The dynamics of L2 self and L2 learning motivation: A qualitative case study of Korean ESL students

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This paper links Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) and activity theory (Tae-Young Kim, 2007, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) to Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) second language (L2) motivational self system. Since the majority of L2 motivation research has focused on quantitative data, an in-depth investigation of L2 learning motivation from a qualitative research orientation seems necessary. By analyzing interview data obtained from four Korean adult English as a second language (ESL) students, this paper focuses on the interface between SCT-based L2 motivation theory and L2 motivational self system. The participants were on short-term visas and lived in Toronto for approximately 10 months to learn English. The findings of the study suggest that 1) in order to facilitate L2 learners’ ESL learning, students’ ought-to L2 self needs to be internalized by the learners and transformed into their ideal L2 self, and 2) only when students’ initial L2 learning motive is integrated with specific learning goals and their sense of participation does L2 learning motivation emerge. It is argued that SCT can be applied to Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system, and this will produce more robust L2 motivation theory having ecological validity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Through teaching experiences, all L2 teachers have observed that some L2 learners achieve a high level of L2 proficiency, while others are not very successful in the same L2 learning environment. In Korea, a typical example of an English-as-a-foreign-language

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* This research was supported by the Chung-Ang University Research Grants in 2009. I thank Dr. Heather Allen at the University of Miami and Ms. Julia Juhee Paek at Seoul National University for their feedback on earlier versions of the paper. I am also grateful for the thoughtful comments from the reviewers.

1 L2 refers to both second language and foreign language in this paper.
(EFL) country, some students demonstrate an amazing proficiency level in an L2 without going and staying abroad for a considerable amount of time. On the contrary, despite a lengthy stay in an English-dominant country such as the U.S., Canada, or Australia, many Korean ESL learners do not achieve high English proficiency.

Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) recent proposal known as *L2 motivational self system* seems to provide clues to explain the above phenomena observed in many EFL contexts. Influenced by the early works by Higgins (1987) and Markus and Nurius (1986), Dörnyei emphasizes the role of individual L2 learners’ self which creates and maintains their L2 learning motivation. Since this proposal still needs robust empirical validations, it is necessary to refine *ideal L2 self* and *ought-to L2 self*, which are stated as key subconcepts in L2 motivational self system, and to apply these in broader educational contexts.

Another noticeable trend in L2 motivation theories might be the influence of sociocultural theory (SCT) initiated by Vygotsky (1978, 1987). As Swain and Deters (2007) state, Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind has been actively used in L2 education research and practice in the past decade. For example, learners’ developing L2 speech is now regarded as the instantiation of concept reformulation. Language learning, viewed from an SCT perspective, is not a simple change of speech medium but gradual transformation from an L1 self to an L2 self (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Each learner’s life history (Pavlenko, 2002), macro and microcultural backgrounds (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008), and L2 learning beliefs (Alanen, 2005) collaborate with L2 learning in the transformational process toward a new L2 self.

Given this, since L2 motivation is constantly influenced by the interaction between L2 learners and their immediate surroundings perceived as important, recent L2 motivation research is reconceptualized by a group of SCT-oriented scholars (Tae-Young Kim, 2005, 2007, 2009; Kimura, 2003; Ushioda, 2003, 2009). For example, Tae-Young Kim (2007, 2009) states that L2 motivation is created when an L2 learner realizes the importance of L2 learning and tries to connect his or her life conditions to L2 learning and use. He further argues that L2 motivation is the integration of initial L2 learning motive, appropriate learning goals, and the participation in actual or imagined L2 communities (Tae-Young Kim, 2007).

With the current state of L2 motivation theories, this paper focuses on the theoretical interface between Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system and SCT-based L2 motivation theory (Tae-Young Kim, 2007, 2009). In order to validate the interconnection between the two distinctive lines of thoughts, longitudinal data obtained from a group of Korean ESL students in an English dominant country will be presented and analyzed. Through semi-structured interviews over the period of maximum 10 months, their comments on L2 learning motivation will be analyzed from Vygotsky’s (1978, 1987) SCT and Leont’ev’s (1979) activity theory. These comments will also be analyzed by using...
Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) ideal and ought-to L2 selves. It is argued that L2 motivational self system can gain its theoretical momentum when SCT-based L2 motivation theory is implemented.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System

For more than 30 years and even now, the research by Gardner and his Canadian associates (e.g., Dressler, 2008; Gardner, 1985, 2001, 2005; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995) has been influential in the field of L2 motivation. One of the crucial arguments in Gardner’s (1985, 2001, 2005) socioeducational model of L2 motivation is the emphasis on L2 learners’ integrativeness, which can be broadly defined as the learners’ “genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community” (Gardner, 2001, p. 5). However, the changing climate in English learning requires a critical re-examination of this concept. As Dörnyei (2009, p. 23) points out, “it is not quite clear what the target of the integration is.” Integrativeness in L2 learning motivation may not successfully explain L2 learners these days in the sense that L2 learners today may not suppose any specific target group to be integrated in the globalized world (Lamb, 2007). In fact, L2 learners may initially be motivated to learn English in order to get a stable or prestigious job in South Korea, and English itself functions as the language of global networking among workers having different nationalities in a job community in many international companies (cf. Block & Cameron, 2002). Given this, it seems logical to state that L2 learners’ ESL learning motivation may not be successfully explained by Gardner’s (1985, 2001) concept of integrativeness.

