An activity theory analysis of L2 motivational self-system: A case study of Korean ESL learners

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An Activity Theory Analysis of L2 Motivational Self-System: A Case Study of Korean ESL Learners

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March 28th, 2011
AAAL 2011 Chicago

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Presentation Overview

I. Introduction: Previous research on L2 learning motivation

II. Vygotskian activity theory (AT) and L2 motivational self-system

III. The study: Two Korean students in Toronto Canada

IV. Findings: Instrumentality and L2 selves, transformation from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self

V. Discussion

VI. Implications
I. Introduction: Previous L2 learning motivation research

- Psychometric genesis: Gardner and Lambert (1959)
- Motivational renaissance in the 1990s (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991)
  - education friendly research (Dörnyei, 1994)
  - a mixture of psychological concepts (cf. MacIntyre, 2002): Inconsistency
  - Investment
I. Introduction: Critiques from a sociocultural theory (SCT) perspective

- Valsiner and van der Veer (2000): Two types of reductionism
  - Sociocultural thinkers often counter the tendencies of explaining psychological phenomena by their underlying biophysical substrate (reductionism “downward”) or by reducing the complexity of personal psyches to social-explanatory constructs (texts, discourse, narratives, culture; i.e., reductionsim “upward”). Both versions of reductionism are similar in their construction features. (p. 6)
  - Gardner (1985, 2000): Integrative motive $\rightarrow$ integrativeness, attitude toward the learning situations, and motivation; motivation $\rightarrow$ effort, desire, and attitude toward learning
II. Vygotskian activity theory (AT)

  - Activity $\rightarrow$ Action $\rightarrow$ Operations
  - (Motive) (Goal) (Conditions)

- Attending on/offline classes
- Making native speaking friends
- Doing homework
- Rote memorization
- Adopting effective strategies
- Participating in group discussions
- Preparing for an exam

- Physical conditions: weather, classroom, technical devices, class-size
- Manner: tutoring, collaborative learning, teacher-centered classes?
II. L2 learning motivation from an AT perspective


- Engeström (1999): Object (long-term) vs. Goal (short-term)
- Leont’ev (1978): Motive + Goal + Condition = Full enactment of motivation
- Future direction should be on motivation not on motive.
II. L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS)

• Critical stance toward Gardner’s socioeducational model
  • No reference group to be assimilated into in the era of English as a global language → The myth of Integrativeness

• The study of future, possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986):
  • Ideal self, expected (default) self, feared self

• L2 motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 106)
  • Ideal L2 self: L2 learners’ mental representation of the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess
  • Ought-to L2 self: The attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e., various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) in order to avoid possible negative outcomes
  • L2 learning experience: influences situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience
II. Interface between L2MSS and AT

- Ideal L2 self: Fully enacted motivation
- Ought-to L2 self: External origin (e.g., parental expectation, peer pressure, filial duty) (cf. Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009, p. 80) Ever since the only child policy was enforced in 1978 [in PRC], young people have had a heavy burden placed on their shoulders to support their ageing parents. People retire at a relatively early age in China, usually with extremely low pensions, so their children have the responsibility and obligations to take care of them as they become the sole breadwinners of the family
The interface between L2MSS and AT: Basic model

The Relationships between L2 Motivational Self System and SCT-based L2 Motivation Theory

Social &
Externalized

Ought-to L2 self
L2 Motive

Goal specificity and persistence
L2 learning communities

Goal specificity and persistence
L2 learning communities

Personal &
Internalized

Ideal L2 self
L2 Motivation

Kim (2009a)

- Transformation from an ought-to L2 self and L2 motives to an ideal L2 self and L2 motivation. When and how??

- Goal specificity and persistence
- Participation in L2 learning communities
III. The study

- Participants: Hana and Chang
  - A short-term visa ESL students living in Toronto for more than 6 months
  - Hana: a 23 year-old, female student majoring in linguistics
  - Chang: a 25 year-old, male student majoring in electronic engineering

- Data collection and Analysis
  - Monthly semi-structured interviews: 7 months (Hana) and 11 months (Chang)
  - Nvivo analysis: grounded theoretic analysis
IV. Findings: Instrumentality and L2 selves

- Practical needs to learn an L2
  - Utilitarian purposes: job screening and placement, promotion
    - 1.74 Chang (C): Well, if I’m in Korea with good English skills, I will have a better job opportunity. But basically, I would like to live here. I mean, I would like to live in a foreign country.
    - 1.2 Hana (H): I need it for the National Teacher’s Exam preparation. Also, even after I become an English teacher, I will need to speak excellent English for my job. So, English is very much related to my future career. Also, because I like to travel, English will be a useful tool for heart-to-heart talks.
  - Goal specificity: Hana (clear, concrete) > Chang (vague, ambivalent)
IV. Findings: Instrumentality and L2 selves

- Kim (2009b, 2011): Longitudinal data using semi-structured interviews: Internalizing L2 learning goal → expressed consistent future prospects (career plan, study plan)

