

Possible L2 Selves: A Case Study in a Thai Context

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Abstract

This qualitative case study aims to examine the factors affecting the English language scores in a communications course and possible L2 selves of non-English major students. The possible L2 selves include an ideal L2 self, ought-to self, motivational intensity, English learning experience, and linguistic self-confidence. The participants were selected based on their midterm scores in an English communications course. They were 58 students from Accounting, Thai Studies, Chemistry and, Bio-Technology (aged from 19-21). Another group was composed of weaker learners who did not pass their mid-term examination. They consisted of 32 students from the Business Computer and General Management majors (aged from 19-21). In data collection, the Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data from questionnaires and do multiple linear regression. The findings showed that motivational intensity (.51) and English learning experience (.41) positively affected the test scores of both groups in this communications course. However, there were no significant correlations.

Keywords: Possible L2 selves, Motivation, L2 learning

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Introduction and rational of the study

Language learning and teaching in classroom management is easier when students are motivated and have higher abilities to learn. It has been claimed that motivation is one of the most important factors enhancing student L2 learning. Krashen (1987) stated that students who have high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image and a low anxiety level, can succeed in L2 learning. It is important that instructors match student activities with their needs and help them understand the importance of their performance (Biggs and Moore, 1993). This will help students to learn things effectively and actively. Dornyei (2005) found that students would like to attain their possible selves. The possible self is one's imagery of one's self in the future including ideas, concepts, feelings, occupations, aims and ambitions. With this, students can develop high energy to become what they want.

There are several related studies about motivation. However, these are studies with research gaps. Age may be a positive factor in second language motivation among young people. Azarnoosh (2014) found that students' ideal L2 self gave them more motivation in English language learning. Research has shown that the ideal L2 self affects test scores. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) observed that using motivational strategies affected teacher and student behaviors at a secondary school level. They found that there was no difference between highly and poorly motivated groups in terms of their ideal second language (L2) selves. Motivation is not a predictor of success in language learning. Additionally, Harmer (1998) found that young adult learners usually worry about language learning. Furthermore, a successful or an unsuccessful experience outside of the classroom can impact language learning. Adult learners have more attention and self-control than teenagers in their learning. This may support their success. However, younger learners may not worry about losing face if they speak and people laugh.

Yao and Crosthwaite (2017) examined the English learning motivation for an ideal L2 self and possible ought-to self in higher education, comparing undergraduate and post graduate English language students. Findings showed that these students had clearer concepts in terms of their ideal L2 self and ought- to self. Prapunta (2016) analyzed data from Thai EFL learners' ideal L2 selves and their learning experiences. These students reported positive attitudes about learning English in classes taught by foreign teachers and out-of-class (trips to ASEAN countries, online chatting with native speakers). They wanted to communicate fluently with foreigners in the future. The current study involved students who were not English majors and it may produce different results.

Wongthong and Patanasorn (2017) proposed classroom activities that support self-image in English learning to promote motivation. The participants in this study were English language majors. This involved activities for five weeks. They proposed in-class activities such as a role model's talk (VDO), an inspirational video, an animation about boys who liked and disliked learning English, creation of posters giving motivations for learning English, and talks in class. These findings showed that the motivation of the experimental group was higher than the control group. The learners had positive attitudes about the activities.

The above studies have several research gaps. Some examined younger students or ones with prior experience learning English or were English language majors. Alternatively, the participants in the current study had various levels of education. However, they had the same background in learning English since they just finished their secondary school, even though they were now in different faculties. Motivated and unmotivated students were allowed to express their possible L2 selves. They were non-English language majors at Udon Thani Rajabhat University, enrolled in a basic English course, English for Communications. Their separation into groups was on the basis of their mid-term exam grades. Moreover, this study aimed to identify the factors that affect English learning proficiency and possible L2 selves.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study is to evaluate factors affecting the English language test scores in an English for Communications course and possible L2 selves of non-English major students.

Research question

What affects the possible L2 selves of advanced and poor English language learners?

