

CHAPTER 9

The L2 Motivational Self System: Using the Selves in the Classroom

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Background

Motivation for second language (L2) learning has been a topic of interest for researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) for over seven decades. Research on this topic was pioneered by researchers in the multilingual context of Canada, where interest in the target language community and culture were determining factors in one's decision and motivation to learn the other language. For instance, if Anglophones were interested in the French-Canadians' community and culture they were more motivated to learn French. If the interest to learn about the French-Canadian culture and community was so intense that the individual wanted to even adopt and blend in with the French-Canadian culture, the individual was assumed to have what was called an integrative orientation toward learning French (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This integrative orientation was found to result in highest levels of motivation to learn the target language. In addition to desire to integrate, learners also had another orientation toward learning a second language that included utilitarian goals such as getting a job, passing a course, traveling, and the like. These two orientations, integrative vs. instrumental, were traditionally assumed to encompass language learning goals and motives. However, in the early 1990s and after three decades of the hegemony of Gardner's theory of motivation, many

researchers started to question the generalizability of these findings to other contexts where there is no target language community to integrate into, and pointed to the restrictive nature of Gardner's theory. Most notably, Zoltan Dörnyei championed a new wave of research on the topic and proposed that motivation is much more complicated than what Gardner's theory (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972) has outlined. Dörnyei proposed multiple theories of motivation each dealing with different aspects of motivation including but not limited to the process of goal setting and motivation, classroom motivation, task motivation, and, more relevant to the present chapter, the notion of L2 selves.

In his L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei (2009a) drew on motivation theories from the field of psychology to propose that if knowing the target language is an important dimension of the future self that the person desires to become, this person is said to have a future L2 self. The future L2 self could be an Ideal L2 Self, representing the L2 attributes that the person would ideally like to possess in future, or an Ought-to L2 Self, representing the L2 attributes that the person is expected to possess in order to avoid negative consequences. An example of an Ideal L2 Self is an image of a person who uses the target language fluently and effectively in communication with international friends and colleagues. An example of an Ought-to L2 Self is an image of a person who performs very well in their language classes or at their job and avoids negative consequences such as failure in school or at work, respectively. An Ideal L2 Self and an Ought-to L2 Self could even look like they are the same goal (e.g., using the target language effectively at work) on surface; however, the deeper regulatory focus of the goals could be different. That is, whereas an Ideal L2 Self has a promotion focus concerned with approaching positive end-states such as advancement and accomplishment in one's career, an Ought-to L2 Self has a prevention focus concerned with avoiding negative end-states such as avoiding losing one's job. In other words, whereas the former is about moving from the current state to a more desirable state, the latter is about maintaining the current state and avoiding a less desirable state.

The Ideal and Ought-to L2 Self act as motivators through creating feelings of discomfort associated with the discrepancy between one's current self and their future selves. In other words, individuals are motivated to reduce the discrepancy between their current L2 self and their future L2 selves. This perceived discrepancy creates a feeling of discomfort that results in motivation to reduce the discrepancy. As the learners move from their current self toward their future selves, they experience different types of emotions depending on the type of future self that they are trying to approach. Learners who are motivated to realize their Ideal L2 Self, experience elation-related emotions such as excitement and joy (see Dewaele, this volume) as they move toward this promotion-related self but if they fail to realize their Ideal L2 Self, they experience dejection-related emotions such as sadness and disappointment. By contrast, learners experience the quiescence-related

emotions such as calmness as they succeed in moving toward their Ought-to L2 Self but feel agitation-related emotions such as anxiety if they do not make appropriate progress in doing so.

The pursuit of Ideal L2 Self vs. Ought-to L2 Self also results in the employment of different strategies in goal pursuit. Learners who are motivated by their Ideal L2 Self are more concerned about moving from the current state to a more desirable state, therefore, they are willing to take an eager strategic inclination, which involves taking advantage of every opportunity to use the target language without being concerned about the risk of making mistakes. Those motivated by an Ought-to L2 Self, on the other hand, are concerned about maintaining their current state and tend to take a vigilant strategic inclination that involves a cautious and minimal use of the target language in order to avoid making mistakes and risking their current situation.

