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# L2 Learners' Self-Appraisal of Motivational Changes Over Time

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*This study is an interview-based grounded theory investigation that explores the phenomenon of the changes in L2 motivation over time and across contexts. Two Taiwanese international students who studied at a higher educational institution in the U.S. were interviewed about their motivational orientations prior to and after the study abroad transition and about how their study abroad experience over one academic year subsequently shaped their L2 motivation. Data analysis of the two participants' self appraisal of their L2 motivational changes indicated that the study abroad transition had a great impact on the development of the participants' L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The participants' L2 goals, attitudes toward the English-speaking community, and self concept changed as a result of their study abroad experience. Several interacting internal and external factors shaped and reshaped the changes in their L2 self images, and these changes varied intra-person and across individuals, depending upon the individual learner's self-determination and action control associated with specific contextual challenges. Furthermore, the changes in the participants' ideal L2 self as a competent English user appeared to be temporary, and long-term stability of the ideal self images was observed.*

## INTRODUCTION

Research on second language (L2) motivation has shown that motivation is an important individual learner variable in second language acquisition (SLA) (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001a, 2003, 2005; Gardner, 1985, 1988, 2001; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Nikolov, 2001; Noels, 2003, 2005; Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000; Vandergrift, 2005). L2 motivation is associated with language learners' thinking and learning behaviors, and the motivated behavior is goal-directed and purposeful. L2 motivation provides language learners a primary impetus to learn an L2 and serves as a driving force to sustain the long-term process of learning (Dörnyei, 2005).

L2 motivation is one of the most researched individual difference factors in SLA, and new theories of L2 motivation have burgeoned over the past decade (see detailed review in Dörnyei, 2005). The most recent development in L2 motivation constructs is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and the Process Model of Student Motivation. While the former focuses on the reconceptualization of Gardner's L2 motivation construct, *integrativeness*, the latter emphasizes the temporal dimension of L2 motivation. As will be discussed below, Dörnyei's models shed new light on the research of L2 motivation and open up ample potential for future research.

Although Dörnyei's new conceptualization of L2 motivation has triggered the interest of a growing number of researchers, a comprehensive review of the literature indicates that we are still far from knowing how L2 self images are built up over the course of learning an L2 and the sources of change that trigger the self developments (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). These unresolved issues in the L2 motivation literature justify conducting an exploratory study on the changes of L2 motivational self system. What will transpire from such a study will inevitably be based upon and related to Dörnyei's reconceptualization of L2 motivation constructs; however, an open, grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) will allow new themes to emerge and can bring forth new hypotheses for further inquiry. In a nutshell, the main thrust of this study is to present a research narrative showing and accounting for the development of the L2 motivational self system from the participants' perspectives and to establish the link between the time dimension and the development of the L2 self images.

In recent years, L2 motivation has attracted considerable research attention in Asian countries where English education is highly valued (e.g., Chen, Warden, & Change, 2005; Gao, Zhao, Cheng, & Zhou, 2004; Irie, 2003; Lamb, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Tachibana, Matsukawa, & Zhong, 1996; Wu, 2003; Yang, 2003; Yashima, 2009; Zhao, 2006). Among these, researchers have increasingly been drawn to the investigation of the changes in motivation among language learners who study abroad. Several studies were carried out in different Asian contexts that examined how Asian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation changes as learners transition to an English as a Second Language (ESL) context (Gao, 2008; Kim, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007; Skyrme, 2007; Zhang, 2007). Zhang (2007) used questionnaire surveys to trace the patterns of motivational changes among 142 Chinese students before and after they moved from China to study at a university in the UK. She found that the Chinese students' attitudes toward the local British community and their language learning goals changed after the transition due to their personal experience studying in Britain and their interaction with the British people.

Many Asian EFL learners who study abroad in an English-speaking country often face great difficulty in adjusting themselves to the new learning environments and experience continuous motivational fluctuations as a consequence of the challenges they encounter in the new learning contexts (Zhang, 2007). To understand the nature of motivational changes as a result of study abroad transition and how the changes impact language learners' learning behaviors, this research project examines the complex process of motivational changes within two Taiwanese international students as they transitioned from studying in Taiwan to studying at a higher educational institution in the U.S.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Gardner's socio-educational model has dominated L2 motivation research

for several decades (Gardner, 1985, 1988, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The socio-educational model posits two major orientations: an integrative orientation, which denotes learners' interests in integrating into the target language community, and an instrumental orientation, which denotes learners' interests in the practical advantages of learning an L2, such as getting a good job. Grounded in this model, two classes of variables, integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation, contribute to the learners' level of motivation. Gardner and his associates suggest that learners' positive attitudes toward the target language group will affect their success in learning an L2 (Gardner, 2001; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic, 2004; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

The past decade has seen a call for the reconceptualization of L2 motivation constructs (e.g., Crooks & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Many new directions for research have since been proposed (see Dörnyei, 2005). One main area of research focuses on the dynamic nature of L2 motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001b; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Shoab, 2004; Shoab & Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda, 2001). The view of L2 motivation as a continuously evolving construct is elaborated in Dörnyei's Process Model of Student Motivation (Dörnyei, 2000, 2001b; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). Dörnyei suggests that the *temporal pattern* of motivation follows through a process from a learner's initial wishes or desires through goal-setting, goal execution and completion, and through subsequent retrospective evaluation of the goal (see Dörnyei 2005, p. 85).

