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Forming a clearer image of the ideal L2 self: the L2 Motivational Self System and learner autonomy in a Japanese EFL context

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Research on the L2 Motivational Self System has drawn considerable attention in Second Language Acquisition. Previous studies have discussed the system itself, its basic concepts and their relationships to such affective variables as anxiety in various L2 learning contexts. The findings of these studies suggest that (1) having a clearer image of one's ideal L2 self might facilitate motivated L2 learning behaviour, (2) affective variables can promote or hinder learners' will to envision their ideal L2 selves, and (3) the system has both theoretical and pedagogical implications for L2 learner autonomy. The present survey study aimed to validate the system among Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in two groups, whose learning contexts made it respectively easier and harder to formulate a clear image of an ideal L2 self. Survey data were analysed using multiple-group structural equation modelling. Results showed that the proposed model fitted both groups, but the relationships among variables in the model were different according to the group. The study also illustrated the dynamic interplay of affective variables (e.g. anxiety, self-efficacy) and the basic tenets of the system thereby providing us with useful insights into L2 learner autonomy.

Keywords: L2 Motivational Self System; ideal L2 self; self-efficacy; learner autonomy; L2 motivation

Introduction

Advances in technology have been changing not only our lifestyle but also our L2 learning style. Twitter, Facebook, instant messaging programmes, and text messaging have let us communicate faster and more frequently in an L2 from any location where an Internet connection is accessible. Tablet PC and smartphone applications also provide us with plenty of L2 learning opportunities. Thus, learners can now engage in L2 learning whenever and wherever they want. In this changing L2 environment, fostering learner autonomy is essential because L2 learning is becoming more and more individualised and personalised in this environment, and learners increasingly need to be able to study their L2 independently. To promote learner autonomy, motivation, which is supported by such self-related concepts as self-efficacy and the ideal L2 self, is considered to be the most crucial factor (e.g.

Benson 2007; Ushioda 2006). This is one of the reasons L2 motivation has been discussed widely in relation to learner autonomy (e.g. Lamb 2011; Ushioda 2011).

For many years, the dominant theory in L2 motivation research has been the socio-educational model proposed by Robert Gardner and his associates (e.g. Gardner 1985). In particular, the notion of ‘integrativeness’ has been at the centre of their research. The notion reflects L2 learners’ desire to integrate themselves into a target language community and culture. However, rapid changes in technology, as well as the emergence of World Englishes (Kachru 2005), have created contexts where there may be no clear target language group into which L2 learners – especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners – would like to integrate. In today’s L2 learning environments, as a result, researchers have increasingly come to question the centrality of the key notions of the social-educational model such as integrativeness and attitude (e.g. Dörnyei 2009). Under such circumstances, it is only natural that there has been a growing demand for a more appropriate conceptualisation of L2 motivation in a globalised world (Ushioda 2006).

Reflecting this demand for reconceptualisation, Dörnyei (2005), with others, proposed a framework called the L2 Motivational Self System. In this system, language learners are assumed to be motivated if they have a vivid future image of their ‘ideal L2 self’ and are willing to make efforts to reduce the discrepancy between their current and ideal L2 self-images. In other words, the desire to reduce the gap between one’s current and ideal L2 selves can be a powerful L2 learning motivator.

Ever since Dörnyei and his colleagues (e.g. Csizér and Dörnyei 2005) developed the L2 Motivational Self System (henceforth ‘the system’), research on L2 selves has attracted considerable attention. Accordingly, researchers have made efforts to validate the system in a variety of L2 learning contexts (e.g. Al-Shehri 2009; Kim 2009; Ryan 2009; Taguchi, Magid, and Papi 2009). Moreover, several recent studies (e.g. Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér 2011) have suggested that Dörnyei’s framework of L2 motivation can also account for the effects of other affective variables, including L2 anxiety and self-oriented beliefs such as self-efficacy, which is considered to be closely related to the concept of autonomy via agency (e.g. Oxford 2011). These findings indicate that the system could potentially be extended into an integrative framework to explain the interplay of various affective variables in one simple system.