For the purpose of modifying Gardner’s (1985, 2001) integrativeness, based on Hungarian nationwide, longitudinal data, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed three main concepts in his L2 motivational self system: Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self reflects desirable future images after attaining L2 proficiency. L2 learners may dream of a prosperous future in terms of their job stability, financial situation, and respect from others. The ideal L2 self is a broad concept in that it incorporates both integrativeness and instrumentality. The reason is because the desirable L2 self images created by learners can be related either to their aspiration to be assimilated into L2 communities or to their realistic expectation to be successful in schools or work places. Given this, the focus in the ideal L2 self is how L2 learners internalize external
reasons for L2 learning. As long as the learners understand the reasons and see prosperous future images after acquiring L2 proficiency, the images function as the ideal L2 self.

The ought-to L2 self, on the contrary, is more related to negative consequences coming from not achieving sufficient L2 proficiency. For example, it has been reported that young Korean EFL learners are compelled to learn English in order not to fail in the College Scholastic Ability Test or not to lose their job (Tae-Young Kim, 2006a, 2007). In this case, Korean EFL learners’ L2 learning motivation can be attributed to external causes since it was not initiated by learners’ intrinsic interest coming from learning the L2; EFL learners feel that they should or ought to have at least a minimum level of English proficiency.

It seems important to note that not all instrumentality is related to the ought-to L2 self. Dörnyei (2009, p. 28) mentions that “when our idealized image is associated with being professionally successful, instrumental motives with a promotion focus … are related to the ideal self,” while “instrumental motives with a prevention focus – for example, to study in order not to fail an exam or not to disappoint one’s parents – are part of the ought self.” Therefore, we should not equate integrativeness with the ideal L2 self or instrumentality with the ought-to L2 self. The criteria then seem located in the promotion/prevention focus of the future image.

The third component in Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system is L2 learning experience. Since L2 learning motivation involves creating and maintaining L2 learning, the role of learning experience is related to “executive” motives. Even though an L2 learner may create an ideal L2 self or an ought-to L2 self in the initial stage of L2 learning, his or her self image might not be maintained unless appropriate L2 learning experiences are accompanied and recognized by the learner. For example, as Lantolf and Genung (2002) report, when L2 lessons are based on rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, there exists the possibility of disappearing the ideal L2 self before the semester is over.

2. L2 Learning Motivation Based on Sociocultural Theory

In the first decade in the 21st century, we are witnessing a rapid advancement of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT) into L2 motivation literature (e.g., Tae-Young Kim, 2005, 2007; Kimura, 2003; Ushioda, 2003, 2007). Similar to Dörnyei’s (2001, 2005) process model of L2 motivation, an SCT perspective sees L2 learning motivation not as static but as always dynamically evolving through the interactions between L2 learners’

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2 Higgins (1998) stated that an ideal self is promotion-based because learners can foresee desirable future images whereas an ought-to self is slanted toward prevention-focused, which comes from social pressure or the desire to fulfill the wishes of significant others such as L2 learners’ parents or teachers.
initial motives, goals, and affordances (i.e., subjectively perceived environments conducive to their L2 learning). Since SCT focuses on the mediational process between humans and their affordances in firmly contextualized settings, L2 motivation research having SCT orientations typically takes the form of a case study design and adopts a longitudinal approach. As Duff (2007) and van Lier (2005) underscore, case studies in L2 literature do not aim to make generalizations but explain the complexity of L2 learning by looking into systematic microgenesis where the learning takes place.

Activity theory (AT) has been developed under the aegis of Vygotsky’s (1978, 1987) SCT. Compared to the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and matter, SCT prioritizes the dialectic process between them (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain & Deters, 2007). Within this paradigm, learning is not a direct transmittal of a new, particular item into our existing mind, but is a mediational process between the subjectively understood learning item and our active mind having previous knowledge and sociohistorical information. Learning from this perspective is not gradual accumulation like building toy blocks, but a non-linear process involving reorganizing previous knowledge (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976); this revolutionary, transformational learning process is the result of the mediational process between the mind and the social milieu; and L2 learners are conceived not as passive pupils merely sitting behind the desk but active co-constructors of and participants in the knowledge building process.