Many researchers have challenged the concept of integrativeness in Gardner's socio-educational model (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Noels, 2009; Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand, 2000). Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed a new approach to L2 motivational thinking, the "L2 Motivational Self System," in which L2 motivation is conceptualized as a part of language learners' self system. Language learners' future self-guides—the ideal and the ought-to L2 selves—are the central components of this system. In line with the dynamic view of L2 motivation, the L2 self system is dynamic and subject to change (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). This new conceptualization of L2 motivation, with its focus on the future-projection of the L2 self and the dynamic nature of motivation, is relevant to the current research inquiry and will serve as the underpinning theoretical framework in this study.

Drawing upon research findings from self research in psychology (Higgins, 1987, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989), Dörnyei developed the L2 Motivational Self System from the notions of "possible selves" introduced in Markus and Nurius's (1986) seminal paper. Possible selves is a type of self-knowledge that

pertains to how individuals think about their potential about their future. Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming. (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954)

Under this definition, possible selves are future-oriented, and they provide

an interpretive context for an individual's current view of him/herself. Dörnyei conceives that language learners' future possible selves are the primary motivational force because learners may have a desire to bridge the gap between their actual self and their projected goal states (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

Among the different types of possible selves, Dörnyei found that the "ideal" and "ought-to" aspects of possible selves (Higgins, 1987, 1996) are of particular educational relevance to the concept of language learning motivation, judging from his large-scale, longitudinal survey studies in Hungary (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002). Apart from the two dimensions of the ideal and ought-to L2 self, Dörnyei incorporates a third dimension, the immediate language learning environment and experience, in his conceptualization of the L2 Motivational Self System. He considers that this aspect of language learning is relevant to the learner's self system because of its direct impact on the actual learning process (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). As such, the L2 self system comprises three components: 1) the Ideal L2 Self, referring to the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self, 2) the Ought-to L2 Self, referring to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess, and 3) the L2 Learning Experience, referring to situation-specific motives and a causal relationship between the learning experience and the learning outcome.

The L2 Motivational Self System synthesizes not only research in personality psychology on possible selves (Higgins, 1987, 1996; Markus & Nurius, 1986), but also two recent conceptualizations of motivation by Noels (2001, 2003) and Ushioda (2001). Informed by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991), Noels (2003) proposed a larger L2 motivation construct that comprises three interrelated types of orientations: (1) intrinsic orientation inherent in the language learning process, (2) extrinsic orientation for language learning, and (3) integrative orientation associated with positive interaction with the L2 community and eventual identification with the community. Noels (2009) suggests that more self-determined extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation signal more positive responses to learning a target language and increased motivation intensity. In contexts where the target language community is readily identifiable, Noels found that language learners developed a stronger sense of belonging to that ethno-linguistic community, or integrative orientation (Noels, 2003; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001; Noels et al., 2000).

Noels' ideas regarding the internalization of extrinsic orientation align with Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System in that they both emphasize the importance of self-regulation in one's learning behavior. In line with SDT's differentiation among different levels of internalized forms of extrinsic motivation, Dörnyei postulates that a more idealized self for language learning is associated with *self-promotion* to realize an important or potential aspect of self, while an ought-to self, or less internalized self, is *prevention focused* and associated with a sense of duty or obligation (Dörnyei, 2005).

Using qualitative methods to explore motivational changes among French L2 learners, Ushioda (2001) identified a complex motivational construct that is

conceptually related to the one offered by Noels (2001, 2003). Ushioda (2001) conducted semi-structured interviews with a group of 20 Irish university learners of French twice with an interval of 16 months. She found that her participants' motivational changes were shaped by their specific response to particular events and experiences in their life. The learners' goal orientations appeared to evolve over time. Even when the learners were not experiencing success, they still felt motivated as they envisioned themselves traveling to France and speaking French with the French people they hoped to meet. Ushioda concludes that motivational disposition is either *causal*, referring to long-term L2-related learning experience, or *teleological*, referring to short-term or long-term goals and future perspectives.

