in the existing applications lies in the methodological applications of cross-sectional designs, such as surveys. These methodological applications usually fail to investigate long-term issues, making it easy for positivists to deal with L2 possible selves as fixed and stable. Yet, for most of the existing quantitative studies, L2 possible selves are reported as fixed, conceptualising this notion as the *L2 self*, even when the studies admit its dynamic nature.

More importantly, employing a longer timescale not only helped reveal the L2 possible selves dynamics but also allowed me to see the crucial role the participants played within this changing process and how they acted as agents despite social constraints. Although the participants shaped and changed their L2 possible selves based on the knowledge received from the external context, they were not just receivers fed by their context. Instead, among all the scenes described in this chapter, they were the main characters acting on and controlling the whole process through their role as agents in their social environment, described as the role of the dancer in the dance (Ushioda, 2015). As seen above, their internalised knowledge helped them to assess their situations intentionally and negotiate what was available or not for them as female learners.

Therefore, as one of the most significant findings in this study, the following chapter presents and discusses the findings related to the fundamental role of agency as the driving force in constructing L2 possible selves. I expand on the participants' agentic behaviours noticed in this chapter, providing a nuanced explanation of their social interactions that played a powerful role in creating their future L2 selves.

Chapter 7 The Powerful Role of Agency in L2 Selves

7.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The present chapter reports and discusses the key findings related to the following research question: To what extent does agency play a role in L2 vision among Saudi female English learners? The overall analysis of this study reveals that the female participant's agency was the driving force in shaping their gendered L2 possible selves. The students were able to determine their future selves through their intention, knowledge, and assessment, which enabled them to make agentic choices, thus creating those future selves. In light of the employed theories (the DPS, Structuration theory, gender as a social structure), this chapter shows how the participants constantly shaped and reshaped their L2 possible selves through their capability to purposefully act on social constraints by meeting and resisting them and how they caused the dynamism of the L2 possible selves through their social interactions.

The first section of the chapter starts by presenting the vital role of the participants' agency in their gendered L2 possible selves, showing how they constantly modified those selves through their continuous interaction with gender discourse. The following section shows how, through their agency, they could empower their gendered L2 possible selves acting as knowledgeable and self-aware learners. The last section demonstrates how they produced multiple gendered L2 possible selves simultaneously based on their agency.

7.2 Gender Discourse as Constraining and Enabling

In the last chapter, I showed the strong association between gender and L2 possible selves. I demonstrated how the participants were socially positioned through gender discourse, (re)shaping their L2 possible selves by the gender knowledge acquired in their

self-concept as a system of beliefs. In this section, I further explain how the interaction between gender and the L2 possible selves was mediated by learners' agency, in which gender discourse resulted in both constraining and enabling their social interactions.

It was very interesting to discover that none of the postgraduates wanted to major in English after they had finished high school. As seen below, they all wanted to study medicine and become medical doctors – where English is the language of communication – but their families had prevented them from entering this field because of the gender stereotypes.

Maram (TR):" I had a vision to be a [medical] doctor a long time ago… what motivated this vision was that when I was in year six at primary school, I attended my older sister's graduation ceremony [from the chemistry department] at the university and the postgraduate medical students were honoured. So, the appreciation they received that day attracted my attention to this position…If I weren't a woman, I wouldn't have studied English because I was a female in a society that did not allow women at that time to study medicine. We are not talking about the societal transformation that is taking place now. Let us say that families did not allow females to specialise in mixed gender spaces… The main reason that made me study English was that I was a woman in a society that did not allow women to study in those areas. The second thing was that I was in a geographical location that did not offer many subject to choose from. The best of which, from my point of view, was English... Regardless of the geographical location, the social constraints at that time in particular, including society and family, did not accept women at that time to study medicine, as if it stopped her whole life."

"كان عندي تصور اني أصير دكتورة زمان.. اللي حفز هذا الهدف اني حضرت حفل تخرج اختي الكبيرة من الجامعة لمن كنت بسادس وكان في تكريم لطلبة الدراسات العليا. فالحفاوة اللي حصلوا عليها الدكاترة في هذاك اليوم شدت انتباهي لهذا المنصب ...انا لو ما كنت امرأة ما كنت حدرس انجليزي كون اني انثى في مجتمع ما يسمح للمرأة في هذا الزمن الماضي احنا ما نتكلم عن التحول المجتمعي اللي صار الان العائلة خلينا نقول العائلة ما تسمح للأنثى في انها تتخصص في مجالات فيها اختلاط ما اجبرني اني ادرس انجليزي السبب الاساسي اللي خلاني ادرس انجليزي اول واحد اني في مجتمع ما يسمح. ثاني حاجة اني كنت خليني اقول المكان ما في خيارات كثير كان افضلها من وجهة نظري الانقلش بغض النظر عن المكان. قيود الفترة الاجتماعية بالضبط كان مو متقبل اجتماعيا او عائليا في هذيك الفترة انه الانثى تروح للطب. كأنه ايقاف لحياتها الاجتماعية."

Nawal (Unedited*):* "I didn't want to actually join the English department. I wanted to join the medicine department, but for cultural reasons, I was not allowed to. It was a kind of stereotypical thing for females who would enrol in any medical department. Not only do they struggle to become doctors, but they would not be able to get married or have kids after that because they are believed to focus just on their career… apparently everyone knew that I would choose English, my family, my parents, my friends, and my brothers, except me. As I said before, it was… the only problem for them was the society. If you major in one of the

departments that would allow you later on to work in a Co-ed workplace, basically male and female, especially if it's in the medical field, you're not going to get married."

Haifa'a (TR): "I had an idea that I would become a doctor. I mean, I said that when I was in high school. I loved medicine, and I used to tell the girls what I wanted to study, do you see? It was in high school when we had to choose our path, and there were those kinds of questions. I told them I wanted to be a doctor. It was a general word. I mean, I was thinking of being a doctor in a hospital. But I was forced not to do so, as I told you. "

" انا يعني انا كان عندي فكرة انه انا بصير دكتورة. وانا قلتها وانا كنت في الثانوية. انا احب الطب. لكن كنت اقول للبنات هند ايش تبي يعني. شفتوا في الثانوية على اخر سنة يدخل علمي ولا ادبي ولا زي كيف ايش الاسئلة هذي. واقول لهم انا بصير دكتورة انا كان كلمةعامة يعني انا ايش جا بالي انا وقتها كنت اقصد دكتورة طبيبة مستشفى وزي كذا طيب. بس لما دخلت انفرض علي زي ما انا قلت لك."

From the DPS perspective, the activation of L2 possible selves occurs because of the activation of the working cognitive system of learners in which internalised knowledge presents the self as the "knower" as well as the "known" (Henry, 2015, p.89). From the analysis, when the participants internalised gender knowledge from the outside world, the knowledge created their self-awareness at the cognitive level. Their self-awareness allowed them to interact with social constraints, making different agentic choices. They intentionally met and resisted social expectations by evaluating the social conditions and possibilities available to them. They interacted with their society to the level that they could produce and change their societies through the application of established rules and norms reinforced by societal acceptability, allowing them to control their situations despite the social roles placed on them (Giddens, 1984; Risman, 2004).

The participants used to visualise themselves as doctors in a mixed gender setting, despite the fact it was unacceptable, enhanced by their evaluation of surrounding social conditions. According to Vidyasagar and Rea (2004), because being a medical doctor is a

highly prestigious and well-paid career in Saudi Arabia, Saudi women aspire to enter this profession. However, as described in Chapter 2, because health institutions were the only settings in the past that conflicted with the gender segregation policy and integrated men and women, there were gender stereotypes about women who worked there (Al-Khunizi et al., 2021). While the participants were aware of those stereotypes from the beginning, they had vision of their future L2 possible selves as doctors in the medical field, intentionally resisting gender norms through their assessment of the surrounding conditions.

Looking at Maram's example above, when she attended her oldest sister's graduation as a young girl, she was impressed by the honour and appreciation the female medical graduate students received during the graduation ceremony, inspiring her to become a medical doctor in the future. Drawing on the DPS, learners can develop an ideal L2 self when they compare themselves with a shared group and have then sense they will gain new opportunities (Henry, 2015). In Maram's case, observing this situation of other Saudi females who studied medicine led her to assess the possibility of her doing so in the future, which gave her the belief that she might have the opportunity to study medicine just like those females despite social expectations. Therefore, through her assessment of this situation, she shaped an ideal L2 self as a medical doctor. Here, I want to refer to the complexity of Saudi culture mentioned earlier. As I explained, despite gender constraints in the past, those constraints differed among women depending on their social class, family and region (Le Renard, 2008). In the scene that Maram observed described above, it was likely that those medical students belonged to a high social class or had educated or open-minded parents who allowed them to make their own decisions about what to study at university more freely than those from conservative families.

Similarly, Nawal had an encouraging family from the beginning, describing her parents "as open-minded" since they had lived in America for a while. As described in the last

chapter, they allowed her to watch the only English channel while other females were not allowed, and they even allowed her to listen to music, which was considered a sin at that time. Thus, assessing her positive conditions within her family domain encouraged her to create an ideal L2 self as a medical translator, as seen in her example above.

However, in every case, the postgraduate participants' families did not allow them to study medicine because of gender stereotypes. As stated above, when Maram graduated from high school and chose to study medicine at university, her family refused, and she was socially discouraged from registering for the medicine undergraduate programme. Nawal's family also refused her choice to study medicine. Despite her parents being open-minded, Nawal's family had concerns about the stereotypes that might affect their daughter's reputation, which would, in turn, minimise her chances of marrying, which her family were particularly concerned about. As seen in the last chapter, her brother-in-law was worried that no one would marry her as she sounded like a Western girl with her English accent. Thus, considering society, her family did not want to risk her reputation or reduce her marriage opportunities by allowing her to study medicine. Haifa'a was also denied the opportunity to study medicine for the same reason, and her father forced her to enter another field.

Facing their parents refusal to give permission, the participants re-assessed their situation within their actual conditions, causing them to shift their choice from medicine to English. As a result of gender stereotypes, English was their second option. For them, the English language was an option available to them that helped them meet social expectations and fit within the social hierarchy and power relations. Assessing the available options, they re-shaped another L2 self. They shifted their ideal L2 self from being a medical doctor in a mixed-gender setting to an ought-to L2 self in higher education in a gender-segregated setting to meet their reality, as seen in the last chapter. Henry (2015) pointed out that

transforming L2 possible selves can involve expanding or minimising their vision, depending on learners' self-awareness, as this enables them to assess their existing availability to reach their future desired self. That is, while there is a chance for learners to continue increasing and upgrading their L2 self when in positive circumstances, they tend to decrease it to fit their reality when the circumstances are not encouraging.

Moreover, all of the postgraduates mentioned that as undergraduate English learners, they were socially expected to become school English teachers because it was the most commonly accepted career for women then, as described below.

Nawal (Unedited): "People were saying 'So, you majored in English, what do you think is going to happen? Do you think that the doors of the heavens are going to open? No! We are women, and nothing is going to happen, so you will just be an English teacher in one of those schools like all others who graduated from English departments'...I think in the last year of the university, I was kind of convinced that I didn't want to be an English language teacher because people would identify me as a teacher or school teacher regardless of what you are teaching. So, I made a decision that I'm not going to apply for any teaching job in schools. I don't want to be what they assumed that I was going to be just because I'm a woman… I'm not going to teach in schools. I am just not going to fit in with their vision of me and society's vision of me as being another female teacher at school…And then, I applied to my current university in the same region I am in right now, and I was hired. Yes, I am a teacher, but technically, I am not an English school teacher."

Haifa'a (TR): "I started to ask myself what it was possible for a Saudi woman to do in Saudi Arabia with English. The first thing that came to mind was the fact society had already determined and decided that I would become a teacher and had left me with no choices. They asked me to apply for teaching training, but I did not do it because I did not want to be a teacher. I believed it was stupid to limit myself to a certain thing."

" صرت اقعد اقول ايش ممكن المرأة السعودية تسوي في السعودية باللغة الانجليزية؟ اول شي جا في بالي المجتمع اللي حدده وقرره انك تكوني مدرسة. خلاص ما عندك خيارات وانا ما اخذت تربوي شوفي انا ما اخذت كان وقتها التربوي فصلوه وقالوا قدمي وانا ما قدمت لانه انا ما ابغى اكون مدرسة انا اشوف انه غباء انه انا اربط شيء بحاجة معينة."

Due to the gender-segregation policy experienced by women in the postgraduates' generation, most women were socially expected to become school English teachers in a female school because it was the most commonly accepted career for Saudi women at the

time (Hamdan, 2005). However, as demonstrated in the participants' descriptions above, the postgraduates wanted to be something other than become an English teacher as a socially pre-determined career. They explicitly expressed their resistance to social expectations, setting future goals for themselves to work in higher education and not at a school. Thus, their resistance to those expectations led them to visualise themselves as L2 users in another setting. This implies that while they shifted their L2 possible self from the medical field to another as a response to social expectations, they were practising their power and control over their situations, somehow resisting those expectations. Thus, all of the postgraduates in this study, shaped their ought-to L2 selves above to resist the existing social vision of them as future English school teachers, already determined and planned by society. Risman (2004) explained that it is always possible for people to resist gender expectations, enabling them to modify gender structure through their reactions. However, according to Risman, although women always have the power to control their situations, they do so "within socially structured imagined possibilities" attached to their gendered selves, leading them to follow or reject social obstacles (2004, p. 30). While the participants resisted social expectations by rejecting the notion of becoming schoolteachers, their resistance was still within the boundaries of gender norms because their future space, higher education, was still restricted to gender-segregated settings.

Interestingly, they also mentioned that the shift in their L2 vision was because of their previous L2 vision that they had initially created for themselves. For example, as in the quote below, Haifa'a explicitly mentioned that she envisioned herself as a doctor at a university because she had dreamed of being a doctor in the medical field from the beginning. Similarly, Maram also shifted her L2 self from being a medical doctor to an academic doctor in higher education because her dream of becoming a doctor had existed since she was young.

Haifa'a (TR): "And when I started studying [English], I did not have a clear vision of myself because my dreams changed. I wanted to be a doctor, I mean, to be a doctor in a hospital …so I started focussing on my education in order to achieve that vision that I had had for myself in my head as a medical doctor… I mean, I pursued my education [postgraduate studies] because I saw that education would direct me to fulfil my dream as a medical doctor, which I used to share with others in high school. But it was changed to be a doctor at the university instead of a hospital, do you see? So, I felt that to achieve my doctorate, I had to do something that I did not like [studying a postgraduate degree], just to reach my goal, which is my vision of becoming a doctor."

