**Chapter 12**

**L2 Selves as a Source of Emotional Discomfort: A Self-discrepancy Perspective**

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**Introduction**

It is widely acknowledged that language learning entails intense emotional experiences, potentially due to the significant involvement of ‘self’. However, it is difficult to grasp the precise role of emotional experiences in L2 (second language) learning due to its momentary nature and conceptual complexity. Unfortunately, negative emotions can be commonly experienced during the L2 learning process (e.g., anxiety), but they are often taken for granted and left to individual learners to overcome. The negligence of negative emotions may be due to the lack of understanding and theory-driven explanation of their impacts on L2 learning. This study aims to elucidate negative emotional experience during L2 learning within the theoretical framework of the self-discrepancy theory and L2 motivational self system (L2MSS). The ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self have been extensively studied in L2 motivation research in the last decade. With regards to the emotional dimensions of the L2 selves, however, little is understood.

With regard to LOTEs learning, negative emotions have not received much scholarly attention. Recent studies on motivation for LOTEs learning showed that learners tend to have a strong positive emotional attachment to the target culture and personal reasons for studying LOTEs (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). The patterns were extracted from studies on LOTEs in various contexts, including Europe, North America, and East and Southeast Asia. Therefore, it is risky to generalise the patterns of LOTEs motivation without taking into consideration of the learning context. For example, motivation for learning LOTEs among anglophone learners in the UK involves the anti ought-to L2 self as rebellious reaction against a societal view of undermining language learning apart from Global English (Lanvers, 2016). The monoglot culture in the UK may be applicable to other anglophone countries, but is not relevant to non-anglophone contexts, such as Asia.

The research population in this study is students enrolled in a Korean degree programme in Vietnam. The Korean programme is mainly designed as a language-specialist training programme, such as a Vietnamese-Korean professional interpreter /translator or a Korean language instructor in Vietnam. The heavy focus on language proficiency creates a highly intensive learning environment, and the consequence of learning the language is high-stake in terms of career prospects and exams. Many students choose to enter the programme due to the love of Korean pop culture and the promising career opportunities expected from the high proficiency in Korean, but they often experience emotional turbulence during the intensive learning process. This study focuses on dejection and anxiety, which are commonly experienced among language learners.

**Self-discrepancy: the current and the future**

A few empirical studies have investigated the relationship between the L2 selves and emotional regulation in exploratory manners. For example, Csizér and Kormos (2014) conducted a correlation study between emotional regulation and the L2 selves. The ideal L2 self was not significantly correlated with emotional control and only marginally correlated with satiation control (i.e., overcoming boredom). In other words, even if learners can vividly visualise their future selves, they may not be efficient in emotional regulation during the L2 learning process. Since the ideal L2 self is ‘future’, learners may not carry over their future selves in ‘current’ L2 learning context.

Emotional experience may be intertwined with learners’ perception of their L2 selves and their perceived capacity to fulfil them. In Garrett and Young (2009)’s case study with a student of the Portuguese language, a majority of emotional comments were related to self-efficacy to cope with learning tasks and self-image that the participant wanted to project to her peers in the class. Negative comments such as *overwhelming* and *embarrassing* were found when the desired self and perceived view of the current self were mismatched, whilst positive comments were often mentioned coupled with episodes of managing learning tasks successfully.

Bown and White (2010) investigated the types of emotions that emerged from an open-ended interview and journals with Russian language learners. Not surprisingly, negative emotion was as twice frequent as positive emotion. Learners frequently experienced *frustration*, *disappointment* and *nervousness*. They also mentioned *feeling stupid* or *unsuccessful* as a reason for quitting the language programme. In terms of the themes related to emotions, the cognitive appraisal was found to be most frequent in both positive and negative emotions. In other words, emotional experience during L2 learning process is often influenced by external situation-related assessment (e.g., a teacher’s praise) or internal appraisal of self. Similarly, Aragão (2011) found a close relationship between self-concept and learners’ emotional experience in class. Although the author did not use the term the ideal L2 self, the qualitative data showed that *fear*, *shame* and *inhibition* were strongly associated with the mismatch between their current capacity to use L2 and the desired goal, i.e., “idealized model” (p. 307).

