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A Study of Chinese University English Majors' L2 Motivational Self

Abstract

As a highly important affective variable, motivation has always been a focus of research in second/foreign language (SL/FL) learning and proved to play a critical role in SL/FL learning. Even so, considering the complex and dynamic nature of SL/FL motivation, it always deserves research. Guided by the newly proposed framework of L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), the present mixed-method study hence explored Chinese English majors' L2 motivational self. One hundred and one English majors from a prestigious university in Beijing answered the questionnaire and 15 of them were interviewed in the present study. Analyses of the data revealed the following main findings: (1) the participants were generally highly motivated to learn English, had vivid images of themselves as proficient English users in the future, had positive appraisals of their L2 learning experiences, and had a moderately good perception of their ought-to L2 self, (2) senior students reported having significantly higher ideal L2 self and held more positive attitudes towards English learning experience. Based on these findings, some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: L2 motivational self, L2 motivation, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience

Introduction

As one of the most important individual variables in second/foreign language (SL/FL) learning, motivation has been investigated by researchers from different perspectives (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Gardner, 1985; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Meanwhile, because of globalization, English has become a lingua franca for international communication in various fields, while intercul-

tural communication and education in other languages have also been growing fast. Along with these, research on SL/FL motivation prospers. Under such circumstances, the dominant SL motivation theory—the socio-educational and then socio-psychological model—loses its explanatory power (Lamb, 2004). Researchers thus have been trying to reconceptualize SL/FL motivation. The major change during this process is the explicit inclusion of the contemporary notions of self and identity into the core of SL/FL motivation. Consequently, L2 (second language) Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009) has received great attention among researchers and educators. Based on the results of a large scale longitudinal study (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006), Dörnyei and his colleagues reinterpret Gardner’s integrativeness as “an internal process of identification within the person’s self-concept” rather than “identification with an external reference group” (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009, p. 3). Dörnyei (2005) further develops this reinterpretation by drawing on the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) to build a new model of L2 motivation, namely L2 motivational self system (L2MSS), which provides researchers with a systematic framework of how to interpret learner’s motivation through a self system perspective. Thereafter, L2MSS has been tested and examined on diverse groups of learners in various contexts either via the L2 Motivational Self System Questionnaire developed in Dörnyei et al. (2006) or interviews (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Pawlak, 2016a, 2016b; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). Even so, more research on L2MSS is needed considering the diversity of learners, complexity of SL/FL learning and motivation, and increasingly faster globalization (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015; Dörnyei, 2014). Thus, the present study aimed to explore Chinese university English majors’ L2 motivational self via a mixed method.

Literature Review

Situated in Anglophone and Francophone communities in North Canada, the social-educational and then socio-psychological approach proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972; Gardner, 1985) was based on the tenet that learners’ attitudes toward the target language and the language community greatly affect their final SL/FL learning outcomes. This approach distinguishes two distinct constructs in L2 motivation—instrumentality and integrativeness and claims that integrativeness plays a more important role in L2 learning. Instrumentality refers to “the practical value and advantages of learning a new language” (Gardner, 1985, p.133) and integrativeness is the desire to “come closer to the

other language community” (Gardner, 2001, p. 5). Countless research has confirmed the importance of learners’ attitudes toward the target language and roles of instrumental and integrative motivation (Allard & Landry, 2009; Clement & Gardner, 2001; Liu, 2007; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Noels, 2001). Meanwhile, the research shows that instrumentality and integrativeness cannot capture the complex and dynamic nature of SL/FL motivation and that instrumental and integrative motivation are not opposite ends of a continuum either.

Hence, along with the development of Gardner’s motivation theory, a number of theories have been advanced to expound the role of motivation in SL/FL learning, such as self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986), attribution theory (Weiner, 1986, 1992), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002), expectancy of success theory (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), and goal theory (Locke & Latham, 1990). Correspondingly, more motivational concepts emerge like intrinsic, extrinsic motives, external regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation. As defined by Gardner and Lambert (1972), integrativeness reflects language learners’ genuine interest in the target language and its community (sometimes even complete assimilation with native speakers). In this sense, there should be a clearly identifiable L2 community for the learners (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). This, nevertheless, is definitely impossible for a vast number of FL learners. In many FL, including EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts such as China, language learners seldom have direct contact with any L2 group, where integrative motivation seems to hardly account for their learning of the target language. For them, integration with L2 community does not make any sense (Kaylani, 1996; Lamb, 2004; Liu, 2007). On the other hand, it is often desirable for them to meet with native speakers, to study or travel abroad, and/or find a more satisfying job, all of which interact with one another and work on their SL/FL motivation (Lamb, 2004). This is further evidenced in the results of a 10-year long longitudinal study on Hungarian students’ attitudes towards learning five foreign languages (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei et al., 2006). This study not only highlighted the importance of integrativeness but also demonstrated considerable overlapping impacts of the underlying factors of L2 motivation (Dörnyei et al., 2006). Based on these results, Dörnyei (2005) expands its original definition and reinterprets it as a language-specific facet of a learner’s ideal L2 self. Correspondingly, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) incorporates the notion of self into L2 motivation with reference to the concept of possible selves proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986), which represents how individuals think about their desired or future selves.