" دخلت والله ما كان عندي رؤية واضحة. انا ايش بقول ليه؟ لانه تغيرت احلامي. يعني انا كنت بصير يعني انا كنت بصير دكتورة. قصدي في مستشفى... يعني انا كان احلامي اني انا بصير طبيبة.. اكون دكتورة. اقول دكتورة. دكتورة. ما اقول ..طبيبة اقول دكتورة. ما ادري ايش المجال ابدأ يعني. بس انا اعرف نفسي لو تسأليني ابغى اصير لدكتور مستشفى يعني فانا صرت اسعى للتعليم عشان انا احقق الرؤية اللي انا في راسي اللي انا رسمتها اللي هي اني انا اضغط الدكتوراة.. يعني انا صرت اسعى للتعليم لانه شفت التعليم توجهني انه انا احقق حلمي اني بصير دكتورة اللي انا كنت في الثانوية كنت اقولها بس انه تغير بدل ما دكتورة مستشفى دكتورة في الجامعة. شفتي؟ فحسيت انه انا لازم يعني انا عشان احقق الدكتوراه انه انه مضطرة اسوي شيء ما احبه بس عشان انا احقق هدف عندي. شفتي؟ اللي هو التصور اني بصير دكتورة."

Maram (TR): " When I didn't get the opportunity to become a doctor, the choice was that I would become an [academic] doctor at university, so this plan existed a long time ago. The social conditions did not allow me [to become a medical doctor], but there was a good saying that I was told at that time when I faced social pressure or when I was young who did not know much. I mean, it was hard for anyone to fight her mum, her mum in particular. I was told that an academic doctor is no less important than a medical doctor, and the former is one who makes the latter, so I was convinced that I would eventually fulfil my dream [of being a doctor]."

" كان عندي تصور اني اصير دكتورة من زمان لما كنت في الابتدائي ولما ما حصلت الفرصة كطبيبة فكان الخيار انه اصير دكتورة في الجامعة فهذي خطة موجودة من زمان...ا لظروف ماسمحت يعني كان في جملة حلوة انقالت لي في الوقت اللي ضغط علي فيه اجتماعيا او كنت صغيرة ما كنت تعرف يعني. وكان صعب انه الواحد يعمل حرب للام او الام بالذات قال لي جملة جميلة انه هذا الدكتور حق العلم لا يقل اهمية عن دكتور الطب. وهو اللي ينتج الثاني يعني دكتور العلم هو اللي ينتج دكتور الطب. فخلاص. كان مقنع بالنسبة لي في الاخر هو الحلم واحد."

As seen earlier, all of them desired to be doctors in the medical field at the beginning, shaping their ideal L2 selves as medical doctors. But, because it was not socially acceptable, they chose to study English, reconstructing an ought-to-gender L2 self of being English doctors at a university, while also resisting becoming an English teacher at school at the same time. Giddens (1984) believed that individuals have the power to intervene in the

outer world or to reject social influence through their ability to employ a variety of casual powers, making actions dependent on a person's ability to alter an existing social situation. The postgraduates had the power to act on the social constraints, somehow using them as a bridge to approach the goal they truly desired. Their insistence on becoming academic doctors and not teachers was due to their desire to achieve their old dream of being medical doctors. Thus, the production of the ought-to self was fostered by their previous ideal L2 self. This, however, makes it complicated in such a study to determine whether their L2 self as academic doctors was an ought-to or ideal self, as being a doctor was their desired goal from the beginning. As described in Maram's quote above, she was convinced that both dreams, being an academic doctor and a medical doctor, were the same, and ultimately, they were one dream (being a doctor). In other words, both L2 possible selves might be considered ideal to the participants, with neither being socially imposed on them. It might be, as Henry (2015) explained, that when learners notice signs that their path towards their ideal self is not going according to plan, they may begin to question the reliability or possibility of their ideal self. Subsequently, an alternate, less desirable but potentially more realistic ideal L2 self might end up seeming more alluring because of this implicit or explicit observation. This downward revision process, according to Henry, "involves changes in the mental imagery of future use, shifting the ideal self closer to the actual self, thereby reducing the discrepancy to a more manageable level." (2014, p.87). Therefore, the participants above changed their previous ideal self, which did not fit their reality, to another ideal one that did. In this case, I agree with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) when they raised a question with respect to the relationship between the ideal and ought-to L2 selves and whether the desired self is ideal "fully owned by the learners" or ought-to self "imposed on learners by others" (p. 352).

As a result of the recent changes in gender discourse, the postgraduates re-shaped their L2 possible selves for the third time. As shown in the previous chapter, they no longer visualised their L2 possible selves in educational places but in other spaces such as leadership and tourism. Again, the emerging gender discourse internalised in them made them aware of the increase in opportunities, leading them to reassess their circumstances and thus modify their future L2 selves. In short, the postgraduates' continuous evaluations of the existing norms accompanying their gendered identity shaped and re-shaped their L2 possible selves, constantly relying on their knowledge that they used every time they amended their L2 possible selves. A central part of this knowledge that significantly impacted their future L2 selves was their knowledge of the outcomes of studying English.

7.3 Agency and Knowledgeability in L2 Possible Selves

In the life history interview, I asked the participants why they had chosen to study English. The postgraduates, they expressed their beliefs that English is a language of prestige and that belief encouraged them to study It. In addition, they had the knowledge that there would be positive outcomes of studying the language, as explained below.

Maram (TR): "I did not want to study English, but I was forced to. I had no other options. Let us say the geographical location that I was forced into, oh, let us say that it left me surrounded by limited options like English, mathematics, and Arabic. At that time, I had the idea that English was like a vessel for science. So, I thought that if I studied English, I would be able to see many things outside the limits of only speaking Arabic. So, English was my choice. English was the best option available out of all the options. English was the best choice for me among the other limited choices. To me, it was a gateway that could open up more opportunities in terms of a professional life and opportunities. I mean, I had a desire to go abroad, and English was the only option that could help me reach those things."

"لما دخلت تخصصت لغة انجليزية قلت انا كنت مجبرة اتخصص ما كنت ابغى. ما عندي خيارات. ما عندي خيارات اخرى خلينا نقول الموقع الجغرافي اللي انجبرت عليه اه خلينا نقول خلاني محاطة بخيارات محدودة. كان من بينها الانجليزي والرياضيات. واللغة العربية. اه وقتها صار عندي تصور ان اللغة الانجليزية هي زي الوعاء للعلوم. ف لو درست انجليزي انا حقدر اطلع على اشياء كثيرة خارج اطار حدود لغتي العربية. لذلك كان هو الخيار الأفضل من الخيارات المحددة الموجودة. الانجليزي كان بالنسبة لي الخيار الافضل. كان بالنسبة لي البوابة. اللي ممكن تخليني الاقي فرص اكثر من ناحية الحياة المهنية من ناحية الفرص يعني كان عندي رغبة في اني اطلع برا واجل كنت اعيش تجربة فايش كان الخيار الوحيد اللي راح يساعدني في هذي الأشياء."

Nawal (Unedited): And I think deep down, I wanted to change the view of Saudi females, like the vision of having to be a housewife, growing up in a certain way, acting in a certain way and working in a certain field. I wanted to challenge that idea. I'm reflecting back on it. Maybe it never surfaced, but I think the one thing I wanted to challenge was the norms and the traditions of being a typical housewife who taught, learned Arabic, or acquired Arabic and only read [in] Arabic... I wanted to challenge the idea of women, of the stereotype of [a] housewife, Saudi women. Yes, and I thought that English would be the window of doing so and actually became the door of doing so because it allowed me to be exposed to other cultures and communicate with other people."

As the analysis shows, their understanding of this outcome guided the postgraduates' actions, pushing them to push back against social constraints. Giddens (1984) argued that actions are carried out by agents when they have the knowledge of a specific outcome or quality of that act. This knowledge of the outcome, according to Giddens, is what pushes individuals to pursue particular behaviours, whether following or resisting social constraints. Their knowledge of the outcomes of studying English led the postgraduates to make a conscious choice to enrol in the English undergraduate programme. Although they initially wanted to study medicine, English was their second best option after their parents refused to give them permission to study medicine. As seen below, other subjects, such as maths, Arabic, and Islamic studies, were options besides English. However, they intentionally chose English because they were aware that it would give them more privilege or grant them better chances as women in the future compared to the other options.

The postgraduates' knowledge of the power of English and its benefits were also the main reason behind their insistence to continue studying English despite the constraints they faced because of its association with anti-Western ideologies. We saw in the last chapter how Haifa'a was excluded from entering the university campus until security had checked her appearance, and how Nawal was accused of being a non-Muslim, as well as the concerns of those around her about her changing her religion, becoming an atheist, or staying single

as, in their view, no Arab man would want to marry her. However, despite all these pressures they experienced, they did not quit university or change their major. Instead, they intentionally continued studying English until they graduated, resisting the dominant anti-western sentiment, as Nawal described above.

The quote above reflects the conflict between the postgraduates and society in terms of the outcome of English, which seemed to be the main reason behind this conflict. Although both parties believed in the power of English, they had different attitudes towards the outcomes. While society viewed English as a potential threat to maintaining women's traditional identities, the postgraduates viewed it as an opportunity to change their identities. By learning English, which they considered a prestigious language, they wanted to change the image of a Saudi woman's identity from being limited to domestic roles. At the same time, despite these different attitudes toward English, the quotes show the so many fears and anxieties around the female image from both sides, society and the participants themselves. While the postgraduates wanted to be powerful, fostered by their knowledge of English, society wanted to keep them powerless, fostered by the same knowledge, bringing the hierarchy and power relations to the surface, with English becoming the battlefield around women's identity.

The undergraduates, also explained that they studied a prestigious language such as English because of their knowledge of the possible outcomes of doing so , as described below.

Asala (TR): "I applied to study electronics at university here in Riyadh, and they accepted me as a business student. So, I started the foundation year, which I finished. In the summer, when they opened the applications for other universities, I said to myself come on, let me apply for English and try my luck. They accepted me onto the English course, and it was a year after finishing my foundation year in business. Honestly, I was hesitant. I asked myself if I should quit business and study English and translation because many people told me that English has no future and everyone can now speak English. You know, they disappointed me. At the same time, I didn't like business, I didn't like it. It's good as a career, but to study, it's not for me. I

was hesitant until I decided to be strong and make the decision because there wasn't enough time. I also thought it was unfair to waste my time thinking and thus take up someone's seat who wanted that specialisation. Then, I decided that I wouldn't study a subject I didn't want [business], and English was considered better in that it was at a public university…, and because it combined three areas of language, literature, linguistics, and translation, which meant that I would be specialising in multiple areas …There were people around me who didn't support the idea [enrolling in the English undergraduate programme], but I didn't care because the most important people to me are my mother and father and what they say, and what I say. I'm not the kind of person who's affected by what others say. I mean, it was about being a teacher. I don't know, but what was in their mind was that I wouldn't be able to work in anything else but teaching English either in a school or university. I couldn't be, for example, someone working in HR."

"قدمت على الجامعة الالكترونية اللي هنا بالرياض وقبلوني إدارة أعمال. فبديت فاونديشن وخلصت الفاونديشين. في ف ترة الصيف لما فتحواقبول الجامعات قلت يلا خل اقدم خل اشوف حظي. اقبلوني في اللغة الانجليزية. وبعد سنة من تخرجي. بصراحة كنت مترددة مرة هل اتركبزنس واروح لغات وترجمة لأنه كان كثير ناس يقولوا لي ما له مستقبل ما له م ستقبل ما له مستقبل كل احد يعرف يسولف انجلش عرفتي الليحطموني؟ ايه بنفس الوقت ما احب البزنس انا ما يست هويني. يعني مم حلو كعمل انه انا اشتغل شيء فافهمه من الحياة احس كذا الدراسةمو انا. عرفتي؟ كنت مترددة مرة ص راحة. لين ما قلت خلاص لازم اصير قوية واختار. لان ما بقى شي وفي نفس الوقت اقول حرام يمكن اخذ مقعد احد يبي التخصص هذا. بعدين اقول طب انا ما قاعدة ادرس تخصص انا ابيه. وهذا يعتبر احسن في انه جامعة حكومية وجامعة الامام تعتبر من احسن الجامعات في اللغة الانجليزية. لانها تجمع ثلاث مجالات في اللغة. الادب والانجوستيك س والترجمة يعني موشيء معين انا اتخصص فيه. في ناس حولي ما كانوا مأيدين الفكرة بس ما يهموني لإنه انا اهم شي ع ندي امي وابوي ايش يقولوا؟ انا ايش اقول؟ خلاص ماني من النوع اللي اتأثر مثلا في كلام فلانة وفلانة لا كانو انه يعني مد رسة ما ادري هم اللي في بالهم يعني مم ما راحتطلعي من مجال التدريس يعني مثلا ما راح تقدري تشتغلي في شي ثاني اللي راح تكوني المدرسة يعني فيها في المدرسة يا معيدالجامعة يا هذا. ما راح اقدر اصير مثلا في الموارد البشرية."

Tahani (TR): "The more you develop in the language, learn, and get certificates, the higher the position you get. Being a teaching assistant at a university, for example, is not the same as being a professor. I mean, for sure, the more you emerge with the language, love it, and take higher degrees, develop, and gain knowledge, the more everyone will like you, and that, of course, would mean you'd get promoted, and your salary would increase. You wouldn't stay the same person... Now, with this time and what we're going through, I am talking about the social awareness that has happened in the last five years that has changed society so much. In this transitional period, this is my time. I mean, it's my time to shine as someone who knows this language [English] because society really needs to learn this language to catch up with globalisation. This is because the educational and tourism plans require people who speak English. Everything requires being able to speak English. So, as a person who speaks English, and, God willing, I'll graduate next year. I feel my position will be very important as I'll teach the next generations to learn and acquire English to keep up with the future that's waiting for them. I feel my presence would be significant."

" شوفي كل ما تطورتي في اللغة اكثر وكلمة تعلمتي واخذتي شهادات اكثر راح يرتفع منصبك. انت لما تكونين معيدة في الجامعة مثلا غير لما تكونين انت بروفيسورة في الجامعة. اكيد يعني كل ما تعلمتي اكثر انغرستي في اللغة وحبيتيها ورفعتي كذا من شهاداتك وتطورك وعلمك الكل راح يعجب فيك وراح يرتفع طبعا وظيفتك راح ترتفع راتبك راح يرتفع ما راح تبقين نفس الشخص الوقت هذا الان اللي حنا قاعدين نمر فيه قلت لك توعية الان اخر خمس سنوات تغيير المجتمع جدا فحنا اللي هذا حنا فيه هذي فترة انتقالية. هذا وقتي انا يعني انه اسطع كانه متعلمة لهذي اللغة لان المجتمع يحتاج

يحتاج جدا انه يتعلم هذي اللغة عشان يمشي مستقبلا لانه يعني الخطة التعليمية والسياحية وكل شي تتطلب من انك انت كشخص انه يكون معاك لغة فانا كمتعلمة لهذي اللغة وان شاء الله قريب السنة الجاية باذن الله تخرجي. احس وضعي مهم جدا اني انا راح اكون اعلم الاجيال القادمة انهم يتعلمون اللغة وانهم يكتسبون اللغة علشان يعني يواكبون الزمن الجديد اللي راح يكون بانتظارهم. فانا وجودي مهم جدا احس."