Literature Review

Motivation in language learning

There have been numerous research studies of motivation in language learning, where psychologists tried to study and define second language learning.

Dornyei (2009) described motivation as an essential concept guiding how people react and think what they do. Motivation in language learning is a reason for success and failure in learning. In terms of L2 learning, it is a force that can be seen at a primary state of motivation until achieving long-term goals or becoming uninterested in learning, depending on how motivation is preserved and individual differences.

Williams and Burden (1997) claimed that motivation is most effective when students want to learn. It refers to stimulation of interest and desires to achieve a particular goal. It will produce various actions depending on the situations and other factors. Individual differences affect one's actions (Skehan, 1989; Geddes & Sturtridge, 1982; Dornyei, 2005) based on various social norms, context and culture.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) offered two kinds of motivational orientation in language learning, an integrative and instrumental orientation. According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2011), an integrative goal is when learners want to study a language with a particular interest in people or culture. An instrumental goal is when learners study a language with practical objectives in mind.

Alternatively, Dornyei (2009) disagreed with Gardner and Lambert (1972). He claimed that integrative and instrumental orientations are more than the definitions offered by language teachers and researchers. He indicated that it is very hard to

explain and use these concepts in the multilingual community and in second language learning. He formulated Gardner's integrative orientation with *future self-guides*.

Gardner's (1985) social educational model includes a learner's cultural beliefs, attitudes towards particular learning situations, their integrativeness and motivation. Motivation includes both integrative and instrumental orientations. Alternatively, Dornyei (1988) argued that motivation can be more detailed than the two terms in Gardner's model. Dornyei suggested the new theory. It was derived by considering the future imagery and imagined-identity (Wenger, 1998) and it can be related to an imagined L2 community. The concept of imagined-identity is further separated into three dimensions of L2 motivational self system: the ideal self, the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience.

Possible L2 Selves and Ideal Self

There is an idea in motivational theory that links to possible L2 selves. Possible L2 selves is an idea derived by Markus and Nurius (1986). They studied the concept of possible selves (PSs). The definition of this is a future-oriented and individualized image of what learners would like to become and their fears. It links the thinking process and motivation. This thought process includes expectations, fears, and a goal. Dornyei (2009) explained that possible L2 selves is the idea that people imagine what they are and what they could become. That image causes their behaviors.

Ideal L2 Self

There have been numerous studies about the ideal self. Cooley (1964) explained that an ideal self occurs in learners' minds when they imagine how to become like other people they see. Higgins (1987) indicated that an ideal self is what other people would like you to become. It represents someone else's expectations, ambition or dreams for a particular person.

Ought-to Self

The ought-to self is what other people believe you will probably become (Higgins, 1987). The ought-to self is the idea that learners take actions to avoid possible negative outcomes. They avoid failure to achieve their goals. Other people exert pressure and impose expectations upon them.

L2 Learning Experience

Dornyei (2005; 2009) observed that L2 learning experiences are related to one's learning environment and experience. It includes frequency of exposure, opportunities for repetition and practice.

Linguistic Self-confidence

L2 learners need to master the use of linguistic affordance to promote the interests of the self. Clement et al. (1994) suggested that the linguistic self-confidence is an important factor impacting student attitudes and desires. Linguistic self-confidence can be further divided *situation specific self-confidence* and *L2 self-confidence*.

- Situation specific self-confidence refers to the feeling that one has the ability to interact with others efficiently.
- L2 self-confidence focuses on one's anxiety and self-perception. Students are confident in their linguistic knowledge. They have low anxiety and their perception of L2 competence is developed.

Motivational Intensity

Motivation makes L2 learners want to learn. Students ask their teacher if they are confused. They make their own decisions to extend their knowledge and understanding with reflection upon their behaviors to achieve their goals.

English for Communications Course

The course, English for Communications, is a compulsory class for students at Udon Thani Rajabhat University (UDRU). The objectives of the course focus on interactive skills, listening and speaking. It is comprised of six units. They are Greetings and Introductions, Describing Places, Things, and People, Asking For and Giving Directions, Shopping, Making an Appointment, and Expressing Feelings, Opinions and Making Suggestions.