In a recent study involving 151 EFL students at a Japanese university, Ueki and Takeuchi (2012) successfully validated an extended framework of this sort for the

L2 Motivational Self System using some hypothesised relationships in a Japanese EFL environment. They illustrated that Japanese L2 learners possess clearer or less clear images of their ideal L2 selves as language learners depending on their level of motivation for learning behaviour, as well as on such affective variables as L2 anxiety and self-efficacy. They also suggest that providing information related to learners' 'future self-guides' ('the ideal L2 selves' in this study) helps the learners develop clearer ideal L2 self-images and, consequently, promotes motivated L2 learning behaviour. Their study, however, focused only on L2 learners who planned to study abroad in the near future, and it therefore leaves open the important question of whether their findings are applicable to a wider range of populations. The present study seeks to confirm the generalisability of the extended framework by examining a different population of EFL learners in the same environment, and on the basis of that examination, it discusses some implications for L2 learner autonomy.

The L2 Motivational Self System

L2 motivation research has seen a recent shift in focus, with increasing emphasis placed on how students' images of themselves as L2 learners affect the learning process itself. With the intention of developing a framework that could accommodate various research trends within this shift, Dörnyei (2005) built his L2 Motivational Self System, drawing on psychological research regarding possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986) and discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987). Higgins postulates that humans self-regulate their behaviour based on the need to balance (1) a promotion focus, with which we are able to anticipate gain or pleasure from an action and (2) a prevention focus, with which we are able to anticipate pain or shame from the same action. According to Higgins, a promotion focus entails a reference to an ideal self, which is the self a person would like to be, and the accomplishments and aspirations we have attached to it. It also relates to a more intrinsic kind of motivation. By contrast, a prevention focus entails a reference to an ought-to self, which is the self a person believes he or she should become, and the safety and responsibility values attached to it. Dörnyei brought these ideas to L2 motivation and formulated an L2 motivational framework comprising three constituents or underlying concepts: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience.

- (1) The ideal L2 self refers to the L2-specific facets of one's ideal self and is the representation of all the attributes that a person would like to possess in that regard. It corresponds to internalised instrumental motives.
- (2) The ought-to L2 self concerns the attributes that one believes one should possess to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes. It corresponds to less internalised, more extrinsic instrumental motives.
- (3) The L2 learning experience concerns situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of teachers and peer groups).

In this system, language learners are assumed to be motivated by the discrepancy between their current selves and their future, ideal L2 selves. Dörnyei (2005) states that 'people are motivated to reach a condition where their self-concept matches their personality relevant self-guides' (p. 101). Furthermore, he argues that future self-guides (i.e. the ideal and ought-to L2 selves) are not just a subset of goals (Dörnyei 2009), although both goals and future self-guides refer to future end-states. The difference between them is that future self-guides involve cognitive, emotional, visual and sensory aspects, whereas goals are merely cognitive in nature (Magid and Chan 2012).

Ever since Dörnyei (2005) presented the system, it has garnered attention from many researchers. One reason may be its synthesis of previous models into one macro model of language-specific motivation, building on the general social-psychological theory of regulatory focus and on the notion that humans make autonomous behavioural decisions based on reference to an ideal self (Ortega 2009). Due to this attention, Dörnyei's system has been widely tested and validated in a number of different countries. For example, Csizér and Kormos (2009) used structural equation modelling (SEM) to explore the role of the three underlying tenets of the system in two language-learner populations, high school and university students studying English in Hungary. Their study indicates that the power of a given motivator to influence L2 learning behaviour can vary according to academic level. Their findings show that particularly for university students, a clear ideal L2 self strongly contributes to motivated L2 learning behaviour. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Shehri (2009) investigated the relationships among Arab L2 learners' visual learning style, imagination, ideal L2 self and motivated L2 learning behaviour. The study revealed that students' visual learning preferences contribute to the development of a vivid ideal L2 self, which in turn can lead to a high level of

motivated L2 learning behaviour. Expanding on Al-Shehri's study, Kim (2011) investigated Korean elementary school students' perceptual learning style preferences, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and motivated L2 learning behaviour, revealing that students' learning-style preferences are closely related to the vividness of the ideal L2 self-image and consequently to L2 learning behaviour.