The quotes indicate their self-knowledge and awareness of the importance of English and the outcomes of studying English, which not only encouraged their choice to study English but pushed their resistance to social constraints. According to the analysis, it was fascinating to discover that while the postgraduates studied English instead of medicine to meet social expectations, the undergraduates chose to study English instead of one of the newly emerging subjects, thus also resisting social expectations regarding what is acceptable for a woman to study at university. In the last chapter, we saw that the undergraduates were socially expected to enrol in the emerging disciplines that had become available to them in order to expand their future career opportunities and not expected to enrol in English, which was considered by some to be an outdated subject.

However, the undergraduates consciously resisted those expectations by choosing to study English based on their knowledge about it. From the quotes above, they were aware that studying English would assure them the desired outcomes because English is needed more nowadays, particularly as Saudi women's contribution to the economic growth of the country is expanding as a result of the Saudi Vision 2030 policies. As Mustafa and Alghamdi (2020) argued, the recent recognition of Saudi women's role in the economic growth of their country makes English more valued than ever because most sectors in the Saudi market require English today. Therefore, as explained in Chapter 2, for women to compete with men and to prove themselves qualified in the Saudi market, they need English as a significant requirement to gain professional opportunities. The undergraduates' awareness of the significance of English in increasing their future chances caused them to select English as

their university degree subject. In other words, the undergraduates acted based on their understanding of the opportunities they foresee arising. That is, rather than resisting others' attitudes that learning English will limit their opportunities, they believe that it will maximise their opportunities, leading them to make an agentic choice to enrol in it.

The findings above suggest that not only do current gendered selves impact L2 possible selves, but the latter affect the former by directing learners' social behaviours toward their future identities. Hoyle and Sherrill (2007) explained that because people thoroughly evaluate their possible selves, these selves become a rich source of behaviours. In addition, Oyserman and James (2011) argued that individuals are driven to behave in ways that align with their sense of identity, inspired to work towards the future selves they desire to be and avoiding those they believe they do not want. Thus, it is a co-relationship between their both current and future gendered selves, in which both affect one another in a complex way. This is in alignment with Dörnyei (2009), who stated that L2 possible selves can impact behaviour when they are actively incorporated into the functioning self-concept that impacts their activation.

Generally, this section shows that all of the participants in this study managed their social situations and were able to balance between both adhering to and rejecting social norms simultaneously, using their self-knowledge and awareness. They continuously constructed their L2 selves based on their interaction with the social constraints, their assessment of the available options, and the intentional choices they made. They did so to the degree that they could empower their future gendered L2 selves, striving to make the best choices to empower themselves as future female English users, as demonstrated in the following section.

7.4 Empowering Gendered L2 Possible Selves

As indicated above, I asked the participants about the reason why they learned English in the life history interview. During the second stage, the semi-structure interview, I also asked them about their views of English to dig deeper into their identities. Although they reiterated their knowledge that English as a language could ensure them a future career, they also extended their views of English, using words such as smart, dominant, prestigious, powerful, and enabling empowerment.

Maram (TR): ″Speaking the language [English] is the most significant contributor to career empowerment. It is the starting point of my academic career, which will give me opportunities to reach the highest positions, whether in a ministry, the Shura Council, or acquiring knowledge of another language. It gives a person, or me specifically as a woman, the opportunity to be an important woman in society."

"وجود اللغة هو ساهم له الدور الاكبر في التمكين الوظيفي. وجود اللغة بشكل ممتاز هو الانطلاق في المسيرة الاكاديمية حقتي حيعطيني فرص للوصول لمناصب اكبر سواء في الوزارة سواء في مجلس الشورى سواء الالمام بلغة ثانية يعطي الانسان بالذات لي كامرأة كشخص حيعطيني فرصة اني اكون امرأة مهمة في المجتمع."

At the local level, they expressed the belief that English was a powerful tool in enhancing their professional position and allowing them to gain higher positions in important administrations in the Saudi government where they could compete with men who currently dominated those positions. They also shared the fact that they viewed English as a powerful tool in empowering women working in mixed gender workplaces such as health sectors, as explained below.

Nawal (Unedited) "Being a female in Saudi Arabia in the medical field is a challenge in itself. Not knowing English would also add more to that challenge…not just because she's a female, but she's a female in the medical field…being a female in that specific field, not knowing English is going to slow down the process of development or the progression of the female there."

Al-Khunizi et al. (2021) stated that despite social changes, working in the medical field, which is still a male-dominated career, remains challenging for Saudi women because of the traditional gender segregation ideologies. As a result, some women who work there still face discrimination because of traditional stereotypes, specifically in relation to promotion. Vidyasagar and Rea (2004) found that because of the dominance of males in the health fields, Saudi female doctors faced challenges in being promoted to higher positions due to the domestic obligations they were also expected to fulfil. Aware of this issue, my participants regarded English as empowering for those female medical doctors. As Nawal mentioned, without a good level of English, female medical doctors would be in a weaker position in that field as it is a challenging career for women.

Significantly, they also believed in English as empowering for women and linked it with feminism. Nawal below, for example, saw English as the key to empowering Saudi women through the transfer of Western feminism to those who wanted their voices to be heard.

Nawal (Unedited): "I believe those who started it [feminism] had a level of English that would allow them to read about what was going on in other countries and then get whatever [was] suitable to our country and what [was] suitable within the limitations that we have in the religion in order for them to start their own movement within the country. I will not say their movement. I will say it is just their voices. So, their voices were heard. And then the government said, OK we want to hear you. What is it that you think you are missing, what [do] you think that needs to be changed? I think that those people, I'm not sure if they're all male or female, we need to try to trace their history, but I think that the majority of them had an exposure to the Western culture and had exposure to English language. This could have added to the density of what they were saying. They say, OK, I've lived in a country outside. I've been responsible for myself and my own children. I was equal to male colleague[s], and nothing happened. Or I've sensed how things were and no longer think that I am in the lower position or lower uh subordinate to… a male husband or a male guardian in general. I think English did open doors for those who wanted their voices to be heard."

Although this finding has not been reported yet in any previous study related to gender and L2 possible selves, it is not surprising. McMahill (2001) demonstrated the connection between English and feminism, arguing that women are motivated to learn English as the

language of empowerment. Today, enhanced by their knowledge and assessment of their social location and limited possibilities, many women worldwide view English as a means to obtain, access and gain power and freedom from the restrictions placed on the female gender. According to a survey of 555 Japanese high school students, female students were found to be considerably more passionate and interested than their male counterparts in learning English and seeking jobs that involved the English language (Kobayashi, 2002). Discussing this study, Pavlenko and Norton (2007) explained that girls' tendency to study English is not unexpected given that young women are still marginalised in traditional Japanese society and that English and translation provide them with a socially acceptable career option.

As the data analysis reveals, the participants' beliefs about English as a powerful language seen above pushed their purposeful choices and, thus, allowed them to create empowered gendered L2 selves. They all shared powerful L2 possible selves that they had at the time, visualising themselves as powerful English users, as shown below.

Tahani (TR): " I see myself as very important. I don't know how to say it in Arabic, but I see myself as a representative of my country, the country I live in. I'd be the Saudi representative for the external world. I'd be like the gate that opens everything by God's will. This is because I would speak English on behalf of Arabs and Saudi society. I'd represent everyone. So, I feel my presence would be significant since I'd speak English in an English-speaking country where I speak their language… Westerners sometimes think that we belong to a desert country and that we have camels and no technology. So, it's very important for Saudi women to show the outside world that they are not oppressed because Westerners think that about us. It's important to show the world that these are just misconceptions, but if we didn't have the language, how would we teach them that?"

" اشوف نفسي جدا مهمة لانه راح اكون يعني ما اعرف ايش نفس الكلمة في العربي بس نفسي اكون ممثلة لكن لمجتمعي البلد اللي انا ساكنة فيه راح اكون انا يعني الممثلة السعودية للعالم الخارجي. اكون انا يعني الباب اللي يفتح كل شي باذن الله. لاني انا بكون انا اتكلم اللغة الانجليزية لكن في مجتمع عربي وسعودي انا راح اكون اني انا امثل الجميع فاحس وجودي له اهمية كبيرة جدا. فيه بلد ثانية لاني انا بكون متحدث بلغتهم... الاجانب احيانا يعتقدون انك حنا دولة صحراوية و عندنا ابل وما عندنا تكنولوجيا فمهم جدا للمرأة انها يعني تظهر للعالم الخارجي ان احنا مو مضطهدين لانهم يشوفون ان احنا مضطهدين حنا معنفين هنا فمهم انك تورين العالم انه لا هذي الثقافات مغلوطة كيف تقدرين تعلمينهم اذا انتي ما معك لغة."

Maram (TR): “In the future, I see myself as an empowered woman in a leadership position even in a global administration abroad. Thanks to the language, I mean, the language [English] would play the first role in empowering me in this field, whether, for example, in an embassy or a business. I’d be a leader in the field of business. I’d have workers who do not speak Arabic, so English would be the language of communication in this career. Professionally, English would be the primary language of communication."

” اشوف نفسي في المستقبل امرأة متمكنة في منصب قيادي او حتى في ادارة خارجية يكون الفضل للغة يعني الدور الاول حيكون للغتي في تمكيني في هذا المجال سواء مثلا في سفارة او ملحقية. اكون قائدة بمجال الأعمال حيكون عندي عمالة ما تتحدث اللغة العربية فهتكون اللغة الانجليزية لغة التحدث الاصلية في هذا المجال. ممكن مهنيا تكون اللغة الانجليزية هي اللغة الاساسية للتواصل."

As seen from the quotes, the participants situated themselves in powerful future positions travelling through their L2 vision, from marginalisation to empowerment, or what Giampapa (2004, p.193) called "moving from the 'margins' (exclusion) to the 'centre' (inclusion)", in which individuals are allowed to imagine a powerful gendered identity. The participants viewed English as a bridge that would help them reach future situations where they could possibly gain power and authority, allowing them to practice their authority by visualising their powerful, gendered ideal L2 selves, even in global spaces. Referring to Chapter 2 (Section 2.4), social changes as a result of the Saudi Vision 2030 have made it possible for many women to engage in global professions today. As seen in the examples, many well-known Saudi women today hold high positions in various parts of the world where English is the language of communication. Because those well-known women were presented in Saudi media as highly educated English speakers, my participants acquired the knowledge that English is a powerful language and is required for holding those kinds of prestigious positions. Their knowledge inspired them to obtain an English degree to help them become qualified for such powerful roles, guiding their choice of English as the best for helping them to gain power and access, thus enabling them to see their L2 selves as powerful women in the world.

Interestingly, the participants desired to hold higher international positions to present their power and capability to the world, as in the quote below. They visualised their L2 possible selves as global leaders because they wanted to contribute to changing the world's traditional image of Saudi women, as well as the image of their country, which represents their national identity, as Tahnai's expressed above. They believed that it was through English that they could represent Saudi women and their culture to the world and, thus, participate in changing the misconceptions about Saudi women as powerless. Mishra (2007) pointed out that Western media has portrayed Saudi women as passive victims for decades without considering their daily lives or their cultural differences. The media discourse, according to the author, claims that Saudi women need Western feminism, presenting Western women as ideal. As a result, around the world, Saudi women have been represented as powerless individuals who have been exposed to ongoing injustices (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). However, despite gender constraints, Saudi women, like my participants, were not powerless but pursuing their goals. As Giddens described (1984), being human is being a powerful agent who has the capacity to carry out an intended action. As agents, the participants were aware of the dominant discourse around the globe that they were oppressed and powerless, leading them to intentionally resist and claiming those beliefs were "misconceptions". Thus, they wanted to change it by making their voice heard in the world by speaking English.

Once again, this shows the participants' aspirations to redefine their image as women through the English language, but at a global level. They believed in the vital role of English in representing their identities and culture as powerful individuals to the world despite the social changes and cultural transformation in Saudi Arabia. They were fighting to empower their image not only in the local discourse, but also in the global discourse against Western feminist imperialism. Their resistance of the existing representation of their image made the

participants set future goals to represent local and global women, thus developing their future L2 identities within powerful positions.

However, despite the powerful roles the participants imagined for themselves, their visions show the complex emotions they have of themselves, that is, being both powerful and vulnerable at the same time. Lips (2007) stated that women who attempt to imagine themselves in powerful roles may find themselves in a difficult situation from which they cannot escape their insecurities. As Lip clarified, as women visualise their possible selves, they might be forced to choose between acting in a way that will violate their expectations of themselves as they act in a particularly powerful manner or fail to meet the demands of the powerful role. To solve this emotional contradiction, Lips explained, women may incorporate stereotypically feminine ideals into the roles they envision for themselves, which includes being future leaders who support and protect other women, considering the contradictory expectations society has for strong women. Because the participants recognised the local and global stereotypes toward Saudi women, they wanted to play an ideal role in protecting the image of all other Saudi women and represent them powerfully in front of the world.

This finding agrees with Higgins (2011) and Yashima (2009), who discussed the production of the L2 selves in globalising contexts. Higgins argued that globalisation has an impact on learners' language learning experiences, giving them the chance to interact with a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts through their visions. Yashima also highlighted the role of global attitudes, or what she called “international posture”, in shaping ideal L2 selves. Learners' goals and aspirations to master the language are influenced by their attitudes and orientations towards global contexts, in which they form their ideal L2 selves in global settings.

Surprisingly, what attracted my attention from the analysis of my study and what distinguishes my findings from others is that all of my participants could create multiple powerful gendered ideal L2 selves that coexist within them. Yet, despite the consensus that L2 selves are dynamic and changeable, empirical research has always reported that learners only have a singular L2 self at any one time. Although a few researchers (Wang & Fisher, 2023; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013) have found coexisting L2 visions related to different languages, this study identified that learners have a variety of L2 selves for one language, in this case, for English. Thus, this finding is very significant to the literature because researchers have raised the question as to whether learners can have multiple ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

7.5 The Multitude of Gendered L2 Selves

During the interview, the participants expressed different L2 possible selves that they currently had at the time, which was an unexpected finding. They also shared that the multiple options they had made it possible for them to set multiple future goals, as in the examples below,

Shahad (TR): "I have more plans. I mean, I know what my goals are from now until graduation. The openness of Saudi Arabia has given us more options than just teaching. Now, more career options exist for those with an English degree.…I've envisioned myself speaking English in political dialogues, diplomacy and in the media."

" صار عندي مخططات أكثر. يعني في حاليا في انا من انا ادرس حتى بعد ما اتخرج عرفت انا ايش هدفي. اثر عليه في انه في هناك كثير من المجالات ليس في مجال واحد فقط اللي هو التعليم الا انه للغة الانجليزية لها اكثر من مجال. مع انفتاح اللي هو المجالات وتطور المجالات هنا في المملكة العربية السعودية. يعني يمكن في اللغة الانجليزية ما صار لها وظيفة معينة لا في أكثر من مجال... اشوف نفسي متحدثة للغة الإنجليزية في الحوارات مثل الحوارات السياسية والدبلوماسية والاعلام."

