The sociocultural interface between ideal self and ought-to self: A case study of two Korean students' ESL motivation

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Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self
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Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self

Edited by
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Contents

The Contributors ..........................................................vii

1 Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self: A Theoretical Overview
   Emast  Ushioda and Zoltan Dörnyei .................................1

2 The L2 Motivational Self System
   Zoltan Dörnyei ..........................................................9

3 The Baby, the Bathwater, and the Future of Language Learning Motivation Research
   Peter D. MacIntyre, Sean P. MacKinnon and Richard Clément ......43

4 The L2 Motivational Self System among Japanese, Chinese and Iranian Learners of English: A Comparative Study
   Tatsuya Taguchi, Michael Magid and Mostafa Papi ..................66

5 Learning Experiences, Selves and Motivated Learning Behaviour: A Comparative Analysis of Structural Models for Hungarian Secondary and University Learners of English
   Kata Csiszar and Judit Kormos .....................................98

6 Self and Identity in L2 Motivation in Japan: The Ideal L2 Self and Japanese Learners of English
   Stephen Ryan ..........................................................120

7 International Posture and the Ideal L2 Self in the Japanese EFL Context
   Tomoko Yashima .........................................................144

8 Motivation and Vision: The Relation Between the Ideal L2 Self, Imagination and Visual Style
   Abdallah S. Al-Shehri ..................................................164

9 Links between Ethnolinguistic Affiliation, Self-related Motivation and Second Language Fluency: Are They Mediated by Psycholinguistic Variables?
   Norman Segalowitz, Elizabeth Gatbonton and Pavel Trofimovich ....172

10 Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation
    Peter D. MacIntyre, Sean P. MacKinnon and Richard Clément ......193

11 A Person-in-Context Relational View of Emergent Motivation, Self and Identity
    Emast  Ushioda .........................................................215
12 Situating the L2 Self: Two Indonesian School Learners of English
   Martin Lamb .......................................229
13 Imagined Identity and the L2 Self in the French Foreign Legion
   Zachary Lyons ......................................248
14 The Sociocultural Interface between Ideal Self and Ought-to Self: A Case Study of Two Korean Students’ ESL Motivation
   Tae-Young Kim ......................................274
15 The Internalisation of Language Learning into the Self and Social Identity
   Kimberly A. Noels ..................................295
16 Possible Selves in Language Teacher Development
   Magdalena Kubanyiova .............................314
17 Identity and Self in E-language Teaching
   Cynthia White and Alex Ding ......................333
18 Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self: Future Research Directions
   Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda ..................350
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Chapter 14

The Sociocultural Interface between Ideal Self and Ought-to Self: A Case Study of Two Korean Students’ ESL Motivation

TAE-YOUNG KIM

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to make theoretical refinements by re-interpreting Dörnyei’s (2005, 2006, this volume) ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self from the perspective of Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Activity Theory (AT). To date, the exact nature of and the interrelationship between ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self have not been fully investigated. This study aims to explore this neglected area by analysing two adult Korean English as a second language (ESL) students’ L2 learning experiences.

SCT and Activity Theory

As Dörnyei (2006) and Skehan (1989) point out, L2 learning motivation is one of the most widely investigated fields in L2 research, but the SCT-based research in this area is in its infancy. Even though Vygotsky’s (1978, 1979a, 1979b) theory has influenced motivation research in general education (e.g. Rueda & Dembo, 1995; Rueda & Moll, 1994; Sivan, 1986; Turner, 2001) and also in applied linguistics (e.g. Block, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain & Deters, 2007), to date, only a few studies (Kim, 2005, 2007; Ushioda, 2003, 2007) have applied Vygotskian theory to the analysis of L2 motivation. Therefore, it is timely to explore L2 motivation from an SCT perspective and investigate the compatibility of this perspective with the L2 Motivational Self System.

This chapter is guided by AT (Leont’ev, 1978; Engeström, 1987, 1999a), which owes its theoretical lineage to SCT. AT focuses on the reciprocal relationship between a subject (or an L2 learner) and an object (or the L2 to be acquired). An L2 learner’s (or a subject’s) acquisition of the L2 (an object) is a mediational procedure. Lantolf and Thorne (2006: 79) state that ‘mediation is the process through which humans deploy culturally constructed artefacts . . . to regulate (i.e. gain voluntary control over and
The culturally constructed artefacts (or tools) include physical tools (e.g. pencil and paper, cassette recorder, computer); symbolic tools (e.g. written or spoken language systems, visual signs, gestures); mental tools (e.g. L2 learner beliefs, cf. Alanen, 2005; L2 learning strategies such as mnemonics and phonics); and significant others (e.g. L2 teachers, more capable peers). Defining activity as ‘a specific form of the societal existence of humans consisting of purposeful changing of natural and social reality’, Davydov (1999) emphasises the following:

any activity carried out by a subject includes goals, means, the process of molding the object, and the result. In fulfilling the activity, the subjects also change and develop themselves. (Davydov, 1999: 39)

Since (L2) learning is a series of purposive cognitive and social behaviours, it is understood as an activity, and L2 learning motivation relates to this activity.