Ushioda's (2001) interpretation of L2 motivation corresponds to Dörnyei's conceptualization of 1) the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self in that they both concern the future end-states of self as a competent L2 user, and 2) the L2 Learning Experience component in that they both show the causal relationship between learning experience and motivation (Dörnyei, 2005). Ushioda (2006, 2009) further suggests that an individual learner's motivation is constructed and constrained through the learner's participation in the social interaction with others. She proposes a "person-in-context" approach to L2 motivation, focusing on the exploration of the complexity and idiosyncrasy of language learner's motivational response to specific learning events and experiences. She suggests that the relationship between individuals and contexts is dynamic, complex, and non-linear (Ushioda, 2009).

Several empirical studies have been carried out to examine Dörnyei's process-oriented model and the L2 Motivational Self System (e.g., Kim, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Shoab, 2004). For instance, Shoab (2004) interviewed a group of foreigners studying or sojourning in Britain to examine the changes in the participants' motivational orientations over the participants' lifetime. Kim (2009) conducted a longitudinal case study with two Korean ESL learners in Canada to examine the development of their self images. Overall, these empirical studies found that L2 motivation is dynamic and evolving over time. Additionally, these studies show that the concept of an L2 self system has specific relevance to learners in both EFL and ESL contexts.

### **Relevance of L2 Motivational Self System in the Taiwanese Context**

With the rapid progress in globalization in the economy and in the society, English learners in Taiwan perceive the English language as an important tool for international economic success. The Taiwanese government mandates English courses at all levels of education, from primary to high school education (Chen, Warden & Change, 2005). The perceived importance of English in Taiwanese society and the future job-related demand for English ability have posed considerable pressure for the young generation in Taiwan. It is not uncommon to see students of all ages in Taiwan expend extraordinary efforts, time, and money to learn English after their regular school classes. However, the Taiwanese EFL context presents little opportunity for language use outside the language classroom. The lack of massive

language input and access to native English speakers provides strong incentives for these EFL learners to partake in study abroad programs in English-speaking countries in the search for better English competence.

As the literature on motivational changes during and after study abroad suggests, many study-abroad students experience daunting academic and linguistic challenges, and these experiences have great impact on the students' subsequent learning behaviors and motivation (e.g., Skyrme, 2007; Zhang, 2007). For instance, when transitioning to an ESL context, EFL learners will have to deal with unprecedented language challenges and sociocultural adaptation while studying abroad. The transition can be overwhelming at times because of the marked differences in the social and cultural backgrounds between the western and the eastern worlds and the high demand of English in the ESL context. This study aims to explore how the study abroad transition results in the development of L2 self images and in what ways language learner's L2 motivation changes over the course of study abroad. The participants' motivational evolution will be captured by reference to their L2 learning experience in the EFL and ESL learning contexts.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The exploratory nature of this study assumes that motivation is context-dependent, multifaceted, dynamic, and changes over time (Ushioda, 2001, 2009). The overarching research question guiding this study is: How do the study abroad transition and the experience of studying in the U.S. result in the evolution of the participants' L2 motivational self system over time, and what are the nature and sources of the change?

## METHOD

### Participants

Originally, I recruited a total of twenty international students, 10 Korean and 10 Taiwanese, for a larger longitudinal study. However, as Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest, possible selves are individualized, and function as the personalized representations of aspirations and motivators, and are associated with personal affective states. In order to capture and focus on individual learner's L2 self system, the report here focuses on only two Taiwanese learners. This provides a more comprehensive picture of the development of the two learners' L2 self systems and allows for a detailed description of how different contextual factors interact with each individual learner. The choice of these two participants was based on the clear personal vision of possible selves and L2 goals that these two students articulated during interviews. My informal interactions with them and observation of their learning behaviors also suggested that different aspects of their future visions and periodical motivational fluctuations were evident as their visions and motivation merged and developed.

These two Taiwanese students were both pursuing a master's degree at a large Midwestern university in the U.S. at the time of the recruitment. The first participant, Jen, first started learning English in an informal conversation class with a private American tutor when she was a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. She started formal English instruction at the age of 13 when she entered middle school and had six years of compulsory English education in schools. She was pursuing a master's degree in Linguistics at the beginning of the study and was 27 years old at the time of the interviews. The second participant, Heng, started learning English as a school subject at the age of 13 when he entered middle school. Similar to Jen, he had six years of compulsory English education during school years. Heng was pursuing a master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at the time when I first contacted him and was 28 years old at the time of the interviews. He continued to pursue a dual major in Linguistics at the university where the study took place.

The formal English education Jen and Heng had received in Taiwan focused mainly on grammar instruction and was oriented to preparing students for exams. Speaking was not a component of the English language curriculum when Jen and Heng received their schooling. Jen and Heng had attended university in Taiwan before coming to the U.S. for the purpose of pursuing a postgraduate degree. They had never lived in an English-speaking country prior to studying in the U.S. They have lived in the U.S. for three months at the time of the first interview, and they participated in a second interview six months later, toward the end of their second semester studying in the U.S.