In addition, recent studies have attempted to develop Dörnyei's system into an integrative framework that explains not only L2 motivation but also other affective variables. For example, Papi (2010) analysed L2 anxiety from the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System and found that a more vivid ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience reduced learners' L2 anxiety, whereas the ought-to L2 self significantly increased their anxiety. Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér (2011) also proposed an extended version of Dörnyei's system consisting of interacting components: attitude, goals, self-guides and self-efficacy. In the Japanese EFL environment, Ueki and Takeuchi (2012) have attempted to expand the L2 Motivational Self System to take adequate account of motivated learning behaviour, L2 anxiety, self-efficacy and the perceived amount of information related to learners' future self-guides.

L2 learning environment in Japan

A brief discussion of the L2 learning environment in which this study was conducted is in order. According to a survey by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communities (2011), there are over 2.5 million university students in Japan. The majority of them are non-English majors, studying in such fields as engineering, business, economics and law,¹ but both English majors and non-English majors often attend EFL courses to improve their odds in the competitive globalised job market. The L2 learning context provided in Japan, however, differs by academic major. For example, a greater variety of EFL courses are offered to English language majors, who also have access to more long-term study-abroad programmes in a wider variety of contexts. Thus, the amount of exposure to authentic communication in an L2 differs between majors. Due to the variety of L2 learning opportunities available to English majors, it can also be assumed that their L2 learning context is more favourable for the creation of vivid images of their ideal L2 selves than the context provided to non-English majors. Yet, these differences in L2 learning context have not received much attention from L2 motivation researchers (Ryan 2009). Since Dörnyei (2009) presumes that envisioning a vivid ideal L2 self-image can increase motivated L2 learning behaviour, it will be

worthwhile to see whether these types of differences can affect the formation of a clear image of the ideal L2 self.

In light of the literature review and discussion above, then, the objectives of the current study are as follows:

- (1) To validate an extended version of the L2 Motivational Self System by examining Japanese EFL learners in two groups: one whose learning context makes it easier to envision a clear image of an ideal L2 self, and another whose learning context makes it harder to do so; and
- (2) To compare the results of validation within these groups and confirm that having a clearer ideal L2 self-image is vital to the promotion of L2 motivation and, possibly, of autonomous L2 learning behaviour.

Method

Measures and procedure

A questionnaire with 46 items was administered to the participants in this study, with their written consent. Most of the items on the questionnaire were based on the ones used in earlier studies (Al-Shehri 2009; Csizér and Kormos 2009; Papi 2010; Pintrich and De Groot 1990; Ryan 2009; Taguchi, Magid, and Papi 2009; Ueki 2013; Ueki and Takeuchi 2012),² although some were specially developed for this study. All the items were measured using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Listed below are the concepts that the questionnaire was designed to measure. Cronbach's alpha values for each concept were satisfactorily high, assuring the reliability of the questionnaire.

(1) The ideal L2 self

This concept refers to the attributes that learners feel that they should possess to fulfil their L2 goals. Following Ueki and Takeuchi's (2012) discussion of the ideal L2 self in the Japanese EFL environment, our questionnaire addressed two levels of the ideal L2 self, macro and micro.

* *Macro ideal L2 self* (4 items) refers to how clearly learners are able to imagine their level of L2 attainment long after they graduate from university.

Like the micro items below, these items were developed by Al-Shehri (2009) and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) to measure Dörnyei's original concept of ideal L2 self-image.

* *Micro ideal L2 self* (4 items) refers to how clearly learners can imagine their level of L2 attainment while at university.

(2) *The ought-to L2 self* (4 items)

This concept refers to the attributes that learners believe they ought to possess in order to meet others' expectations. The four items were originally developed by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009).