In this chapter, the analyses are based on Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework (see Figure 14.1), which locates the subject, the object, and the instrument (or the mediational artefact) as three core elements. The community (i.e. those who share the same general object; see Cole, 1996), the rules (i.e. explicit norms and conventions that constrain actions within the activity system), and the division of labour (i.e. the division of object-oriented actions among members of the community) are included as well because human activity is always influenced by these elements.

In L2 learning, Figure 14.1 serves as an explanatory framework, where an L2 learner (subject), who wants to acquire sufficient L2 skills (object), needs to use various mediational artefacts (instrument). The learner, as a social being, lives in a variety of language communities such as L2

![Figure 14.1 A complex model of activity system (Engeström, 1987, 1999a).](image_url)
schools, (homestay) family, peer networks, and workplaces (community), conforms to unique rules of learning and using the L2 (rules), and collaborates with other L2 learners or users (division of labour). The double arrows in the relational lines in Figure 14.1 imply that elements may potentially oppose one another and in such cases tensions may arise. From a longitudinal perspective, L2 learning is the process of experiencing and overcoming tensions; if tensions persist, L2 learning stagnates, whereas if the L2 learner can solve the tensions, he or she can achieve a higher level of L2 proficiency.

**AT and the L2 Motivational Self System**

I believe that the AT perspective on L2 learning can usefully contribute to theoretical refinement of Dörnyei’s (2005, 2006, this volume) L2 Motivational Self System. The concept of the ideal L2 self has the potential to overcome the distinction between integrativeness and instrumentality (Gardner, 1985), often (mis)understood as dichotomous (e.g. Brown, 2000). Dörnyei (2005, 2006) considers the ideal L2 self as dynamic and including both integrative and instrumental dispositions. As an image of the ideal L2 self, L2 learners may dream of being a person competent in the L2. This image may reflect a desire to integrate into the L2 community (integrativeness) or the hope of working in an international company using the L2 (instrumentality), or the combination of both aspirations. In the era of globalisation, it does not seem so easy to maintain a clear distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations, and the concept of an ideal L2 self offers a more meaningful way of capturing this complexity.

The second concept, the ought-to L2 self, reflects a less-internalised type of instrumental disposition. In this connection Higgins (1998) draws an insightful distinction: the ideal self is promotion focused, whereas the ought-to self is prevention focused. In other words, the ought-to L2 self reflects the situation where learners feel pressured to learn an L2 in order to avoid the negative consequences of not learning it. For example, in many parts of the world, English is now regarded as a powerful tool for future success in a job or in the college entrance exam. Given this, ESL learners feel that they should or ought to possess at least a minimum level of English proficiency.

The third concept in Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System – L2 learning experience – deserves careful consideration as well. In the execution of L2 motivation, the learner’s experiences in the L2 surroundings mediate the learner and the development of L2 proficiency. Through these L2 learning experiences in various, multiple L2 communities, the learner’s initial motivation in the preactional stage may subsequently undergo significant changes. For this reason, in their Process Model of L2
Motivation, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998; see also Dörnyei, 2005) focus on the dynamic nature of L2 motivation during the actional stage of the L2 learning process.

The three concepts summarised above can be linked to Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework. Since the ideal L2 self is more geared toward the positive aspiration to become a better person who commands good skills in the L2, this self image relates more to the subject rather than other elements in Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework. The ideal L2 self represents uniquely internalised, personal aspirations. On the other hand, the ought-to L2 self originates from an L2 learner’s apprehension of failure, which mirrors social pressure (e.g. fulfilling parents’ aspirations for academic or career success). The ought-to L2 self, compared to the ideal L2 self, is less internalised in the subject. It rather reflects the external demands coming from other members of the community, another major element in the AT framework, and in this regard, there is a possibility that tension may exist between the subject and the community. As stated above, if tension arises among the AT elements and the L2 learner does not notice or overcome the tension, L2 learning may stagnate, which may lead to demotivation.