As discussed in Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 954), possible selves fall into three types: (1) “ideal selves that we would very much like to become,” (2) “selves we could become,” and (3) “selves we are afraid of becoming.” Since the notion of possible selves centers on a person’s view of his/her future, it manifests his/her enduring hopes, goals, aspirations, and fears. Hence, possible

selves act as ‘future self-guides,’ which helps explain “how someone moves from the present toward the future” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 11). This concept thus provides a conceptual link between possible selves and motivation. Meanwhile, Higgins’s (1987) self-discrepancy theory explains how this self system functions, according to which the domains of the self cover the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self. The actual self is the representation of the qualities that one or people important to him/her believe he/she possesses (Higgins, 1987). The ideal self refers to the representation of the attributes that one hopes to possess (e.g., wishes and aspirations), and the ought self is the representation of the attributes that others think he/she should possess (e.g., duties and obligations) (Higgins, 1987). This theory assumes that there is often a discrepancy between one’s actual self and the ideal/ought self, which drives people to make efforts towards their self-guides. Alternatively, motivation derives from people’s desire to reduce the discrepancy between one’s actual self and the ideal/ought self (Higgins, 1987).

Drawing on these theories of selves, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposes the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) theory which involves three components: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. Ideal L2 Self refers to the L2-specific facet of one’s ideal self, which is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one’s actual and ideal selves (e.g., traditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives). Ought-to L2 Self concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes. This dimension corresponds to Higgins’s ought self and thus to the more extrinsic types of instrumental motives. L2 Learning Experience involves situated and executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., classroom atmosphere, teacher-student relationship, and experience of success/failure).

To explore this L2 motivation, the L2 Motivational Self System Questionnaire (L2MSSQ) was developed (Dörnyei et al., 2006; Taguchi et al., 2009), which generally has 56 items and covers eight dimensions: L2 motivation, ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience, integrativeness, instrumentality-promotion, instrumentality-prevention and international posture. Then both the L2MSS and the L2MSSQ have been tested and validated in various studies with a primary focus on English as the target language (Alshahrani, 2016; Chen, 2015; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Islam, Lamb & Chambers, 2013; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012; Pawlak, 2016a; Pawlak, 2016b; Rajab, Far, & Etemadzadeh, 2012; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009; Yashima, 2009). These studies reveal that: (1) the ideal L2 self correlates strongly with integrativeness; (2) L2MSS’ components all correlate with learners’ intended efforts to learn English, (3) instrumentality can be divided into two distinct types—instrumentality-promotion and

instrumentality-prevention, with the former having higher correlation with the ideal L2 self; and (4) L2MSS' components all correlate with learners' intended efforts to learn English.

For example, Liu's (2010) study of Chinese EFL learners found that the ideal L2 self had stronger explanatory power in learners' motivation than integrativeness. The study also showed that the ideal and ought-to L2 selves contributed more to L2 motivation for higher level learners while the L2 learning experience mattered more for lower level learners. Kim's (2011) longitudinal study of two Korean ESL students' ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self showed that instrumentality could be merged to either the ideal L2 self or the ought-to self based on the internalized degree of instrumentality. One hundred and seventy-two Chinese students aged 13–15 participated in Dörnyei and Chan's (2013) study of the relationship between learner characteristics, learners' future L2 self-guides and learning achievement in English and Mandarin Chinese. The study revealed a consistently positive relationship between the ideal self and the criterion measures and confirmed the importance of a broad imagery capacity in the development of individuals' future self-identities. The study also showed that the ideal-self images associated with different languages formed different L2-specific visions, which might affect the potential interaction of learners' self images. Yu's (2015) research of 190 Chinese college students showed that most college students had high ideal L2 self and positive L2 learning experience, that the ideal L2 self explained more variance in students' motivation, and that English majors' ideal L2 self was higher than that of non-English majors' while there was no significant difference in their ought-to L2 self.