AT (Engeström, 1987, 1999; Leont’ev, 1978, 1979) unifies the above ideas in a coherent way. It focuses on the dialectic relationship between humans (e.g., L2 learners) as active agents and external sociocultural milieus (e.g., peers, ESL school). Activity, defined as “a specific form of the social existence of humans consisting of purposeful changing of natural and social reality” (Davydov, 1999, p. 39) or simply a system of purposive behavior, is always initiated by an individual’s motive, and when the motive is concretized by a goal, the activity is realized in a variety of real actions (Leont’ev, 1978). Depending on operational conditions, one activity can take the form of several different actions, whereas the same action may turn into totally different activities. For example, English learning (an activity) can take the form of attending traditional ESL classes or taking on-line CALL courses (two actions) (Thorne, 2003).

In dealing with L2 learning motivation, we often use many related terms such as motivation and motive interchangeably. However, from an AT perspective, these terms require a rigorous distinction and should be used prudently. From Leont’ev’s (1978) AT perspective, motives gain the momentum only when they are actualized by concrete human actions which are under the direct control of manageable short-term goals. To clarify this, it seems necessary to delve into the mediational nature between a subject and an object in AT. In L2 learning contexts, for example, a subject can be an individual L2 learner, and an object is the ultimate attainment of L2 proficiency. In order to achieve this
object, the learner utilizes a variety of mediational tools such as a pencil and paper (physical tools), learning strategies (psychological tools), and an ESL instructor or more capable peers (human tools). These tools mediate the learning process between the subject and the object, and the choice of a mediational tool can influence the result of learning or may even change the nature of the entire activity (cf. Wertsch, 1998).

Viewed from this, L2 motivation is generated when an L2 learner perceives the gap between the current physical or mental state, and an idealized or imagined state. When an L2 learner notices the gap between his or her current self (represented by the subject in AT) and the ideal L2 self (represented by the object in AT), the learner wishes to minimize the gap. However, since the object is related to the ultimate, idealized future L2 self, L2 learning needs to be guided by specific learning goals. According to Locke and Latham (1990), when learners set moderately challenging, concrete, and short-term learning goals, they can manage and enhance their own learning. Therefore, L2 learning motivation can gain its momentum when the object is operationalized by specific L2 learning goals. If not, L2 learning motivation cannot emerge, and only initial L2 learning motive remains. In this case, an ESL learner may have a vague or general motive to study English, but the motive is not elaborated into short-term, moderately challenging, and specific learning goals; an ESL learner may keep repeating that he or she wants to achieve high English proficiency with neither formulating specific goals nor making necessary efforts. If no goal is set, the learner’s initial motive cannot be transformed into motivation, which does not have much guiding force to L2 learning processes. Accordingly, from an SCT perspective, goals function a mediational role between a subject’s motive and an object, and make the challenging task of L2 proficiency mastery attainable.

Recently, Tae-Young Kim (2007, 2009) proposes an SCT-based L2 motivation framework. He argues that L2 learners’ initial motive should be accompanied by L2 learning goals, and when they find the participatory space to practice their L2, the motive can be transformed into a motivation. In this conceptualization, demotivation is conceived as the gradual disintegration of L2 learners’ motive from their goal(s) and from their sense of participation in L2 communities.

Note that the ideal and ought-to L2 selves in Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 motivational self system and Tae-Young Kim’s (2007, 2009) theorizing of L2 motivation from an SCT perspective bear striking similarities. It is because the crucial factor in both is each L2 learner’s recognizing the importance of L2 learning. That is, if the learner finds the reason to learn the L2 and personalizes it seriously, the reason may function as a powerful nexus between his or her current self having mediocre L2 proficiency and the future self speaking L2 with confidence and elegance. When understanding and personalizing the reason, the learners’ initial motive is backed up by their learning goals and increases the level of participation in L2 communities.
With all these theoretical considerations, in this paper, I investigate 1) the mediational processes between L2 learners’ motives and their object and how such processes can be explained by both L2 motivational self system and SCT-based motivation theory, and 2) the interrelationship between two different types of L2 selves: ideal and ought-to L2 selves. I will argue that there exists conceptual affinity between SCT-oriented L2 learning motivation theory and Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system. Both highlight the dynamically evolving aspects of L2 learning motivation. In SCT, motivation results from the interaction between an L2 learner and his or her proximal or distal affordances (e.g., L2 school, family, peer network, regional community, etc.). In L2 motivational self system, there is a possibility of transforming an L2 learner’s self image from an ideal L2 self to an ought-to L2 self or vice versa if there exists the changes in L2 learners’ life conditions and contexts.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

Four adult Korean ESL learners were selected in Toronto (see Table 1). As international visa holders, they had all been in Canada for less than one month at the inception of the study. All interviews were conducted in Korean with the assumption that I could elicit detailed verbal accounts from the participants using our shared first language rather than English.