Methodology

The participants

The researcher used a purposive sampling method for sample selection among a population of Udon Thani Rajabhat University (UDRU) students who did not major in English language. They were enrolled in an English for Communications course in the first semester of the 2017 academic year. There were two groups of students in this study. They were:

1. Advanced proficiency English learners: These were 58 students who majored in Chemistry, Biotechnology, Accounting, and Thai Studies. They were 19-21 years old and passed their mid-term examination. Their average score was 48 points.

2. Low proficiency English learners: This group consisted of 32 students, also 19-21 year old, from other departments, business computer and general management. They did not pass their mid-term examination. Their average score was 15 points.

The cut-off between the groups was 40 points.

Data Collection

This study used questionnaires employing a Likert scale. The researcher adopted the questionnaire of Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012). It was adapted from Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008).

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data from questionnaires using multiple linear regressions.

Research Procedures and Time Frame for the Research

The researcher separated the study into two parts. The first part illustrates the procedures and timeframe. The second part is shows the expected framework.

Procedures	Time
Stage 1: Search and study more about motivation: Possible L2 selves	1 st – 14 th October 2017
Stage 2: The questionnaire was designed.	15 th – 31 th October 2017
Stage 3: The questionnaire was piloted and revised. Then, the researcher translated it from English to Thai. Translating from Thai to English was done by two English teachers: one from Udon Thani Rajabhat University and the other from Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat of Sakonakorn campus.	15 th – 31 th October 2017
Stage 4: The questionnaires was used as a research instrument to collect data.	1 st November – 14 th November 2017
Stage 5: The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS (multiple linear regression).	15 th November – 30 th November 2017

Table 1: Procedures and Timeframe

The findings and results

The research question required examination of factors affecting the test scores of non-English major students in an English Communications course and their possible L2 selves. There are seven tables the show the mean values for each questionnaire item of the two groups. The first to the fifth table shows the means of possible L2 selves that measure the ideal self, ought-to self, motivational intensity, English learning experience, and linguistic self-confidence, respectively. The sixth table compares the means of the two groups. The last table shows the results of multiple linear regressions.

Ideal self	High Proficient Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficient Group Mean (SD)
I suppose that I will live abroad and use English effectively for communicating with the natives.	3.56(.84)	3.24(.70)
I suppose that I will speak English as if I'm an English native.	3.31(.95)	2.93(.72)
I suppose that I will speak English to my foreign friends or my colleagues.	3.58(.93)	3.17(.58)
Whenever I think of the future career, I suppose that I will use English.	4.00(.82)	3.51(.81)*
I suppose that I will study in a university where all courses are taught in English.	3.78(.86)	3.12(.84)
I suppose that I will I write the e-mails fluently	3.47(1.11)	3.00(.67)

in English.		
I suppose that I will become known as a fluent English speaker.	3.39(.93)	3.10(.89)
I suppose that I will live and get to know friends in modern society using English.	4.06(.82)*	3.56(1.0)*

Table 2: The ideal self

In Table 2, the ideal self refers to what the respondent would like to become. The findings showed that the two groups agreed about living and getting to know friends in modern society using English. These items had the highest mean scores (high 4.06(.82) and low 3.56(1.0)). Moreover, members of both groups thought that they will speak English in their future careers (high 4.00(.82) and low 3.51(.81)).

Ought-to self	High Proficient Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficient Group Mean (SD)
If I fail in studying English, I will disappoint others.	3.03(1.1)	2.90(.97)
I study English because my close friends think it's important.	1.81(.92)*	2.66(.76)
Studying English is important for me since other people will admire me more if I have English knowledge.	3.50(1.1)	3.29(.90)
I rely on the importance of studying English because a person whom I respect thinks I should study English.	3.00(1.33)	3.63(.82)*
I find that studying English is important to me for to prove myself to my friends, teachers, and family.	3.72(1.23)*	3.46(.77)
Studying English is important because people around me anticipate that I will study it.	3.64(1.12)	3.39(1.20)
I should study English or other languages or people will think negatively about me.	2.42(1.31)	2.66(.79)
I will study English or other languages at which people think I'm poor.	2.31(1.36)	3.15(.93)*