The qualitative findings from the previous studies are particularly relevant to this study investigating the perceived discrepancy between the current and future L2 selves within the framework of the self-discrepancy theory. The qualitative results imply that negative emotional experience is closely linked to self-doubt or failure in maintaining desirable L2 selves, whereas positive emotion is often mentioned as an outcome of successful management of learning tasks. There needs to be a systematic approach with a relevant theory to understand why and how negative emotional experience is involved with the L2 selves, while the positive emotion is not.

According to L2MSS, language learners’ perceptions of themselves related to L2 learning are the central component of motivation as they make motivational efforts to become the person they want to be as a result of successful L2 learning. The initial L2MSS model proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009) consisted of three components: (1) the ideal L2 self; (2) the ought-to L2 self; (3) the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self represents L2-specific attributes that learners would like to possess in the future, thereby reflecting hopes and aspirations. The ought-to L2 self refers to L2-related attributes they believe they should possess or that others (i.e., parents, teachers, society) expect them to have in the future, thereby related to responsibilities or duties. The third component, the L2 learning experience, concerns situated and temporary motives influenced by the immediate learning environment such as a teacher, peers or learning materials.

A key assumption of the L2MSS is that motivation arises from acknowledging the discrepancy between the future selves and the current state. Learners put effort into reducing the discrepancy to reach their desirable L2 selves. Dörnyei (2005) claimed that adequate distance between the current state and the L2 selves is one of the prerequisite conditions in order to exert motivational effort. On the one hand, the L2 selves must not be comfortably attainable without increasing effort because if a learner believes that their future selves will definitely be fulfilled, they may not try to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the L2 selves should be plausible and realistic, anchored within possible expectation. If the L2 selves are far beyond their capacity, it is understandable that learners would not try to achieve them.

In psychology, self-discrepancy theory primarily concerns negative emotional consequences of the discrepancy between the current and future ideal and ought-to selves. The chronic discrepancy between the current and ideal self evokes dejection-related feelings, and the discrepancy between the current and ought self evokes agitation-related feelings (Higgins, 1987). Both dejection- and agitation-related feelings are commonly experienced during the process of L2 learning, although agitation arousal has been studied more extensively due in part to the noticeability of the feelings. When students are anxious, they tend to notice the feeling more easily than dejection-related feelings, such as boredom, frustration or disappointment.

In Applied Linguistics, the adequate discrepancy between the current and future L2 self has been favoured for motivated efforts despite the lack of empirical support. In fact, a few exceptional studies have found that the close distance between the current and future L2 self leads to motivational effort. For example, Hessel (2015) tested the predictive power of properties of the ideal L2 self (i.e., desirability, accessibility, discrepancy, plausibility) on intended effort and reported that lower discrepancy led to more effort. MacIntyre et al. (2009) found similar results with a possible selves scale developed based on Gardner’s Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner, 1985) and possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). 18 items were adapted from Gardner’s AMTB and 5 follow-up questions were generated for each item. The first two follow-up questions were about the current and future selves, asking whether the participants have the characteristic of the prompt now and future: “1) Describe me now (yes/no) and 2) Describe possible future (yes/no)” (p.198). A series of ANOVAs were run for each of the 18 AMTB questionnaire items based on the responses to the two follow-up questions. The yes/no dichotomous questions generated three possible groups for each item: Group 1) those who perceive the prompt questionnaire item describes the individual now and in the future (yes/yes), Group 2) those who perceive they do not possess the prompt characteristics now but expect or desire to have them in future (no/yes), Group 3) those who think they do not possess the prompt characteristics now and in the future (no/no). The ANOVAs results showed that Group 1 showed the highest motivation, followed by Group 2 and Group 3. Although the motivational construct was based on Gardner’s AMTB, the results may still be relevant to clarify the key assumption of L2MSS, that is, the discrepancy between the current and future is the precondition for exerting motivation to reduce the discrepancy.

L2 motivation literature suggests that a key approach to L2 future self is ‘not too close’ and ‘not too far’. It may be a fair assumption that attainable goals without effort would not trigger motivated behaviour, but within such a broad range of perceived plausibility, the role of the discrepancy needs to be clarified. This study empirically investigates the emotional aspects of the distance between the current and future L2 selves within the framework of self-discrepancy theory.

