

Rural Japanese Learners' Motivation  
to Learn English from the Ideal L2 Self Perspective

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松 山 大 学  
言語文化研究 第32巻第1-1号 (抜刷)  
2012年9月

Matsuyama University  
Studies in Language and Literature  
Vol. 32 No. 1-1 September 2012

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## 1. Introduction

One of the so-called individual differences variables in second/foreign language (hereafter L2) acquisition research is L2 motivation, which is considered to be related to both the rate of L2 learning and the ultimate attainment of an L2. L2 motivation has been a popular and widely researched construct, and various motivational models have been proposed to date in order to understand why and to what extent learners learn an L2. Recently a new model has been proposed and gained popularity, namely the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This model proposes that the L2 motivational system is made up of the following three constituents: (a) ideal L2 self; (b) ought-to L2 self; and (c) L2 learning experience. Past studies have shown that one of the most important types of motivation related to L2 learning effort is ideal L2 self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self (e.g., Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). The model postulates that the more elaborate and vivid the ideal L2 self is, the more motivational power it has (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 19). The present study aims to validate this construct of ideal L2 self and examine how relevant it is to learners of English living in a rural area in Japan, where it seems difficult to develop ideal L2 self.

## 2. Background of the Study

### 2.1. L2 Motivational Self System

Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system is a relatively new model. The model is based on the psychological model of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987), which argues that human beings are motivated to try to reduce the gap between their actual self and their ideal self. Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system consists of the following three constituents: (a) ideal L2 self, consisting of the L2 learning-related self one wishes to be; (b) ought-to L2 self, which is created by what one believes one ought to be to meet the expectations of others and to avoid negative consequences; and (c) L2 learning experience, which is related to one's "situated" immediate learning environment and experience (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). To further illustrate, if an L2 learner hopes to be a proficient L2 speaker this ideal L2 self works as a strong motivator to learn the L2 because he/she hopes to reduce the gap between his/her actual L2 self (a non-proficient L2 speaker) and his/her ideal L2 self (a proficient L2 speaker). Specific ideal L2 selves can include, for example, a university student taking classes which are taught only in English, a proficient English speaker doing business in English overseas, and a teacher teaching English to junior high school students. Ought-to L2 self works based on what L2 learners believe others want them to be, such as the case of learning English because their parents want them to do so.

The L2 motivational self system has empirically been tested in various contexts, including Japan (e. g., Al-Shehri, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). The system has been validated mainly by quantitative questionnaires, and studies have shown that ideal L2 self in particular correlates highly with intended L2 learning effort (e. g., Al-Shehri, 2009; Csizér & Lukacs, 2010; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Taguchi Magid, & Papi, 2009).

One of the areas in this model which have not been widely researched is the process of creating ideal L2 self, particularly in foreign language contexts. In rural Japan it is often the case that L2 learners do not have many opportunities to communicate in English and only study it because it is a required subject. These learners may lack ideal self related to English because they do not see the relevancy of English to their life outside class. In a sense it seems understandable that these learners are not motivated because they do not think they need the English ability now or in future.

## 2.2. The Present Study

The question arises, then, as to (a) whether this construct still correlates highly with intended L2 learning effort in such a rural area ; and (b) how learners develop ideal L2 self in rural Japan despite their circumstances. For learners of English who do not have many opportunities to communicate in English or do not think that they need English for their future, it seems quite difficult to create and enhance an ideal L2 self. On the other hand, there exist learners who do put much effort into learning English in spite of their circumstances, in which case they may have clear ideal L2 selves. Thus, the present study aims to examine the relevancy of ideal L2 self for a sample of population in a rural, English as a foreign language (EFL) context, and the process of developing ideal L2 self. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following two research questions :

- (a) How closely is ideal L2 self related to intended L2 learning effort in rural Japan ?
- (b) How do learners develop ideal L2 self in rural Japan ?

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

Participants for this study were 173 students taking various English classes at Matsuyama University. They were non-English majors coming from various departments. Their ages varied from 18 to 20 with the mean of 19.02, and 82 were female and 91 were male .

#### 3.2. Instrument

For this study I administered a questionnaire consisting of 20 Likert-scale questions and three open-ended questions. The questionnaire is an efficient method for gathering data from a relatively big sample. On the other hand, its weakness, particularly with closed questions, is that it is difficult to be comprehensive in gathering detailed accounts of the participants. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions in order to collect data from a relatively large sample and still be as comprehensive as possible. Among the 20 Likert-scale questions, 12 items measured participants' ideal L2 self, asking them to rate the extent to which they agreed with a statement on a particular ideal L2 self. The remaining eight Likert-scale items measured their intended L2 learning effort, asking them to rate the extent to which they were ready to put efforts into English learning (see Appendix A for the 20 Likert-scale items). The items were in 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being "strongly disagree" to 5 being "strongly agree." They were adopted and adapted from past studies working within the L2 motivational self system (Ryan, 2009 ; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). All of the Likert-scale items, which were originally in English, were translated into Japanese. Then in order to check the adequacy of the translation, the items were checked by a Japanese doctoral student at the Department of Second Language Studies at the University of