It should be noted that the object needs to be operationalised into a more manageable learning goal or set of goals. The object in L2 learning may vary but usually is the ultimate attainment of L2 skills to the satisfaction of the learner. However, an L2 learner needs to establish proximal, specific, and moderately difficult goals (cf. Locke & Latham, 1990) to attain the distal object. Regarding the nature of goal and object, Engeström (1999b) underscores the following:

goals are attached to specific actions. Actions have clear points of beginning and termination and relatively short half-lives … the object is never fully reached or conquered. (Engeström, 1999b: 381)

In this sense, although not illustrated in Figure 14.1, the subject and the object are mediated by L2 learning goals.

Goals also bear bidirectional relationships with other elements in AT, especially with the community. As Turner (2001) states, contexts perceived beneficial to L2 learners turn into affordances. For example, a considerate homestay owner who is fluent in the target language and gives appropriate L2 feedback in daily L2 conversations can afford an optimal L2 learning environment for the L2 learner. This may positively affect the learner’s sense of ideal L2 self. In contrast, a teacher-fronted L2 classroom providing few opportunities for meaningful L2 interactions may conflict with the learning goal of an L2 learner who wishes to develop L2 communication skills (Lantolf & Genung, 2002). This may eventually lead to a less-internalised ought-to L2 self. The L2 learning
in the former situation, from an SCT perspective, reflects the functioning of the L2 learner’s self-image within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) through appropriate linguistic scaffolds (Wood et al., 1976) from more capable other(s), and the L2 learner can maintain (or even enhance) L2 learning motivation. In contrast, the L2 learner’s self-image in the latter situation does not function within the ZPD, and the learner’s motivation may gradually decrease, resulting in demotivation.

The Study

The study reported in this chapter investigates the intricate relationship among subject, object, goal, and community. The general research question is: How can we understand the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self in relation to Vygotsky’s (1978, 1979a, 1979b) sociocultural theory of mind and Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework? Specific research questions are: (1) To what degree can the internalisation of the ought-to L2 self contribute to L2 learning motivation and learning behaviour? (2) How does the learning goal (or how do the learning goals) influence the above two selves?

To address the research questions, I will analyse two cases of Korean ESL students. By presenting selected interview data, I will focus on the interface among the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experiences through the lens of SCT. Based on Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework, I will then highlight differences in the two students’ ideal and ought-to L2 selves through illustrations of their activity system. I will conclude by analysing the relationship between the ideal and ought-to selves in terms of Vygotsky’s (1979b) general law of cultural development.

Participants

Originally, I recruited a total of ten adult Korean ESL students in Toronto, Canada, for a larger longitudinal case study (Kim, 2007). However, for the sake of thick description (Geertz, 1973) and in-depth analysis from an SCT perspective, I will focus here on just two study-abroad ESL students, Joon and Woo (pseudonyms). Both were males in their mid-20s who had attended university and majored in economics-related fields in South Korea before coming to Toronto for the purpose of learning English (see Table 14.1). Despite these similarities, as my analysis will show, the two students differ considerably in terms of their ideal and ought-to L2 selves.

Joon wanted to get a job in which he could use English. He was not only interested in learning English in Toronto but very much interested in travelling and socialising with others in Canada. As such, Joon’s data
Table 14.1 Korean ESL visa student profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>University major</th>
<th>Arrival</th>
<th>Departure</th>
<th># of interviews conducted</th>
<th>Courses taken in Toronto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joon</td>
<td>Student visa</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>July 2005</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>General ESL → study group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woo</td>
<td>Visitor</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>General ESL → business English + private tutoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Sociocultural Interface between Ideal Self and Ought-to Self
showed that his goals for learning English were to get a job in Korea and to socialise with members of L2 communities. His communication in L2 contexts was quite diverse. On many occasions, Joon also socialised with other Korean ESL students where communication in L1 prevailed. Woo, the other participant, expressed his goal to work at a steel company in South Korea in the future, and his motivation to learn English seemed clearly related to this practical goal. In his opinion, for application to the steel exporting company, excellent proficiency in English would be his strongest asset. From his first month, he had stayed in a Canadian homestay and built a solid relationship with the native English-speaking homestay owner.