**Emotional properties of L2MSS**

Recently, there have been several studies that investigated learners’ emotional experience using the L2MSS framework within the component of the L2 learning experience, which was originally defined as “situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 106). However, the recent conceptualisation of the L2 learning experience goes beyond the momentary, external stimuli experienced in classroom settings such as peer interaction or learning materials (Csizér & Kálmán, 2019). This broad conceptualisation may better capture emotional experience which occurs concurrently and retrospectively, based on the cognitive appraisal of ongoing and past learning experiences and situations.

Pavelescu (2019) qualitatively investigated the L2 learning experience of two teenage EFL (English as a foreign language) learners in Romania and identified the types of emotion linked to motivation. The theme-based analysis of data (i.e., a journal reflection, semi-structured interview with students and a teacher, class observation) showed two themes related to positive emotions: 1) *Love*, defined as generic positive attitudes towards the target language, not necessarily tied to the learning context, 2) *Like*, defined as positive emotions linked to specific learning contexts such as classroom, culture-related aspects of English, and English usage outside the classroom. Both generic *Love* and situation-specific *Like* are linked to motivation (i.e., a driving force to learn English) in idiosyncratic ways. The findings suggest that both the generic and the situation-specific scope of emotional experiences emerge organically where L2 learning takes place, and they shape motivation in behavioural terms.

Hiver et al. (2019) explored the L2 learning experience using narrative methods from the complex dynamic systems perspective. The most salient theme emergent from the data was the “*emotional loading* or *emotional tone*, ranging from extreme positivity to extreme negativity” (p. 99). The narrative analysis revealed the mixture of positive (e.g., enjoyment, enthusiasm, excitement) and negative experiences (e.g., frustration, fear, embarrassment, discouragement), and the transition of emotional experience from negative to positive emotions that correspond with overcoming learning difficulties. The finding supported the salience of emotional experience in L2 learning and its interaction with engagement.

As reported in past studies, L2 learning involves intense emotional loads. While past studies on the emotional dimension of the L2 learning experience took an exploratory and qualitative approach, this study takes a theory-driven approach with the aim of clarifying the emotional dimension of the L2 learning experience in relation to the ideal and ought-to L2 selves within the framework of self-discrepancy theory.

**Asian learners of Asian LOTEs**

In recent L2 motivation literature, East Asian learners became the majority of the research population within the L2MSS framework (Boo et al., 2015). The previous research with East Asian learners has yielded some context- and culture-specific dimensions of L2 motivation, for example, the strong ought-to L2 self, family influence, or exam pressure (Apple et al., 2016). Not surprisingly, Global English is often the target language in Asian countries due to the strong career prospects and international opportunities expected to gain from the L2. Unlike Global English, learning other Asian languages in Asian countries is a marked choice due to the lack of societal support and low instrumental values of the target languages. However, a few studies reported advantages of learning LOTEs as L3 in Asian countries, including gaining competitiveness in job markets, developing general intelligence and cultural understanding, and appreciating cultural and language similarities between the mother tongue and the target L3 Asian language (Huang, 2019).

The unique status of LOTEs in Asian countries is likely to trigger ambivalent motivation for learning them. The social attitude toward LOTEs learning is generally not supported due to the low instrumental value of language proficiency (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017), and Asian countries that were influenced by Confucianism tend to value societal harmony and family approval on important life decisions (Chen et al., 2005). Therefore, the congruence between one’s desire for learning LOTEs and family and societal support is likely to be important. When learners encounter societal objections against their choice of learning LOTEs, they may need stronger motivation for LOTEs to compensate for the lack of social support. The previous research found cultural interests towards the target LOTEs are often a strong factor that predicts intended efforts in various LOTEs learning contexts, including Asian countries.

In the case of the Korean language, which is the target LOTE in this study, there has been a sharp increase in the number of language learners in the world over the last two decades due to the popularity of Korean pop culture and media (Yang & Yu, 2020, January 23). The fondness towards Korean pop culture can be an initial attractor for Korean language learning. However, in Vietnam, which is the research site of this study, students enrolled in Korean degree programmes at university tend to have strong economic reasons for studying Korean. Korean language instructors commented that graduates from the Korean degree programmes can earn a high salary from working in the Korean business sector located in Vietnam (Kim, 2022, November 23). In this context, Korean language learning at university can be highly intensive and competitive, causing stress and negative emotional reactions among students.