(3) *The L2 learning experience*

This concerns learners' attitudes towards L2 learning and can be affected by situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experiences derived from it (e.g. the influence of teachers or peer groups). Dörnyei (2009) accordingly divides this concept into two subconstructs: *attitude towards the immediate learning environment surrounding the learner*, and *the influences of teachers, parents and peers* (called *others' influence*).

* *L2 learning attitude towards the immediate learning environment* (4 items) refers to the extent to which learners are satisfied with their immediate learning environment or how much they like learning English in that environment. The four items were originally developed by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) and Papi (2010).

* *Others' influence* (9 items) describes the extent to which other people, such as teachers, parents and peers, encourage or pressure learners to study L2. Most of the items were originally developed by Al-Shehri (2009) and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009), while some were specially developed for this study.

(4) Motivated learning behaviour (5 items)

These five items measure learners' perceptions of the level of effort they have invested in L2 learning. In the current study, the concept is used synonymously with L2 motivation. The five items were originally developed by Papi (2010) and Ryan (2009).

(5) L2 anxiety (6 items)

This concept refers to the level of L2 anxiety that EFL learners experience with regard to L2 communication and learning. These items were originally developed by Ueki (2013).

(6) Self-efficacy (5 items)

These items measure the learner's level of confidence in doing a specific task. The five items were originally developed by Pintrich and De Groot (1990).

(7) Perceived amount of information related to learners' future self-guide (5 items)

This concept concerns learners' perception of the level of information they have about their future self-guide (i.e. the 'ideal L2 self' in this study). The five items were originally developed by Ueki and Takeuchi (2012), who suggest that the larger the amount of information, the more thorough the formation of the macro and micro ideal L2 selves.

Participants

A total of 302 Japanese university students participated in this study: 151 (69 males, 82 females; age range 18-21) majored in the English language, while the rest ($n = 151$; 98 males, 53 females; age range 18-20) majored in non-English academic fields such as liberal arts, law and business administration. Self-reported L2 proficiency levels of the two groups were not statistically different.³ The self-reported chance of using English among the English majors was relatively high, while that of

non-English majors was low. Both groups reported that they had little overseas experience. English language majors in this study were expected as part of their major to participate in a one-year study-abroad programme in an English-speaking country. Given that these students planned to study abroad in the near future and had had ample opportunities as English majors to learn and use their L2, it can be said that their L2 learning context was favourable to the formulation of a clear ideal L2 self-image. In contrast, non-English majors generally had fewer opportunities to use English and did not plan to study abroad in the near future. Most of them reported that they were studying English with no specific image of L2 use in mind. Thus, we assumed that their L2 learning context was less favourable to the formulation of a clear ideal L2 self-image.

Analysis

Multi-group structural equation modelling (MSEM)

SEM is a general term that has been used to describe a number of statistical models that evaluate the validity of substantive theories by employing empirical data (Lei and Wu 2007). One of the advantages of SEM is that it can be used to examine relationships among latent constructs indicated by multiple measures. In the present study, we used MSEM, a technique used to compare two (or more) groups by applying the same theoretical model to each of them simultaneously. In the present study, this procedure allowed us to compare two learner groups, each of which had a different learning context. MSEM determines the extent of associations using coefficients. Thus, even though the effects of certain factors (e.g. clear ideal L2 self-image) may be significant in the L2 learning contexts of both English majors and non-English majors, their relative weight in each context can still be assessed by examining whether or not the coefficients are significantly different. This characteristic makes MSEM a particularly fruitful approach for studies like this one. The MSEM analysis here was conducted using SPSS Amos version 20.0.

Measures of model fit

In SEM analysis, several statistical indices measure how well the proposed model fits the obtained data. As these indices reflect different aspects of model fit, In'nami and Koizumi (2011) recommend using several fit indices at the same time. The fit indices selected for this study and the criteria of model fit for each index selected are provided in Table 1.

