

## *Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self: A Study in the Thai Context*

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### **Abstract**

The study of motivation has been one of main interesting areas in second language teaching and learning. The integrative and instrumental motivation proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) has been challenged by the rise of global English and the changing purposes of English language teaching, learning, and using worldwide. In this study, the new theory of L2 Motivational Self System (Dornyei, 2005) has been used as the framework. The objectives of the study were to: 1) explore how students view themselves as L2 users; and 2) explore what students believe they ought to meet expectations. The participants consisted of 28 undergraduate students from an international university in Thailand. The instruments used in this study were questionnaires and student's vision form. Questionnaire data was analyzed by using descriptive analysis in terms of frequencies and percentages. Student's vision form data was analyzed by content analysis. The findings show that: 1) students view themselves as L2 users who have to use English in their work and daily life in the future; 2) students perceive that they ought to learn English in order to meet social and family expectations. This indicates that the ideal L2 self is influenced by future careers, whereas the ought-to L2 self is strongly influenced by society, parents, and peers. Finally, it is suggested that the sense of L2 self and ought-to L2 self should be promoted in English language classrooms. Language teachers should encourage and guide students to construct their language vision.

Keywords: L2 motivational self system, L2 vision, ideal L2 self, ought to L2 self

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## **Introduction**

The study of motivation has been explored in second language learning and teaching for a period of time. The research on motivational study can be dated back to 1972 when Gardner and Lambert proposed the two motivational orientations that affected language learning process and success: integrative and instrumental orientations. Integrative motivational orientation can be described as learners who wished to integrate themselves into the culture or the community of the second language group and become involved in social interaction in that group (Brown, 2007) whereas instrumental orientation can be described as those who possess some certain degree of motivation and are willing to learn L2. They tend to have ability to develop and achieve L2 proficiency due to a better job, higher salary, job promotion (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2011).

Over the past four decades the rise of global English and lingua franca has gradually led to a big move towards the theory of motivation. The spread of English has called for a reconsideration of English users' cultural and identities around the globe. Graddol (2007) points out the issue of "English as a foreign language" whether it may mean to the end of the notion. The world is globalized and so does English. Linked to the study of motivation, it is more difficult to relate the concept of Gardner and Lambert into reality where English has been widely used as a means for communication. On the other words, English is used by speakers who have diverse regional, social, and educational backgrounds (Meierkord, 2012). If English is used for a variety of purposes by speakers with diverse backgrounds, it is noteworthy to explore whether integrative and instrumental orientations are still authentic and applicable.

Challenged by the current phenomena, the L2 Motivational Self System firstly initiated by Dornyei (2005) has been viewed as a new authentic and practical theory in English language classrooms particularly in English as a lingua franca and international contexts. The theory has been shifted from integrative and instrumental orientations to three main concepts of motivation: ideal L2 selves, ought-to L2 selves, and L2 learning experience. Ideal L2 selves is a powerful motivator to learn the L2, ought-to L2 selves can be described when one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes, and L2 learning experience can be related to the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success, and the impact of the teacher (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009).

In this study, I will report on a study I conducted to explore how students view themselves as L2 users and what students believe they ought to possess to meet expectations.

## **Literature Review**

### **The L2 Motivational Self System**

Dornyei (2005) lists the category of this motivational approach to conceptualizing second language learning motivation within a "self" framework (Dornyei, 2009, in Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009). This is called the L2 Motivational Self System. The system emerged after a growing concern with the concepts of integrative orientation that reflects a desire to integrate into L2 community. In the past decade, this orientation seemed powerful in a way that learners or users acquired English as a means to integrate themselves into the English

speakers' cultures. However, a drastic change in the spread of English are currently interconnected with non-native and native speakers of English around the globe. The motivation to learn or use English should instead lies in the contexts of learning and using English in the globalized world (Ushioda, 2013). This could be explained that motivational study should be focused on real persons who possess own unique feelings, history, and backgrounds.

The L2 motivational self system consists of three components. As earlier stated, they are Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience. The approach has been validated by a number of previous studies (Taguchi, Magid, and Papi, 2009, Lamb, 2007, Al-Shehri, 2009). Taguchi, Magid, and Papi conducted a comparative motivational study of learners of English in Japan, China, and Iran. The findings showed that there was a positive correlation between the ideal L2 self and integrativeness in all three groups. However, learners' intended efforts could be explained by the ideal L2 self rather than integrative orientation. Lamb (2007) also conducted a case study research with two learners in Indonesia. It was found that the ideal and ought L2 selves could be effective factors in language learning motivation. The motivational study was also conducted by Al-Shehri (2009) who used Saudi students as the research participants. It was interesting to find that the ideal language self was a major motivational factor.