Hawaii at Manoa. Furthermore, I asked three open-ended questions in an attempt to tap into the details of participants' ideal L2 selves. Specifically, these questions asked participants to write freely (a) what their ideal L2 self was, (b) who affected them in developing their ideal L2 self, and (c) their detailed account of the process of developing it. The open-ended questions aimed at gaining detailed accounts of participants' experiences of developing ideal L2 self so that I could obtain clues as to how L2 learners in a rural area develop ideal L2 self (see Appendix B for the complete questionnaire in Japanese).

### **3.3. Procedures**

The questionnaire was administered at the end of the first class session of spring semester in April 2012. Participants were informed of the volunteer nature of the questionnaire as well as its non-relationship to their grades, and their anonymity. The questionnaire was administered in participants' first language, Japanese. It took approximately ten minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected at the end of the class period and was subsequently analyzed.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Reliability Analysis**

First, in order to handle missing data, five answers which were missing were replaced with the means of the individual responses for each sub-construct, i. e., ideal L2 self and intended learning effort. Then in order to check the internal consistency of the questionnaire, I calculated Cronbach alpha coefficients for ideal L2 self and intended L2 learning effort. The coefficients were within an acceptable range : .93 for ideal L2 self and .85 for intended learning effort.

#### 4.2. General Motivational Patterns

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the 20 Likert-scale questions. As can be seen, the items that have the highest means regard themselves needing the English ability rather vaguely. Both item 4 and item 12 have a score higher than 3.00, and they mention English ability without specifying particular purposes. In

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the 20 Likert-Scale Questions**

Item Number and Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Ideal L2 Self</i>		
1. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.	2.37	1.00
3. I often imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.	2.73	1.05
4. When I think about my future, it is important that I use English.	3.62	1.02
6. I can imagine myself living abroad and having a discussion in English.	2.08	.94
8. I can imagine speaking English with international friends.	2.27	1.10
10. I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with locals.	2.09	.98
11. I can imagine a situation where I am speaking English with foreigners.	2.47	1.11
12. The things I want to do in the future require me to speak English.	3.28	1.00
13. I can imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English.	2.11	.90
14. If my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future.	2.84	1.06
16. I can imagine myself studying at a university where all my courses are taught in English.	1.80	.89
19. I can imagine myself writing English e-mails fluently.	1.99	.89
<i>Intended Learning Effort</i>		
2. I would like to study English even if I were not required.	3.41	1.06
5. I would like to concentrate on studying English more than any other topic.	2.90	1.05
7. I would like to spend lots of time studying English.	2.92	.93
9. I think that I am doing my best to learn English.	2.87	.98
15. I am working hard at learning English.	2.87	.98
17. I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning English.	2.87	.94
18. Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.	2.46	.87
20. If my teacher would give the class an optional assignment, I would certainly volunteer to do it.	2.94	1.01

contrast, the items that are rather specific had lower scores—for example, question 16, which stated that they could imagine themselves studying at a university where all classes are taught in English, had a score lower than 2.00. Perhaps this implies that participants do not plan on studying abroad and thus the statement had a low mean.

#### **4.3. Relationship between Ideal L2 Self and Intended Learning Effort**

In order to examine whether ideal L2 self was as highly related to intended learning effort as in past studies, I calculated the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The coefficient was  $.64 (p < .01)$ , which means that approximately 42% of the variance of intended learning effort can be explained by ideal L2 self.

#### **4.4. Process of Developing Ideal L2 Self**

In order to tap into the process of developing the ideal L2 self in more detail, I then analyzed answers to the three open-ended questions. As explained above, these questions asked participants to explain what their ideal L2 self was, who influenced them in developing their ideal L2 self, and the process of developing their ideal L2 self.

First, as presented in Table 2, 33.53% of the participants either answered that they did not have an ideal L2 self or did not write anything. Although we cannot automatically assume that those who did not write anything do not have any ideal L2 self, this percentage is rather high.

The ideal L2 selves which the participants did have varied to a great extent, both in the content and their specificity. They varied from using English for business purposes (15.61%) to using it when travelling overseas (13.87%). Others included themselves being able to direct foreigners when asked for a direction and



**Table 2 Participants' Ideal L2 Selves**

Ideal L2 self	Number
Do not have ideal L2 self	47
Using English for business purposes (including getting a high score on the TOEIC)	27
Using English when travelling overseas	24
Using English for daily conversation	10
Using English when asked a question by a foreigner	8
Others	50
No answer	11

*Note* : Their ideal L2 selves could have more than one purpose. Therefore the total does not match participants' number.

being able to read literature in English. Those who possessed a specific ideal L2 self wrote, for example, that their ideal L2 selves were “teaching English to junior high school students in future,” “gaining a score of 600 on Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and working at a company such as Nissan and UNIQLO,” and “making a contract at a company with a foreigner in English.” Others only vaguely answered that they wanted to be able to use English “for daily conversation,” “to talk to a foreigner,” and “to use English overseas.”