Even though many studies have been done within the framework of L2MSS which have revealed interesting findings, more research is required considering its explanatory power and the complex and dynamic nature of SL/FL motivation (Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei, 2014). Hence, the present study sought to examine Chinese English majors' L2 motivational self within the framework of L2MSS.

Research Design

Participants. One hundred and one English majors (thirty male and seventy-one female) from a prestigious university in Beijing answered the questionnaire in the present study, of whom 33 were first-year students, 35 second-year students, and 33 third-year students. As English majors, they all were (quite) proficient in English, and the higher their years of study, the more proficient in English they tended to be. At the time of data collection, the participants had been learning English for an average of 13.7 years. Among them, 69 (68.3%)

had been to English-speaking countries for short-time travel or study and 25 (24.8%) had stayed in English-speaking countries for more than three months. Meanwhile, 15 (thirteen female and two male) survey respondents (five from each year) participated in semi-structured interviews.

Instruments. Data in the present research were collected via questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, as detailed below.

The L2 Motivational Self System Questionnaire (L2MSSQ). To explore Chinese English majors' L2 motivational self, a short form L2MSSQ was adapted from that used in Taguchi et al. (2009) and Yashima (2009) in the present study: only items centering on ideal and ought-to selves were selected. Since L2 motivation and learning experience are highly related to ideal and ought-to selves, items on these two dimensions were also included in the present study. Hence, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.901, the resultant short form L2MSSQ (See Appendix) had 25-item and included four dimensions: (1) Criterion measures (six items) ($\alpha = 0.784$) assessing learners' L2 motivated behaviors toward learning English, (e.g., 'I think I am doing my best to learn English'), (2) Ideal L2 Self (seven items) ($\alpha = 0.819$) indicating students' view of themselves as successful L2 speakers (e.g., 'I often imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English'), (3) Ought-to L2 Self (seven items) ($\alpha = 0.746$) suggesting students' or significant others' view of the importance of learning English in order to avoid negative outcomes (e.g., 'I study English because close friends of mine think it is important'), and (4) L2 Learning Experience (five items) ($\alpha = 0.844$) reflecting the extent to which students liked English learning (e.g., 'I like the atmosphere of English classes'). All the items were placed on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 6 ('Strongly Agree'). The higher the score, the greater the motivation.

The Background Information Questionnaire. This questionnaire aimed to collect demographic information about the participants such as age, gender, and year of study.

Semi-structured Interview. The interview guide was developed based on the questionnaire items to elicit more of the participants' inside views of their motivation to learn English. The leading questions involved their perceptions of ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience, such as "Describe the efforts you have made in order to improve your English ability," "Describe the person with high English proficiency," and "Describe a situation where you use English fluently."

Procedure. The study was conducted during the second term of an academic year. All the questionnaire items were translated into Chinese and double-checked, which was then administered to students online along with a consent form. Concurrently, five students from each grade were recruited for the semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2009). Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes. All interviews were conducted primarily in Chinese, with

a mixture of English, so that students could express their ideas freely (Kim, 2011). All the interviews were audio-recorded.

Data Analysis. All the survey data were analyzed with SPSS 20.0. Means and standard deviations of L2MSSQ were calculated to explore the profiles of the participants' L2 motivational self, and one-way ANOVA was run to reveal differences in L2MSSQ among students in different years of study. The interviews were transcribed, double-checked, and then were subjected to thematic content analyses (Richards, 2009) conducted by two raters with an inter-rater reliability score of .92. Example themes were strategies to improve English proficiency, perceptions of ideal L2 self, and future career plans. To protect interviewees' privacy, a number was assigned to each interviewee, which was then used when their remarks were reported in this paper.