Table 3: Ought-to self

The ought-to self is the idea that learners take actions to avoid possible negative outcomes. They avoid failure to achieve a goal. Table 3 shows that the low proficiency students were more motivated by the ought-to self than the other group. For example, the item, the low proficiency group responded to "I am studying English because a person to whom I respect thinks I should" with a score of 3.63(.82) vs. 3.00(1.33) for the high proficiency group. Another item with higher scores for the low proficient group was for the item, "I will study English or other languages at which people think I'm poor" with a score of 3,15(.93) vs. 2.31(1.36).

English Learning Experience	High Proficient Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficient Group Mean (SD)
Do you like the atmosphere in your English class?	3.61(.96)	3.44(.74)
Do you really enjoy studying English?	3.86(.99)	3.71(.75)
Do you think time to study English runs faster than usual?	3.58(1.02)*	2.98(.88)
Do you always look forward to studying English?	3.56(.87)	3.17(.77)
Do you need to have the additional English hour at the university?	3.61(1.02)	2.83(.99)
Do you think studying English is really interesting?	4.14(.99)*	3.88(.87)

Table 4: English learning experiences

In Table 4, English learning experience is related to the learning environment and experience. It includes frequency of exposure, opportunities for repetition practice. The results showed that the highly proficient students had higher scores than the low proficiency group in the item, “English is really interesting” 4.14(.99). They also thought that their English class runs faster than usual 3.58(1.02).

Linguistic self-confidence	High Proficiency Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficiency Group Mean (SD)
I find that my English knowledge has developed this semester.	3.39(.87)	3.80(.67)
I often offer to make presentations in the English class.	2.69(.85)	2.73(.86)
I often find myself successful in studying English this semester.	3.14(.96)	3.41(.89)
I’m sure that I will be able to speak English.	4.06(1.10)*	3.83(.80)
I always understand what I have to do and how to do it when studying English in this semester.	3.50(.91)	3.54(.67)
I think my English is considered at a good level this semester.	3.19(.82)	3.39(.80)
I think I will get a satisfactory grade in English this semester.	3.25(1.05)	3.51(.89)

Table 5: Linguistic self confidence

L2 learners need to master linguistic affordance to promote the interests of the self. According to Table 5, the highly proficient group hoped that they will be able to speak English in the future 4.06(1.10). However, the low proficiency group also showed a similar result, 3.83(.80).

Motivational intensity	High Proficient Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficient Group Mean (SD)
When I was in English class, I offered to answer as many questions as I could.	3.00(.67)	3.05(.92)
If English at the university level is not difficult, I need to develop my everyday-life English, such as watching English movies, reading English textbooks and newspaper, trying to speak English whenever it's possible, and so on.	4.14(.76)*	4.00(.77)
When I don't understand while I'm studying English, I will ask the teacher immediately.	3.17(.87)	3.10(.86)
When I have the English homework, I will do carefully to ensure my understanding.	3.47(.77)	3.41(.94)
If my teacher needs someone to do the extra work besides ones assigned in the English class, I'll certainly volunteer.	3.30(.77)	2.95(1.02)
I actively think about what I have learned in my English class.	3.72(.94)	3.66(.65)

Table 6: Motivational Intensity

Motivational intensity refers to what makes L2 learners want to learn. For example, asking your teacher when you get confused is an example of this. In Table 6, the item "If English at the university level is not difficult, I need to develop my everyday-life English, such as watching English movies, reading English textbooks and newspaper, trying to speak English whenever it's possible, and so on", the responses were quite similar. That means English is important even though it is difficult for them. The highly proficient group scored 4.14(.76) and the low proficiency group scored 4.00(.77).