![FIGURE 1](Participant Profiles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Arrival</th>
<th>Departure</th>
<th>ESL Courses taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joon</td>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sept. ’04</td>
<td>Jul. ’05</td>
<td>General ESL → Study Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were originally recruited for my dissertation study (Tae-Young Kim, 2007), for which I recruited 10 Korean ESL visa-holding students and immigrants. In order to guarantee consistency, data from participants with similarities in gender (males), status in Canada (ESL students), and age (mid 20s to early 30s) are selected and analyzed in this study.
2. Data Collection and Analysis

With only a few exceptions (Kimura, 2003; Ushioda, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999), most L2 motivation studies have used a large-scale quantitative data collection method. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a set of interview questions relevant asking students’ L2 learning motivation from a longitudinal perspective. After a series of piloting (Tae-Young Kim, 2006b), semi-structured interview questions were designed for the study reported here (see Appendix). Approximately one and half hour interviews were conducted once a month for each participant over the period of ten months. Interview questions were theoretically based on Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and Wenger’s (1998) concept of communities of practice. In addition, related questions were asked such as the participants’ interpersonal relationships with their ESL teacher(s) and other ESL learner peers, their perceived socioeconomic status, their previous language learning experience, and their affective experiences in learning ESL. I encouraged all participants to further introduce and explore any relevant topics which they felt necessary.

Immediately after each interview, the audio-recordings were transcribed and returned to the participants for correction and verification purposes. I transcribed the audiotaped data in Korean first. Only if considered necessary, they were translated into English. Based upon the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), paragraph units were thematically analyzed (Ratner, 2002). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 120) support the legitimacy of using paragraph unit approach mentioning that “this approach to coding can be used at any time but is especially useful when the researcher has several categories and wants to code specifically in relation to them.”

I used a commercial qualitative data analysis software, NVivo (L. Richards & T. Richards, 2002), for the purpose of systematic and expedited data coding. In order to guarantee the reliability of data coding, I recruited a graduate student majoring in applied linguistics, explained all coding categories, and trained her as a second coder. I asked her to code one fifth of the interview data. I compared her NVivo coding of the data with my own, resulting in an inter-coder percentage agreement of 0.83.

IV. FINDINGS

1. The Relationship Between Ought-to L2 Self and L2 Learning Motive

Since I adopted a semi-structured interview format, the same question was repeated over the data collection period. Responding to the first interview question, Why are you

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4 For detailed coding process and categories, please refer to Tae-Young Kim (2008).
interested in learning English?, all the participants expressed strong needs to learn English for their future career. For example, Joon, a 24-year old college student, responded that he needed to get a good job after studying English abroad. All the other students’ answers did not differ from Joon’s. It is noteworthy that they always mentioned such job-related L2 learning motivations from the beginning to the end of the entire interview period.

<Excerpt 1>

PK: I thought I could get a job related to English use. (Interview 1)
Hyun: It is because I’d like to get a job in Korea. (Interview 2)
Joon: To learn English… To get a job in Korea. (Interview 8)

Traditionally, the above comments have been categorized as instrumentality (Gardner, 1985) or extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). They expressed the strong desire to be employed after successful mastery of English, and English was seen as a means to an end. They neither expressed the desire to be integrated into L2 community (i.e., integrativeness) nor wanted to find enjoyment in learning English itself (i.e., intrinsic motivation).

However, from an SCT perspective, we cannot confirm these comments are the instantiation of L2 motivation because their L2 learning goal and the level of participation are not verified. It seems plausible that they merely expressed their L2 learning motive not motivation per se. Also, from the perspective of Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system, it is not clear whether they expressed their ideal L2 self or ought-to L2 self. Indeed, it seems problematic to identify whether they expressed their desirable future images, or future images which originate from their apprehension of potential unemployment or losing a job for the lack of English proficiency. As Dörnyei (2009) and Tae-Young Kim (2009) state, L2 learners’ self images are versatile and changeable depending on the learners’ degree of internalizing their future images. That is, even though their future image originates from an ought-to L2 self, this can be transformed to an ideal L2 self when the learners seriously understand the reason of learning an L2 and truly wish to devote themselves to accomplish the externally originated L2 self image.