**Methods of data collection and analysis**

For data triangulation (Denzin, 1978), I collected data from four complementary sources: interviews, ESL classroom observations, picture-cued recall tasks, and language learning autobiographies. Among these, the interviews received the most research attention and were conducted on a monthly basis. I conducted semi-structured interviews with my participants and used NVivo, a QDA computer program (Richards & Richards, 2002) to analyse them. After conducting a series of pilot studies, I developed core interview questions (see Kim, 2006a, for the interview questions) and used them throughout the interviews. Since I used qualitative thematic analysis, all the thematic categories emerged as the NVivo analysis proceeded. That is, I coded topics commented on by participants first. Then, by iteratively re-reading the interview transcripts and initial coding categories, I re-coded the data, and deleted or added categories. In doing so, I applied the constant comparison method of qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I used meaning units (Ratner, 2002) for my unit of analysis. Ratner states:

> the meaning unit must preserve the psychological integrity of the idea being expressed. It must neither fragment the idea into meaningless, truncated segments nor confuse it with other ideas that express different themes. (Ratner, 2002: 169)

Thus, I coded coherent related comments in the interviews as one meaning unit. I always included the participants’ comments in a meaning unit and, if necessary, included my clarifying questions or related comments as well. All the interviews were conducted in Korean and the data presented in this chapter have been translated into English. The inter-coder reliability (i.e. percentage of agreement) was 0.83.
Analysis of the Two Students

Joon: Instrumentality functioning in the ought-to L2 self

It is noteworthy that Joon, a third-year university student, had a very close relationship with an American living in Korea who was of Korean parentage but had been adopted by an American couple in infancy. To communicate with him and to build a personal relationship with him, Joon tried to learn English in Toronto. His close friendship is described in his language learning autobiography in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1 (Language learning autobiography, October 2004)

[In Korea,] I was in the same dormitory with him [his American friend]. Drinking beer together and travelling together, I think I learned lots of English from him. (…) My goal is not obtaining full scores on the TOEIC or TOEFL. It is simply to be able to have a nice, relaxing heart-to-heart talk with my American friend when I go back to Korea.

This is a typical expression of Joon’s ideal L2 self in that Joon aspires to learn English to consolidate his friendship with the American peer by having ‘a nice, relaxing heart-to-heart talk’. Even after his arrival in Toronto, Joon keeps communicating with his American friend in Korea through an Internet chatting program. Joon’s ideal L2 self, however, is not limited to the continuation of the pre-existing friendship. He also actively participates in ESL student communities and in fact believes that the best way to learn English in ESL (not EFL) contexts is to make friends and to have various conversations with other English speakers.

In his daily communications with his friend in Korea and other ESL students in Canada, Joon cultivates his internalised ideal L2 self. Since ‘the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves’ (Dörnyei, 2005: 106), we might expect to find in Joon’s data utterances that relate his ideal L2 self to his L2 learning motivation such as ‘I learn English to communicate with my American friend in Korea’.

However, contrary to expectation, when asked about his main motivation to learn English in Toronto, Joon’s answers across six months were as follows:

Excerpt 2 (Second interview, November 2004)

2.69. Interviewer (I): Why are you interested in learning English?
2.70. Joon (J): That’s because I need to get a job in Korea. Also, I want to talk with the adoptee. I mean, my [American] friend in Korea.
Excerpt 3 (Third interview, December 2004)

3.40. J: Of course, getting a job in Korea comes first. And then I want to communicate with my American friend. I mean without any hesitation.

Excerpt 4 (Seventh interview, April 2005)

7.72. J: Now, in Korea, uh, English has already become a world language, so learning English is not a matter of personal interest but a must. That’s why I learn English.

It is important to note the order of sentences in Turn 2.70 in Excerpt 2. Even though Joon’s desire to communicate with his American friend is firmly grounded in his past experiences in Korea and maintained by his current Internet chatting, he first mentions a different goal for learning English: to get a job in Korea. Similarly, in Turn 3.40 in Excerpt 3, he uses ‘of course’ to emphasise the Korean (or worldwide) belief that English will surely be key to employment in Korea.

Excerpt 4 shows the influence of the macro social discourse of English as the Global Language (EGL). Although Crystal (2003) talks of English as a global language, I prefer to say the global language. As Canagarajah (1999) and Phillipson (1992) point out, English is perceived as the only global language in many countries. Be it positive, negative, or value-neutral, English has gradually gained the status of lingua franca (cf. Dörnyei et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2007). Excerpt 4 suggests strongly that Joon’s job-related orientation to learn English is in fact generated from Korean societal demand, and reflects both Joon’s concern about potential unemployment due to lack of English proficiency, and his desire ‘to avoid possible negative outcomes’ which is mentioned as an important characteristic of the ought-to L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005: 106).