The first interview was conducted roughly three months after the participants' arrival in the U.S. because the participants were expected to be able to recall their initial L2 motivation for studying abroad and how the change in learning contexts impacted their motivation. The second interview was conducted six months after the first interview because the participants were farther into their program and thus able to discuss how their experience studying in the U.S. had influenced their L2 motivation and how their L2 self system took shape as their study progressed.

## **Instruments**

Since the purpose of this study is to explore the two participants' motivational changes across the EFL and ESL contexts, the dynamic nature of motivation therefore necessitates a methodological approach that allows me to focus on their learning profiles and to account for their motivational progression from their own perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to permit an open exploration and to ground the findings in an emic rather than etic perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007). The semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows the participants to provide any information or interpretation they feel appropriate and to propose topics and shape the direction of the interviews instead of simply responding to the pre-decided interview questions from the researcher. Secondly, while having a set of general questions for discussion, I could follow up on the participants' responses and actively engage with them in the meaning-



making process of the interview (Holdstein & Gubrium, 2002). An active interview process empowered me to elicit more fruitful and rich responses from the two participants. In addition, the same method was employed by Ushioda (2001), Shoaib (2004) and Shoaib & Dörnyei (2005), who also investigated the phenomenon of motivational evolution.

The interview questions consisted of four parts (see Appendix). The first part included general questions regarding the participants' background information. These questions were used to set the scene and to obtain information regarding the participants' academic backgrounds. The second part included questions related to the participants' previous language learning history, their general attitude toward learning English, and reasons for studying in the U.S. The third part included questions related to their motivational changes across different stages of their learning process. Specific attention was paid to the participants' motivational changes before and after they came to study in the U.S. The fourth part of the interview questions pertained to the participants' learning experience over the two academic semesters studying in the U.S. and how these experiences impacted their L2 self concept and their motivation to learn and to achieve. The fourth part of the interview was used only at the second interview. Additional questions were added to follow up or to clarify their responses.

### **Procedures**

Pilot interviews were conducted before the main study to test the efficacy of the interview questions and to increase the clarity and likelihood of eliciting desired information for the main study. An initial list of interview questions drafted based on theoretical issues of motivational changes was used in the pilot study—for example, Dörnyei's (2005) identification of theoretical issues of motivational changes. Six international students from academic backgrounds similar to that of the two participants were invited to participate in the pilot study. The students responded to the original list of questions and commented on the clarity of the interview questions. Comments and suggestions given by the six students were used to formulate the core interview questions that were later used throughout the main study.

The interviews in the main study were conducted one-on-one. Each interview took between twenty and thirty minutes. The interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the participants' native language, and the transcriptions of the interviews were translated into English.

### **Data Analysis**

The raw interview data was subjected to several iterative categorizations and was analyzed through diverse analytical methods, including pattern identification, clustering of conceptual groupings, and constant comparisons (McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). The data analysis procedure was broadly based upon grounded theory (see a detailed review in Corbin & Strauss, 2007). During the concept formation stage of the data analysis, I read and re-read the transcripts

several times until I was closely familiar with the transcripts in their entirety. I then gradually identified the underlying patterns in the data and categorized concepts gained from the data. As I noticed recurring ideas in the participants' words, I made note of them as emerging categories (Charmaz, 2005). Then, by iteratively re-reading the interview transcripts and initial coding categories, I re-coded the data, deleted or added new coding categories. Through this method of constant comparison, coherent and related comments in the interviews were grouped as one theme (McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). The constant comparative method also allowed me to compare parts of the interviews with the whole to ensure that the categorization of the emerging themes was consistent with the whole sense of each participant's motivational disposition.

## RESULTS

This section of the paper presents the two participants' responses to the interview questions and their perceptions of the motivational changes as a result of the study abroad transition. Despite the similarities in previous language learning experience in Taiwan, as the results will show, Jen and Heng differ considerably in their L2 self system and the changing pattern of their L2 motivation due to their personal learning and living experience in the U.S. In order to focus on the individual learner, the following subsections will report the changing patterns of the two participants' motivation separately.

### **The Changing Pattern of Jen's L2 Motivational Self Images**

As Dörnyei (2009) suggests, the ideal L2 self will be an effective motivator when it comes with a repertoire of appropriate plans and self-regulatory strategies. The set of concrete actions that Jen had carried out prior to study abroad illustrates this point well. Jen articulated a positive attitude toward learning English and a strong desire to integrate with the English-speaking community when she reflected on her L2 motivational orientation prior to study abroad. Her integrative orientation was primarily generated from and strengthened by her previous favorable experiences in learning about American popular culture, watching TV shows and movies, or listening to English songs. Jen recalled her earlier English learning experience with the following narration.