Results

Survey results

To explore the profiles of the participants' motivational self system, means, and standard deviations (SD) of L2MSSQ subscales were computed, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means and SDs of L2MSSQ Subscales

	The whole sample (N = 101)		Year 1 (N = 33)		Year 2 (N = 35)		Year 3 (N = 33)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
L2 Motivation	3.84	0.74	3.80	0.75	3.93	0.66	3.79	0.86
Ideal L2 Self	4.94	0.71	4.71	0.75	4.93	0.71	5.18	0.69
Ought-to L2 Self	3.30	0.83	3.16	0.80	3.39	0.89	3.34	0.87
L2 Learning Experience	4.25	0.82	4.25	0.85	4.21	0.64	4.29	0.98

As shown in Table 1, the participants scored 3.30 to 4.94 on the L2MSSQ subscales, generally (far) above the scale midpoint 3.5, especially on Ideal L2 Self (mean = 4.94) and L2 Learning Experience (mean = 4.25). This finding indicated that the students had high expectations of themselves as being successful L2 speakers, had quite positive attitudes towards English learning, had high motivation to learn English and had a moderately good expectation of their ought-to self. A similar pattern was observed for the participants in

three different years of study. Meanwhile, comparison of L2MSSQ subscale scores revealed that, for both the whole sample and the subsamples of different years of study, Ideal L2 Self scored the highest, followed by L2 Learning Experience and L2 Motivation respectively, and Ought-to L2 Self scored the lowest. Alternatively, the participants highly believed that they would become successful speakers of English, enjoyed learning English, had moderately high motivation to study English, and were moderately affected people surrounding them (e.g., teachers, parents, and friends, etc.) in learning English.

In addition, comparison of L2MSSQ subscale scores across years of study showed that the 2nd-year students scored the highest (mean = 3.93) while their 3rd-year peers scored the lowest (mean = 3.79) on L2 Motivation, that the 3rd-year students scored the highest (mean = 5.18) while their 1st-year peers scored the lowest (mean = 4.71) on Ideal L2 Self, that the 2nd-year students scored the highest (mean = 3.39) while their 1st-year peers scored the lowest (mean = 3.16) on Ought-to L2 Self, and that the 3rd-year students scored the highest (mean = 4.29) while their 2nd-year peers scored the lowest (mean = 4.21) on L2 Learning Experience. Yet post hoc one-way ANOVA (Duncan's) results showed that significant difference occurred only between 1st-year and 3rd-year students in Ideal L2 Self ($F = 3.31$, $p = 0.04$), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

ANOVA Results of L2MSSQ Components

	Mean Square	df	F	p	Location of Sig. difference ($p = .05$)
L2 Motivation	0.26	2	0.42	0.66	/
Ideal L2 Self	1.74	2	3.31*	0.04	1st-year & 3rd-year
Ought-to L2 Self	0.92	2	1.21	0.33	/
L2 Learning Experience	0.11	2	0.08	0.92	/

Interview results

When asked about how to study English well (better), the interviewees listed a series of motivational efforts, as summarized in Table 3. The most frequently mentioned efforts were accomplishing compulsory assignments (13/86.7%), reading English books and novels (10/66.7%) and watching programs in English (e.g., English movies, TV series, talk shows, etc.) (6/40%). For example, "I try to improve my reading ability by reading English books and novels, through which I can develop my sense of English. I have been reading English a lot." (No.5, 1st-year).

Table 3.

Interviewees' Self-reported Motivational Efforts to Study English (N = 15)

Interviewees' motivational efforts	Frequency/percentage [%]
1. Accomplishing compulsory assignments	13/86.7
2. Reading English books and novels, etc.	10/66.7
3. Watching programs in English (e.g., English movies, TV series, talk shows, etc.)	6/40
4. Listening to programs in English	4/26.7
5. Practicing English language tests	4/26.7
6. Communicating with native speakers	3/20
7. Learning English vocabulary (words, phrases and idioms, etc.)	3/20
8. Reciting English texts	2/13.3
9. Writing diaries in English	2/13.3

Meanwhile, the interviewees voiced their perceptions of their ideal L2 self in terms of language, culture, and career, as reported in Table 4. Linguistically speaking, the interviewees hoped to speak English fluently (13/86.7%), to speak English like native English speakers (9/60%), to be good at English writing (6/40%), and to think in English directly (6/40%). The following are some examples of their remarks: "I will speak English better and better in the future and will be able to communicate with professors and discuss academic topics fluently in English with them" (No. 12, 3rd-year), and "I expect to write confidently in English and be proficient at academic writing" (No. 3, 1st-year). In terms of culture, the interviewees expected themselves to understand more about English cultures (8/53.3%) and native English speakers' way of thinking (5/33.3%), to get along with people from different cultures (5/33.3%) and be more tolerant to different cultures (4/26.7%), and to expand their worldview (4/26.7%). In terms of career, most respondents expected to take careers directly related to English (7/46.7%) or those requiring (high) proficiency in English (7/46.7%). As reported by No. 11 from year 3, "I imagine myself communicating fluently and freely with interviewers in a job interview. I understand all the questions and make quick responses." "I imagine myself discussing with my professors on academic topics confidently and fluently" (No. 12, 3rd-year). To summarize, their idealized L2 self was generally a person who could use English well or even freely, understand English cultures and use English in their future careers.