In sum, learners who are motivated by their Ideal L2 Self experience joy and excitement and use eager strategies in their L2 use when they advance toward their Ideal L2 Self and experience sadness and disappointment when they fail to do so. By contrast those who are motivated by their Ought-to L2 Self experience anxiety and use vigilant L2 use strategies when they fail to realize their Ought-to L2 Self but experience calmness and safety when they succeed in doing so. In other words, the ultimate goal of learners motivated by their Ideal L2 Self is to achieve the feeling of joy whereas the goal of learners motivated by their Ought-to L2 Self is to achieve the feelings of calmness and safety.

Research on L2 Selves

The future L2 selves have been the subject of scholarly research. Studies in this area can be divided to three groups that have explored the relations between the selves on one hand and emotions, motivation, behavior, and achievement, on the other hand.

Some studies have explored the connection between selves and emotions. Papi (2010) found that Ought-to L2 Self increase L2 anxiety whereas Ideal L2 Self decreased L2 anxiety. Papi and Teimouri (2014) found similar results. In another study in the context of Iran, Teimouri (2017) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted L2 learning enjoyment whereas Ought-to Selves predicted L2 anxiety and shame. Similarly, Papi and Khajavi (2021) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted L2 enjoyment positively and L2 anxiety negatively whereas Ought L2 Self predicted L2 anxiety positively.

The biggest group of studies have examined the predictive validity of motivation theories by exploring how the selves predicts motivation and behavior. In the case of the future L2 selves, researchers examine whether the learners who have strong Ideal or Ought-to L2 Selves also show high levels

of language learning motivation, behavior, and achievement or proficiency outcomes. Many studies all around the work have been conducted to evaluate the predictive validity of the future L2 selves. For instance, in an international study in the context of English learning in China, Japan, and Iran, my colleagues and I (Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009) found that Ideal L2 Self was a strong predictor of motivation; Ought-to L2 Self also predicted motivation but not as strongly as Ideal L2 Self. Csizer and Kormos (2009) tested the model in the context of Hungary and found only Ideal L2 Self to predict motivation. In Hong Kong, Dörnyei and Chan (2013) found that Ideal and Ought-to L2 Selves were both associated with motivation among learners of English and Mandarin but only Ideal L2 Self correlated with the students' grades in Mandarin. In a large-scale study in the context of China, You and Dörnyei (2016) found that in both rural and urban areas Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self predicted motivation. Csizer and Lukács (2010) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted motivation among learners of German and English in Hungary. Kormos and Csizer (2014) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted motivation among secondary school, university, and young adult learners in Hungary. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) found that Ought-to L2 Self was associated with low class participation. Domakani and Mohammadi (2016) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted the use of self-regulated learning strategies but Ought-to L2 Self did not. Khajavi and Ghonsouli (2017) found that Ideal L2 Self resulted in willingness to communicate in a second language. Papi et al. (2019) found that Ideal L2 Self contributed to eager L2 use strategies representing maximum use of the target language whereas the Ought-to Self resulted in vigilant L2 use strategies concerned with the minimal and cautious use of the target language.

The third groups of studies have also been conducted on the relationship between the selves on one hand and L2 proficiency achievement on the other hand. Papi and Teimouri (2012) found that the learners who had a strong Ideal L2 Self and a weak Ought-to L2 Self rated their English proficiency higher than other groups of learners. Kim and Kim (2014) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted self-reported English proficiency among elementary students in South Korea. Papi and Khajavi (2021) found that Ideal L2 Self predicted English achievement (final course grades) through increasing enjoyment and eager L2 use, whereas Ought-to L2 Self negatively affected English achievement through increasing anxiety and vigilant L2 use strategies. Finally, in meta-analysis of many studies in this area, Al-Hoorie (2018) found that only Ideal L2 Self correlated with L2 achievement.