I started learning English when I was at the second grade. At that time, English was not a school subject. My mom hired a personal tutor to teach me when I first started learning English. The tutor was from the U.S., and the class was a lot of fun. Over time, I watched many American TV series, like *Friends* and *Sex and the City*, and listening to many English songs to improve my English. I also like the American movies and I enjoyed making friends with people who speak English when I was in Taiwan. Because of these reasons, I had always wanted to come to the U.S. and to live here for a while to learn about the American culture.

Jen's comment shows an open and non-ethnocentric attitude toward the American culture and the English-speaking community. However, it needs to be noted that her positive attitude toward the American culture and people is not fully equivalent to Gardner's well-known motivation construct, *integrativeness*, which reflects a positive affective disposition toward the L2 community and a desire to interact and identify with its members (Gardner, 1985, 1988, 2001). In the Taiwanese EFL context, no specific English-speaking community is readily identifiable and accessible. English, to a large extent, is the vehicle through which Taiwanese EFL learners like Jen can connect themselves to the English-speaking community and to people with whom they can communicate in English.

The lack of access to the L2 community, however, did not deter Jen from her wishes to interact with the English-speaking people. Instead, her motivation was sustained through her self-determination and action controls. That is, she took specific actions to improve her English through different means, such as watching English movies, and she tried to approach people with whom she could communicate in English. Jen's wishes to relate to the English-speaking community can be understood from the construct of "international posture" proposed by Yashima (2009). Yashima asserts that EFL learners such as Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans have a general tendency to relate to the international community with which they can communicate through the global language, English (see detailed interpretation in Yashima, 2009). This concept of international posture provides an optimal interpretation for Jen's aspirations to connect with the English-speaking community because of the concept's specific relevance to the EFL context. Prior to the study abroad transition, Jen's wishes to integrate with English speakers can thus be seen as an aspiration to connect with the international English-speaking community rather than to identify with a specific group of L2 speakers as indicated in Gardner's socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985).

After the study abroad transition, Jen realized that a genuine interest or willingness to communicate and interact with native speakers of English was no guarantee of success. She felt that it was very difficult for her to make American friends during her early stay in the U.S. because of her insufficient language ability.

I haven't had many chances to meet with native speakers since I came here. I usually end up hanging out with my Taiwanese friends. This is really frustrating and counter-intuitive because I had thought that I would have a lot of opportunities to interact with native speakers before I came here. But now I realize that if your English is not good enough, native speakers tend to become impatient after they talk to you for a while. If you can't continue the conversation with them in depth, you can't really become their friends or hang out with them. (Jen, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

Jen subsequently mentioned that the realization of her inability to make friends with the Americans had changed her previous positive attitudes toward

English native speakers and decreased her motivation. Over time, Jen felt more and more disappointed by the discouraging experience she had in making friends with the Americans and she had finally decided not to take extra actions or exert more effort.

I feel really frustrated at times. I paid an American undergraduate to have conversation with me a few times a week. But he wasn't very patient to listen to me. So eventually I gave up. My motivation really decreased a lot because of this experience. But I don't care now. If I can't make American friends, that's fine. (Jen, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

Although Jen had taken specific actions to improve her English proficiency and to make American friends by hiring private tutors, her effort was not properly rewarded. This experience has decreased her L2 motivation and denotes the weakening of her aspiration to integrate with the American community. She had previously envisioned herself becoming a member and participating in the events of the American community; however, this ideal self image became unrealistic and even impossible after the study abroad transition. Counter-intuitively, while Jen had expected that an ESL context would provide ample opportunity for interaction with native speakers, the reality shows that language and cultural barriers could preclude the ESL learners from integrating with the L2 community even though the L2 community is readily identifiable and seemingly accessible.

After the study abroad transition, Jen also developed a prominent sense of obligation for improving her English due to the changes in the demand of English skills. Jen found that using her current English skills for academic tasks was far more challenging than she had expected. This realization compelled her to exert extra effort to improve her English and to minimize the potential threat of failing. Her emotional reactions to her language performance also influenced her subsequent motivation to achieve and her learning behaviors.

There are too many things I don't understand and I've lost all my sense of achievement in learning and using English since I came here. ... I feel that now I'm forced to improve my English. It's not fun at all. It's just something I need to do just so I can survive. But you know, I need to study English harder whether I like it or not because I need to write my paper, I need to complete my coursework, and the most important of all, I want to get my degree. ... it's interesting that I feel discouraged but at the same time I feel more motivated to study English. I think this is because I need to survive and I don't want to fail my courses. (Jen, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

Given the fact that the potential negative outcomes of failing her coursework was threatening, Jen developed an ostensible ought-to L2 self to prevent the unwanted consequences from happening. Taken together, Jen's personal account of her motivational changes implies that she had experienced a change from an intrinsic motivation prior to study abroad to an extrinsic motivation (Noels, 2003,

2009; Noels et al., 2000), and a change from a promotion-focused to a prevention-focused L2 self after studying in the U.S. for a few months (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Higgins, 1987, 1996).