To specify the evidence for this kind of transfer from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self, Tae-Young Kim’s (2007) definition of L2 motivation gives theoretical insights. As explained above, from an SCT perspective, L2 motivation is understood as the transformation of L2 learning motive when integrated with a specific learning goal and the learners’ sense of participation. Therefore, unless the learners’ goal and participation are provided in their comments, we cannot argue that the participants’ comments shown in Excerpt 1 reflect their L2 learning motivation. They may only reflect an initial motive, not motivation providing guiding force to facilitate their L2 learning.
Similar theoretical line of thoughts is also found in Dörnyei (2009). According to his L2 motivational self system based on structural equation modeling, learners’ ideal L2 self directly influences L2 learning effort and eventually L2 proficiency. The model, of course, does not negate the potentially beneficial role of ought-to L2 self, but it needs to be transferred to the ideal L2 self, and the key to this transfer is the degree of internalization of the ought-to L2 self into the learner’s already existing value system.

An important criterion for internalization is learners’ goal specificity. That is, if an L2 learner had internalized his or her future self image having external social origins, the learner should have a specific learning goal which does not alter considerably as time elapses. Since the research method used in this study was a series of longitudinal semi-structured interviews, the participants’ learning goal was always asked each month. In many cases, participants expressed conflicting goals for English learning in different interviews. Excerpt 2 illustrates such conflicts in PK’s interview.

<Excerpt 2>

Interviewer: What is your ESL learning goal?

3.302 PK: Right now, I focus on my class presentation and role-play. This is also the class objective. This course is a special course for business English. So I tried a lot to participate in classroom activities today. (Interview 3)

7.170 PK: … Well, uh, I didn’t have a goal. I didn’t make a special resolution for today’s ESL tutoring. Well… It’s just like because “Oh I don’t have much time here in Toronto, just do not skip this class.” That’s it… (Interview 7)

In Line 3.302, which was collected in the third interview, PK articulates his short-term goal relatively well, whereas in Line 7.170, collected after four months, the same person admits that he repeats his daily routine without much consideration of specific learning goals. Compared to the first comments by PK, his second comments in Line 7.170 reveal noticeable passivity in L2 learning and the lack of a manageable and concrete L2 learning goal. Therefore, PK’s L2 learning goal was not sufficiently internalized within himself and his comments in Excerpt 1 on his L2 learning motivation may reflect only on his ought-to L2 self.

A more typical case is found in Joon. As stated above, the nature of longitudinal interview necessitated asking the same question over time. Whenever asked the same question of ‘what is your English learning goal?’ his answers turned out to be extremely inconsistent.

5 ‘3’ means the third interview session, ‘302’ means the 302nd turn.
As shown in Excerpt 3, Joon does not seem to have a concrete goal for English learning in Canada. In Interview 1, he sets his goal to work in the New York Stock Exchange, but in the next month’s interview, he wants to go to Australia. Two months later, his goal for English learning is to work in a hotel. Such disparity demonstrated in Joon’s comments shows the lack of a concrete learning goal for Joon. From an SCT perspective, Joon may have an initial L2 learning motive, but since his goal is not clear and constantly changing, his motive does not seem to have been incorporated into his learning goal. As a result, Joon’s motive did not develop into L2 learning motivation.

From Dörnyei’s (2009) point of view, his desire to learn English for his future job seems to reflect his ought-to L2 self. The major characteristics of the ought-to L2 self is prevention-focus and its social origins. He might have been influenced by the social discourse such as “English is the key to employment,” which is widely agreed on in Korea. The dominant social discourse affected Joon’s decision of studying English in Canada, and the English-speaking L2 self has closely been related to his ought-to L2 self having external origins. As Dörnyei emphasizes, the degree of internalization of the social discourse distinguishes the ideal L2 self from the ought-to L2 self. If Joon had internalized the social discourse, he must have expressed a consistent learning goal, or at least might not have expressed such disconnected, whimsical goals shown in Excerpt 3.

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6 Two anonymous reviewers pointed out that Joon’s inconsistency might result from the nature of the interview format or from his different understanding of the word meaning for ‘goal.’ The semi-structured interview format used in this research required me to repeat the same question every month. If the interviewees thought that they had answered in a specific way in the previous interviews, they may have altered their answers in the next interview. However, this is contrary to practice effect (Dörnyei, 2007), where participants tend to repeat the same comments over a series of interviews. Moreover, in the semi-structured interviews, if necessary, I clarified any misunderstanding or uncertainty coming from the interviewees. As indicated in Turn numbers (1.200, 2.76, 4.195), in different occasions, I used various clarifying questions for Joon’s goal changes. His inconsistent goals were confirmed even after clarifying the questions.
2. The Relationship Between Ideal L2 Self and L2 Learning Motivation

Both SCT-based L2 motivation theory and Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system put an emphasis on the role of internalizing socially driven L2 learning causes. L2 learners’ internalization is reflected in the degree of consistency in expressed learning goals. If an L2 learner showed similar L2 learning goals over a period of time, it is possible to argue that the learner has transformed his or her initial ought-to L2 self into ideal L2 self. In such a case, it is also possible to argue that the learner expresses his or her L2 learning motivation not L2 learning motive.