Results and discussion

Summary of descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics for the current study show that the English majors had a higher level of L2 motivation ($t = 4.77, p < 0.001, r = 0.27$) and a lower level of L2 anxiety

Table 1. Selected fit measures for the final models and their evaluation.

Index	Obtained value	Criterion	Evaluation
χ^2/df	1.42	< 2.0	Very good
RMSEA	0.037	≤ 0.05	Very good
SRMR	0.013	≤ 0.05	Very good
CFI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Very good
TLI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Very good

($t = -4.95, p < 0.001, r = 0.28$) than the non-English majors. The strength of the ideal L2 self was higher in the English major group than in the non-English major group ($t = 6.72, p < 0.001, r = 0.36$), while the ought-to L2 self of the former group was lower than that of the latter group ($t = 6.05, p < 0.001, r = 0.33$). The self-efficacy level of the English-major group was higher than that of the non-English major group ($t = 5.37, p < 0.001, r = 0.29$), as was their L2 learning attitude ($t = 6.41, p < 0.001, r = 0.35$).

The final models of the two groups

The initial SEM model was submitted to evaluation using maximum likelihood estimation, which simultaneously tested the model's fit for two groups: one whose L2 learning context is favourable to the formation of a clearer ideal L2 self-image, and the other whose context is not. As seen in [Table 1](#) below, all fit indices were found to be acceptable, which means that the hypothetical model provides acceptable 'joint model-to-data' fit indices for the two samples.

The final models of the two subsamples were combined into a single multi-group model, and a subsequent multi-group procedure was carried out. Figures 1 and 2 contain schematic representations of the final models, with standardised estimates for each sample studied. [Figure 3](#) shows the final multi-group model obtained.

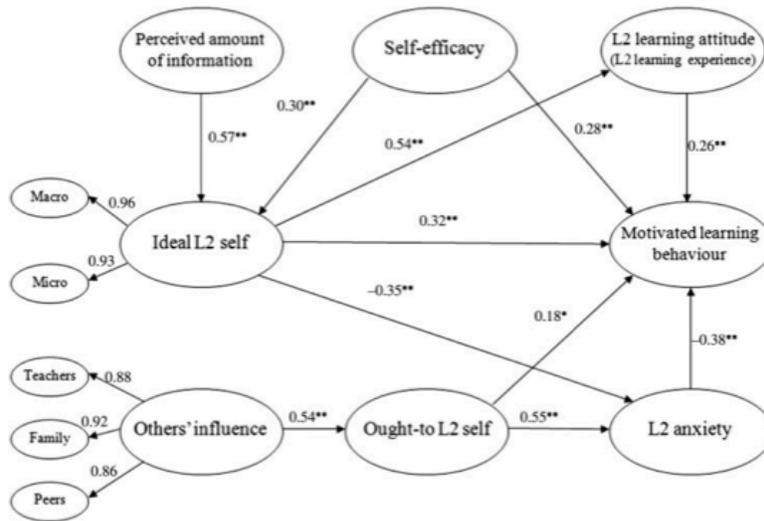


Figure 1. Final motivational model for English majors whose L2 learning context is favourable to the formulation of a clear ideal L2 self-image (with standard estimates). Note: $n = 151$. * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$. Fit indices for this model are as follows: $\chi^2 = 1315.2$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.35$, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.013, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92. All of them are acceptable in terms of model fit.