However, by no means is it easy to reach an accurate understanding of whether or not Joon’s comments in Excerpts 2, 3, and 4 reflect his ought-to L2 self. Much depends on the degree of internalisation of the EGL discourse wherein may lie the major distinction between the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. That is, even though the job-oriented, utilitarian disposition is often categorised as instrumentality or as an instantiation of the ought-to L2 self as Dörnyei (2005, 2006) notes, ostensibly similar comments can be understood as evidence of the ideal L2 self. If an L2 learner internalises such reasons for needing to learn the L2 and can foresee a personally prosperous future in this way, such utilitarian reasons connect to the ideal L2 self.

In Joon’s data, clues to define the nature of his self expressed above are provided in subsequent interview questions asking about his job prospects. The logic is, if he has internalised the EGL discourse so that it is transferred into his ideal L2 self, he must have elaborated on specific job plans by adding a personal rationale, and I should be able to find
coherent comments about specific occupations requiring English. If such comments are not to be found in the data, the evidence points to a less-internalised ought-to L2 self. Excerpts 5, 6 and 7 are Joon’s responses to the question about his future job.

Excerpt 5 (First interview, October 2004)
1.200. J: I’m not sure if this will come true, but, anyways, I would like to work in the New York Stock Exchange.

Excerpt 6 (Second interview, November 2004)
2.76. J: I think it may not be sufficient to learn English for only a year. I’m planning to apply for a Working Holiday Maker visa and go to Australia. Maybe in two years?

Excerpt 7 (Fourth interview, January 2005)
4.195. J: Perhaps, international business. Or hotel management? Now I would like to get a job in a hotel. I’m trying to find some books on the hotel business or hotel management. I don’t know what exactly I want to do for a living.

Excerpts 5, 6, and 7 all clearly demonstrate inconsistency in Joon’s plans, and suggest that he does not seem to have developed a concrete future plan for using English with a specific job in mind. Regarding this kind of inconsistency, Ryan (2006) points out that without any concrete idea about future job prospects, ESL learners often expend extraordinary efforts, time, and money to learn English. Viewed in this light, it seems that Joon’s ought-to L2 self, rather than ideal L2 self, is reflected in the above Excerpts 2, 3, and 4. Joon’s ought-to L2 self takes its roots in the beliefs of the Korean community. Even before coming to Toronto, Joon came to be familiarised with the EGL discourse which is dominant in South Korea, and ventriloquates the externally-driven EGL discourse in Excerpt 4 (cf. Bakhtin, 1981).

From an AT perspective, it can be understood that Joon has formulated two distinctive learning goals to achieve the object. Joon’s two learning goals are: to communicate with other L2 speakers (Goal 1), and to get a job in South Korea (Goal 2). These are relatively specific and proximal compared to the distal object, which can be broadly summarised as to acquire English proficiency. Excerpts 2, 3, and 4 show that the two goals influence Joon’s L2 learning in Toronto. The first communicatively oriented goal reflecting his ideal L2 self is confirmed and internalised through his daily interactions with other L2 speakers. In this case, tension between subject and goal does not exist. On the other hand, the second EGL-based and job-oriented goal reflecting his ought-to L2 self is less internalised in Joon. This goal is not supported by other elements in Joon’s activity system either. Since he attended ESL schools and not job preparation courses in Toronto, none of the community,
rules, and division of labour relate to this externally-imposed goal. Therefore, tension arises between subject and goal. Figure 14.2 is the visual representation of the relationships among elements in Joon’s activity system.

Note that Goals 1 and 2 are clearly separate. Goal 1 is more incorporated into Joon, the subject, whereas Goal 2 is located in Community 2 (L1 community) in Figure 14.2. On the one hand, Goal 1 stems from Joon’s desire to reduce the discrepancy between his actual self and ideal self (see Excerpt 1), so this goal is closely related to Joon’s ideal L2 self. Goal 2, on the other hand, resonates with the L1 community’s dominant social discourse. Excerpts 5, 6, and 7 corroborate that Goal 2 is not fully internalised in Joon, which results only in inconsistent job plans. Goal 2 is an extrinsically stipulated one which

Figure 14.2 Joon’s activity system.
Joon does not perceive as imminently necessary since this goal does not stem from his life experiences. Goal 2 is related to Joon’s ought-to L2 self.