Even though most participants expressed discrepant learning goals in the longitudinal semi-structured interviews, Woo, a 25 year-old college graduate, kept stating a consistently similar learning goal. Throughout the interviews, Woo stated that he wanted to learn English for his future job, which is not dissimilar to other participants. But in Woo’s case, he reiterated the importance of English proficiency for fulfilling his life dream: to work at a steel exporting company in Korea. He even stated the name of the company and expressed his lifelong wishes to work in the company. Every time I asked him of his learning goal, he clearly stated an unaltering ESL learning goal. Excerpt 4 illustrates Woo’s learning goal.

<Excerpt 4>

2.284. Woo: What I’d like to do in the future is work in the field of steel manufacturing. The steel company, XXX [name] is, for sure, the top producer of high quality steel … I hope I can get a job in the international sales department of that company. (Interview 2)

8.142. Woo: English is the best tool for my steel exporting job, I mean, employment. My major goal is to get the job. (Interview 8)

Compared to Joon’s inconsistent learning goal shown in Excerpt 3, Woo’s learning goal expressed in Excerpt 4 shows a remarkable similarity. Since he wanted to work at the steel manufacturing company in Korea, he is motivated to learn English. Given this, Woo’s consistent goal for learning English in Canada demonstrates that Woo had internalized his ought-to L2 self resulting in the ideal L2 self. Like Joon, Woo was also in Korea before coming to Canada to learn English, but unlike Joon, Woo’s ESL learning motivation is supported by a specific and moderately challenging goal in Excerpt 4. From an SCT perspective, Woo’s initial motive to study English in Canada is supported by his learning goal, and finally is transformed into L2 motivation.

In L2 motivational self system, the third component is L2 learning experience. In Woo’s case, his ESL learning is supported by his L2 learning community. In the interviews, he
frequently commented on the beneficial role of his Canadian, English-speaking landlady. Woo stayed in a homestay, where a single, middle-aged landlady provided breakfast and dinner for him. Woo pays monthly room rental fee to her. It was found that the participants in this study would stay in similar type of accommodation in the beginning stage of ESL learning, but for various reasons such as the financial burden of monthly rental fee, the difficulties in English communication, or homesick, they changed their housing. The most preferred type was to share a room with other Korean or ESL students. Joon, for example, started his ESL learning in a Canadian homestay, but mainly due to his financial problem, he lived with another male Korean ESL student in a sublet from the third month. However, Woo, unlike Joon, stayed in the same homestay, and he seems to have benefitted from conversing with his homestay owner, often referred to as ‘homestay mom.’ Excerpt 5 exemplifies Woo’s relationship with his homestay owner.

<Excerpt 5>
2.22.4. Woo: I can ask anything about English to my homestay mom. I ask her what she did that day, and she also asks me my day. In this way, I can talk with her comfortably. (Interview 2)

The beneficial role of Woo’s homestay owner remained the same throughout the interviews. This means that his L2 learning experience is supported by his homestay as well as his ESL schools. As Dörnyei (2009) underscores, L2 learning experience continuously provide the guiding force which maintains L2 learners’ ESL learning motivation. If he had changed his accommodation into L2 input-impoverished one, he must have eliminated one of the L2 communities. By making an L2 supportive environment, Woo could maximize the opportunity to practice his English, which supported maintaining his ideal L2 self.

It should be emphasized that Woo’s homestay placement was neither serendipitous nor sheer luck. Instead, he intentionally chose the homestay and kept the same accommodation. His L2 learning motivation connected to specific life goals and strong ideal L2 self initially screened the best place to stay in order to maximize authentic L2 communication. Excerpt 6 below was from the first interview when Woo did not settle into the landlady’s homestay. Even during the first month, he believed that the best way to learn English was to increase his opportunity to speak English. In Excerpt 6, Woo clearly warns against the idea of sharing a room with other compatriots. His specific life goal to work in the steel exporting company led him to find the best place to fully participate in authentic L2 communication, which resulted in transforming his L2 learning motive to motivation.
<Excerpt 6>
1.33. Woo: As you know, a good many Korean ESL students rent a room and share it with others. Or they first live in a homestay and then move. But, in my case, I’d like to stay in a homestay. Although the monthly fee to live there is kind of expensive, if I make friends with them [native English speakers], I may have lots of chances to speak English. If I rent a room and live there, I may be alone. If I were alone, I would probably seek Korean ESL students to lose my loneliness. Then there’d be no use living in Toronto, right? (Interview 1)