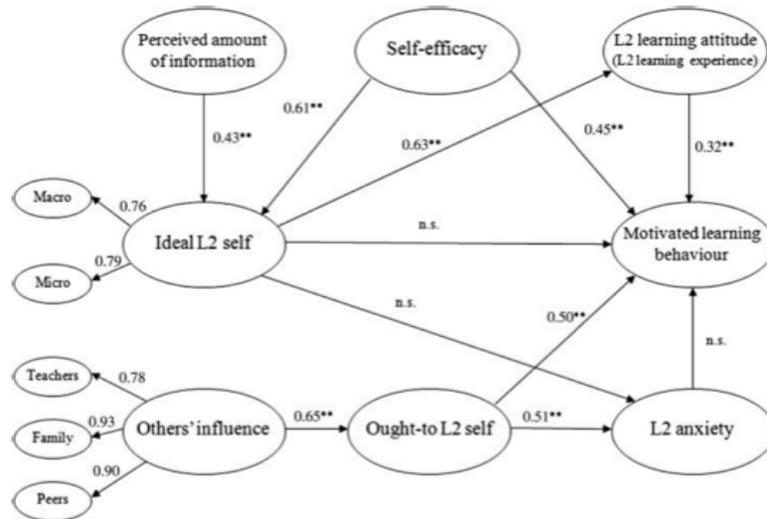


Figure 2. Final motivational model for non-English majors whose L2 learning context is *not* favourable to the formulation of a clear ideal L2 self-image (with standard estimates). Note: $n = 151$. ** $p < 0.001$. Fit indices for this model are as follows: $\chi^2 = 1458.4$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.49$, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.014, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91. Overall, the indices are acceptable in terms of model fit.

The final SEM models (Figures 1 and 2) show that learners who perceive themselves as having enough information related to their future self-guides possess more vivid images of their ideal L2 selves, while those who do not possess less vivid images. This finding is in line with that of Ueki and Takeuchi (2012). Providing information related to learners' future self-guides is therefore an especially effective strategy for helping students envision vivid images of their ideal L2 selves in both groups.

Specific findings in the MSEM analysis

We would now like to consider each SEM model to further elucidate the differences between the two groups.

The SEM model for English majors whose L2 learning context is favourable to the formation of a clear ideal L2 self-image

For English majors, the ideal L2 self, self-efficacy, and L2 learning attitude were significantly positive influential factors on motivated learning behaviour (Figure 1). Not surprisingly, in accordance with previous research (e.g. Al-Shehri 2009), the ideal L2 self was the most powerful motivator (0.32) of the three. This suggests that if learners possess clearer ideal L2 self-images, they are more likely to have sufficient motivation to carry out the intended course of learning or action. Meanwhile, the SEM model also demonstrates that less vivid ideal L2 self-images appear to arouse L2 anxiety significantly (-0.35).

Dörnyei (2009) presumes that elaborated ideal L2 self-images contribute to learners' engagement in L2 learning behaviour. A possible reason behind this relation might be that learners with clearer ideal L2 self-images can better estimate how far the distance between the current L2 self and ideal L2 self is. This estimation could help learners identify the direction and amount of effort needed to reduce the gap between the two selves. Consequently, learners with clear L2 self-images could make the current L2 self match the ideal one as closely as possible. Similarly, less vivid ideal L2 self-image could impede learners' attempts to estimate the direction and amount of effort they need to reduce the gap. This inability to carry out the estimation above might arouse L2 anxiety.

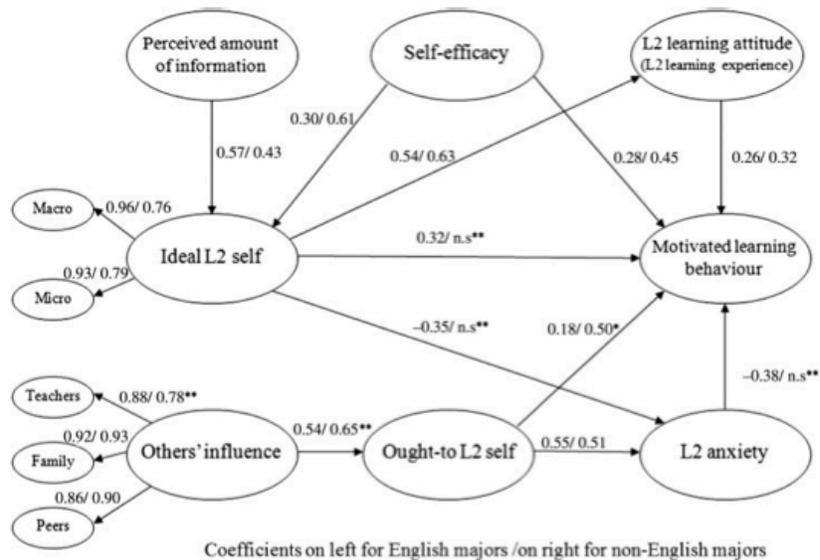


Figure 3. Comparison of coefficients in the models for English majors and non-English majors (with standard estimates). Note: $n = 302$. * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$. Asterisks indicates that there is a significant difference in terms of CR.