Table 4.

Interviewees' Self-Reported Ideal L2 Self (N=15)

Aspect	Interviewees' self-reported ideal L2 self	Frequency/percentage [%]
Language	1. Speaking English fluently	13/86.7
	2. Speaking English like native English speakers	9/60
	3. Being good at English writing	6/40
	4. Thinking in English directly when using it	6/40
	5. Discussing academic topics fluently in English	4/26.7
	6. Understanding various types of materials written in English	3/20.0
	7. Speaking English beautifully	3/20.0
	8. Being good at academic English writing	2/13.3
	9. Being a highly proficient English user	2/13.3
Culture	1. Understanding more about English cultures	8/53.3
	2. Understanding native English speakers' way of thinking	5/33.3
	3. Getting along well with people from different cultures	5/33.3
	4. Being more tolerant to different cultures	4/26.7
	5. Expanding the worldview	4/26.7
Career	1. Having careers directly related to English (e.g., translators, interpreters, English professors and teachers)	7/46.7%
	2. Having careers requiring (high) proficiency in English (e.g.,)	6/40
	3. No specific ideas	4/26.7
	4. Having careers which don't require English proficiency	2/13.3

Table 5 summarizes the respondents' perceptions of their ought-to L2 self. As many as 46.7% of the interviewees reported that their parents played a significant role in motivating them to learn English. As No. 1 (1st-year) recalled, "my parents want me to learn English well because they think learning English is really meaningful." 40% of them confided that they studied English and chose to major in English to get admitted to their ideal university in China.

Concurrently, most interviewees reported enjoying English learning in general (11/73.3%), liking content courses (9/60%), and feeling dissatisfied with language courses (8/53.3%), as reported in Table 5. As No. 11 from year 3 remarked, "I'm quite involved in learning English because it gives me a sense of accomplishment"; and "I always enjoy learning English because it is interesting" (No. 6, 2nd-year). Even so, it was worth noting that junior students complained a lot about the courses offered by the Department of English, especially language courses, when asked about their attitudes towards specific English courses. They attributed this to three reasons: too simple content, unsystematic design of certain courses, and unpleasant classroom atmosphere.

Table 5.

Interviewees' Self-Reported Ought-to L2 Self and Learning Experience (N = 15)

Dimension	Self-reported ought-to L2 self and learning experience	Frequency/percentage [%]
ought-to L2 self	1. Studying English because my parents think it is good.	7/46.7
	2. Learning English in order not to be rejected by my ideal university.	6/40
	3. Learning English because my friends think I can learn it quite well.	3/20
L2 learning experience	1. Enjoying English learning.	11/73.3
	2. Enjoying content courses (e.g., linguistic courses).	9/60
	3. Being dissatisfied with language courses.	8/53.3
	4. Enjoying the classroom atmosphere.	3/20

Since many students were already (quite) proficient in English, most language courses available to them were too simple for them, as an interviewee commented, "I think the language courses for us English majors are too simple and sometimes I have a feeling that I am taking courses designed for non-English majors. To be honest, I am disappointed" (No. 5, 1st-year). The interviewees were not satisfied with the design of certain courses either, just as No. 6 from year 2 commented, "...Let me take writing courses as an example. We have four writing courses in a series. Of course, I expected this series to be systematically designed. To my surprise, there is quite much overlapping in the contents of these 4 courses." Some students complained that "there is not enough interaction between teachers and students in language classes, which is boring and makes me sleepy" (No. 4, 1st-year). As fewer language courses and more content courses were provided in senior years, students' negative comments on language courses decreased and more positive comments were remarked. For instance, No. 13 from year 3 said, "...Content courses like Sociolinguistics, Introduction to Linguistics, American Literature are so interesting. They are all good and I learn a lot from them."