Second, as shown in Table 3, the individuals who influenced the participants most in developing ideal L2 self turned out to be their teachers and friends. Their teachers seem to be the most influential type of person on participants' ideal L2 self creation. They were either an informer of the importance of English or a role model for learners as an English user. Some wrote that their teachers made them aware of the importance of English in the future. Furthermore, it turned out that the participants' friends, particularly those who have studied abroad, were also an important influence in developing ideal L2 self. Although some only wrote that the influential people were their “friends,” others specifically wrote that their friends “who studied/are studying abroad” were the important ones.

**Table 3 People Who Influenced Participants  
in Developing Ideal L2 Self**

Type of People	Number
Teachers	24
Friends	17
Family Members	8
Seniors ("Sempai")	4
Others	24

*Note*: Each participant could have named more than one type of person.

Third, in order to compare those who did not report an ideal L2 self and others who possessed a vivid and clear ideal L2 self I compared the participants with particularly low ideal L2 self scores (<1.5 out of 5) to those with particularly high ideal L2 self scores (>3.5 out of 5). Not surprisingly, among the 16 participants whose mean scores were below 1.5 eight did not have ideal L2 self and three did not write anything on the question, "What is your ideal L2 self?" Furthermore, one specifically wrote that he/she had never wanted to improve his/her English ability because it was not necessary. In contrast, those with high ideal L2 self scores were rather specific in describing their ideal L2 selves: some wanted to "do business in the U. S. and speak with locals," and "be able to have small talks with foreigners when drinking." These participants were also specific in their accounts of the process of developing ideal L2 self. They wrote, "my ELT teacher in junior high was a native speaker of English. However, he spoke good Japanese in three years, which made me think that I may be able to speak English like that." "(I developed my ideal L2 self) when I heard a story of my friend who studied in Australia in high school."

Furthermore, an important factor when developing an ideal L2 self seemed to be related to how much participants enjoyed learning English. Those with the

highest ideal L2 self scores wrote that their ideal L2 self was a product of their enjoyment of English, saying that they “liked English” and when they studied English in junior high school they “enjoyed it.”

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. How Closely Is Ideal L2 Self Related to Intended L2 Learning Effort in Rural Japan ?

The answers to the Likert-scale questions suggested that even in a rural EFL context ideal L2 self was closely related to intended learning effort. This was shown by a fairly high correlation coefficient of .64. The next step in future research is to examine how closely their self-reported intended learning effort is related to how much L2 they achieved, possibly by examining the relationships between ideal L2 self, intended L2 learning effort, and L2 achievement.

### 5.2. How Do Learners Develop Ideal L2 Self in Rural Japan ?

Two patterns are noteworthy from the three open-ended questions. First, as expected many completely lacked any ideal L2 self and did not see the relevancy of learning English. Many participants seem to vaguely think that they may need the English ability in the future. However, it is not an immediate relevancy and they do not have a vivid and elaborate image of themselves using English in future. Furthermore, some do not seem to know how to close the gap between their actual selves and ideal selves. One participant with a low score of ideal L2 self (2.33) wrote, “I think for sure that English will be a must and that it’d be nice if I can use it well, and I want to be able to. However, I can’t draw a map for it at all.” On the other hand, those with high ideal L2 self scores had clearer and more specific ideal L2 selves for whatever purpose in their mind.

Second, two important types of people for developing ideal L2 self are teachers and friends studying abroad. Perhaps they are the closest people who can be a role model for the participants and who can help them create a vivid image of L2 ideal self. Furthermore, although recent studies indicate that Japanese youngsters are becoming more “inward-looking” and do not study abroad, those who do study abroad not only supposedly improve their English ability but also work as role models for other L2 learners in rural areas.

## **6 . Conclusion**

### **6.1. Limitations of the Study**

One of the limitations of this study is that the questionnaire only measured intended L2 learning effort. Thus, we do not know whether indeed participants who report that they put in a lot of effort into learning English do so. As explained earlier, in future studies it will be necessary to add a non self-report measure and further examine the relationship between intended learning effort and participants' L2 achievement, possibly by way of grades and proficiency test scores such as TOEIC scores. Also, although the questionnaire had open-ended questions there is a limit as to how much participants reveal about their experiences in developing ideal L2 self in a questionnaire. Thus in future studies a method of gaining more in-depth knowledge of learner's experiences (e. g., interview studies) will be promising.