Tahani (TR): " Honestly, I set myself two goals, to be in academia or in an applied field like banks and hospitals. Everything is now in English. English is not limited to the English specialisation on its own. All business administration disciplines, and medical health specialities are now in the English language. With an English degree, I have multiple options because English is not limited to one thing. I can be in any field...I see myself in the future as a businesswoman... I see myself as a presenter (= representative) of my country abroad,

speaking English with English speakers and being in another field of translation, representing the translators' community."

"صراحة انا حطيت لنفسي هدفين. ياني اكون في المجال الأكاديمي و هو التعليم وما التعليم او اني اكون في مجال تطبيقي زي مثلا السفارات المستشفيات البنوك يعني ما حطيت لي مجال معين. خلاص كل شي الان صار اللغة الانجليزية لا ما يقتصر الموضوع على تخصص الانجليزي لحاله كله تخصصات ادارة الاعمال اه التخصصات الصحية الطبية كلها الان صارت في اللغة الانجليزية. احس انا لما اتخرج بما اني خريجة لغات وترجمة تخصص اللغة الانجليزية وآدابها ما يقتصر عليه شيء الحمد لله اقدر ادخل اي شيء ابغاه.. اشوف نفسي سيدة اعمال... اشوف نفسي ممثلة لبلدي بالخارج وفي مجال ثاني أمثل المترجمين."

Therefore, what caused the participants to create many L2 possible selves was the participants' knowledge of the multiple possibilities they had received from the evolving gender discourses. According to research, language learners may be able to imagine various gendered identities in English based on their social circumstances in their contexts (Pavlenko et al., 2001). The emerging gender discourse in Saudi Arabia, which changed the social conditions, gave the participants increasing possibilities and opened up more options for their future. As a result of the learners recognising the new options available to them, they were allowed to set multiple L2 goals for themselves in the future, contributing to the creation of various gendered ideal L2 selves in various powerful positions. This became more evident when looking at and comparing the postgraduates' L2 selves in the past and the present.

As seen in the last chapter, the postgraduate participants only expressed one L2 self at a time when they were undergraduates, which was clearly explained by their limited possibilities because of the gender segregation discourse. However, as postgraduates in the present, they expressed multiple L2 selves based on the contemporary discourse, which had normalised the integration of both sexes in the workplace and granted them more opportunities. Their awareness of their social position enabled them to limit or expand the number of L2 selves they envisioned for themselves based on their assessment of the

contemporary opportunities. This suggests that the L2 selves can be single or multiple depending on the number of availabilities given by the discourse available at the time. At the same time, this further complicates the picture of L2 selves as it reflects the considerable complexity of the L2 self-concept, where beliefs are distributed and connected to multiple future local and global settings. Mercer (2011) found that language learners' self-concept is multifaced and complex in that they may hold self-beliefs in multiple contexts reflecting ongoing environmental parameters and experiences. While a learner may express specifically situational beliefs, he/she can also hold more global and general ones. I believe that the applications of qualitative tools in this study allowed for the emergence of this unexpected finding, which is worth further exploration.

Overall, the findings of this chapter agree with the studies of Lamb (2009, 2013), who drew on the role of learners' agency in their future L2 identities. Although the author did not focus on gender in both of his studies, he found that the social structure constrained his participants' L2 selves, as they acted based on those constraints in their social context. In addition, he found that the language learners in his studies were constrained by social aspects of power, capital, and unequal access to resources in the learners' community.

The findings of this chapter also agree with Lamb (2009). In his study, he found that English learners' identities shaped their English learning experience through the surrounding social dimensions that affected their learning choices. Their agency was both enabled and constrained by the cultural and economic capital affecting the learners' choices and the available resources surrounding each participant.

Finally, in this chapter, I endeavoured to show how, through their agency, my participants caused the dynamicity of their L2 selves through their continuous interaction, which enabled them to modify their future selves multiple times, and thus rejecting the total

control of their society as an intangible notion over their L2 selves. As stated in Giddens' structuration theory (1984), social structure is an intangible concept that depends entirely on individuals who produce it and practise it regularly, either by following the rules or rejecting them, making people contributors to social changes. Without my participants as social actors, it would have been impossible for the social structure as an intangible concept to have any impact on their future L2 selves.

7.6 Conclusion of the Chapter

The current chapter reported and discussed the findings related to the concept of agency as the driving force in shaping the participants' gendered L2 possible selves. It outlined that social constraints did not control the participants but allowed for their interaction with the surrounding constraints, and thus a constant production of their L2 selves based on their knowledge of existing gender discourse, which enabled them to both meet and resist gender rules. Because each of the participants' L2 self was produced as a result of a specific gender discourse and in certain conditions that caused the participants to take a particular action at a certain time, this study argues for the need to position language learners within a time and space to fully understand the dynamicity of their L2 possible selves and their interaction with gender, as well as the roles of learners in this complex interaction.

As a source of dynamics, time and space are critical concepts in understanding learners' behaviours within their social structure and social change. Giddens (1984) highlighted the need to examine the institutionalised patterns of interactions over time and space to understand social production. To comprehend the characteristics of social structures, it is also essential to understand how learners conceptualise time and space and how they manage to organise themselves across these concepts. By considering the Saudi

context as a social space as a structure of various dimensions, in addition to the historical transformation of gender discourse over time reflected in the participants' narrated historical events, I was able to observe the social interactions that were continuously responsible for producing their future L2 selves.

Therefore, due to the criticality of these two concepts, the results of this study caution researchers against drawing specific conclusions about various contexts and individual students and emphasise the value of conducting more thorough, situated research. Studies of this kind can shed light on the important, complex nature of learners' self-concepts, as well as the impact of histories on their perceptions, affordances, and the potential for their substantial uniqueness, all of which are likely to be the reasons behind diverse L2 possible selves among female learners from different contexts, as observed in this and other studies.

In terms of methodology, I also call for narrative methods to be employed, specifically the life history approach. This approach has the ability to capture L2 selves in time and space, allowing for a holistic comprehension of the issue. It places learners within an inclusive, longer timescale, including their past, present, and future, helping to observe the evolving conditions at each time, learners' interaction with those conditions, and thus, the process of (re)shaping their future L2 selves.

Chapter 8 Re-Thinking Gender as a Known Known Issue for L2 Vision Research

8.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In the introductory chapter, I introduced gender as an unknown unknown issue in the subject of L2 vision, as it is a concept we have yet to fully comprehend and effectively address. In this conclusion chapter, however, I present gender as a known known issue, drawing on the insights obtained from the analysis of this study. Dong (2012, p.11) defined the known knowns as the research issues that we are aware of, have knowledge about and understand how to address. In light of my findings, which have increased my understanding of the role of gender in L2 vision, I outline in this chapter what became known and concluded about the complex relationship between gender and L2 vision.

To summarise, this research attempted to address the gap in the literature related to gender and L2 possible selves, the findings of which have been conflicting across various parts of the world, specifically among female English learners. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, this limitation has blurred the picture of L2 vision, causing researchers to call for future studies to be conducted in order to offer more insights into female language learners' L2 vision (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Other researchers (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013) have also highlighted the impact of the broader environment on L2 selves among female English learners, arguing that gender norms may affect females' future L2 identities, and thus calling for future research into various socio-cultural contexts to validate these arguments and "help in shedding light on a complex and multifaceted phenomenon." (p.19). Hence, the primary purpose of this research was to investigate the role of gender among Saudi female English learners while considering the larger gender context in their future L2 vision. From dynamic perceptions, it aimed to explore how their gendered

identities played a role in their L2 possible selves and how the latter operated through the former within the larger gender discourse surrounding the learners, as well as the role of agency as a critical part of their gendered identities.

Throughout this chapter, I summarise my key findings related to my research questions introduced in the first chapter (Section 1.5). I then follow with a broad discussion of the key conclusions drawn from my data analysis and interpretation, highlighting their theoretical and methodological contributions to the field. In the following sections, I also present the limitations of the study followed by recommendations for future research, which include theoretical and methodological recommendations. The last section outlines my concluding thoughts drawn from analysis as a whole.

8.2 Summary of Key Findings

This study strived to understand the role of gender among the Saudi female English learners involved in this study. It was able to reveal: 1) the way Saudi female English learners visualised their L2 possible selves, 2) the way they constructed their L2 possible selves in their social environment, 3) the role of their gender in constructing their L2 possible selves, and 4) the role of their agency in this process.

According to the analysis, the Saudi female English learners envisioned their future L2 selves through the wider gender discourse, which produced the participants' gendered identities in Saudi society and impacted their English learning experiences. Within their social environment, the female English students produced and reproduced their visions of themselves through gender assumptions embedded in institutions. These gender assumptions come from a range of interrelated macro factors, including social, political, cultural, religious, and economic factors. These assumptions affected their life chances, including opportunities open to them in the future, through the distribution of (un)equal

accessibility to resources and opportunities in the cultural context where they lived and stayed. This accessibility to resources and opportunities included access to education, economic and employment opportunities, and social mobility, which offered the learners either limited or expanded possibilities for setting future goals, thus shaping their future L2 selves. They constructed their future L2 selves based on whatever resources and accessibility were available to them, incorporating gender discourse into their future selves, in which the L2 selves became a gendered notion.

Significantly, the analysis also revealed that due to the dynamics of gender in Saudi society, the participants constructed and reconstructed their L2 selves based on the available gender discourse, which they had internalised into their self-concept. As gendered identities changed due to discourse dynamics, their L2 selves changed accordingly. This, however, was mediated by the participant's agency as the driving force of shaping and reshaping their L2 selves. Despite gender constraints, the participants were able to continuously develop their future selves through their intention, knowledge, and assessment of the social constraints that enabled and guided their social behaviours toward their future identities. In addition, they could control their situations concerning their future direction by considering possibilities, negotiating challenges and acting on gender constraints, in which they created their L2 selves through their agentic choices. They were also able to generate multiple L2 selves at a time based on their evaluation of the normative shifts and expanding possibilities, which led them to empower their future identities by placing them in powerful roles in various spaces, locally and globally.

Although these findings cannot be generalised beyond the research context and the participants' experiences in their environment, they provide theoretical insights into understanding the nature of the L2 possible selves, specifically in relation to gender, and the theory of L2 vision in general, beyond population. Polit and Beck (2010, p.1453) elaborated

that “qualitative researchers can arrive at insightful, inductive generalisations regarding the phenomenon under study,” allowing them to add to existing theories or conceptualisation.

In the following sections, I highlight the concluding marks of these findings, first describing their theoretical contribution to the field then, subsequently, their methodological contribution.

8.3 Theoretical Contribution

This study provided valuable insights into how English female students visualised their L2 selves in the EFL context and how it affected their L2 motivation within a large ecological framework. It not only examined how they shaped their L2 identities in relation to their gender but also shed light on the broader gender discourse and its impact on their identity formation and, thus, their L2 motivation. Significantly, it dug into the complex internal processes that occurred within them as they shaped their L2 visions, which involved the interaction between these processes with other external systems.

In this section, I broadly discuss these theoretical insights, providing a theoretical understanding of t L2 possible selves related to gender through external and internal frameworks. Regarding the external framework, I discuss the findings in relation to the external context of female language learners, in which the notion of L2 selves is developed in the wider discourse that produces female identities. In terms of the internal framework, I also discuss the findings in relation to the learners’ self-concept and how learners, as containers of multiple selves, can switch their L2 selves off and on within interconnected internal systems. At both levels, I offer insights into L2 vision theory, expanding on existing knowledge.

8.3.1 The External Framework: The Development of L2 Selves within the Wider Discourse

At the external level, the findings indicate the strong association between L2 possible selves and the wider gender discourse in the social environment, drawing attention to the need for conceptualising L2 vision broadly beyond the L2 self as an individual concept. According to this study, L2 possible selves are social products that are developed through various social elements that shape learners' identities. As social products, these future selves represent female learners' identification of themselves in their particular historical, cultural and sociological time as they maintain and adopt norms and relationships with others in society. This is because future identities in nature are socially produced, consisting of broad social elements and significant others, including how other people in society consider those selves based on cultural norms (Oyserman & James, 2011).

Because of their connection to the broad contextual levels and gender discourse, L2 possible selves become embedded in various relational social identities relevant to gender. They cannot be separated from any social dimension. In this study, although I targeted the role of gender in particular, factors including age, religion, education, economy, nationality and social class all intersected to form crucial aspects of the participants' identities, offering them a perceptual framework through which they understood their lived experiences and affecting the development of their future L2 possible selves. Brady et al. (2022) stated that social identities like age, class, family and others are all interconnected with the notion of gender and its dynamics and cannot be separated from it. This is a very important point to bear in mind when discussing the existing research because it offers insights for those who are interested in a specific social element of identity, isolating one social dimension from another when studying the role of gender in L2 vision.

Essentially, the embeddedness of future L2 identities in the social structure is mediated by learners' social interaction. Students' agency as "interrelated with contexts at different levels ranging from broader contexts such as the sociocultural and educational contexts through family and classroom contexts down to the level of immediate interactional contexts." (Mercer, 2012, p.44) is a key to constructing those identities. In general, students consider the possibilities of how much their present social circumstances align with their future goals when becoming a particular L2 user, forming those future selves based on social affordance and constraints as they meet and resist social factors through their agency.

Gender agency gives female language learners the ability to challenge restrictive gender norms and work towards gender justice, specifically in environments where traditional norms are present. As they act on gender constraints, they are able to envision their future L2 selves that challenge the existing barriers, thus contributing to the development and shift in their future selves through social interaction. They even expand their assigned role and expectations by maximising their future identities, creating a range of L2 possible selves in spaces where they feel free to practice imaginable powerful roles. In short, female language learners can produce a collection of L2 visions that resist dominant gender discourse, contributing to social change.

Because agency is temporal in nature due to the dynamics of societies that cause its change over time, learners can have different L2 possible selves over time. Indeed, societal dynamics play a key role in the transformation of L2 possible selves. The nature of societies as dynamic entities makes female language learners' lives continuously transformable, which affects the development and loss of their possible selves over a long period of time. Because gender dynamics continuously modify gender norms, either by making them weaker or stronger, the learners continuously (re)create their L2 selves. This dynamism permits a

change in positions and provides an expansion of one's sense of opportunities and meaning, which encourages a chain of re-evaluative actions that result in exploring new accessibilities, possibilities and meaning, revealing new L2 possible selves (Lips, 2007). Significantly, according to this study, the less accessibility given by society, the more likely it is for female learners to develop limited L2 selves, and the more accessibility given to them, the more likely they are to develop multiple identities at a time. This, however, is dependent on the nature of society, that is, whether it is traditional or modern.

Burke and Stets (2023) asserted that within modern societies, multiple identities can operate, depending on the number of available identities given by those societies, however, this is not often the case in traditional societies. To clarify, in a traditional society, women tend to have limited identities, such as being a mother and wife. In contrast, women in modern societies have many identities due to the greater accessibility and number of opportunities given to them. Thus, female language learners who live in modern societies often have more chances to generate a variety of future L2 identities. In contrast, traditional societies usually provide limited possibilities and access, which limit their future identities. As demonstrated in this study, while the postgraduate participants were able to create a limited future identity within the previous traditional norms that offered them limited opportunities, the current reformation of society toward modernisation allowed them to create multiple future selves because new possibilities become available to them through this modernisation.