Discussion

The present study revealed that the respondents were generally highly motivated to learn English, consistent with the findings in similar studies both in and outside Chinese EFL contexts (Allard & Landry, 2009; Alshahrani, 2016; Chen, 2015; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Noels, 2001). This was largely because

as English majors, they had clear goals about English learning and were more obliged to study English well to understand information documented in English, which in return helped enhance their English proficiency and made them more motivated to study the language. To improve their English proficiency, they adopted a number of strategies varying from accomplishing compulsory assignments to meeting course requirements, to reading English books and novels, similar to those reported in existing studies (Lu & Liu, 2015).

Meanwhile, this study showed that the students saw themselves as successful English users in the future. They had quite vivid images of themselves as successful L2 users in terms of language ability, culture, and career. The participants not only had a general idea of being proficient English users but had more specific expectations of their English ability, such as communicating with professors on academic topics fluently in English and speaking English as well as native speakers did. They also expected themselves to understand English cultures and English way of thinking. At the same time, most interviewees clearly stated that English would play an indispensable role in their future professional lives. They envisioned themselves having careers which required high proficiency in English, such as English teachers, professors, translators or business consultants in international companies. In summary, as found in Csizér and Kormos (2009), Alshahrani (2016) and Pawlak (2016a, 2016b), the respondents of the present study had a high vision of their L2 ideal self. This might be partly because as English majors, they had much more exposure and access to English and English-speaking people and thus integrated themselves more with English and the English culture than other EFL learners, as reported in Yu (2015).

In addition, most participants reported having positive appraisals of their general English learning experience, as found in similar ESL/EFL contexts (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Liu, 2010; Yu, 2015). The respondents also voiced factors that could affect their attitudes towards classroom learning, such as course content being simple and having inadequate interaction between the instructor and students. This indicates that it is necessary to design courses substantially and appropriately, plan lessons properly, and create a friendly and supportive classroom atmosphere (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). This also further confirms that students' in-class experience plays a significant role in their evaluation of L2 learning experience, thus affecting their L2 motivation.

In addition, the participants reported having a moderate view of their ought-to L2 self, similar to their peers in other Chinese EFL contexts (Liu, 2010; Yu, 2015). This might be largely because the respondents chose to study English well themselves and were less affected by people around them, indicating that personal interest and one's own ideal self play a more significant role in L2 motivation and SL/FL learning.

Lastly, although not a focus in the present research, the present study revealed that the 3rd-year students scored significantly higher in the L2MSS scales than their 1st-year peers, indicating that they had significantly more vivid and potent images of themselves as being successful English users than the latter. Interview remarks also revealed certain differences in L2 motivation self such as perceptions of future careers and L2 learning experience between students in different years of study. This might be probably due to the difference in their years of study: students become more concerned with the future when approaching graduation. Nevertheless, other factors such as personality and instructors might also play a role. Consequently, differences in L2MSS among students with different backgrounds are worth exploring and should be a focus for future research.

Conclusions and Implications

The present mixed-method study explored Chinese English majors' L2 motivational self within Dörnyei's (2009) L2MSS framework. The main findings were:

1. the participants were quite motivated to learn English and exploited a variety of learning strategies to improve their English proficiency;
2. they had (fairly) high expectations of their ideal L2 self: they generally envisioned themselves as successful English users in terms of language ability, culture and career;
3. they generally had positive attitudes towards their English learning experience;
4. they had moderate expectations of their ought-to L2 self; and
5. the 3rd-year students had significantly higher expectations of their ideal L2 self than their 1st-year counterparts. The interviewees in different years of study also expressed different opinions about their L2 motivational self, as shown by their remarks previously presented, though the difference was not detailed in the present paper.

The importance of motivation in language learning has already been confirmed by a plethora of studies (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012; Liu, 2010; Alshahrani, 2016). Hence, it has always been an important issue to enhance students' motivation to study the target language. Various strategies can be implemented by course instructors to increase students' SL/FL motivation, such as encouraging positive self-reflection and evaluation, creating a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, providing motivational feedback, and setting realistic and achievable goals, as discussed in the current

literature (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012) and reported by the participants in the present research. Meanwhile, it is important to understand students' needs, design courses accordingly and systematically, substantiate course content, and conduct classroom instruction constructively and friendly. This can be done by organizing formal and informal seminars and talks between teachers and students to design course syllabi and lesson plans of high quality. This will not only help students learn more but also increase their positive attitudes towards learning of the target language and their satisfaction with their learning experience, ultimately enhancing their motivation to study the language, as reported by the interviewees in the present study and discussed in Dörnyei (2009). Moreover, the present study showed that students in senior years had higher expectations of their ideal L2 self than those in junior years. Therefore, it might be helpful to guide students to make subtle adjustments to their desired selves to make different aspects of their ideal L2 self more harmonious with each other. For example, career guidance activities where graduates can share their views on the role of English in their future career can be held. Through such activities, students can strengthen the link between different aspects of their ideal L2 self, thus not only being highly motivated to learn English but also taking more specific strategies to operationalize their vision.