### **The age of globalization and the role of English as a global language**

It is increasingly apparent that English has become an international language and its demand for a medium of communication is enormous. The world has become a global village and globalization has brought with it quite radical changes to how political and other communities function (Held and McGrew, 2001, cited in Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 82) The interesting issues related to its role are that globalization has caused communication relations, transactions, and networks to become more extensive and cut across conventional communal boundaries (Seidlhofer, 2011). Due to the fact that English has been spreading worldwide, a great number of international institutions where English has been used as a medium of communication or instruction has been established. In these kinds of "international English" communication settings, the notion of the previous motivational theory by Gardner and Lambert tends to be more difficult to conceptualize. It is more difficult to assume when one wants to learn English because he or she wants to integrate into the native speaker's culture. Moreover, the globalization has led to an increase in the degree of diversity in terms of a large number of non-native speakers of English.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do students view themselves as L2 learners?
2. What do students believe they ought to possess to meet expectations?

## Research Methodology

The participants consisted of 28 undergraduate Thai students from Faculty of Law, Assumption University, Thailand. Regarding their range of age, they were between 19-23 years old. All of them enrolled the foundation course “English III” in semester 2, 2015 (January-May, 2016). The instruments used in this study were 5-point likert scale questionnaire and learners’ visions form. The questionnaires were adapted from Taguchi, Magid, and Papi, (2009) whereas the learner’s vision form was adapted from Dornyei and Kubanyiova (2014). Questionnaire data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis in terms of frequencies and percentages. Learners’ vision form data were analyzed by content analysis. In this study, the establishment of standards setting determined and proposed by Srisa-ard (2002) was used. They are as follows:

Mean	Degree of Motivation
4.51-5.00	Very high
3.51-4.50	High
2.51-3.50	Average
1.51-2.50	Low
1.00-1.50	Very low

As stated earlier, the 5-Likert scale questionnaire consisted of 5 scales, namely “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “not sure”, “agree”, and “strongly agree” degree of motivation; therefore, data were interpreted as follows:

Mean	Degree of Attitudes
4.51-5.00	Very positive
3.51-4.50	Positive
2.51-3.50	Average
1.51-2.50	Negative
1.00-1.50	Very negative

## Findings

### Research question 1: How do students view themselves as L2 learners?

The five-point Likert Scale 15-item data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics to find the mean (M) score and standard deviation (SD). The data analysis shows that the mean is 4.33 and SD is 0.73. This means that students’ degree of motivation is positive.

**Table 1: Questionnaire to measure motivation and ideal L2 self (n=28)**

Statements	Mean	SD
1. I imagine myself who will live abroad and have a discussion in English.	4.30	.86
2. I imagine myself who will live abroad and use English effectively for communicating with local people.	4.22	.84
3. I imagine I can speak English with non-Thai people in the future.	4.41	.88
4. I imagine I can speak English with international friends in the future.	4.41	.88

5. I imagine I will be someone who can speak English.	4.56	.97
6. I imagine I can speak English as if I were a native speaker of English.	3.85	1.02
7. Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.	4.56	1.15
8. I imagine I can do anything that requires me to use English.	4.85	1.02
9. I imagine myself who can study in a university where English is used as a medium of communication.	4.30	1.03
10. I imagine myself who can write English correspondence fluently.	3.93	1.14
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.33</b>	<b>.73</b>

\*\*Adapted from Taguchi, Magid, and Papi, (2009)

According to Table 1, the mean is 4.33 (SD = 0.73). This means that students' degree of motivation is positive. Among the statements, item 8: *I imagine I can do anything that requires me to use English* gains the highest mean (M = 4.85, SD = 1.02), while item 5: *I imagine I will be someone who can speak English* and item 7: *Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English* gain the second highest (M = 4.56, SD = .97, 1.15). The lowest mean falls to item 6: *I imagine I can speak English as if I were a native speaker of English* (M = 3.85, SD = 1.02).

### Learner's Vision Findings

The learner's vision form consists of two parts: personal information and 9 short answer questions. Data from the vision form provides insights into how students view themselves as L2 users. The data are classified into themes and quantified to gain a number of each theme. Data are shown in the tables below.