Based on the above discussion, I find the existing contradictions in previous studies on gender and L2 vision conducted in various EFL contexts more logical. The contextual differences around the world due to different cultural norms, ideologies and gender discourses are likely to be the reason behind existing contradictions in research related to gender and L2 possible selves. A female language learner's identification of herself in her

particular context is not the same as those from other contexts. Undoubtedly, women around the world do not have the same equal resources and opportunities due to the different nature of the societies they are embedded in and the options available to them. They construct their selves differently depending on their relationship with the external context, how these selves are internalised and the type of timescales in which the constructions of these selves operate (Mercer, 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that female language learners from different contexts create different L2 future visions since these visions are fostered by existing gender assumptions surrounding each learner. Knox (2006) demonstrated that one's future identities are structured within the surrounding gender norms and expectations, making these identities vary based on gender. Therefore, if we see contextual differences such as the dynamic of societies, gender and agency through a complex lens, we should not worry about existing contradictions because the consistency of those findings would conflict with this acknowledgement.

However, for those who are interested in the gender within L2 possible selves paradigm, it is important to examine gender and its dynamicity at the broadest level because it is only through understating the dynamicity of gender that one can come to understand the complexity of language learners' future L2 selves in relation to gender. Even when researchers narrow down their focus to small environments such as classrooms or any other educational setting – as most of the existing research has done – the larger gender discourse still needs to be considered. This is because female language learners inevitably bring their sociocultural identities and ideologies to those small settings, since these identities and ideologies exist in their cognitive world, and they are essential parts of their self-system at the internal level, where they produce and re-produce their L2 possible selves.

8.3.2 The Internal Framework: The Development of L2 Selves through the Self-Concept as the Centre

At the internal level, this study sheds light on the much more complex internal processes that occur within female language learners as they develop their L2 possible selves. It draws attention to the interconnection between gendered identities and L2 selves through shared information distributed by the learners' self-concept as the centre of knowledge stored in memory (Talaifar & Swann, 2018). This shared information makes these two identities close to each other. Burke and Stets (2023) demonstrated that considering the different identities that coexist inside individuals, these identities can only be connected if there is a shared knowledge between them. According to this study, the activation of L2 selves entails the transformation of gender knowledge from gendered identities to them, in which the L2 selves adjust the same gender knowledge attached to learners' current gendered identity. However, although both gendered identities and L2 selves are created based on the same content, gendered identities are more influential than L2 selves because they control the possible selves through those norms and cause their gendering and changes over time. In other words, the L2 selves cannot shift unless the information accompanied by gendered identities shifts.

At the same time, L2 possible selves play a powerful role in impacting gendered identities in terms of regulating learners' social behaviours. As L2 selves are activated, they work as behavioural guides to female learners based on shared knowledge regarding female learners' agency. Burke and Stets (2023) stated that connected identities do not only share identity information with each other, but also the meanings of the degree to which an individual can control social situations. Because in this study the learners' gendered identities corresponded to the learner's ability to act on gender constraints influencing their L2 selves, the latter become embedded within the self-regulation process, motivating certain

behavioural output in an effort to attain them. Hoyle and Sherrill (2007) described how possible selves are part of the control process models of self-regulation because they work as behavioural standards. As they explained, they allow people to compare their current state with desired thoughts and feelings in a social situation, allowing them to interpret their situations with reference to future goals.

However, these behavioural consequences are affected by the concept of congruence, in which learners' behaviours toward their future are aligned with their current selves' conditions. As Oyserman and James (2011) illustrated, when present and future identities are connected, people create perceptions that actions needed to reach future selves must be congruent with crucial aspects presented in the current self. Female language earners interpret their present experience in light of the demands of social circumstances, which guide them to apply particular actions. As they act, they make sure that their actions are congruent with the meaning held in their gendered identities and consider matching their future L2 selves with social demands and obligations. As a result, depending on the nature of their current experience and situation, learners change their social situations, either by meeting or resisting gender norms, using their knowledge, awareness, and intentions.

Therefore, the process of developing the L2 selves does not occur spontaneously because a single language learner, as a container of multiple selves, has the capacity to consciously hold her current and future identities through accessed and retrieved knowledge that exists in her self-concept. Talaifar and Swann (2018) elaborated that by accessing and retrieving knowledge in our memory, we are able to activate and maintain various selves depending on different situations. When their self-concept is filled with particular gender content, a certain gendered identity is activated based on this. Being aware of this present activated identity and the norms accompanying it, female learners make a thorough evaluation of social situations, developing a future L2 self that adjusts to the standards of

the current identity. Later, when the self-concept is refilled by new gender content emerging from the outside world, their existing gendered identity is deactivated because a new gendered identity is developed. Again, learners' awareness about the emergent identity allows them to assess the modified norms and the new options available for future identities, deactivating the previous L2 self and reactivating another one that adjusts to the new norms. Additionally, the more positive content exists and is recognised in their self-concept in terms of the number of possibilities and accessibility attached to the current gendered identity, the more likely it is for them to produce a collection of different future L2 selves.

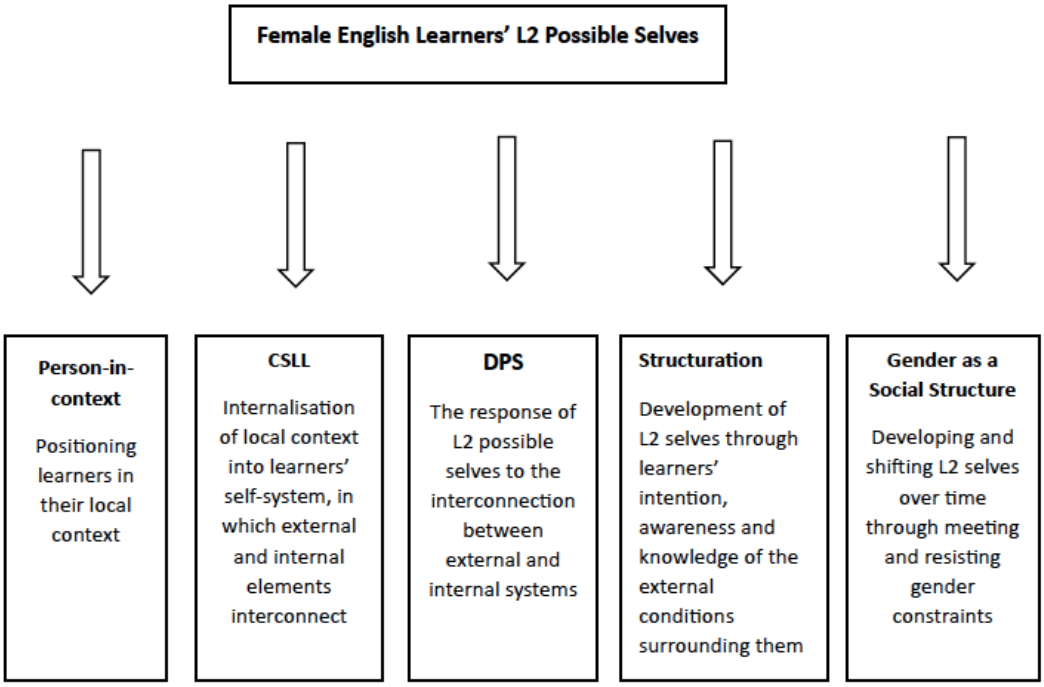
In this sense, both the activation and transformation of L2 selves are a result of the self-concept that continuously receives gender information. The dynamicity of self-concept is the engine of L2 selves dynamics, which works as the centre for creating and discarding possible L2 identities. It is important, however, to mention that the transformation of L2 selves is only likely to occur through significant knowledge that causes a significant change in life circumstances, such as the normative gender shifts that occur over a long period of time. Similarly to this study, King and Raspin (2004) also found that women only shift their future identities when a significant change occurs in their lives, such as the shift from being married to being divorced. In other words, because L2 selves are developed over time, they are solid and do not change based on the daily information we receive through social interaction. Instead, they change over time, affected by powerful changes that commonly occur within longer timescales.

The current failure to attend to the much more complex internal process of L2 selves at the gender level and the broad level is one key element in limiting our understanding of the internal process of L2 selves in terms of their accessibility and change (Dörnyei, 2020). Hence, the discussion provided in this section may help offer insights into understanding the

internalisation processes of L2 possible selves, how they are managed and controlled by knowledge-based mechanisms, and the role of learners themselves as containers of multiple selves.

Overall, the insights above are provided by the integration of the five theories adopted in this study (shown in the figure below). The theories together help position learners in the wider gender discourse in their local environment as an external context in which they internalised that external context within them, which interacts with other internal systems. They also help look at the development of their L2 selves through these complex interactions between external and internal elements, in which gender agency becomes the mediator of the dynamism of L2 selves. They, thus, allowed for understanding the L2 vision as a working theory in which learners create their future selves in relation to their gendered identities through their conscious experiences and assessments rather than through their thoughts and sense of who they are. It integrates social cognitive processes that involve learners' representation of social roles and expectations, in which learners affect and are affected by their societies.

Because of its social cognitive nature, L2 vision must be examined through integrated psychological and sociological approaches, as they effectively reveal its complexity in a nuanced way (Ushioda, 2009). Nowadays, the fluidity of identities acknowledged in the wider literature (e.g., Darvin & Norton, 2023; Rudolph et al., 2020) makes it easy to bridge psychological and sociological perspectives when studying future possible selves. By bridging both, we can avoid the decontextualisation of this concept and widen our lens to include its interaction with social factors and other identities with which it intersects.



The Function of the Five integrated theories

Remarkably, the study contributes methodologically to the literature in terms of the showing how useful a qualitative approach is when studying L2 vision in relation to gender. It can elucidate how English female students form their L2 possible selves in response to their gender in the wider original environment and give insights into the more complex processes involved. Thus, it challenges the use of quantitative measures to investigate gender in L2 vision research, as that approach tends to conceptualise L2 selves as fixed notions focusing on their content rather than their functions, the detailed social process and the consequences involved.

Such quantitative applications are inadequate to address the much more complex processes involved, such as the interplay of systems and the social behavioural consequences that result from this complexity. Specifically, applying narrative inquiry in this study led to theorising that L2 possible selves are actively constructed and interpretive through life stories, making those stories the representation of the learners' selves. By telling their stories, language learners naturally reveal their self or identity to the researchers, making both the notions of the narrative and the self identical

notions that are expressed simultaneously. Hence, in the following section, I explain how the methodological insights obtained from this study contribute to existing methodological applications.

8.4 Methodological Contribution: Life Story as the Self

As shown in this study, narrating a life story is inseparable from language learners' selves, meaning that a story is the language learner's self. That is, life stories can tell us a great deal about students' selves as psychological mechanisms as well as their complexities. When telling a story, a language learner expresses his/her uniqueness and identity, revealing their inner world as components of psychological constructs, thus allowing us to see and examine the interplay between several different selves that exist within a learner. It also helps us see the impact of those selves on one another. As Pasupathi and Adler (2021) explained, a life story as a selective, consistent, and internalised representation reveals the narrators' imagined past, present, and future, as well as the meaning they derive from their experiences. This representation not only delivers the person's sense of identity over time but also their goals and direction for the future, fully revealing the self within a variety of social contexts, including the local and larger context.

This intertwined relationship between the self and the life story is acknowledged widely in narrative psychology, in which many researchers argue that there is a strong link between them, to the point they could be considered identical. They take the position that our story is our identity, maintaining that every one of us has a life story, an internal narrative that constitutes our identities (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). They believe that every individual composes and embodies a story, and that story is us. Being human entails having a story and telling that story describes our life (Randall, 2001). In short, narratives are an integral part of ourselves; they are the core of who we are and how we exist in the world.

In this study, the representation of language learners' selves through their life stories lies in the fact that both occurred at the same time. To clarify, as language learners narrate their stories, they construct their self and thus present it through those stories. In line with this thinking, some researchers have argued that the identicality between the self and narrative centres on their performance, in which both are acted out simultaneously, and that both are intertwined, mutually reinforcing, permeating, and overlapping to the point where both occur simultaneously. Kelly and Dickinson (1997), for example, asserted that in narratives, the self is not created before a story is told but is formed through stories, which provide its meaning and structure. In short, the story told is a constructed self. This is because people in nature create their selves through language and processes of engaging in conversation (Crossley, 2000).

When narrating their life stories, language learners need to engage with the interviewer, who plays a crucial role in this representation of their selves through the direction given to the narrators and clarification sought about significant events. Polkinghorne (1988) argued that the concept of the self is not something that is discovered or released from an innate "I." Rather, it is a construction based on the perceptions and reactions of others towards an individual and is susceptible to change, as these reactions, which are inherently unpredictable and inconsistent, take on new meaning. Therefore, in order to develop a cohesive and harmonious self-concept and personal identity, individuals must integrate and synthesise the various interactions with society they have, telling us more about their roles as social agents.

More importantly, according to this study, a life story is not only an identical notion to the selves as psychological mechanisms are, but it also brings the outside context in as a significant integral element with the selves. It examines the interplay of social environments with those psychological constructs in terms of their impact on the formation of the

language learners' selves, the continuous recreation of their selves, and the social process involved. The basis of narratives stands on the fact that people cannot create their identities in isolation and must rely on social and cultural factors and norms that are accessible to them as a tool. Thus, a person's life story never serves as merely a vehicle for expressing a singular self or identity but involves the surrounding culture, both the immediate and the larger culture they are part of and are embedded in.

Although the themes of context can be examined and presented in most research regardless of the methodology employed, it becomes more accessible when stories are used as a source of data collection within the narrative as an employed method (Tuval-Maschiach, 2014). This is due to the holistic nature of stories, which allows for the revelation of identity complications in relation to other individuals or groups within temporal dimensions. By applying narrative, researchers can access the development and amendments to L2 selves through social events and social interactions that take place in specific historical contexts.

Stories are told as a representation of selves in relation to specific historical events and conditions. Schiebe (1986) explained that human identities are dynamic constructs that result from ongoing social interactions throughout life. Those identities are developed in stories in accordance with certain historical parameters, utilising a certain set of operational historical norms and a specific pattern of prevailing ideologies. Although the basic forms of narrative are common, according to Schiebe, the structure and content of the selves vary depending on specific historical norms related to time and place.

Language learners place their life stories within specific historical events and social structures as they tell their stories, selecting contextual factors as significant elements in analysing what they consider to be relevant or significant to their selves. This is because stories can always carry both open and hidden references that are critical and relevant to

the storyteller's personal experience. Such references become precise in addressing institutions and societies within the current social and political context, as well as the historical time frame and events that involve significant others (Tuval-Maschiach, 2014). Thus, it allows researchers to examine how language learners develop and redevelop their identities at different times as a result of being affected by organisations and policies, as well as their changes over time. Specifically, considering historical approaches such as a life history helps in understanding gender constructions throughout history, revealing the production and shifts in L2 selves in relation to gender identities and constraints.