In sum, for Joon, the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self function on different planes. His ideal L2 self, supported by other elements in his activity system, is connected with Goal 1: to communicate with other L2 speakers; whereas his ought-to L2 self stems from the dominant EGL discourse in South Korea and is connected to Goal 2: to get a job in Korea. No interface between the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self is found.

**Woo: Incorporation of instrumentality into the ideal L2 self**

In contrast to Joon who did not have clearly developed job plans, Woo, a fourth-year university student, consistently mentioned the importance of learning English in order to work at a steel exporting company in Korea. As shown in Excerpt 8, his goal in Toronto was to increase his job opportunities by enhancing his proficiency in English. Thus, he kept attending ESL schools and remained in a Canadian homestay, which he regarded as an optimal community of English practice.

*Excerpt 8 (Language learning autobiography, October 2004)*

In the future, I hope to meet many other people (…) And eventually to increase my English speaking and listening skills for my future job.

Since Woo, like Joon, came from South Korea where the EGL discourse prevails, we can assume that his job-related, utilitarian orientation towards learning English reflects the outer societal EGL discourse. As discussed in the previous section, even the same comments reflecting the EGL discourse can relate to either the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self depending on the degree of internalisation. In Joon’s case, as he did not fully internalise this goal and other elements in his AT system did not support the discourse, he showed no interface between the two selves. This is corroborated in his comments on qualitatively different learning goals and in his inconsistent job plans. To tap into the degree of internalisation, I compared Woo’s comments on job plans with Joon’s. Unlike Joon’s inconsistent job plans, Woo expressed a specific, consistent career goal as Excerpts 9, 10, and 11 show.

*Excerpt 9 (Second interview, November 2004)*

2.284. Woo (W): What I’d like to do in the future is work in the field of steel manufacturing. The steel company, BOSCO [a pseudonym] is, for sure, the top producer of high quality steel [in Korea]. (…) It is not sufficient to sell the steel within Korea. So, I hope I can get a job in the international sales department of that company and be successful.
Excerpt 10 (Third interview, January 2005)
3.172. W: I’d like to devote myself to that field [steel manufacturing]. I’d like to sell steel. We cannot sell everything only in Korea; we need to sell all over the world. In that sense, English skill is an important requirement.

Excerpt 11 (Eighth interview, June 2006)
8.142. W: Well, for my job. It is the best tool for my steel exporting job, I mean, employment. My major goal is to get the job.

Woo’s future goal is very specific: to work at BOSCO. Woo’s job-oriented L2 learning motivation is more internalised and firmly associated with his career goal. This differs from Joon. In this sense, despite the similarity in the job-oriented comments, Woo’s comments in Excerpts 9, 10, and 11 confirm Woo’s internalisation of the dominant EGL discourse of learning English in the Korean community. Without this internalisation, Woo’s job plans expressed above could not show such consistency. Therefore, it would seem that Woo’s comments, originating from the EGL discourse, represent the ideal L2 self.

Regarding the internalisation, his close contact with his girlfriend in Korea seems to be a contributing factor (see Excerpt 12). According to Woo, his girlfriend’s low TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) score posed a barrier for entry into the job market. Although there have been a few noticeable changes in the employment policies of public and private employers in South Korea, in general it is still widespread practice for each job applicant to submit an official test score (demonstrating that he or she has above-minimum English proficiency) in order to advance to the second round of job interviews.

Excerpt 12 (Third interview, January 2005)
3.104. W: I believe, if I can’t speak English, I can’t get a job. Actually, my girlfriend in Korea is going to graduate from her college very soon, but her TOEIC score is really low. So, because of her poor English score, she has not been offered any job interviews yet. The more I see this situation, the more I feel I need English.

In short, Woo’s job-related motivation for learning English was confirmed through various channels, such as communication with his girlfriend above, whereas Joon’s job motivation, which was ostensibly similar to Woo’s, was not. Woo’s job plans are firmly focused on the steel exporting company. Woo makes the EGL discourse (as succinctly expressed in ‘if I can’t speak English, I can’t get a job’ in Excerpt 12) personally meaningful by equating his friends’ negative experiences with his own (as in ‘The more I see this situation, the more I feel I need English’ in Excerpt 12).
As stated above, Woo gradually built a strong relationship with his Canadian homestay owner, who clearly had a beneficial impact on Woo’s English use. He had many opportunities to speak English at the dinner table and while watching TV with his ‘homestay mom’. In Excerpt 13, Woo’s relationship with the homestay owner is described as quite casual like ‘an open-ended conversation’ and intimate like ‘a mother-and-son relationship’, which is similar to the conditions of scaffolding (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976; Wood et al., 1976). That is, in a non-threatening atmosphere, the caregiver or teacher provides necessary assistance to the novice.