2.84 H: I want to be a good English teacher who is willing to help students learn English well. [second interview]
4.119 H: Eventually, I would like to become an English teacher. [fourth interview]
6.84 H: Once I go back to Korea, I would like to teach English. Although I may not succeed in passing the National Teacher Exam, I will re-take the exam in next year. [sixth interview]

2.78 C: … I’m not sure yet. Well, I have to make an effort… [second interview]
4.88 C: I’d like to do something after immigration, but I don’t know yet. What seems clear to me right now is to get a permanent resident visa. [fourth interview]
6.70 C: Well, perhaps I may major in accountings, but if I find myself not good at it, I may learn car maintenance skills… These days, I think I may need to learn a special skill and work at, uh, an auto repair shop, for example, to make a living here. [sixth interview]
IV. Findings: Instrumentality and L2 selves

- Chang’s family history
  - His grandfather immigrated to Canada in the 1960s
  - Worked at a cabbage farm and made a huge success
  - Invited other relatives on his mother’s side in the 1970s
  - Chang had more than 20 relatives in the Greater Toronto Area

- Korean network: a double-edged sword
  - A safety net for emotional/physical well-being vs. an initial barrier for L2 communication

- 3.63 I: Do you have many opportunities to speak English with your aunt’s children?
- 3.74 C: Just a little when I come back [aunt’s] home and a bit in the morning right after I wake up. So, in fact, there’s little chance. I think I use English mostly in my ESL school.
IV. Findings: Instrumentality and L2 selves

- Chang vs. Hana

Chang: less-internalized (inconsistent job plans after L2 learning), low degree of participation in L2 communities

Hana: More internalized/personal goals (becoming an English teacher), various instances of L2 participation
IV. Findings: Transformation from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self

- Chang’s life changes in the sixth month:
  - Up to fifth month: inconsistent learning goals + adverse L2 learning context
  - From sixth month: Decided to immigrate to Canada
    - To acquire a specific skill readily applicable to North American market.
    - To enroll in a college in Toronto College preparation program (CPP) course (TOEFL exemption + transfer to a technical college in Canada)
  2.78 C: ... I’m not sure yet. Well, I have to make an effort… [second interview]
  4.88 C: I’d like to do something after immigration, but I don’t know yet. What seems clear to me right now is to get a permanent resident visa. [fourth interview]
  6.70 C: Well, perhaps I may major in accountings, but if I find myself not good at it, I may learn car maintenance skills... These days, I think I may need to learn a special skill and work at, uh, an auto repair shop, for example, to make a living here. [sixth interview]

7.131. I: Why are you interested in learning English?
7.132. C: I need it to live here.
7.133. I: Do you mean to live as an immigrant?
7.134. C: Yes. In order to immigrate here... Also, I need English for my future career. [seventh interview]
IV. Findings: Transformation from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self

- Participating in L2 communities of practice
  - Lave and Wenger (1991): CoP is not simply a group of people. They must share a common goal/interest.
  - CPP: qualifies conditions of CoP: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998, p. 70)

7.86. C: In my ESL school, almost all day long, I mean, from nine to four, I would use English. I ... speaks English quite well and expresses all that she wants to say all the time. I want to speak English like she does.

7.87. I: In English?

7.88. C: Of course. She wants to say all the time [seventh interview]

Figure 2.1. Dimensions of practice as the property of a community.
IV. Findings: Transformation from an ought-to L2 self to an ideal L2 self

- Alignment of learning goal and the learning context
  - Learning goal: Graduating from CPP and get an admission to a college
  - L2 learning context: CPP for L2 peer collaboration
  - Before: unclear goal, non-participation
  - After: specific career and life goals, active participation

- Motive: Vague urge for L2 learning
  - Origin: Social, external origin – Ought-to L2 self
  - Becomes internalized when aligned with learning goal and participation in L2 CoP

Motivation/An ought-to L2 self $\rightarrow$ Motivation/An ideal L2 self
V. Discussion

- Study abroad (SA) research
  - Mere exposure to L2 community does not guarantee the learner’s success in L2 acquisition (Kinger, 2008; Mendelson, 2004)
    - Mendelson (2004): SA students do not take a full advantage of SA experience – No CoP with native L2 speakers
    - Miller and Ginsberg (1995): Native speakers are expected to function as L2 instructors – Extra burden
  - Why only some learners are successful (but others are not so successful) in the same SA environment?
V. Discussion: the interface between L2MSS and AT

Revised interactive paradigm between the L2 motivational self-system and SCT-based L2 motivation theory

- van Lier (2000): affordances ↔ indifferent environment

  - “An affordance is a property of neither the actor [L2 learner] nor of an object: it is a relationship between the two.” (p. 252)

VI. Conclusions, implications, future directions

• An ought-to L2 self shares interface with L2 learning motive, and the ought-to L2 self can be transformed into an ideal L2 self when it is aligned with attainable L2 learning goals and participation in a meaningfully-perceived contexts. Thus, an ideal L2 self shares similarities with L2 learning motivation.

- Goal specificity
- Participation in L2 CoP

• Future research should address 1) conceptual compatibility between SCT/AT and L2 motivational self-system, and 2) ontological inconsistency in understanding and defining L2 learning motivation (cf. Norton’s [1995, 2000] investment).
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