**The focal setting**

The target population for this research is Vietnamese learners of Korean language in Hanoi, Vietnam. They are enrolled in a 4-year Korean degree programme whose curriculum consists of Korean language and culture. The Korean language is the core subject area whereas Korean studies such as Korean literature, history, and linguistics are only marginal. Most contact hours are assigned to Korean language reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar and Korean-Vietnamese translation. Graduation requirements include passing the Test of Proficiency in Korean Level 5. The description of the required level is below:

*The individual can use the language skills professionally or for research in a specialized field to a certain extent and understand and express him/herself regarding unfamiliar topics concerning politics, the economy, culture, and so on. He/she can appropriately use different forms of language according to the context and situation (e.g. formal/informal and colloquial/literary).*

(National Institute for International Education, 2021)

In addition to the exam pressure, the expected proficiency in Korean is high because most graduates work as professional translators/interpreters at Korean organisations or pursue graduate studies in South Korea. In recent years, the Korean degree programmes in Vietnam have become extremely popular, attracting students with strong academic backgrounds. The cut-off point for the programme is the highest among modern language programmes, followed by Global English, Chinese and Japanese (Lee, 2020, October 6). Due to the popularity of the language and career prospects, admission to the programme is considered prestigious. The student retention rate is high even though the proficiency level varies between students, which may cause stress to those who do not progress at the same rate as others.

The purpose of this study is to test the following hypotheses.

1. Greater discrepancy between the current and the ideal L2 self is associated with dejection-related feelings compared to the modest discrepancy.
2. Greater discrepancy between the current and the ought-to L2 self imposed by others is associated with anxiety-related feelings compared to the modest discrepancy.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

A total of 533 Vietnamese learners of Korean participated in this study (age *Mean* = 20.05, *SD* = 1.46, female *n* = 495, male *n* = 20, unidentified *n* = 18). The participants were enrolled in an undergraduate degree programme in Korean language and culture in Hanoi, Vietnam. All participants spoke Vietnamese as their first language.

**Instrument Development and Materials**

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was the L2 selves measures and the second part was 5-point Likert-type items of dejection and anxiety in L2 learning. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions for the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self adopted from *Selves Questionnaire* (Higgins et al., 1985). The ideal L2 self was measured by asking the participants to list four attributes that they would like to have as a result of achieving L2 learning goals, and the ought-to L2 self was operationalised as four expectations that others (i.e., parents, a teacher or peers) have on their L2 learning. Because the L2 selves are highly personal and idiosyncratic, the open-ended responses to the L2 selves would allow identification of the domains of the L2 selves (e.g., careers, living abroad, test scores) that are personally important to individual learners. The responses were written in Vietnamese or Korean by the participants and translated into English by two professional translators.

The responses for the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self consisted of four open-ended answers, respectively (e.g., *I want to be successful in my career*; *I ought to make good money when I graduate from university*). Under each open-ended response to the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self, three follow-up questions were asked in order to measure: 1) the importance of the L2 selves, 2) the distance between the current and the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self, adopted from *Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale* (Aron et al., 1992), and 3) plausibility of the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self (see Appendix A).

For the Likert-scale items of L2 dejection and L2 anxiety, previous literature on measures of L2 emotions (e.g., anxiety) were examined, following the guidelines for the development of questionnaires in the field of applied linguistics (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). However, since it has been rare to study L2 dejection-related feelings as a quantitative measure, the questionnaire items for this study were adopted from social psychology, in particular, *Subjective Vitality Scale* (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) and some items were newly developed for the L2 learning context. L2 anxiety items were adopted from *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The questionnaire was originally designed in English and then translated into Vietnamese. The initial translation was back-translated into English in order to validate the Vietnamese translation. Some phrasings were changed after back-translation. After the revisions, the Vietnamese version of the questionnaire was compared with the original English version by a Vietnamese native speaker and piloted for readability by four Vietnamese undergraduate students in Hanoi, Vietnam. The questionnaire items used in this study were part of a larger questionnaire on L2 motivation (item *k* = 83). The participants completed all items in the questionnaire, but for the purpose of this study, only emotion-related items (item *k* = 45) and the L2 selves measure were analysed.