While the external pressure for survival compelled Jen to study English harder, as time went by, Jen gradually re-gained her self confidence and exercised a greater sense of achievement as she moved into the end of the second semester.

I think my listening ability has improved a lot and I have more confidence using English now. Also, I will become a Chinese TA next semester, so this gives me strong motivation to improve my English. I will have to communicate with my American students, so I need to improve my speaking skill. ... English is really important for me now. ... I feel good that I can use English to teach Chinese and I think this experience will help me improve a lot. Besides, I'll have more chances to interact with my American students and that is really exciting to me. (Jen, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

During the writing of this article, Jen has been working as a teaching assistant for two semesters and proceeded to pursue a doctoral degree in Linguistics. She has shown greater confidence in her English and renewed her previous interest in learning about American culture. My informal interaction with her suggests that she has developed a new ideal L2 self as a highly proficient English speaker who can communicate with her American colleagues effortlessly and a future professor of Linguistics teaching at a U.S. higher educational institution.

### **The Changing Pattern of Heng's L2 Motivational Self Images**

In contrast to Jen, who has shown a genuine interest in and positive attitude toward learning English, Heng's L2 motivation was more instrumentally oriented and job-related. Heng started learning English when he entered middle school and considered English as simply a school subject. He commented that he did not have any intrinsic interest in learning English during school years. After completing the six years of compulsory English education in school, Heng never had any additional formal or informal English education. Not until he entered the job market and had worked as an engineer for a few years did he pick up English again. Based on his previous work experience, he suggested that English was an important skill for people to have to land a good job in Taiwan because many international and domestic companies in Taiwan required prospective employees to pass English tests. This societal expectation of good English skills had imposed great pressure on him.

Like I say, I was an engineer in Taiwan before. To become an engineer, you need to take an English test when you apply for a job. ... Once I started to work, I realized that most of the email exchanges in my company were done in English and many documents were written in English. So I needed to be able to read well enough to keep up with others. It was a lot of pressure for me at the same. I was afraid of not being able to perform well in my job or I might

lose my job, so I spent a lot time to improve my English. In fact, if my English had been better, I would have found a better job. (Heng, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

Heng's job-related orientation to learn English prior to study abroad originated from the Taiwanese job-market demand and societal expectations. His narration signifies that the societal pressure imposed on him is a doubled-edged sword. Judging from Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system, we can interpret that external pressure has, on the one hand, promoted Heng's ideal L2 self image to become that of a competent English user, and, on the other hand, warned him of the possible consequences of losing his job on the other. Nevertheless, Heng's strong sense of fear, hope, and even obligation to improve his English competence appear to be important fundamental L2 motivators (MacIntyre, Mackinnon, & Clément, 2009). In other words, Heng's concern about the threat of unemployment due to lack of good English skills and his desires to avoid these possible negative outcomes were powerful driving forces. All of these are indicative of important characteristics of Heng's ideal and ought-to L2 self images prior to the study abroad transition since they have both a promotion and a prevention focus that are associated with his wishes or the possibility of failing to live up to various responsibilities or obligations (Dörnyei, 2009).

Moving from Taiwan to the U.S. had subsequently intensified Heng's L2 motivation although it was exercised through a relatively unfavorable manner at the early stage of the transition. Heng's insufficient English listening and speaking skills were tested in real life encounters when he first came to the U.S. Several discouraging incidents happened when he tried to converse with native speakers of English. This experience had brought with him negative emotions of frustration, embarrassment, and disappointment. He felt that he was perceived as an "incompetent" English speaker while he was talking with his professors and colleagues in several occasions.

A few times when I talked to my supervisor and professors here, they just couldn't understand what I was trying to say. When they asked me to repeat again and again, I feel really frustrated. Besides, I couldn't understand what my classmates are talking about most of the time and they couldn't understand me, either. The confusions showing on my American friends' faces made me feel really intimidated when I speak in English. It seems to me that they thought I am a really poor English speaker. (Heng, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

As Heng reported, the more he felt constrained in using English when talking to native speakers, the less confident he became. The interaction between his sense of confidence and unsatisfactory performance using English was intertwined and cyclical. His lack of confidence led to a lesser sense of satisfaction, which culminated in stronger unfavorable fluctuations in his motivation. As he said, "The more I try to talk, the more frustrated I feel. I'm gradually losing my confidence and motivation in learning English after I came here" (Heng, 1<sup>st</sup> interview).

Heng's feeling of lack of confidence and dissatisfaction with his language competence and performance further underwent sporadic ups and downs after he lived in the U.S. for a few months.