**Table 2: Your future jobs**

Future Jobs	Frequency
Judge	14
Lawyer	10
Business-related	4

**Table 3: Your goals for future jobs**

Goals for Future Jobs	Frequency
Stable/successful career	13
Money-oriented career	8
Self- development career	7

**Table 4: Your goals for lifestyle**

Goals for Lifestyle	Frequency
Family-oriented goals	15
Stable financial goals	9
Dream/wish fulfillment goals	2

**Table 5: Goals for learning English**

<b>Goals for Learning English</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Communication (Verbal/written proficiency)	18
Personal advantages	8
Career aspects	2

**Table 6: Your L2 positive role model**

<b>L2 positive role model</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Public figures	14
Family members	8
Friends	6

**Table 7: How you envision yourselves in English in the future**

<b>Envision in English</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Better advantage in career	18
Use English to communicate	9
Native like proficiency	1

**Table 8: Your L2 negative role model**

<b>L2 Negative role model</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
One of the political leaders of Thailand	13
Family members and friends	8
Other public figures(both Thai and native speakers)	7

**Table 9: To be recognized in English use by others in the future**

<b>To be recognized in English use</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Native speakers of English	9
Non-native speakers of English	19

**Table 10: Confidence towards using English**

<b>Confidence towards using English</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
With confidence	21
Without confidence	7

## Research question 2: What do students believe they ought to possess to meet expectations?

The results of the five-point Likert Scale 15-item data were analyzed by descriptive statistics to find the mean (M) score and standard deviation (SD). The data analysis shows that the mean is 3.79 and SD is 0.93. This means that strength of the vision of the ought-to L2self is positive.

**Table 11: Questionnaire to measure strength of the vision of the ought-to L2 self (n=28)**

Statements	Mean	SD
1. I study English because my close friends think it is important.	2.93	1.54
2. If I do not study English, my parents will be disappointed with me.	2.81	1.30
3. Learning English is necessary because I am expected to learn by people surrounding.	3.56	1.39
4. I must study English because my parents believe that I will be an educated person.	3.93	1.23
5. I have to learn English because the people I respect think that I should learn English.	3.78	1.42
6. I want to learn English in order to be accepted by my peers/teachers/family.	4.59	.97
7. I will get negative impact on my life if I don't study English.	4.19	1.46
8. An educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.	4.85	.86
9. People will respect me more if I have knowledge of English.	4.22	1.25
10. I will let other people down if I fail in English.	3.07	1.35
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>.93</b>

According to Table 2, the mean is 3.79 (SD = 0.93). This means that students' strength of the vision of the ought-to L2 self is positive. Among the statements, item 8: *An educated person is supposed to be able to speak English* gains the highest mean (M = 4.85, SD = 0.86), while item 6: *I want to learn English in order to be accepted by my peers/teachers/family* (M = 4.59, SD = 0.97). The lowest mean falls to item 2: *If I do not study English, my parents will be disappointed with me* (M = 2.81, SD = 1.30).

## Discussion

### Ideal L2 Self

The findings show that the degree of students' motivation on ideal L2 self is positive. If we examine the specific items that gains the highest and second highest means on ideal L2 self (*The things I want to do in the future require me to use English, I imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English, Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English.*), it is likely to see realistic desired students' future selves. The results provide support for Dornyei's (2005) theory of the Motivational Self System. Regarding the findings gained from learner's vision form, the main goal of learning English is to be competent in both written and spoken language. This could be explained that studying English has been

useful and related to students' ideal L2 self. Data gained from students' short answers are shown below.

### **Your goals for learning English**

*I want to speak and write more fluently and effectively.*

*I want to work with an international company.*

*I want to write very well.*

*I want to communicate with other people.*

*I can use English in my job.*

*I can speak English professionally.*

*I can use English in my job.*

Along the same lines, when students envision themselves in English use in the future, the data strongly support why learning English tends to be advantageous to them. Students perceive the importance of English in terms of career-related and communicative purposes. The data gained from students' learner vision from are shown below.

### **How you envision yourselves in English in the future**

- *Use English fluently for working and travelling*
- *Become a lawyer in an international company*
- *Work with foreigners*
- *A professional lawyer who can use English effectively*
- *Own a law firm and have customers who are foreigners*

However, it should be noted that 19 out of 28 students would like others to recognize them in English use as a non-native speaker of English. Most of them feel very proud to be Thai who can use English as native speakers. The following answers are shown below.