**Procedure**

After obtaining permission to carry out the research from the ethics board of a Canadian university and the head of the department at the Vietnamese university, the pen-and-pencil questionnaire was administered during in-person Korean classes in Vietnam. The participants were informed of the general purpose of the research and their right to disagree or discontinue participating in the study. They were also reminded that their instructors would not have access to the data and that taking part in the questionnaire would not affect their grades. The consent form and the questionnaire were written in Vietnamese. The participants were not rewarded for completing the questionnaire. The survey data were collected in 2016.

**Data Analysis**

In order to test the hypotheses with statistical analyses, the following steps were taken.

**Prior analysis: L2 dejection and L2 anxiety scales**

The questionnaire items for dejection and anxiety in L2 context were developed and validated with principal component analysis (PCA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). For all analyses, missing values were excluded listwise. Among the total of 533 participants, 276 participants were randomly selected for PCA and the other 257 participants were assigned for CFA. With the validated items of L2 dejection and L2 anxiety using the 5-point Likert scale, the sums of the L2 dejection scale and the L2 anxiety scale were computed respectively for t-test analysis (for final items, see Appendix B and Appendix C).

**Main analysis: L2 self-discrepancy (distance \* plausibility)**

The L2 self-discrepancy was computed with the following steps. First, out of the four open-ended responses to the ideal L2 self, the response with the highest score of the importance was selected (i.e., *How much does each answer matter to you? Circle the level of importance of each of your answer. 1 = not important; 5 = very important*). Second, L2 self-discrepancy was computed by multiplying the distance between the current and the ideal L2 self and the plausibility of the ideal L2 self with the 5-point Likert scale. The same procedure was applied to the open-ended responses to the ought-to L2 self and the following questions regarding the importance, distance and plausibility of the open-ended responses to the ought-to L2 self. Thus, two values were computed for self-discrepancy of the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self (*Min* = 1, *Max* = 25).

In some cases, the participants assigned an equal rate of importance to multiple open-responses to the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self. For example, the highest value of the importance of the ideal L2 self could be given to multiple items (e.g., *5 = very important* on the Likert scale for *studying aboard for graduate studies* AND *getting a well-paid job*), indicating the most important ideal L2 self lies in multiple life domains. In this case, the L2 self-discrepancy was computed by averaging the values of the L2 self-discrepancy for each response that was highest rated on importance.

The hypotheses were tested by dividing the participants into quartiles on the L2 self-discrepancy scores on the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self (i.e., the distance score multiplied by the plausibility score of the most important ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self). The upper and the lower quartiles of the participants were selected for t-test analysis of L2 dejection and L2 anxiety scales to test if the two groups of the participants were significantly and sizably different on the scores of L2 dejection and anxiety.

**Results**

The overall results partially supported the hypotheses that the discrepancy of the ideal L2 self would be associated with L2 dejection and the discrepancy of the ought-to L2 self would be associated with L2 anxiety. The groups with the greatest discrepancies in both ideal and ought-to L2 self tended to experience both L2 dejection- and anxiety-related feelings more intensely than those who perceive the least discrepancies. No specific links between the ideal L2 self and dejection or the ought-to L2 self and anxiety were found.

**Prior analysis for L2 dejection and L2 anxiety**

Prior to the comparison-based statistic (i.e., t-test), the PCA and CFA tests were run with the L2 dejection and L2 anxiety items as noted above. The tests validated the L2 dejection scale with three subconstructs of 1) *lack of L2 self-efficacy* (initial λ = 4.17, explained variance = 34.72%), 2) *disappointment in L2 use* (initial λ = 1.75, explained variance = 14.57%), and 3) *learning fatigue* (initial λ = 1.11, explained variance = 9.21%), and the L2 anxiety scale with three subconstructs: 1) *fear of negative evaluation* (initial λ = 4.46, explained variance = 44.59%), 2) *test anxiety*, (initial λ = 1.34, explained variance = 13.40%), and 3) *communication apprehension* (initial λ = 1.10, explained variance = 10.96%) that is consistent with the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety* *Scale* devised by Horwitz et al. (1986).