There is evidence in sociology of the effectiveness of historical narrative approaches in placing social arrangements of gender in their larger context and highlighting their unique characteristics and constraints as they are currently organised (Brickell, 2006). This is because this kind of anti-essentialist research enables us to analyse how gender is perceived and organised differently in light of broader societal changes, as well as the ways in which it is expressed differently in each individual.

The most interesting finding of this study is that in addition to examining the context and the integrated social expectations and traditions through stories as part of the self, a life story brings the conflict that exists between language learners' individuality in relation to their gender and the culture they live in. When language learners express their identities, researchers can access how learners struggle with social constraints and how they find ways to form their future L2 possible selves through meeting and resisting gender constraints as well as their applications of continuous (re)evaluations of emerging norms. Here, I take the position of Bruner (1990) that the self in narratives is represented as a respondent to the cultural conditions and agent of continuity, in which the culture offers directives for navigating a space between continuity and change, encouraging reassessing and redefining what the culture offers by drawing on its abilities for reflection and seeking the

alternativeness they imagine. Although Bruner tended to make this argument within the local conversational context, my study adopts his position, based on the results of this study, arguing for this representation of the self within the narrative as an agent in relation to the larger culture beyond the local where telling a story takes place. In this light, Bruner (1986) describes narrative as the landscapes of action and narrators demonstrate the significance of those events as another landscape, the landscape of consciousness. That is, narratives as landscapes of action enable narrators to communicate their social interactions, unveiling the importance of social situations within their social environment.

In short, this study suggests that the narration of life stories is an effective methodology for examining the complexity, nuances, and learners' experiences of gender in their social and historical environment, as well as their interaction with social factors and norms, providing detailed, comprehensive descriptions of their L2 possible selves and their dynamics. Therefore, I argue that a well-explained analysis of language learners' context within narratives can provide the means by which researchers can comprehend learners' goals, behaviours, and the gender constraints that shape their identities in their social environment, thus explaining the complexities of the current and L2 possible selves through this deep analysis.

8.5 Limitations

Despite the meaningful understanding of the complex experiences of the Saudi female English learners in this research, there are several limitations of this study in terms of time and space. Because of the limited timeframe of this study, I was not able to use the longtiudinal methods which I believe are more useful than the narrtaive inquiry. Longitudinal methods are particularly effective in capturing complex issues within certain timescales such as my study. They have the ability to identify any alterations, developments, or patterns in

relation to particular individuals, as well as their behaviours and interaction with social elements. Additionally, because the study was constrained by time, I also ommitted some of significant data related to the participants' lives due to the large amount of data I obtained. These data included their motherhood, which was mentioned in relation to their L2 vision. The participants talked about their children many times during the interviews and they sometimes had L2 visions related to their childrens' English future. In addition, I also exluded data related to their personal relations that were significant to them as well. I believe this information would have added more value to this study if it had been analysed and interpreted. Also, due to the limited time of this study, I was not able to integrate another different research method to triangulate my data. Although I did theoretically triangulate my study, I believe another research tool would have had a positive impact on the findings of this study.

In terms of space, the study was constrained by the fact that some of the participants were a great distance away and so I needed to conduct online interviews rather than face-to-face. I believe being present at the research site can do complex issues full justice compared to researching them online.

8.6 Recommendations for Future Research

8.6.1 Theoretical Recommendations

In terms of theory, for future researchers interested in gender and L2 selves, this study strongly advocates adopting dynamic approaches when addressing complex relational issues fully. These kind of approaches focus on understanding the patterns of interaction between system elements at different levels in different times and spaces, distancing scholars from analysing female learners' identities as isolated individual elements. In this study, for example, I believe one of the most effective approaches that played a significant role in my

study was the CSLL theory. The idea that the language learners themselves were conceptualised as a complex system containing multiple internal and external interplaying elements, in which they cognitively acted on social factors, helped me see the participants' lives as ongoing contexts. It enabled me to see how the dynamicity and fluidity of their identities through different phases and transitions of their lives subjected their current and future identities to continuous changes through their agency. More importantly, dynamic perspectives offer a variety of concepts because they are flexible since they can be combined with various theoretical frameworks, which results in providing multiple perspectives on complex phenomena. In other words, they make it easier for researchers to use a transdisciplinary approach, combining various bodies of knowledge to provide a deeper understanding of complex issues.

Furthermore, this study recommends considering the self-regulation theory as it seems valuable in revealing gender agency as a critical factor, based on the findings of this study. The theory pays greater attention to individuals' active engagement in managing their own behaviour and outcomes, emphasising the role of self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-control in achieving and attaining goals. Hoyle and Sherrill (2007, p.1676) termed future possible selves that influence people's behaviours as "self-regulatory possible selves", defining them as the selves that embody a self-definition goal and incorporate particular behavioural procedures to achieve it. Thus, the integration of this theory would enable the researcher to recognise the role of female learners' self-regulated processes in pursuing envisioned L2 identities, allowing the researcher to observe the development of participants' future L2 selves' through their social engagements and activities.

The need for this theory in gender and L2 vision research lies in the fact that envisioned possible selves are linked to current selves, and they evolve over time as learners reflect on their experiences, adjust their goals, and revise their self-concept in response to

constraints and social change. In addition, they serve as powerful motivators for social behaviour and drive learners to pursue future goals and identities meaningful to them, motivating them to overcome constraints. Therefore, I assume that if is integrated into L2 vision and gender research, it helps provide a nuanced understanding of how female language learners navigate their self-concept, aspirations, goal-setting processes, and future identities, potentially giving us important insights. Some recommended research questions for future research might be: 1) what is the role of self-regulated behaviours in female language learners' L2 selves? 2) How do self-regulated behaviours play a role in L2 selves dynamics among female English learners?

Moreover, considering the interactions between the current gendered identity and L2 future identity and the way the formers govern the latter, this study recommends investigating this issue in greater depth. To do so, I recommend adopting the identity control theory (Burke, 2007) because it is concerned with the development of multiple identities, their nature, their relationship and the way they are managed and controlled by one another. It is also worth investigating multiple L2 selves that exist at the same time. Researchers may explore the following questions:1) how each L2 self is developed and operated, 2) why each L2 self is located in a different space compared to the others, 3) how these selves are related to each other, managed and controlled within one learner, and 4) what the implications for each L2 self on learners' behaviours are. This is very important because, according to Talaifar and Swann (2018), achieving a certain goal requires applying one's limited resources and attention, and focusing on one future identity, which may conflict with pursuing another identity due to the shift in resources and attention taken from one future identity and placed on another.

Finally, this study recommends bridging the area of language ideologies with female L2 selves research to shed light on feminist issues related to empowerment. As seen in my

study, the beliefs about the English language play a crucial role in enhancing social actions toward creating desired future selves in powerful roles and positions. Questions that researchers may focus on could include: 1) How do language ideologies affect the development of L2 selves among female language learners? and 2) What is the role of language ideologies in empowering future L2 selves among female language learners?

8.6.2 Empirical Recommendations

In terms of practice, the study recommends future researchers be present at the research site to observe the life of learners over time through qualitative observational methods to allow them to fully represent the complexity and dynamicity of the issue under investigation. Ethnographic observations and a collection of interviews would serve as great research tools to yield insights. More importantly, considering space and time as key factors of the complex dynamic process, qualitative longitudinal research might be helpful in studying the relationship between gender and L2 selves. Lin (2023, p.401) argued that this temporal approach embeds time and change as key features with time, becoming "a physical contextual, gendered, cultural, individual and subjectively interpreted construct" and that "change is also contextual and multi-faceted", shifting during the course of life. Thus, by applying this approach, researchers not only can examine the process, but also the dynamic events that emerge. It also enables researchers to interpret experiences by understanding how and why they happen, as well as how and why these experiences evolve over time.

Additionally, I recommend replicating this study with the inclusion of male language learners to do a comparative analysis of how each gender shapes L2 selves in relation to gender norms and power relations. I believe this would provide comprehensive information on how gender L2 vision by bringing male agency to the debate. Finally, it is also worth

replicating the study in a more progressive society where gender equality is more closely matched, in order to offer more insights from another sociocultural context.

8.7 Final Thought: Women's Voice as a Key to Unveiling the Complexity of L2 Vision

"I visualise myself to be one of the people who give more voices to young females. If you give a voice to young females, they will change the future."
Nawal.

As a final thought in this thesis, I wish to share one of the participants' quotations above to highlight the unique insights I obtained from meeting my participants regarding the ways in which female language learners' voices can create opportunities for researchers to effectively explore the complex, interconnecting and shifting identities they hold. A female language learner's sense of self is the result of a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted interaction between various social relationships and elements that significantly influence her daily life. By asking her to reflect on her life journey using first-person accounts, such as the life history interview, her voice becomes instrumental in exploring those relationships and elements and how they interplay with the construction of and change in both present and future identities.

Giving female students a voice to access their identities is crucial because it is not just about eliciting their experiences, but also empowering those language students by bringing their silent experiences to the table and highlighting the complexity of their lives. By giving them the space to express themselves, researchers provide an empowering platform for them to talk about their experiences as women that may be muted in their society and invisible within their own culture. By actively listening to their stories and assisting them to

express themselves, it allows them to have authority over their stories, likely revealing their continuous, complex conflicts and interaction with gender ideologies and significant others, as well as the evolving gender identities as a result of social change.

Furthermore, it sheds light on the mechanisms by which their gender interacts with other interplaying dimensions of identity, such as religion, family, ethnicity, and class, that contribute to producing gender within established norms. It tells us what it means for them to be female language students and how they challenge those societal norms and act within the boundaries of their social environment. This, in turn, fosters access to their inner world: how they perceive, comprehend, and define the world around them and how, through this definition, they shape and shift their identities. It enables us to look closer at their subjectivity in relation to themselves, other people, organisations, and policies that are all governed by a broad gender discourse that significantly impacts their L2 visions.

As researchers, we will never understand this discourse as a key to comprehending the role of gender in L2 vision until we give female learners a voice and let them talk from their own perspectives about their gender experiences in their local context and reveal the complex relationship between their gender and future L2 selves. Gendered selves and L2 possible selves are socio-cognitive constructs that are related to various complex elements, both internal and external, that uniquely exist within every context and within every particular learner. It is not easy to understand this complexity without listening to the female learners and allowing us to enter their private world through their voices, their individuality, the way they construct their identities, under which circumstances, and how they engage with social factors and interact with gender constraints.

Although we, as researchers, may think that we understand a specific group's identities because we belong to the same community or we have enough contextual knowledge about

the research context where learners live and belong, we will never know the unique experience of each woman, since identities are complex and are affected by multiple dimensions that vary from one place to another, one time to another and one condition to another even within the same society. Thus, the female learner's voice is a crucial element in unveiling this complexity so that the relationship between them and their environment can be thoroughly examined and the complex interplay between their present gendered selves and future L2 selves can be understood, which still remains unclear in the literature.

This discussion, therefore, informs existing mainstream quantitative research of the serious need to turn our attention to the qualitative strategy, since it is the most significant methodological approach for offering a voice to any individuals under investigation. If we do so, I believe we can provide rich perspectives on those complex systems by examining the various unique gender experiences of diverse female language students from various contexts worldwide, which can potentially enrich our discussion of the interrelated complex relationship between the notions of gender and L2 vision.

Appendix A An Invitation for Participation

دعوة للمشاركة في بحث الدكتوراة

مرحبًا

هذا الاستطلاع هو دعوة للمشاركة في دراسة لبحث الدكتوراه حول تأثير هويات متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية على صورهم الذهنية المستقبلية كمستخدمين للغة.

تستهدف الدراسة متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية السعوديات، سواء في المرحلة الجامعية أو الدراسات العليا. يتضمن الاستطلاع تسعة أسئلة فقط والتي تستغرق دقيقة واحدة فقط للإجابة عليها.

تعبئة الإستبيان هو موافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة والتي تتكون من مقابلتين.

بعد إرسال الاستبيان، سيتم الاتصال بك من الباحثة للترتيب للمقابلات عن طريق رقم الهاتف أو البريد الإلكتروني المقدم في هذا الاستطلاع.

قبل ملء الاستبيان، يرجى الاطلاع على القسم الأول والذي يتضمن معلومات للمشاركين بالدراسة وحقهم كمشتركين. إذا كنت توافقين على المعلومات المزودة، يرجى التوقيع على نموذج الموافقة في القسم الثاني عن طريق تحديد جميع المربعات، ثم يمكنك الانتقال إلى القسم الثالث لإكمال الاستبيان، والذي يستغرق دقيقة واحدة فقط.

إذا كانت لديك أي أسئلة قبل موافقتك على المشاركة، يرجى الاتصال على:

966506090279

ea1n19@soton.ac.uk

شاكرة لكن مقدماً

Section 1

معلومات للمشاركين بالدراسة

ERGO number: 69144

عن ماذا تبحث الدراسة؟
تبحث هذة الدراسة في تأثير الهويات على رؤية اللغة الثانية بين متعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية السعوديات
لماذا تتطلب مني المشاركة؟
بصفتك متعلمة سعودية للغة الإنجليزية، مشاركة تجربتك قد تضيف معلومات قيمة الى هذه الدراسة
ماذا سيحدث لي إذا شاركت؟
إذا شاركت في الدراسة ، فسيتم إجراء مقابلتين عبر الإنترنت والسؤال عن تجربة تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية ووجهة نظرك حولها وأسئلة عن نفسك بما فيها رؤيتك المستقبلية كمستخدمة للغة الثانية.
هل هناك أي فوائد في مشاركتي؟
قد لا تفيدك هذه الدراسة بشكل مباشر ولكنها قد تعطي توصيات لمساعدة الطالبات في تعزيز رؤيتهم للغة الثانية
هل هناك أي مخاطرة في المشاركة؟
لا.
هل ستكون مشاركتي سرية؟
سيتم الاحتفاظ بجميع البيانات التي يتم جمعها عنك بسرية تامة.
هل أنا ملزمة بالمشاركة؟
لا. الأمر متروك لك تمامًا
ماذا يحدث إذا غيرت رأيي؟
لديك الحق في تغيير رأيك والانسحاب في أي وقت.
ماذا سيحدث لنتائج البحث؟
سيتم نشر النتائج في بحث الدكتوراة وسيتم الإحتفاظ بها في جامعة ساوثامبتون للدراسات المستقبلية مع الحفاظ على سرية التفاصيل الخاصة بك.
ماذا يحدث إذا كانت هناك مشكلة؟
يرجى التواصل مع الباحث من خلال هذا البريد الإلكتروني
ea1n19@soton.ac.uk

Section 2

نموذج توقيع

1. ***يرجى تحديد جميع المربعات كموافقة على المعلومات أدناة*** *

Please select 11 options.