Applications in the Classroom Context

As the studies reviewed above show, both Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self contribute to student motivation. However, whereas Ideal L2 Self enhances learning enjoyment and decreases the negative emotion of anxiety, Ought-to

L2 Self results negative emotions such as anxiety and shame. In addition, whereas Ideal L2 Self results in constructive learning behaviors such as willingness to communicate in a second language and the eager use of the second language, Ought-to L2 Self leads to vigilant and minimal use of the language and low class participation. These findings show that whereas both Ideal and Ought-to L2 Self contribute to the intensity of learner motivation, there are qualitative differences in the emotional and behavioral outcomes of these selves (Papi, 2016, 2018) with Ideal L2 Self appearing to lead to emotional and behavioral patterns more adaptive and constructive to language learning. It is, thus, not surprising that most motivation researchers have emphasized the enhancement of Ideal L2 Self as their focal approach in motivating language learners (see, e.g., Thompson, this volume). Such an enhancement of Ideal L2 Self can lead to learners' experience of positive emotions during the learning process and enhance their promotion-oriented learning behaviors such as eager L2 use and willingness to communicate. Different techniques have been empirically used in a few studies (e.g., Mackay, 2015; Magid, 2011; Magid & Chan, 2012; Munezane, 2015; Sampson, 2012; Sato, 2020) to help learners develop and activate an Ideal L2 Self. These studies, reviewed below, have shown that helping students develop an Ideal L2 Self with specific and clear features could have positive motivational, behavioral and learning outcomes.

Magid (2011) conducted a motivational program consisting of activities to develop students' future L2 selves (Ideal L2 Self and feared L2 self) and help them come up with plans and strategies to achieve them. He had students read or listen to motivational songs. Then the students were asked to close their eyes and listen to excerpts that were developed by the researcher to help students visualize their ideal English selves (e.g., imagine living in a community abroad and using English to communicate with others). The students were also guided to jot down their goals as well as their ideal L2 selves in the domains of jobs, relationships, and lifestyle, and their positive or negative role models for their motivational goals in each domain, and come up with a timeline and strategies to achieve those goals. The researcher reported that at the end of the program, the students' vision of their ideal L2 self, their English learning motivation, oral English proficiency and vocabulary knowledge increased even though it is hard to attribute the linguistic improvements directly to the intervention program.

Magid and Chan (2012) employed sophisticated workshops within two intervention programs on developing an Ideal L2 Self among learners of English in England and Hong Kong that lasted four and three months, respectively. In the England program, students were asked to write about their future professional, personal, and social future including their jobs, relationships, and life styles. They were also asked to make lists of their positive and negative role models and also think about the self they fear they might become. These techniques were intended to help learners to develop a clear and elaborate picture of their Ideal L2 Self. In a following

workshop, the learners were asked to create a timeline including paths and steps toward achieving their Ideal L2 Self. This was meant to make the achievement of these goals appear as something feasible and real rather than imaginary. To make it feel even more real and doable, they asked students to develop action plans detailing the steps they need to take to move toward those goals and the date they had in mind to start working on the plans. In the Hong Kong program, students were asked to draw an Ideal Self Tree each with three limbs indicating the ideal English user they want to be, their ideal career, and how they want to use English at work in personal life. After the workshops, the students were given twenty-three audio-recorded imagery situations to listen to and keep their Ideal L2 Selves activated and motivating. The participants also received counseling and feedback on how they were progressing in achieving their goals. The results of the studies showed that these interventions helped the participants develop a vivid and elaborate vision of their Ideal L2 Self, and increased their motivation and self-confidence (see also Chan, 2014).

In an action research study, Sampson (2012) conducted a one-semester program during which the researcher asked students to complete a free writing activity describing their “best possible English self.” Based on data collected from the free-writing task, other task-based activities were developed to enhance the participants’ Ideal L2 Self explicitly and implicitly. These included ranking pictures of their Ideal Selves (e.g., jobs, lifestyle), discussing the pros and cons of each, selecting role models, developing strategies for goal-achievement, timelines for achieving their ideal selves, and also reflecting on the “failed future self.” Students also wrote reflections on their progress throughout the semester, and in the end they presented their reflections through a skit. The study found that by the end of the program the student developed a clear Ideal L2 Self and came to recognize themselves as agents of their own learning process.