CFA with maximum likelihood was conducted to estimate the L2 dejection and L2 anxiety constructs respectively (*n* = 257). The goodness of fit indices were excellent; for L2 dejection, χ2 (51, *n* = 255) = 73.22, *p* = 0.02, comparative fix index (CFI) = .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.04, *p* = 0.74; for L2 anxiety, χ2 (32, *n* = 255) = 38.95, *p* = 0.02, comparative fix index (CFI) = .99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.03, *p* = 0.87.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively, the overall L2 dejection and L2 anxiety subcomponents showed small to moderate correlations; the highest correlation was found between fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension (*r* = .51). The final items with the factor loadings and Cohen’s alpha are in the Appendix B and Appendix C.

Table 1. *Component correlations of L2 dejection*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Lack of L2 self-efficacy | Disappointment in L2 use | Learning fatigue |
| Lack of L2 self-efficacy |  | .48 | .37 |
| Disappointment in L2 use |  |  | .13 |

*p < .*001

Table 2. *Component correlations of L2 anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fear of negative evaluation | Test anxiety | Communication apprehension |
| Fear of negative evaluation |  | .47 | .51 |
| Test anxiety |  |  | .41 |

*p* < .001

**Main analysis for t-test between the groups with the greatest and least discrepancies**

In order to test the two hypotheses, two separate t-tests were conducted with the upper and the lower quartiles of the ideal L2 self discrepancy (i.e., distance \* plausibility, *n* = 113 for the least discrepant group, *n* = 129 for the greatest discrepant group) and the ought-to L2 self discrepancy (*n* = 116 for the least discrepant group, *n* = 105 for the greatest discrepant group) based on the means of the subconstructs of the L2 dejection and L2 anxiety. The t-test results showed that the upper and lower quartiles for both ideal and ought-to L2 self discrepancies were significantly different on all subscales with medium to large effect-sizes.

As shown in Table 3, the groups with the greatest discrepancy in both ideal and ought-to L2 self showed significantly higher scores on L2 dejection and anxiety. For the ideal L2 self, the significant and sizable differences of the greatest and least discrepancy groups were found in the lack of L2 self-efficacy with a large effect size, *t*(219) = -5.776, *p* < .001, *d* = .78 and communication apprehension with a medium-to-large effect size *t*(219) = -3.602, *p* < .001, *d* = .56. For the ought-to L2 self, the significant and sizable differences between the greatest and least discrepancy groups were found on the lack of L2 self-efficacy with a large effect size, *t*(240) = -5.45, *p* < .001, *d* = .70, and test anxiety with a medium-to-large effect size, *t*(240) = -4.04, *p* < .001, *d* = .51. The size of the effect sizes was judged based on the field-specific benchmark proposed by Plonsky and Oswald (2014).

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of upper and lower quartiles of the ideal L2 self discrepancy (distance \* plausibility) and the ought-to L2 self discrepancy (distance \* plausibility) on the subconstructs of L2 dejection and L2 anxiety*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The ideal L2 self discrepancy | | | |
|  | Group | *Mean* | *SD* | |
| Lack of L2 self-efficacy | Least discrepancy (*n* = 116)  Greatest discrepancy (*n* = 105) | 2.47  3.09 | .82  .77 | |
| Disappointment in L2 use | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.90  3.29 | .88  .87 | |
| Learning fatigue | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.25  2.55 | .63  .57 | |
| Communication apprehension | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 3.12  3.58 | .84  .79 | |
| Test anxiety | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.69  3.06 | .96  .97 | |
| Fear of negative evaluation | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 3.27  3.59 | .90  .75 | |
| The ought-to L2 self discrepancy | | | | |
|  | Group | *Mean* | *SD* | |
| Lack of L2 self-efficacy | Least discrepancy (*n* = 113)  Greatest discrepancy (*n* = 129) | 2.45  2.98 | .78  .73 | |
| Disappointment in L2 use | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.82  3.07 | .81  .83 | |
| Learning fatigue | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.30  2.51 | .61  .58 | |
| Communication apprehension | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 3.09  3.45 | .82  .77 | |
| Test anxiety | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 2.54  2.99 | .92  .83 | |
| Fear of negative evaluation | Least discrepancy  Greatest discrepancy | 3.24  3.53 | .87  .76 | |

**Discussion**

Self-perception of the current state in relation to the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self is one of the important assumptions in the L2MSS theory. However, the current aspect has been under-investigated thus far, whereas the importance of having vivid images of the ideal L2 self has been extensively discussed as a source of generating will power (e.g., You & Chan, 2015). Substantiating the vision of the ideal L2 self may enhance the perceived plausibility of the ideal L2 self as claimed by Dörnyei (2009). Imagining the desired future is a way of activating the future self and bringing the future self to the current working self that triggers motivational action (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987). The perceived plausibility of the ideal L2 self is consistent with the central tenet in expectancy-value theories in psychology; however, there have been untested properties of the L2 selves regarding the current perception of the ideal and the ought-to L2 self.