- [ ] I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. لقد قرأت وفهمت ورقة معلومات المشارك وأتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح أسئلة حول الدراسة.
- [ ] I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study and future research. أوافق على المشاركة في هذا المشروع البحثي وأوافق على استخدام بياناتي لغرض هذه الدراسة وفي أي بحث مستقبلي
- [ ] I understand my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected. أدرك أن مشاركتي تطوعية ويمكنني الانسحاب في أي وقت ولأي سبب دون أن تتأثر حقوق المشاركة الخاصة بي
- [ ] I understand that my personal information collected about me such as my name or where I live will not be shared beyond the study team. أدرك أن معلوماتي الشخصية التي تم جمعها عني مثل اسمي أو المكان الذي أعيش فيه لن يتم مشاركتها خارج فريق الدراسة.
- [ ] I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. أدرك أن جميع المعلومات التي أقدمها لهذه الدراسة ستعامل بسرية تامة
- [ ] I agree to take part in the interviews for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet and understand that these will be audio-recorded for data analysis. أوافق على المشاركة في المقابلات وأفهم أنه سيتم تسجيلها صوتيًا

- [ ] I understand my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.أدرك أن مشاركتي تطوعية ويمكنني الانسحاب في أي وقت ولأي سبب دون أن تتأثر حقوق المشاركة الخاصة بي

- [ ] I understand that my personal information collected about me such as my name or where I live will not be shared beyond the study team.أدرك أن معلوماتي الشخصية التي تم جمعها عني مثل اسمي أو المكان الذي أعيش فيه لن يتم مشاركتها خارج فريق الدراسة.

- [ ] I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. أدرك أن جميع المعلومات التي أقدمها لهذه الدراسة ستعامل بسرية تامة

- [ ] I agree to take part in the interviews for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet and understand that these will be audio-recorded for data analysis. أوافق على المشاركة في المقابلات وأفهم أنه سيتم تسجيلها صوتيًا

- [ ] I understand that I will not be directly identified in any reports of the research and my identity will remain anonymous by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.أفهم أنه لن يتم تحديد هويتي بشكل مباشر في أي تقارير بحثية وستظل هويتي مجهولة من خلال تغيير اسمي وإخفاء أي تفاصيل من مقابلاتي والتي قد تكشف عن هويتي أو هوية الأشخاص الذين أتحدث عنهم.

- [ ] I agree to my data to be anonymously quoted in research reports and publications. أوافق على الإفصاح عن بياناتي دون الكشف عن هويتي في التقارير والمنشورات البحثية.

- [ ] I agree to be contacted for follow-up questions at any time during the study. أوافق على الاتصال بي لطرح أسئلة للمتابعة في أي وقت أثناء الدراسة.

- [ ] I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. أفهم أنه يحق لي الاتصال بأي من الأشخاص المشاركين في البحث للحصول على مزيد من التوضيح والمعلومات

- [ ] I give permission for the data I provide to be held by the university of Southampton as described in the participant information sheet so it can be used for future research. أعطي الإذن بالبيانات التي أقدمها لتحتفظ بها جامعة ساوثهامبتون لإستخدامها في الأبحاث المستقبلية

Section 3 ...

Please answer the following questions.

2. What is your name? (first and last name please) يرجى كتابة إسمك الأول والأخير *

Enter your answer

3. What is your gender? ماهو جنسك *

- ◯ Female أنثى
- ◯ Male ذكر

4. What is your age group? ماهي فئتك العمرية *

- ◯ 18-25
- ◯ 26-30
- ◯ 31-35
- ◯ 36-40

5. Which region are you from in Saudi Arabia? ماهي منطقتك باالسعودية *

- ◯ East الشرقية
- ◯ West الغربية
- ◯ North الشمال
- ◯ South الجنوب
- ◯ Middle نجد

6. What is the name of your University? ماهو إسم جامعتك *

Enter your answer

7. What is your major? ماهو تخصصك *

Enter your answer

8. Select either you are Under or post graduate student. إختاري ماإذا كنت طالبة جامعية أو دراسات عليا *

- ◯ Undergraduate طالبة جامعية
- ◯ Postgraduate طالبة دراسات عليا

9. Please write your phone number AND email to contact you. يرجى كتابة رقم الهاتف والإيميل للتواصل *

Enter your answer

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher: Ebtisam Arishi

ERGO number: 69144

You are invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or if you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

I am a PhD. Student in applied linguistics at the University of Southampton. I am working towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. My research looks at the impact of identity, particularly self-positioning, on the L2 vision among Saudi female English learners. I am doing this research to investigate further information about the L2 future possible selves and better understand the L2 vision of females and how their context can contribute to forming their L2 vision. The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission fully sponsors my study, and Jizan University funds it.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You are asked to participate because you are a Saudi female English learner who can effectively answer my research questions. My research can help to understand Saudi female English learners and gain knowledge about the factors that interfere with their language learning, potentially helping to overcome their language learning issues in the future. So, your experience can add a lot to my study because you will share your individual experience from your own perspective, which will give my research value. Other participants are also included in this study from different universities who will share their thoughts and experience as well.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in the study, an online interview will be conducted, asking you to share your language learning experience. The interview will last for 45 minutes. Two weeks later, you will be invited to another interview asking different questions about your views on English, context, identity, and L2 vision. Your answers will be recorded in both interviews, which is required for data analyses later. The recordings will be transcribed later

and translated into English, as it is the language for the research. The interviews are individual, and each student will be interviewed individually. You will be met only with me (the researcher), and no others are involved in the interview. If further information is needed after the interview, you will be contacted for follow-up questions within one or two weeks. For example, if you provide an unclear answer, I may contact you after the interview to seek clarification. My research project needs two years after the interviews to be finished. So, I may contact you anytime during my study if required.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?

Saudi Arabia is a unique society characterised by a particular social structure that differs from many other cultures. Considering Saudi female English learners as an important group, this study may help Saudi females learn English effectively by understanding the impact of their society and identities on the way they visualise themselves in the future as English users. While this study may not benefit you directly, it may recommend implications later that can help empower the vision of Saudi female English learners, potentially contributing to the development of their learning.

Are there any risks involved?

There will be no risks involved in this study.

What data will be collected?

A participation survey will be distributed online to the participants through their English departments, requesting personal information such as name, age, gender, region, and contact detail. Personal information is for the purpose of comparison, and contact detail is for participation arrangements. Two follow-up interviews will be conducted after they submit the survey and the participation is arranged. The interviews contain questions about participants' life experiences, including past and present experiences, their views about English, their context, identities, and their future, which will take a narrative form. The interviews are individual; there is only the researcher and the interviewee for each interview.

Personal information will be kept secured and stored on the server of the University of Southampton and OneDrive, protected by a password. No one but the researcher can access this data. Study data will also be secured and will not be shared with any other researchers or groups. Audio records, hard data, and consent forms will also be stored securely in the university of Southampton servers. The data will be stored in the University of Southampton to be used for future research and will remain secure and confidential.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your information on the survey, as electronic data, will be saved on the university of Southampton and OneDrive, protected by password and accessed only by the researchers. Audio records, hard copies of the interview transcripts, and consent forms will be stored securely in the university server to ensure confidentiality. Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory

authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. Supervisors for my projects will have access to the data for supervision purposes. All of these people have a duty to keep your information as a research participant strictly confidential.

Do I have to take part?

No, your submission of the survey does not mean that you have to participate in the study. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to show you have agreed to take part.

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected. Your information and answers during interviews can be removed at any time based on your request. You only need to inform the researcher through email about your willingness to withdraw. If you also want to remove particular answers, you have the right to do so. You can contact the researcher, indicating the parts you wish to withdraw. Please get in touch with the researcher through this email: ea1n19@soton.ac.uk

What will happen to the results of the research?

All participants will receive a copy of the results of their data for trustworthiness purposes. The research will be published, including the results, and your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any future reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent.

Where can I get more information?

If more information is needed, please contact the researcher through email to answer all your questions. Don't hesitate to get in touch with the researcher through this email: ea1n19@soton.ac.uk

What happens if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you should speak to the researcher, who will do her best to answer your questions. Please get in touch with the researcher through this email: ea1n19@soton.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally-identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the

purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. If any personal data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose. For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 10 years after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet and considering taking part in the research.

CONSENT FORM

Researcher name: Ebtisam Arishi

ERGO number: 69144

Please tick the box if you agree with the statements:

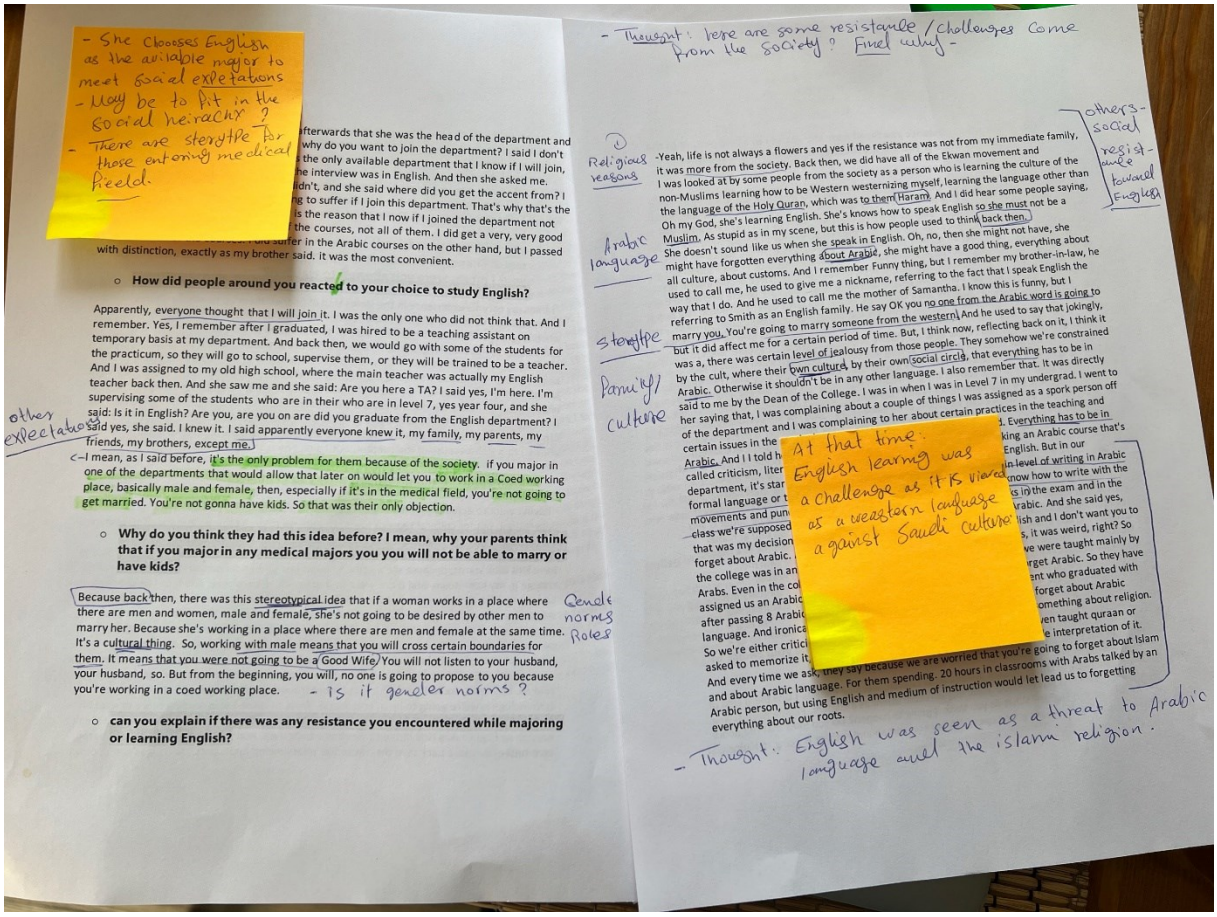
I have read and understood the participant information sheet (dated16-11-22/ *version no*.3) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study and future research.	
I understand my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that my personal information collected about me such as my name or where I live will not be shared beyond the study team.	
I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.	
I agree to take part in the interviews for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet and understand that these will be audio-recorded for data analysis.	
I understand that I will not be directly identified in any reports of the research and my identity will remain anonymous by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.	
I agree to my data to be anonymously quoted in research reports and publications.	
I agree to be contacted for follow-up questions at any time during the study.	
I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.	
I give permission for the data I provide to be held by the university of Southampton as described in the participant information sheet so it can be used for future research.	

Name of participant (print name) ……

Signature of participant……

Date……

Appendix C Analysis of the Hard Copy



afterwards that she was the head of the department and why do you want to join the department? I said I don't the only available department that I know if I will join, he interview was in English. And then she asked me. idn't, and she said where did you get the accent from? I g to suffer if I join this department. That's why that's the is the reason that I now if I joined the department not the courses, not all of them. I did get a very, very good suffer in the Arabic courses on the other hand, but I passed with distinction, exactly as my brother said. it was the most convenient.

- **How did people around you reacted to your choice to study English?**

Apparently, everyone thought that I will join it. I was the only one who did not think that. And I remember. Yes, I remember after I graduated, I was hired to be a teaching assistant on temporary basis at my department. And back then, we would go with some of the students for the practicum, so they will go to school, supervise them, or they will be trained to be a teacher. And I was assigned to my old high school, where the main teacher was actually my English teacher back then. And she saw me and she said: Are you here a TA? I said yes, I'm here. I'm supervising some of the students who are in their who are in level 7, yes year four, and she said: Is it in English? Are you, are you on are did you graduate from the English department? I said yes, she said. I knew it. I said apparently everyone knew it, my family, my parents, my friends, my brothers, except me.

<-I mean, as I said before, it's the only problem for them because of the society. if you major in one of the departments that would allow that later on would let you to work in a Coed working place, basically male and female, then, especially if it's in the medical field, you're not going to get married. You're not gonna have kids. So that was their only objection.