Excerpt 13 (Second interview, November 2004)

2.224. W: Once I come back home, I can ask anything about English to my homestay mom [i.e. owner]. I ask her what she did that day, and she also asks me about my day. In this way, I can talk with her comfortably. It’s like a mother-and-son relationship.

The scaffolding from the homestay owner is found in other interview data. In Excerpt 14, where Woo describes his Christmas card writing, the homestay owner demonstrates the role of skilful L2 teacher.

Excerpt 14 (Third interview, January 2005)

3.224. W: At Christmas time, I wrote two Christmas cards and gave one to my homestay mom and the other to her neighbour. Both of them were quite pleased. Of course, I wrote my greetings in English. You know what? She [the homestay mother] checked my English grammar!

3.225. I: (laugh) Oh, did she?

3.226. W: She said she would check whether or not I wrote properly. And she said everything was OK. I said thank you. I felt so happy, because I had this handy opportunity every day.

Excerpt 14 demonstrates that Woo and the homestay owner constitute the community in this activity system. As defined by Cole (1996: 141), the community comprises ‘those who share the same general object’. If their general objects had been different, Woo might have perceived the situation above as unwanted criticism by a dominant person who holds both linguistic (native English speaker) and environmental (landlady in the guise of homestay mom) hegemony. However, Woo, instead of being embarrassed, is genuinely thankful to the owner and sees this as an opportunity. Their object was to increase his English proficiency and Woo’s goal of getting a job is aligned with the object. For this reason, the unexpected scaffolding coming from the community in Excerpt 14 strengthens Woo’s goal, object, and his ideal L2 self (working in the steel exporting company using English). In sum, Woo’s L2 community
afforded constant provision of optimal L2 input, which had a positive impact on Woo’s ideal L2 self. This was not found in Joon’s case.

Figure 14.3 illustrates Woo’s activity system, which significantly differs from Joon’s. The relationships among the subject, the goals, and the community show considerable overlap. Unlike Joon, Woo expressed only one goal: to get a steel exporting job in South Korea. This goal does not alter as shown in Excerpts 9, 10, and 11, which evidences the integrated nature of this goal for Woo. Accordingly, the goal overlaps with the subject. The community, represented mainly by Woo’s homestay family, also overlaps with both subject and goal. The community constantly patrols and guides Woo’s goal and maintains his (executive) L2 learning motivation. In terms of conceptual overlap, on the right hand side of Figure 14.3 the goal of learning English to get a job, which relates only to the ought-to L2 self in Joon’s case, is subsumed into Woo’s ideal L2 self.

**Figure 14.3** Woo’s activity system.
In sum, the English as the Global Language (EGL) discourse and L2 learning experiences influence the creation of both Joon’s and Woo’s ideal and ought-to L2 selves. For Joon, the EGL functions only in his less-internalised ought-to L2 self. Joon perpetuates the dominant social discourse without fully internalising its meaning into his personal life. The less-internalised nature of the ought-to L2 self is reflected in Joon’s inconsistent remarks on future job plans. Joon’s ideal L2 self is grounded in his previous and current L2 experiences in Korea and Canada. For Joon, the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self do not share any interface. In contrast, for Woo, his instrumentality originating from the externally stipulated social discourse of EGL is subsumed into his ideal L2 self. The internalised nature of the EGL discourse is confirmed in his consistent comments on his job plan. Woo’s goal of learning English for a job, which also mirrors the EGL discourse, is deeply rooted in Woo’s L2 experiences, such as his girlfriend’s negative experiences and his meaningful communication with his homestay owner, and significantly contributes to the expansion of his ideal L2 self.

**Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self: SCT Accounts**

In analysing the two students’ self systems, it is important to emphasise that their ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self are not in entirely antithetical positions. What can be regarded as the typical instantiation of the ideal L2 self can sometimes be understood as that of the ought-to L2 self, or vice versa.