But you know what, sometimes when I'm conversing with a native speaker and if the person can understand me, and if I can communicate fine, then I'll feel confident and motivated again. (Heng, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

The changes in Heng's L2 self confidence accentuate the dynamic nature of motivation. Heng transformed from experiencing a temporal demotivating emotional reaction to a cheerful motivating emotional response by virtue of situational stimulations. His experience shows that intra-person variability in one's self concept is often temporal and malleable (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Heng's enduring goal of receiving his master's degree in TESOL continued to sustain his motivation and transformed his self image as time went by. Towards the end of the second semester, he gradually developed a genuine interest in English because of his continuous effort and perceptible improvement in English.

I feel that my English has gradually improved although I haven't reached the level that I'm aiming for. I found that understanding my professors isn't that difficult, and when I go to the supermarket here, I can understand what people are saying much better. The really good thing is that I no longer feel that I'm forced to learn English because of my job or my study. In fact, I really enjoy learning English in the U.S. now. I guess the massive input I can get here and the fact that I can communicate with people much better these days have given me a greater sense of achievement and confidence. I really like English language now and, in fact, I've decided to do another master's degree in Linguistics. (Heng, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

Instead of simply focusing on getting the Master of Arts TESOL degree in order to find an English teaching job as he had initially planned prior to the study abroad transition, Heng envisions himself a double major in TESOL and Linguistics and a prospective teacher who is not only equipped with good teaching skills but also well-versed in linguistic theories. This changing process signifies an internalization of extrinsic motivation (job-oriented) to intrinsic motivation (genuine interest in English) whose end product was facilitated by Heng's internalization of the true value of learning English (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Noels, 2001, 2003, 2009).

Heng's self-appraisal of motivational changes summarizes the complex interplays among his emotional reactions to situational challenges, actual language performance, and the consequential changes in his L2 motivational self system. In a nutshell, his emotional fluctuations aroused by the environmental changes had led to the subsequent changes in his self concept beliefs, learning behaviors, and his possible L2 selves. In Dörnyei's term, this transformative process represents the relationship between the ideal and the ought-to L2 selves and illustrates that

human beings' self-perceptions are often originally socially grounded (in this case, imposed by societal expectations), but can be internalized or personalized to a desired possible self or an ideal self.

## DISCUSSION

Results of this study show that the two participants' L2 motivational dispositions consist of many interacting factors that evolve over time. As Dörnyei (2009) suggests, learners' possible selves involve a set of interrelated goals for language learning, and the quality of the possible selves are likely to change as time goes by. Jen's and Heng's self accounts of their motivational changes across the study abroad transition were indicative of the process of how their future possible selves changed as a response to the changes in their L2 goals and contextual situations (Dörnyei, 2009) and how their self-determination and action control have guided their learning behaviors (Heckhausen, 1991; Heckhausen & Kuhl, 1985; Kuhl, 1985; Noels, 2003). Prior to the study abroad transition, both of the participants' ideal L2 self as a prospective student studying in an English-speaking country was a powerful motivator and was shaped and realized through their engagement in L2 learning prior to the study abroad transition. Additionally, while Jen generally held a positive attitude toward and a genuine interest in learning English, Heng's L2 motivation was more job-related and instrumental.

After the transition, the increased difficulty in academic coursework and the need for survival through better English skills generated a new L2 self system. Jen and Heng both exhibited a prevention-focused L2 ought-to self during the early stage of their study abroad, as shown in their first set of interviews. However, they gradually developed a more internalized, promotion-driven self-image as they moved into the end of the second semester. This change displays a transformative process through which Jen and Heng internalized the external reasons for learning English into an ideal L2 self as a competent English user.

The analysis of the two participants' motivational dispositions suggests that the notions of ideal and ought-to L2 selves are useful explanatory constructs in L2 motivation, especially when viewing motivation as a dynamic entity that evolves over time (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The L2 self system has shown to cover Jen's and Heng's internal and external desires to learn English for their future academic aspirations, the social pressures exercised by authoritative people in the society or in the learning environment, and their actual learning experience in the EFL and ESL contexts (Dörnyei, 2005). The possible selves perspective also helps examine different motivational bearings such as the convergence of both motivating and demotivating factors among individual language learners (MacIntyre, Mackinnon, & Clément, 2009). Jen's and Heng's personal language learning experience provides an individualized and interpretive context and facilitates the simultaneous examination of multiple motivational factors as we understand and disentangle the complex process of their L2 motivational changes over time.



As English spreads throughout the globe, in an Asian EFL context such as Taiwan, English is used as the only global language (Crystal, 2003; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006) for intercultural communication. The lack of a specific English-speaking community within EFL contexts undermines the notion of integrativeness for explaining EFL learners' motivational orientations (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006). Taking into account the concept of World Englishes, which is not associated with any particular Anglophone culture and is instead identified with the predominant forces of globalization (Lamb, 2004; Smith, 1983a, 1983b), Dörnyei's L2 self system provides us with a platform to view EFL learners' desires to relate to the international community within their own self-concept. This psychological and emotional identification process signifies individual learners' recognition of the cultural and intellectual values attached to the English-speaking community and the language itself (Dörnyei, 2003, 2009; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006) rather than an integrative motive associated with the learners' affective disposition toward the L2 group and a desire to identify with the L2 community (Gardner, 2001).