In addition to the ideal L2 self, self-efficacy (0.28) and L2 learning attitude (0.26) had significantly positive impacts on English majors' motivated learning behaviour. Researchers in the field of psychology (e.g. Bandura 1997; Schunk 1991; Zimmerman 2000) as well as those in Second Language Acquisition (e.g. Bown 2009; Lamb 2011) have acknowledged that the stronger the sense of self-efficacy possessed by a learner, the more motivated he or she is to take action for his or her learning, and consequently, the more autonomous he or she will be in learning. This is because self-efficacy relates to personal judgements about one's control over one's learning behaviour and outcomes, that is, human agency (Oxford 2011). Highly self-efficacious learners are confident in their ability to control their learning and take appropriate action (Zhong 2010). Thus, self-efficacy is considered one of the most important factors in promoting L2 motivated learning behaviour and, possibly, L2 learner autonomy. As for L2 learning attitudes, which were originally included in the extended system under the label 'L2 learning experience', this study seems to lend further support to the findings of previous work (e.g. Csizér and Kormos 2009; Papi and Teimouri 2012), in which the positive impact of good L2 learning attitudes has been consistently confirmed.

Another noteworthy finding is that the influence of other people significantly affected the formation of the ought-to L2 self (0.54), which in turn significantly

influenced L2 anxiety (0.55) for English majors in this study. The participants in this group might be expected by others, such as parents and peers, to be highly competent in English. This expectation might contribute to the participants' formation of ought-to L2 selves thereby fostering higher L2 anxiety levels. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) and Papi (2010) have reported similar relationships. Putting these findings together, it appears that the influence of others strongly affects L2 anxiety via the ought-to L2 self.

The SEM model for the English-major group shows that promotion-focused variables such as the ideal L2 self, self-efficacy and L2 learning attitude affect the motivated learning behaviour of learners. Among these variables, the most influential was the ideal L2 self. Higgins et al. (1994) maintain that learners who are motivated by the ideal self are more likely to regulate their actions by focusing on positive outcomes. To produce these positive outcomes, learners become actively and spontaneously involved in their learning and attempt to fill the perceived gaps between their current and ideal selves. We thus argue that motivated behaviour supported by promotion-focused variables such as the ideal L2 self will likely support the promotion of autonomous learning.

The SEM model for non-English majors whose L2 learning context is less favourable to the formation of a clear ideal L2 self-image

As with the English majors, the SEM model for non-English majors indicates that factors significantly influencing motivated learning behaviour included self-efficacy (0.45) and L2 learning attitude (0.32; showing no significant difference between the two groups; Figure 2). However, the most influential factor for this group was the ought-to L2 self (0.50 for non-English majors vs. 0.18 for English majors, a significant difference). The SEM model also shows that the influence of others strongly affected the formation of the ought-to L2 self (0.65). Interestingly, the ideal L2 self did not play a significant direct role for non-English majors (n.s. for non-English majors vs. 0.32 for English majors, a significant difference).

Putting together the findings above, we assume that for the non-English major group, prevention-focused variables such as others' influence and the ought-to L2 self affect motivated learning behaviour. Indeed, Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) reported that among Asian EFL learners, the ought-to L2 self sometimes had greater influence on L2 motivation than did the ideal L2 self. This phenomenon might be related to the level of instrumentality involved in their learning of English.