Mackay (2015) employed three types of visualization activities. The first type included positive visualization, through which students using breathing and relaxation techniques and were guided on how to use visual stimuli to trigger mental images. The second type of activities included visualizing the future L2 self they identified with the most. The third type included students interviewing successful language learners on the strategies and plans they used to realize their future L2 selves, and developed a learning timeline and a list of strategies and plans to realize their own L2 selves. Based on the qualitative results, the author reported that the intervention helped students form clear, detailed, and personal visions of their Ideal L2 Selves.

Munezane (2015) examined the effects of a similar intervention on learners’ willingness to communicate in a second language (L2 WTC). The students were asked to visualize their Ideal L2 Self with the desired proficiency in English and share them with their classmates. Next, they drew pictures of their Ideal L2 Selves, wrote about them at home, and presented them in class. While imagining themselves as future specialists

in their own field, the students discussed important global issues and gave class presentation on the issues. One group of the students were asked to jot down and discuss their goal for the next twenty years, the next year's goals, and the current semester's goals. The students were then guided to reflect on how English proficiency can help them reach those goals. The study showed that visualization increased students L2 WTC; in addition, students enjoyed the content of the interventions and found themselves to be more competent in reaching their motivational goals.

Safadri (2021) employed a six-step program on a small sample of participants in Iran. The program included activities such as creating a vision of learners' Ideal English Self through reflection, discussion, and scripted imagery, strengthening the vision through creating their future autobiographies, interviewing successful English learners, and doing mini-projects. The authors reported that these activities enhanced learners' motivation and Ideal L2 Self.

Finally, Sato (2020; see also Sato & Lara, 2019) had a group of Chilean business-major students complete language learning tasks that required envisioning their ideal selves as internationally successful entrepreneurs and emphasized the important use of English. The students also had to reflect on the potential obstacles that they might have in the pursuit of their ideal selves. More specifically, they were asked to watch an interview with a very successful Chilean entrepreneur who spoke English with a Chilean accent. They were asked to pay special attention to the person's English skills. They were then asked to envision themselves just like the person in the video and as highly successful people and pay attention to the role of English in their success. A control group watched a similar video of a successful Chilean entrepreneur without who spoke Spanish and did similar worksheets without any attention to the role of English. The results of the study showed that the intervention led to improvements in Ideal L2 Self but not in Ought-to L2 Self or intended effort. In addition, the students in the intervention group used English more frequently and Spanish less frequently in their classes.

The studies reviewed about employed interventions based on the conditions that Dörnyei (2009a) considered necessary for the future selves to have motivational power. That is, the studies tried to (a) create an Ideal L2 Self if students didn't have one, (b) strengthen the vision through imagery enhancement, (c) make the Ideal Self appear plausible, (d) activating the Ideal Self through different communicative tasks, (e) operationalize the ideal vision by developing action plans and strategies, and, finally (f), making the Ideal L2 Self more desirable by considering the possibility of failure. Even though these preliminary studies might lack empirical rigor, they provide promising evidence that classroom activities developed based on Dörnyei's proposals provide the motivational content that many language classes seriously need. They also confirm Papi's (et al., 2019) proposal that enhancing the Ideal L2 Self can lead to more eager behavioral outcomes such as WTC and the eager use of the target language.

From a motivation-as-quality perspective (Papi, 2018; Papi et al., 2019), designing experiments that enhance both the ideals and the oughts, and measuring the effects of those interventions not only on the ideal and oughts but more importantly on the quality of learning behaviors and outcomes could be theoretically more meaningful and lead to more validity in the results and interpretations of such studies. In addition, both immediate and long-term benefits of such interventions should be explored in order to better understand the real value of such interventions, which can only be valid if the sample size is large enough to allow for sufficient statistical power in the analyses, the participants are blinded to the purpose of the study, and there is a control group that is involved in equally instructional learning activities. Keeping the principles laid out by Dörnyei (2009a) and Papi et al. (2019; see also Papi & Khajavy, 2021) in mind, teachers can creatively develop numerous ideas that can not only provide communicative, task-based, and enjoyable activities for language teaching but also implicitly or explicitly enhance learners' motivation to achieve the highest levels of proficiency in the language they desire to learn.