Using Structural Equation Modeling, Dörnyei et al. (2006) proposed a schematic model of the interrelationships between the motivational variables and the criterion measures. They argue that one of the immediate antecedents of the ideal L2 self is instrumentality. They state that ‘depending on the extent of the internalisation of the extrinsic motives that make up instrumentality, the instrumentality can be either ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self’ (Dörnyei et al., 2006: 93). Put simply, if an L2 learner genuinely wishes to use the L2 for utilitarian purposes (e.g. job, academic advancement), the instrumental disposition becomes closely linked to the person’s vocational or academic identity, which leads into a brighter future image of him/herself. In such a case, the instrumentality is internalised into the L2 learner and reflects a promotion-focused self-image. Since the instrumentality is internalised, it is natural for the learner to have personalised, contextualised reasons or meaning for learning the L2, and these reasons, often expressed explicitly as learning goals, should be specific and concrete. If not internalised sufficiently, however, the instrumentality reflects more the prevention side of external obligation. In this case, the L2 learner becomes passive and does not attribute a personal rationale and
meaning to L2 learning. Although he or she may reiterate reasons mandated by others in a speech community, they do not emanate from an internalised, promotion-driven self-image. The L2 learner may want to learn the L2 because parents, teachers, friends, the education system and the media keep emphasising the importance of the L2 (in this study, English). Thus viewed, the less internalised instrumentality is prevention-focused, and the fear of having a negative future self-image prevails in this case.

Dörnyei et al.’s (2006) concept of instrumentality fits well with the AT analyses shown earlier. The important difference between Joon and Woo is the degree of internalising the instrumentality. Vygotsky (1979b: 163) states that human development appears twice, or on two different planes, first ‘on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane’. Referring to this developmental process as the general genetic law of cultural development, he further states:

First, [cultural development] appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition... [I]t goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. (Vygotsky, 1979b: 163)

In L2 learning situations, L2 development stems from intermental functioning between the L2 learner and other L2 users, and through L2 interactions (or L2 instruction) the external social plane is gradually and creatively internalised, or taken up, by the learner. The ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self, interpreted from Vygotsky’s (1979b) perspective, capture the developmental nature of self. As shown in Joon’s data, the social discourse is mostly related to the social or inter-psychological plane, whereas in Woo, we can identify the transition from the inter- to intra-psychological plane and thus his ideal L2 self prevails. In other words, we might say that the ought-to L2 self reflects the inter-psychological plane, and the ideal L2 self reflects the intra-psychological plane in the development of the L2 self.

In this study, the EGL discourse is linked to the prevention-focused nature of instrumentality. Proficiency in English is understood as ‘the social ladder’ (Zeng, 1995) into the power-elite in Korean society (Kim, 2006b). Joon understood the external meaning of learning English for his job preparation, but did not fully internalise it into his ideal L2 self. In contrast, Woo internalised this discourse and it became subsumed into his ideal L2. If an L2 learner regards the EGL discourse as more closely related to his or her personal contexts, this discourse may provide a powerful motivator for learning English; if not, this may function only as
a minimal role and remain only in the realm of the ought-to L2 self. Depending on how far they internalise the external social discourse, learners may transform their ought-to L2 self into their ideal L2 self. That is, they may imagine the situation of actively or even freely using English in their ideal job, which is associated with the aspiration of enhancing their life quality.

Summary

The cases reported in the study enrich our understandings of the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self in two important ways. First, instrumentality, or pragmatic orientations, in learning an L2 can be merged into either the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self, depending on the degree of internalisation. In this study, the socially originated EGL discourse was aligned to the job-oriented comments of the two participants. Second, an L2 learner’s ideal L2 self needs to be aligned to the learner’s life experiences in a variety of communities. Without the support from the community and its related rules and division of labour as defined Engeström’s (1987, 1999a) AT framework, the L2 learner cannot envisage a positive, competent, and promotion-based future L2 self-image. As Joon’s data indicate, this may result in the prevention-focused ought-to L2 self.

Despite the findings, this case study has limitations. First, since an ESL proficiency test was not administered, it is hard to investigate the relationship between the ideal and/or ought-to L2 selves and the two students’ linguistic gains during and after their stay in the ESL contexts. Second, as case studies do, this study has focused only on a selected population, which inherently makes the findings specific to particular phenomena and contexts. More extensive cases need to be researched to make conclusive arguments about the interface between the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self in a variety of contexts.

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Notes

1. ‘2’ means the second interview session, ‘69’ means the 69th turn. The bold face in Excerpts denotes an added emphasis by the author. Brackets mean the author’s added phrases or comments for clarification. Three dots in parentheses indicate a deleted utterance.
2. The Working Holiday Maker Visa issued by the Australian Embassy in Korea combines a study permit and a work permit. Once issued, applicants can learn English as a second language for less than 3 months as well as work for a maximum of 1 year. They are often hired as interns or volunteers.
References