V. DISCUSSION

As described above, although the participants stated that they were motivated to learn English mainly for the purpose of getting a job after returning to Korea, in many cases their L2 learning goals were not upheld by their comments in the interviews. Traditional research methods, mainly analyzing massive amount of questionnaire data, were not sensitive to distinguish L2 learners’ L2 motivation and initial L2 motive. Thus, viewed from the previous L2 motivation research method, the participants’ comments would be categorized as either instrumental orientation (Gardner, 1985) or extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

However, the interpretations based on Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 motivational self system are not straightforward because the degree of internalization of the ought-to L2 self is all different among the participants. The participants’ desire to learn English is socially driven and thus has external origins. As Tae-Young Kim (2009) states, the discourse that ‘English is the key to employment’ in Korea exerts too much influence on many Korean students, and a study abroad experience has long been regarded as one of the compulsory requirements for employment and future promotion in work places. All participants in the study were influenced by this educational atmosphere in Korea, which might have provided an initial motive to move from Korea to Canada for the purpose of ESL learning. Given this, their L2 learning motivation is rooted in the ought-to L2 self because they are required to learn English for employment, and in case of failure, unexpected consequences such as potential unemployment or the lack of promotion in the job places might follow.

The crucial elements in Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system is the interactive nature of the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self. In order to correctly identify the nature of L2 learners’ self, it seems important to focus on L2 learners’ internalization of social discourse. As long as the learners understand the reason to learn ESL and try to attach personal meaning to it, the ought-to L2 self having social origins can be transformed into the ideal L2 self. In the above section, it was shown that the key for distinguishing the two
L2 selves lies in the learners’ specificity and persistence of their L2 learning goal. Excerpts 2 and 3 from PK’s and Joon’s data prove that they did not internalize the external cause of learning English and thus remained in their ought-to L2 self. Conversely, Excerpts 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate that Woo fully internalized the meaning of learning ESL and tried to maximize the opportunity to practice his English skills. The consistent nature of Woo’s goal and the supportive L2 community contributed to the transformational process from his ought-to L2 self to the ideal L2 self. If he had not internalized the meaning of ESL learning in a foreign country, he would not have stated such a coherent learning goal. In sum, from Dörnyei’s (2009) perspective, the ideal L2 self is only illustrated in Woo’s data in that his learning goal was clear and specific and his L2 learning experience is supported by his homestay environment.

From an SCT-based L2 motivation theory, the participants’ comments usually exhibit their L2 learning motives. It is only when their L2 learning goal and their participation in L2 communities are clearly stated in the interview that their L2 learning motivation is corroborated. Without the existence of consistent learner goals and L2 communities, L2 learners as subjects in an activity system (Leont’ev, 1978) may not attain ultimate L2 proficiency (an object in AT). Therefore, L2 learning motivation theory needs to take the motive, the goal, and the participation into its account.

Figure 2 below is the schematic representation of Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system and the SCT-based L2 motivation theory. It is not intended to be that only the ideal L2 self or L2 learning motivation can lead to the successful mastery of L2. Instead, it focuses on the theoretical flow from the ought-to L2 self to the ideal L2 self and from L2 learning motive to L2 learning motivation. As the data presented in this study demonstrate, L2 learners’ ought-to L2 self can be transformed into the ideal L2 self when the learners personalize and internalize the external reasons to learn ESL. The degree of internalization can be confirmed in L2 learners’ goal specificity and persistence. Also, when their L2 communities support their L2 learning, the ideal L2 self can be maintained. From an SCT perspective, L2 learners’ comments on their motivation cannot be corroborated until their learning goals and L2 communities support their comments. If not, although L2 learners may think and comment on a variety of L2 learning motivation, this may reflect their L2 learning motive only. The figure below also shows the potential relationship between the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self and between L2 learning motive and L2 learning motivation, which is bidirectional. That is, even after their ideal L2 self and L2 learning motivation are created after integrating specific learning goals and beneficial L2 communities, if the goals or L2 communities cease to exist, there exists the possibility to revert to the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning motive.
VI. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, the theoretical connection between Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Tae-Young Kim, 2007, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) and Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system was investigated. To date, Dörnyei’s concepts of ideal and ought-to L2 selves have not been examined much from the lens of SCT. Based on longitudinal data obtained from four Korean ESL students in Canada, it was found that the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning motive both represent less-internalized external social causes to learn English. Only when L2 learners personalize and internalize the external reasons for ESL learning, can they possess promotion-based ideal L2 self and transform their L2 learning motive into L2 learning motivation.