This study included participants from more than one department. However, these did not include students majoring in English and thus the sample is not representative of the whole university. It may be necessary in future studies to examine students' motivational patterns for English majors and compare them with non-English majors.

## 6.2. Implications

Limitations aside, this study has demonstrated that although ideal L2 self is closely related to L2 learning effort in rural Japan many participants totally lacked an ideal L2 self. Teachers are reminded that as the immediate contact persons for L2 learners, they can inform them of the relevancy of English learning and work as role models of proficient L2 speakers. Perhaps their own accounts of how they became proficient in English can be a good stimulator for developing students' ideal L2 self. They may also provide clues as to where they can gain opportunities for communicating in English. Still other ways of helping developing ideal L2 self may be to guide learners to narrow the gap between their actual selves and future selves—this can include, for example, what vocabulary and what skills to strengthen if they want to do business in English in future. The more specific students' ideal L2 selves and their strategies for closing the gap with their actual selves, the more it is likely that they put efforts into learning English.

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### **Appendix A : Questionnaire Items on Ideal L2 Self and Intended Learning Effort**

#### **Ideal L2 Self**

Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.

I often imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.

When I think about my future, it is important that I use English.

I can imagine myself living abroad and having a discussion in English.

I can imagine speaking English with international friends.

I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with locals.

I can imagine a situation where I am speaking English with foreigners.

The things I want to do in the future require me to speak English.

I can imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English.

If my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future.

I can imagine myself studying at a university where all my courses are taught in English.

I can imagine myself writing English e-mails fluently.

**Intended Learning Effort**

I would like to study English even if I were not required.

I would like to concentrate on studying English more than any other topic.

I would like to spend lots of time studying English.

I think that I am doing my best to learn English.

I am working hard at learning English.

I am prepared to expend a lot of effort in learning English.

Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.

If my teacher would give the class an optional assignment, I would certainly volunteer to do it.

Appendix B: Questionnaire in Japanese

英語学習に関するアンケート

このアンケートは、今後の授業の改善と英語学習に関する研究のためにお願いするものです。アンケートは任意・匿名で、成績とは全く関係ありませんので、率直な意見をお願いします。

性別（○で囲んで下さい）： 男 女

年齢： \_\_\_\_\_ 歳

パート1：英語学習に関するあなたの気持ちを聞かせて下さい。

各項目の文を読み、正直にあなたに当てはまる度合いの□印をチェック(✓)して下さい。

	全くそのとおり	その通り	どちらともいえない	そうではない	全くそうではない
1. 将来のキャリアについて考えるときはいつも、英語を使っている自分を想像する。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. 英語は必須でなくても勉強したい。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. 英語が話せるようになって自分をよく想像する。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. 自分の将来を考えると、英語が使えることが重要だ。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. 他のどの科目よりも英語の勉強に集中したい。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. 海外に住んで英語でディスカッションしている自分を想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. 英語の勉強にたくさん時間をかけたい。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. 海外の友達と英語で話しているのを想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. 英語の勉強に最善を尽くしていると思う。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. 海外に住んで、地元の人とコミュニケーションするのに上手に英語を使っている自分を想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. 自分が外国人と英語で話しているような状況を想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. 将来やりたいことのためには英語を話す力が必要だ。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. ネイティブスピーカーのように英語を話している自分を想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. もし夢がかなえば、将来は英語を上手に使うだろう。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. 英語の勉強は一生懸命やっている。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



16. すべての授業が英語で行われている大学で勉強している自分が想像できる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. 英語の学習に相当努力をつぎ込む覚悟がある。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. クラスメートに比べると、比較的一生懸命英語を勉強している方だと思う。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. 英語のメールを流ちょうに書いている自分を想像することができる。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. 授業でやってもやらなくてもよい任意の宿題が出れば、もちろん進んでやるだろう。	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

パート2：「英語に関する理想とする自分」について教えてください。

1. 「英語に関する理想とする自分」はどんなことですか？

(例：将来ビジネスで英語を使っている自分、英語を教えている自分、海外旅行で英語を上手に使っている自分、など思うままに書いて下さい。特にない場合は「なし」と書いて下さい。)

2. そのような自分を描くようになるにあたって、周囲のどのような人が影響したと思いますか？

3. そのような「英語に関する理想とする自分」を描くようになった過程を教えてください。

(「いつ頃」「どのような人が影響して」「どのような出来事がきっかけで」英語に関する理想とする自分を描くようになったか、できるだけ具体的に書いて下さい。また、「英語を使う機会がなく、理想とする自分はない」など、ネガティブな意見でも構いません。ネガティブな場合も、具体的にその理由の記述をお願いします。また、スペースが足りない場合は裏に記述をお願いします。)

ご協力ありがとうございました。