The possible selves framework—uncoupled from any particular culture—and Yashima's (2009) concept of international posture provide ideal explanatory frameworks for the current research inquiry and are believed to have ample potential for future research. Other empirical studies that have examined Asian EFL learners' motivational dispositions and changes also confirm the explanatory power of these new approaches to L2 motivation research (e.g., Kim, 2009; Lamb, 2007, 2009; Ryan, 2009). The unique case of EFL learners' L2 self system changes as a function of study abroad, as investigated in this study, also reveals that Dörnyei's new conceptualization of L2 motivation has specific relevance to EFL as well as ESL learners and learning contexts.

One important theme that emerged from the data pertains to how the short-term dynamics of the possible selves change over time (de Bot, 2008; Markus & Nurius, 1986; van Geert, 2007, 2008). Although Jen's and Heng's possible selves are complex and prone to change as a result of the study abroad transition, the changes in their self images are often short-term and situational. When Jen's and Heng's self images interacted with different internal and external factors, such as the changes in their L2 goals, emotions, and learning contexts, their L2 self images changed. Nonetheless, their possible selves as proficient L2 users persist throughout their motivational dispositions prior to and after the study abroad transition. The short-term changes in one's L2 self images echo Markus and Nurius's (1986) suggestion that possible selves are temporally malleable, but exhibit an overall stability. The nature of the short-term dynamics of one's self images suggests that the possible selves vision might work better as long term goals than as short term ones, as is speculated by Dörnyei (2009). In line with this thinking, future research needs to explore how long-term goals serve as relatively stable possible selves images (especially when negative emotions are taking their toll) and what other sources of change may cause consequential developments in one's self images.

Finally, a methodological issue needs to be addressed. Although there has been a growing interest in using qualitative research methods in the studies of L2 motivation (e.g., Douglass, 2005; Lamb, 2009; Shoaib, 2004), there have been very few studies that have directly followed grounded theory (e.g., Kember, Hong, & Ho, 2008). It is my belief that grounded theory deserves more attention in future L2 motivation research because it can provide a rich description of the process of motivational change, facilitate the interpretation of the development of the L2 self system, and result in a set of propositions that render how the L2 motivational self images are generated and shaped over time. Furthermore, by following systematic data analysis procedures, techniques, and assumptions to formulate new theoretical constructs or generate hypotheses for future inquiry, we will be more empowered to clarify unique aspects of individual L2 learners' motivational dispositions and to provide new insights into L2 motivation research.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the process of unraveling the complexities of these two EFL learners' motivational changes, I have come to realize that there are many interconnections and relationships between different motivational factors. Going beyond traditional quantitative research methods in identifying prominent motivational factors, this study employed a qualitative research method to explore the changes in L2 motivational self system across the study abroad transition. The study elucidates the interplays among different L2 self images and the interaction among motivation, self-determination, and contextual situations. The inherent complexity of this research inquiry could not be easily captured in large-scale survey studies. It is hoped that findings of this study can not only add to our understanding of the development of the L2 motivational self system over time and across contexts, but also broaden the base on which motivation is conceptualized in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System within the dynamic and process-oriented approach to L2 motivation research.

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## APPENDIX

### *Interview questions*

#### Part 1. Background information

Can you tell me what program and which year of study are you in now?

Can you tell me your age and your length of residence in the U.S.?

#### Part 2. General questions regarding learners' language learning experience and motivation

Please talk about your previous language learning experiences.

Did you enjoy learning English? Why or why not?

How would you describe your motivation when you were studying English at school?

What did you do when you encountered obstacles or difficulties learning English?

Can you tell me why you decided to come to study in the U.S.?

#### Part 3. Motivational changes over different stages of learning processes

Have you ever set up goals for learning English? If so, what are they?

Do you think your learning goals affect your learning behaviors? If yes, how?

How did the desire to study abroad affect your approach to learning English?

What did you think about your English language proficiency before you came to the U.S.?

What did you do to prepare for the TOEFL test?

Did your language learning motivation change after you came to the U.S.? Why or why not?

How do you prioritize your academic goal and language learning goal?

What do think is the most important factor that contributes to your English achievement?

What do you think about the level of effort you have put into learning English?

#### Part 4. Motivational changes after studying in the U.S. for two semesters

How would you describe your motivation in learning English now?

Did your language learning goal change over the past two semesters?

How did your learning experience in the U.S. affect your language learning motivation?

Were there any incidents happening over the past year that affected your learning motivation? If so, tell me your stories.

What do you think about your English ability now? Do you see any improvement?

How confident are you when you speak English to native speakers?

Do you set up any new goals in terms of learning English?

What is your plan for your future after you receive your master's degree?



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