Despite these interesting findings, some limitations existed in this study due to various constraints. The main limitation was that the present study only examined the participants' L2 motivational self while ignoring other aspects of L2 motivation such as integrative, instrumental motivation and international posture. A more comprehensive examination of L2 motivation would have helped better understand the participants' English learning motivation and reveal interrelationships between L2 motivation components, which should be done in future research. Moreover, though the present study revealed certain differences in the measured L2MSSQ scales, the differences were not detailed (systematically). Future research can focus on this to reveal a fuller picture of SL/FL motivation in learners of various backgrounds. Finally, since L2MSS involves various aspects of SL/FL learning, it offers a new window for research on FL/SL motivation. Coupled with the complex and dynamic nature of SL/FL motivation (Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei, 2014), this issue deserves various continuous research with learners of diverse backgrounds.

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Appendix

The L2 Motivational Self System Questionnaire (LMSSQ)

Directions: This part has 25 items (1–25), please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by simply circling a number from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree)

LMSSQ items	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I'm working hard at learning English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I spend lots of time and energy studying English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I think that I am doing my best to learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I can overcome the difficulties and remove interferences when I learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. If my teacher would give the class an optional assignment, I would certainly volunteer to do it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals.	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. The things I want to do in the future require me to use English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. I can imagine a situation where I am speaking English with foreigners.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I can imagine myself writing English e-mails frequently.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I always imagine myself communicating in Chinese as if I were a native speaker of Chinese.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. I study English because close friends of mine think it is important.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. If I fail to learn English, I'll let other people down.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. Studying English is important to me in order to gain the approval of my peers/ teachers/ family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. I consider learning English important because the people I respect think that I should do it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. Learning English is necessary because people surrounding me expect me to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. I like the atmosphere of my English classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. I find learning English really interesting.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23. I always look forward to English classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24. Learning English is one of the most important aspects of my life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. I really enjoy learning English.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Meihua Liu

Eine Studie zur Ego-Motivation beim Erwerb einer Zweitsprache bei chinesischen Studierenden der englischen Philologie

Zusammenfassung

Als eine bedeutende affektive Variable hat die Motivation immer die Aufmerksamkeit der Forscher des Lernprozesses einer Zweit-/Fremdsprache (SL/FL) auf sich gezogen und spielt dabei eine Schlüsselrolle, was in den bisherigen Untersuchungen nachgewiesen wurde. Angesichts der Komplexität und Dynamik verdient die Motivation dennoch Aufmerksamkeit. Angeregt durch das vor kurzem von Dörnyei (2005, 2009) vorgeschlagene „Modell der motivierenden Persönlichkeit der Zweitsprache“ untersucht diese Studie das „motivierende Ego“ von chinesischen Studierenden der englischen Philologie, indem die gemischten Forschungsansätze angewendet werden. 101 Studierende der renommierten Peking-Universität nahmen an der Umfrage teil, und 15 davon beteiligten sich auch am Interview. Die Analyse der gesammelten Informationen ergab Folgendes: 1) die Probanden waren im Allgemeinen

zum Lernen hoch motiviert, hatten ihre deutlich herauskristallisierte Vision von sich selbst als künftig kompetente Verwender des Englischen, schätzten ihre bisherigen Erfahrungen mit dem Sprachenlernen positiv ein und bewerteten ziemlich zuverlässig die Mängel ihres eigenen „zweitsprachlichen Ichs“; 2) Studierende der letzten Jahre erklärten einen deutlich höheren Sprachstandard als ihre gewünschte „zweitsprachliche Identität“ und stellten eine positivere Wahrnehmung ihrer eigenen sprachlichen Erfahrung dar. Diese Schlussfolgerungen ermöglichen es, die Diskussion über pädagogische Implikationen zu entwickeln und die Richtungen für weitere Studien zu umreißen.

Schlüsselwörter: motivierende L2-Persönlichkeit, Motivation zum Erlernen einer Zweitsprache, ‚Ideales Ich‘, Sprachlernziele, Spracherfahrung