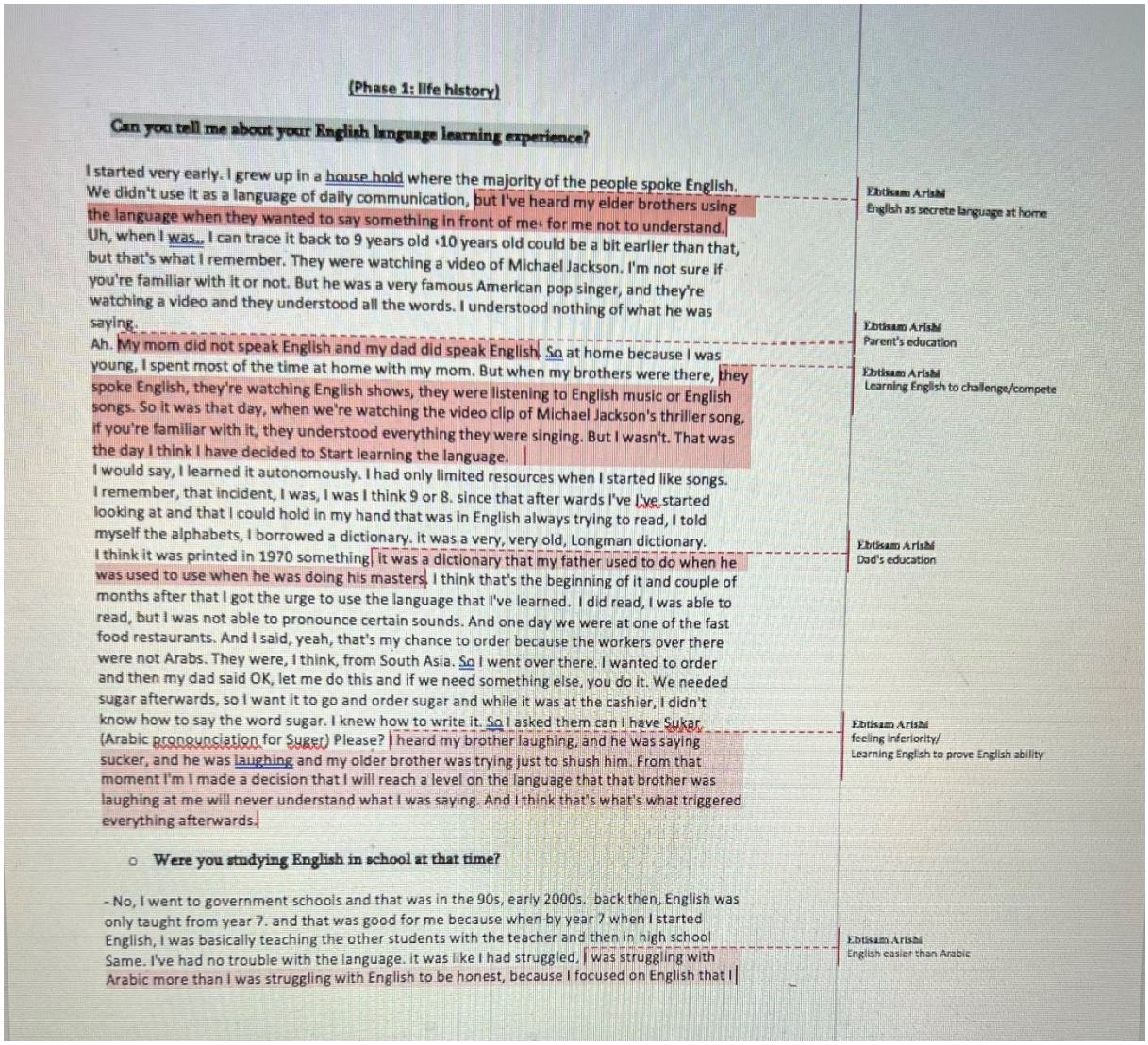
- **Why do you think they had this idea before? I mean, why your parents think that if you major in any medical majors you you will not be able to marry or have kids?**

Because back then, there was this stereotypical idea that if a woman works in a place where there are men and women, male and female, she's not going to be desired by other men to marry her. Because she's working in a place where there are men and female at the same time. It's a cultural thing. So, working with male means that you will cross certain boundaries for them. It means that you were not going to be a Good Wife. You will not listen to your husband, your husband, so. But from the beginning, you will, no one is going to propose to you because you're working in a coed working place. - is it gender norms ?

- **can you explain if there was any resistance you encountered while majoring or learning English?**

-Yeah, life is not always a flowers and yes if the resistance was not from my immediate family, it was more from the society. Back then, we did have all of the Ekwan movement and I was looked at by some people from the society as a person who is learning the culture of the non-Muslims learning how to be Western westernizing myself, learning the language other than the language of the Holy Quran, which was to them Haram. And I did hear some people saying, Oh my God, she's learning English. She's knows how to speak English so she must not be a Muslim. As stupid as in my scene, but this is how people used to think back then. She doesn't sound like us when she speak in English. Oh, no, then she might not have, she might have forgotten everything about Arabic, she might have a good thing, everything about all culture, about customs. And I remember Funny thing, but I remember my brother-in-law, he used to call me, he used to give me a nickname, referring to the fact that I speak English the way that I do. And he used to call me the mother of Samantha. I know this is funny, but I referring to Smith as an English family. He say OK you no one from the Arabic word is going to marry you. You're going to marry someone from the western. And he used to say that jokingly, but it did affect me for a certain period of time. But, I think now, reflecting back on it, I think it was a, there was certain level of jealousy from those people. They somehow we're constrained by the cult, where their own culture, by their own social circle, that everything has to be in Arabic. Otherwise it shouldn't be in any other language. I also remember that. It was directly said to me by the Dean of the College. I was in when I was in Level 7 in my undergrad. I went to her saying that, I was complaining about a couple of things I was assigned as a spork person off of the department and I was complaining to her about certain practices in the teaching and certain issues in the . Everything has to be in Arabic. And I I told h king an Arabic course that's called criticism, liter English. But in our department, it's star in level of writing in Arabic formal language or t know how to write with the movements and pun s in the exam and in the class we're supposed rabic. And she said yes, that was my decision sh and I don't want you to forget about Arabic. s, it was weird, right? So the college was in an ve were taught mainly by Arabs. Even in the co rget Arabic. So they have assigned us an Arabic nt who graduated with after passing 8 Arabic forget about Arabic language. And ironica omething about religion. So we're either critici en taught quraan or asked to memorize it e interpretation of it. And every time we ask, they say because we are worried that you're going to forget about Islam and about Arabic language. For them spending. 20 hours in classrooms with Arabs talked by an Arabic person, but using English and medium of instruction would let lead us to forgetting everything about our roots.

Appendix D Analysis of the Soft Copy



(Phase 1: life history)

Can you tell me about your English language learning experience?

I started very early. I grew up in a house hold where the majority of the people spoke English. We didn't use it as a language of daily communication, but I've heard my elder brothers using the language when they wanted to say something in front of me‹ for me not to understand. Uh, when I was.. I can trace it back to 9 years old ‹10 years old could be a bit earlier than that, but that's what I remember. They were watching a video of Michael Jackson. I'm not sure if you're familiar with it or not. But he was a very famous American pop singer, and they're watching a video and they understood all the words. I understood nothing of what he was saying.

Ebtisam Arishi
English as secrete language at home

Ah. My mom did not speak English and my dad did speak English. So at home because I was young, I spent most of the time at home with my mom. But when my brothers were there, they spoke English, they're watching English shows, they were listening to English music or English songs. So it was that day, when we're watching the video clip of Michael Jackson's thriller song, if you're familiar with it, they understood everything they were singing. But I wasn't. That was the day I think I have decided to Start learning the language.

Ebtisam Arishi
Parent's education

Ebtisam Arishi
Learning English to challenge/compete

I would say, I learned it autonomously. I had only limited resources when I started like songs. I remember, that incident, I was, I was I think 9 or 8. since that after wards I've I've started looking at and that I could hold in my hand that was in English always trying to read, I told myself the alphabets, I borrowed a dictionary. it was a very, very old, Longman dictionary. I think it was printed in 1970 something, it was a dictionary that my father used to do when he was used to use when he was doing his masters. I think that's the beginning of it and couple of months after that I got the urge to use the language that I've learned. I did read, I was able to read, but I was not able to pronounce certain sounds. And one day we were at one of the fast food restaurants. And I said, yeah, that's my chance to order because the workers over there were not Arabs. They were, I think, from South Asia. So I went over there. I wanted to order and then my dad said OK, let me do this and if we need something else, you do it. We needed sugar afterwards, so I want it to go and order sugar and while it was at the cashier, I didn't know how to say the word sugar. I knew how to write it. So I asked them can I have Sukar (Arabic pronounciation for Suger) Please? I heard my brother laughing, and he was saying sucker, and he was laughing and my older brother was trying just to shush him. From that moment I'm I made a decision that I will reach a level on the language that that brother was laughing at me will never understand what I was saying. And I think that's what's what triggered everything afterwards.

Ebtisam Arishi
Dad's education

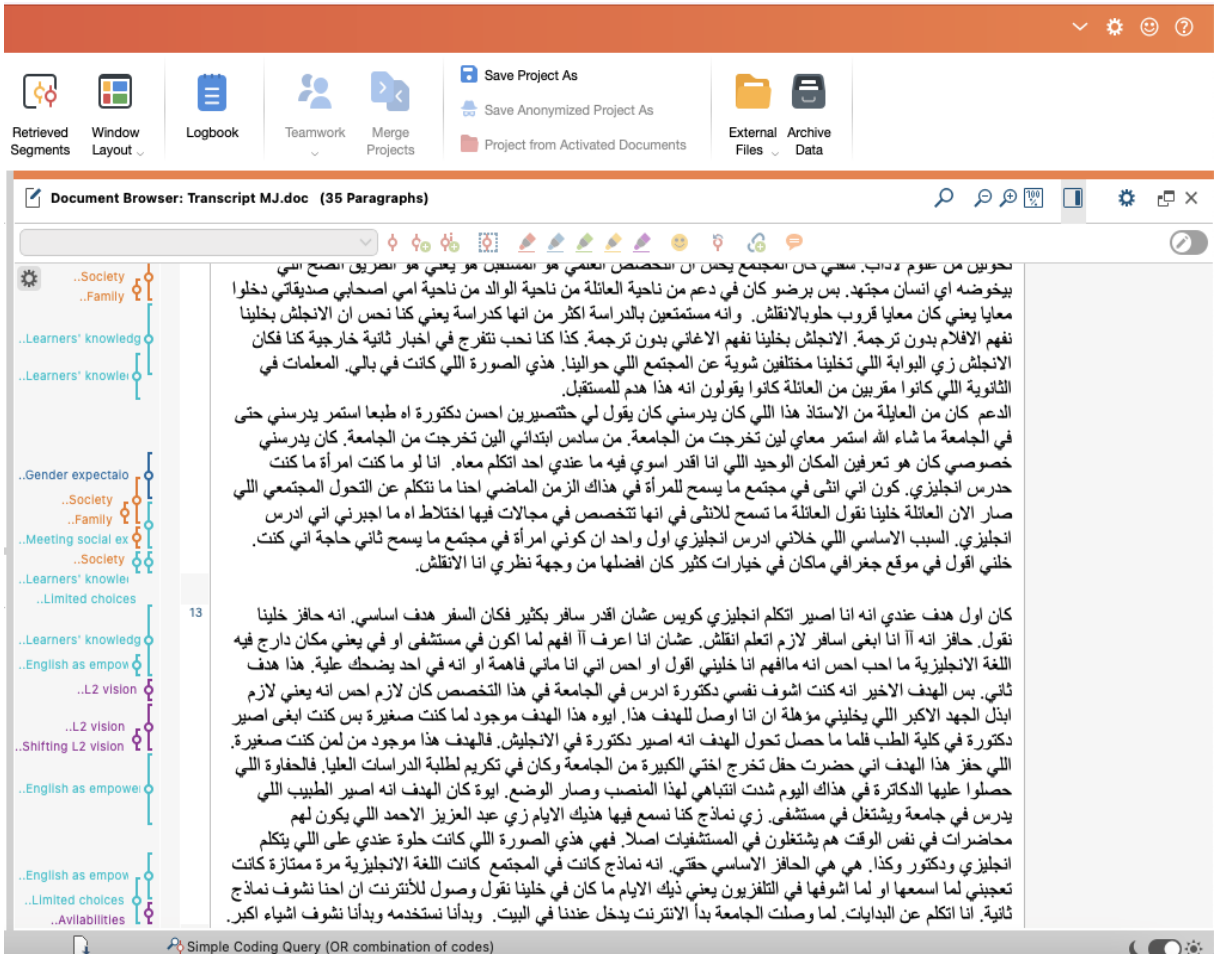
Ebtisam Arishi
feeling inferiority/
Learning English to prove English ability

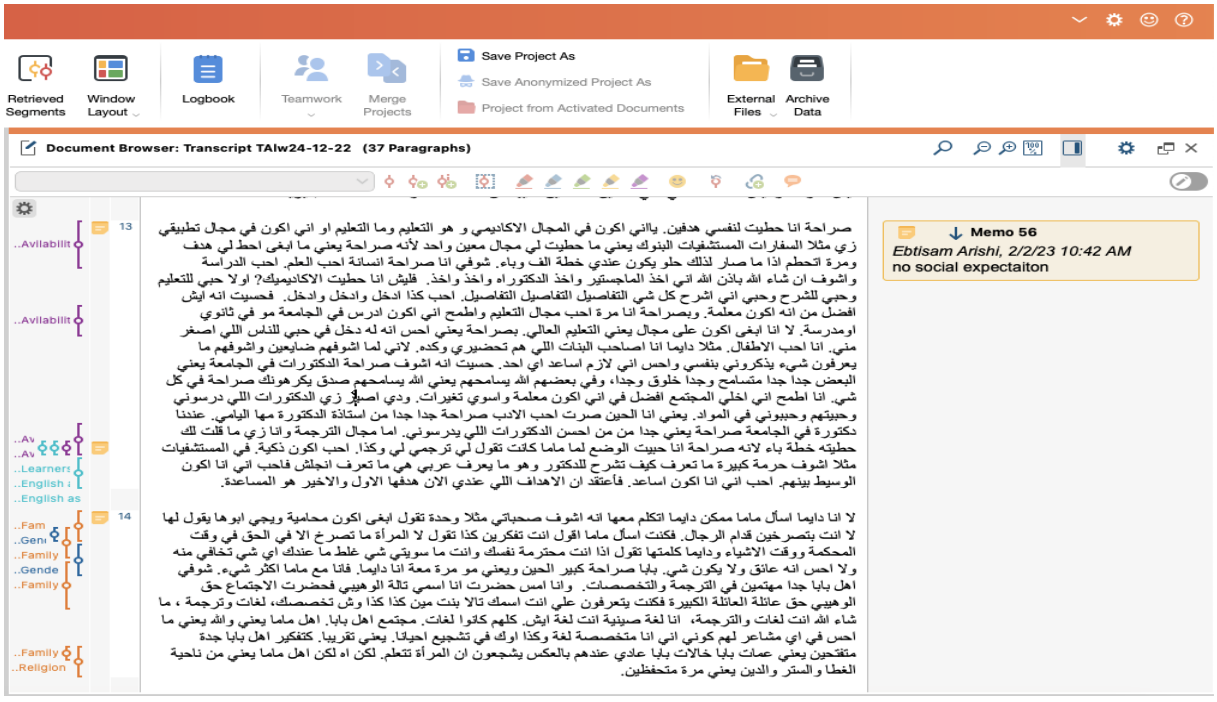
- **Were you studying English in school at that time?**

- No, I went to government schools and that was in the 90s, early 2000s. back then, English was only taught from year 7. and that was good for me because when by year 7 when I started English, I was basically teaching the other students with the teacher and then in high school Same. I've had no trouble with the language. it was like I had struggled, I was struggling with Arabic more than I was struggling with English to be honest, because I focused on English that I

Ebtisam Arishi
English easier than Arabic

Appendix E Analysing on the MAXQDA





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