Possible L2 Selves	High Proficient Group Mean (SD)	Low Proficient Group Mean (SD)
Ideal Self Scale	3.46(.79)	3.20(.77)
Ought-to Self Scale	2.92(1.18)	3.14(.89)*
Motivational Intensity Scale	3.64(.90)*	3.36(.89)
English Learning Experience Scale	3.72(.97)*	3.33(.83)
Linguistic Self-Confidence Scale	3.31(.93)	3.45(.79)
The means of five items	3.41(.95)*	3.29(.83)*

Table 7: The Ought to self

According to the Table 7, the highly proficient group showed higher scores than the low proficiency group, but the results were quite similar (high 3.41(.95) and low 3.29(.83)). In possible L2 selves, English learning experience and motivational

intensity were the greatest motivators of the proficient group. Additionally, the ought-to self motivated the low proficiency students to a greater degree than the highly proficient group as 3.14 (.89). However, the mean score of the highly proficient group was 2.92(1.18).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t.	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	Std. B	Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1(Constant)	30.85	7.23		4.27	.000		
Ideal self	-.30	.34	-.12	-.86	.38	.54	1.87
Ough-to	.02	.24	.01	.06	.95	.80	1.26
Motiv	.51*	.33	.23	1.53	.13	.50	2.02
Exp	.41*	.36	.17	1.16	.25	.50	1.99
Con	-.45	.38	-.18	-1.19	.49	.49	2.06

Table 8: Scores of dependent variables

According to the Table 8, this study aims to find the factors that affect English learning proficiency and possible L2 selves. After running a multiple linear regression, the findings showed that motivational intensity (.51) and English learning experience (.41) positively affected the scores in English for Communications for both groups. However, there were no significant correlations.

Discussion

In this session, the researcher will interpret the information from the findings gained from the students' reflections. They include:

- 1) The ideal self. The perception of learners showed that English is important for living in a modern society and for the future careers.
- 2) Ought-to self. The result of this item showed that close friends did not affect this group. Alternatively, the low proficiency group demonstrated this effect to a moderate level. Therefore, close friends and people they respect affected learning English of the low proficiency group. The low proficiency groups showed that they do not want people think they are poor, therefore, English needs to be studied. In the same way, Ryan and Deci (2000) observed the desire for reward from outside, such as from parents, employers, teacher or others. Students do not want to lose status in society. In any activity, the teacher may stress the importance of learning English in class.
- 3) Motivational intensity. Both groups showed that if English is not difficult, they will use it more in their daily life. This is the reason that some students reflected that they want to watch tutorial videos for computer programming, planting and farming. They may use English as a tool to connect their knowledge. In class, the teacher may find content that relate to their fields or the teacher may need to apply other teaching approaches such as ESP, EMI, and CLIL.
- 4) Learning experience. The highly proficient group thought the time in English class ran faster than usual. However, both groups indicated that English is interesting for them. In class, interesting activities and approaches are needed.

5) Linguistic self-confidence. The low proficiency group indicated that they think that their English knowledge had developed in the current semester. Vibulphol (2016) suggested that the students' motivation in language learning may be changed depending on not only internal factors, but teaching techniques and activities in class.

6) The findings from multiple linear regression showed a correlation of English proficiency and possible L2 selves of motivational intensity (.51) and English learning experience (.41) at a tertiary level among non-English major students. This research showed that it is beneficial to find appropriate activities to support motivational intensity and English learning experience. These will be the recommendations in the next session.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study examined students' motivation for learning English in Thai context. Both groups showed L2 motivation as positive and high results.

L2 learning experience and motivational intensity are very important in learning a new language. Prapunta (2016) and Wongthong and Pattanasorn (2017) suggested activities that support motivation and learners' experience. The next study would be adjusted with activities that enhance or support student motivation. Wongthong and Pattanasorn (2017) indicated that learners may experience a change in their motivation while studying.

In my next study, these types of activities will be implemented into the course. For example, this can be done in Unit 6 of our English for Communications course. It aims to allow students express their opinions about the news or current events. The students may be assigned to interview foreigners who live in Udon Thani to learn their opinions about current issues. The students will gain more learning experience than in class.

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