Theoretically, this paper helps us understand that L2 learning motivation is a dynamically evolving process, which was not highlighted sufficiently in Gardner’s (1985) socio-education model. Specifically, as Dörnyei (2009, p. 23) states, integrative motivation composed of integrativeness, motivation, and attitudes towards the learning situation was certainly ambiguous in that “it is not quite clear what the target of the integration is.” This paper argues that instead of supposing an imaginary concept, integrativeness, the deciding factor for motivation is the degree of internalizing the external reason for learning English at a personal level. This results in linking specific learning goal(s) and a sense of participation to L2 learning motive and eventually leads to creating L2 learning motivation. From Dörnyei’s (2009) perspective, such a linking process is the transformational moment from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self.

It is important to note the role of specific learning goals for maintaining L2 learning motivation. The longitudinal data proved that L2 learners’ frequent comments on their L2 motivation might not be in line with their learning goals. In many instances, it was found that L2 learners did not have specific learning goals. In this case, they did not internalize the ought-to L2 self and failed in creating an ideal L2 self through the experience of L2 learning. From an SCT perspective, the lack of goal specificity indicates that their comments mostly remain in the realm of L2 learning motive not L2 learning motivation.
Methodologically, the use of longitudinal interviews is proven useful in this research. As Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) state, L2 learners’ motivation is dynamically changing. In the lengthy process of L2 learning, which usually takes several years’ time span, L2 learners’ motivation in the beginning months might not be the same as that of the last few months. Also, although an L2 learner may have mentioned that his or her motivation is to get a job, for instance, it is still unsure whether or not such a comment reflects the learners’ genuine motivation. When the learner’s learning goal(s) and L2 learning experience converge with the L2 learning motive, it can be stated that the learner commented on his or her L2 learning motivation. Therefore, it seems important to investigate L2 learners’ motivation from longitudinal interview data. By utilizing the interviews, L2 learners’ current motivation and their motivational changes can be correctly identified.

This paper endeavors to make a theoretical bridge between Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self system and SCT-based L2 motivation theory. Nonetheless, a couple of issues remain unsolved. First, the theoretical interface between SCT and Dörnyei’s concept may not be equally interchangeable. In fact, Dörnyei’s theoretical developments are mostly based on quantitative research; L2 motivational self system is established after analyzing massive questionnaire data collected in Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). However, research using an SCT-orientation (e.g., Tae-Young Kim, 2007; Kimura, 2003; Ushioda, 2001) has mainly focused on the idiosyncratic influence of society, personal history, and environments on individual learners. Hence, most SCT-based research adopted qualitative research methods. The two research paradigms adopting different research methods are presented together in the above figure. In the future, theoretical efforts need to be made to refine their methodological interchangeability.

Second, the pedagogical effectiveness of the ideal L2 self and L2 learning motivation (i.e., not L2 motive which is dissociated with goals and L2 communities) invites future research. It seems probable to argue that L2 learners who have formulated an ideal L2 self and who succeeded in transforming their L2 motive into L2 learning motivation might exhibit higher gains in terms of L2 proficiency. However, it is equally possible that even L2 learners having an ought-to L2 self or with L2 learning motives may reach a high level of L2 proficiency. Therefore, the exact influence of L2 self and SCT-based motivational concepts on L2 proficiency deserves robust educational experiments.

REFERENCES


The Dynamics of L2 Self and L2 Learning Motivation: A Qualitative Case Study …


APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

The ESL Motivation

• Why are you interested in learning English?
• To what degree are you committed to learn English? Please give examples.
• How do you feel when you are learning English as a Korean ESL learner in Toronto?
• What is your goal for learning English?
  • What are your goals for learning English today?
  • What is your long-term goal for learning English?

Life History

• (During the past one month.)
  • What is your most pleasant memory as a language learner? Please describe it.
  • What is your most unpleasant memory as a language learner? Please describe it.
• (During the past one month,) as a language learner, who has been the most influential person? And what personal or family incidents have affected you most in your English learning?

Relationships, Social Status and Identity

• How do you feel about your ESL teacher(s) now?
• How do you feel about your Korean ESL classmates in Toronto?
How do you feel about your ESL classmates from other countries?

What kind of relationships do you have with your family (or landlord/lady or roommates) in Toronto?
  - How do they help you to learn English?

Do you have a specific identity or “voice” when you learn or use English? Does it reflect who you are? (your personal or ethnic identity)

**The Tool Use**

What tools do you use to help you learn English? (e.g., materials, such as dictionaries, books, computer software, audio-tapes; mental strategies, such as mental outlines, heuristics; human resources)
  - How and why do you use them? Please give examples.
  - Do you get any help from the use of the Internet? If so, please give examples.

**The Participants’ ESL Learning Expectations**

- What is your expected English proficiency level?
  - Among the four areas (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing) in English, what is the most needed and important area for you?

Applicable level: college

Key words: L2 learning motivation, motive, goal, SCT, activity theory, L2 motivational self system, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self

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Received in
Reviewed in