*- It is so proud if I can speak like native speakers of English.*

*- I am Thai so I think this is different from others. People will know where I come from.*

*- I think I have to use English well but I don't have to speak like native speakers. I am Thai so I think it is fine just to be able to communicate in English.*

*-I do not want to be a native speaker of English but I want to communicate with others and they can understand me. That is fantastic for me.*

*-Because I have some accents that we cannot sound like native speaker. The important thing is we can use English to communicate with foreigners.*

This confirms the aforementioned findings of students' ideal L2 self. Learning English tends to be advantageous to students' future careers and communication rather than be native-like. If we take a look closely into students' L 2 positive role model, it is notable to find that 14 out of 28 students perceive that public figures (both Thai and non-Thai) are their L2 positive role model. Public figures given by students are the King Bhumipol of Thailand, the King Jigme of Bhutan, the former Prime Minister of Thailand (Mr.Abhisit Vejjachiva), actors or



actresses, Thai model, English teachers at Assumption University, Thai English tutor. On the contrary, 13 out of 28 students agree that one of the political leaders of Thailand is an L2 negative role model in English use. This could be explained that students are fully aware of the relationship between English competency and career advancement.

The overall findings indicate that students tend to have future self-images related to future careers. These future self-images can be seen as a powerful motivator to learn English. Students agree that English is a tool to lead to possible successful career. In their views, English is a channel for stable and successful future careers.

### **Ought-to L2 Self**

The findings show that the degree of students' motivation on ought-to L2 self is positive. The highest mean falls to item 8: *An educated person is supposed to be able to speak English*. The finding indicates that English could be seen as a marker of identity: the identity of educated person. English is playing a more important role for those who seek a stable or successful future career. Students believe this is one of the attributes to possess to meet their future expectations. When linked the finding with the spread of global English, Ushioda (2013) agrees that it is more difficult to explain people's motivation for learning English in terms of an interest in the target languages culture and community. As a matter of fact, English user may be integral to how they wish to see themselves or sense of self. When we take a look at the second and the third highest mean items, it goes to item 6: *I want to learn English in order to be accepted by my peers/teachers/family* and item 3: *Learning English is necessary because I am expected to learn by people surrounding*. The findings are associated with the earlier finding (item 8) in a way that social or peer expectation has influenced and shaped students' belief and perception. The highest mean item should be supported by the lowest mean item which falls to no.2: *If I do not study English, my parents will be disappointed with me*. This reflects a long-standing cultural belief of Thai people who tend to value people by their education. The finding also provides support for the motivational study conducted by Tagichi, Magid, and Papi (2009) in Japan, China, and Iran. In this study, it is found that many Iranian parents tend to have hope on their children. They believe that if their children will be successful, that will be a sign of their own success as well. Regarding English, they believe that it is necessary to know English in order to advance in many careers in Iran. In addition to the corroboration from the previous research finding, the finding from ought-to L2self questionnaire corroborates the learner's vision findings. It is found that the majority of students tend to pursue their family-oriented goals. Family socialization has been strongly tied to students' values and beliefs.

### **Summary of the Main Findings**

As we have seen, the findings indicate that the concept of students' ideal L2self is positive. Students envision what they want to do and how they can do their careers in the future. English has played a vital role in students' future life dimensions such as career aspects, personal advantages (travelling, communication, self-development), and financial stability. English is perceived as a powerful tool to help reinforce their future careers and lifestyles. Since English is a means for communication in the globalized world, the majority of students

well perceive that they want to be competent at communication, not as a native speaker of English.

In the case of ought-to L2 self, we found that the concept of students' ought-to L2 self is also positive. Students learn English in order to fulfill their families' expectations. Peers, neighbors, and bosses also perceive those who are competent in English as an educated person who can access to new information resources and introduce innovation. When a person can meet these expectations and requirements, they tend to be perceived as an educated and successful person. It is also perceived that an educated person tends to be financially stable.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of the study are useful to both language teachers and language learners. The following implications are addressed below.

1. Language learners should be strongly encouraged to speak as themselves (Ushioda, 2011). Language teachers should design classroom materials to invoke students to express their own interests and identities. Teachers should allow students to share their views of what and how they want to do and use English as a means to do what they want.
2. Language teachers should be aware that linguistic knowledge taught in language classroom should not be adequate. Students should be taught or mentored to have language vision. Then the language vision can be strengthened and transformed into action. For example, L2 positive role model people such as public figures, friends, and successful language learners should be invited to give a motivational speech.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

1. It is recommended that a broader sample of students in different levels and majors should be investigated. This study is a small-scale research; therefore, different studies using the same methodology should be further conducted.
2. It is recommended that Thai and non-Thai students' degree of motivation should be explored. This could be useful for teachers to design appropriate and authentic classroom materials and curriculum.
3. It is recommended that a correlational study between students' degree of motivation and their learning outcomes should be explored.

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