According to Carver and Scheier (1990), the ought-to L2 self can induce actions that amplify the discrepancy between the current state and the undesired end state. In other words, learners with a strong ought-to self are motivated to move their current state as far as possible from the undesired state, whereas those with a clear ideal self are motivated to move their current state as closely as possible to the desired state. Therefore, as long as the main factor affecting motivation is the ought-to L2 self, we might not expect learners to be actively involved in their L2 learning because their motive is primarily to avoid the undesired end state rather than to approach or aspire to the desired end state. Similarly, Higgins et al. (1994) claim that learners who are motivated by the ought-to self are likely to regulate their action by focusing on negative outcomes, while those motivated by the ideal self are likely to draw on positive outcomes. Learners with a strong ought-to self are thus prone to make a minimal effort to avoid negative outcomes, whereas those with the ideal self tend to make a maximal unforced effort to achieve positive outcomes. We therefore argue that motivated behaviour supported by such prevention-focused variables as the ought-to L2 self may deter the promotion of autonomous learning behaviour.

Conclusion

The results of the SEM analysis in this study showed that the proposed model was applicable to differing populations in the Japanese EFL environment. However, the relationships among the variables differed according to L2 learning context. For the English major group, whose L2 learning context was favourable to the formation of a clearer ideal L2 self-image, such promotion-focused variables as the ideal L2 self, self-efficacy, and L2 learning attitude had a positive impact on L2 motivation. The ideal L2 self had the strongest direct effect on motivated L2 learning behaviour for these learners. Given this, they are more likely to regulate themselves by focusing on positive outcomes and to make unforced efforts in their L2 learning in order to reach the ideal. These learners are thus in an optimal learning context for developing L2 learner autonomy.

In contrast, for the non-English major group, whose L2 learning context was unfavourable to the formation of a clear ideal L2 self-image, prevention-focused variables such as the ought-to L2 self and others' influence were seen to impact motivated L2 learning behaviour. Among them, the ought-to L2 self had the strongest direct impact on L2 motivation. Learners influenced by the ought-to L2 self are said to be prone to focus on negative outcomes in learning. They are thus more likely to make efforts to avoid such negative outcomes, and to learn as a result, but these efforts may abate soon after the potential negative outcome has been

averted. To circumvent this unfortunate situation and guide learners with less clear ideal L2 self-images towards more autonomous learning, the pedagogical approach of transforming and gradually internalising their ought-to L2 selves into ideal L2 selves needs to be vigorously explored.

Lastly, a brief discussion on the relationships among such concepts as *autonomy*, *agency*, *self-efficacy*, *the ideal L2 self* and *motivated learning behaviour* is in order. According to Benson (2007), agency – that is, belief in one’s control over outcomes or being the cause of an effect – can be seen as ‘a point origin for the development of autonomy’ (p. 30). As Bandura (2001) and Oxford (2011) argue, human agency closely relates to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is in turn connected to the ideal L2 self, and both self-efficacy beliefs and ideal L2 self-images are the driving forces behind motivated learning behaviour, as shown in this study. Moreover, motivated learning behaviour is considered to be a crucial factor in promoting learner autonomy (Benson 2007; Ushioda 2006), while enhanced motivation is conditional upon a sense of autonomy (Bown 2009; Lamb 2001; Ushioda 2003, 2006). As explained above, these important concepts are tightly interwoven with each other, although there are some ontological differences in the approaches researchers have taken to understanding and describing each concept and its relationships to others. As Lamb (2011) demonstrates, however, the differences in approaches could (and should) be bridged; and our current insights into the relationships obtained through SEM analysis could potentially be utilised to complement findings in qualitative studies that attempt to analyse how these relationships unfold between human beings situated in specific contexts of L2 learning.

Notes

1. According to a survey from the Statistics Bureau of Japan and the Director General for Policy Planning of Japan (2011), approximately 90% of Japanese university students are non-English majors.
2. The questionnaire is available from the authors upon request.
3. The results of the *t*-test are as follows: $t = 1.33$ (n.s.), effect size (r) = 0.08.

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