The results of this study strongly suggest that learners who perceive their ideal and ought-to L2 self as being more distant and less plausible are likely to experience dejection and anxiety more intensely compared to those who perceive the lower discrepancies. The findings further confirmed previous studies by MacIntyre et al. (2009) and Hessel (2015) in that learners who perceive themselves as possessing desired attributes (i.e., possible self) now and in the future are better motivated than those who do not have a connection between the desired attributes and the current state.

With regards to the relationship between the L2 selves and negative emotions, the first hypothesis that the ideal L2 self discrepancy would be associated with L2 dejection was partially supported. Both ideal L2 self discrepancy and ought-to L2 self discrepancy were associated with the lack of L2 self-efficacy with large effect sizes. The lack of L2 self-efficacy is a cognitive dimension of dejection-related feelings, that is, the appraisal of one’s capacity to fulfil the desired learning outcomes. It is perhaps not surprising that those who perceive the greatest self-discrepancy in either ideal or ought-to L2 self tend to experience the cognitive dimension of dejection the most. The large effect sizes from the comparison of learner groups of the greatest and least self-discrepancy imply that the appraisal of the self-discrepancy in the L2 self is closely linked to evaluating one’s efficacy in L2 learning.

The ideal and ought-to L2 self discrepancy differed in the experience of anxiety-related emotions. The ideal L2 self discrepancy was associated with communication apprehension, and the ought-to L2 self discrepancy was associated with test anxiety, both with the medium effect sizes. Communication apprehension derives from one’s perception of L2 capacity, and test anxiety refers to anxious feelings aroused from the fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986). Interestingly, both communication apprehension and test anxiety are state-based anxieties, whereas fear of negative evaluation represents prolonged anxiety from L2 learning process (e.g., *I feel anxious about a large number of grammar rules and vocabulary I have to study.*) or undesired consequence in the long term (e.g., *I worry about experiencing failure in learning Korean*). In other words, the ideal and ought-to L2 self discrepancies have an impact on temporarily experienced anxiety in L2 communication and test settings. On a temporary basis, a student may feel anxious when they notice errors in L2 speaking, and these anxious feelings may lead to self-doubt in achieving their ideal L2 self. On the other hand, it is also possible that a student who is unsure about their capacity to achieve the ideal L2 self may be more anxious when carrying out L2 conversation. Therefore, self-perceptions of the L2 selves and emotions are likely to have bidirectional relationships.

The results showed that self-discrepancy has a detrimental influence on emotional experiences in general, but the fine-tuned links between the ideal L2 self discrepancy and L2 dejection, and between the ought-to L2 self discrepancy and L2 anxiety were not supported. L2 emotional experience is likely to be dynamically mixed, whereas dejection and anxiety in clinical psychology are characterised by a chronic nature. Therefore, the original self-discrepancy theory from psychology is, to some extent, applicable to the L2 context in a sense that prolonged self-discrepancy is linked to negative emotions. However, the core aspect of the original self-discrepancy theory – an exclusive link between ideal self discrepancy and depression and ought self discrepancy and anxiety – is harder to apply to the context of L2 learning.

L2 learners experience emotions intensely because the learning process involves constant cognitive appraisal of one’s learning capacity and progress. It is widely considered that L2 learning is a process to overcome some kind of deficiency in L2; thus, the learning process can be mentally and emotionally draining especially among adult learners who have mastered at least one language – usually their mother tongue. The significant divergence of L1 and L2 proficiency is a constant reminder of the self-discrepancy between the current state and the desirable future of L2 selves. Research attention thus far has been directed to the motivational dimension of self-discrepancy, assuming that efforts to reduce the gap between the current and desired future are the key source of motivation. However, as MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) noted, “although Dörnyei emphasizes discrepancies in cognition about the present and the future, there is a role to be played by emotional reactions that emerge from perceived discrepancies and the prior experience of positive and negative emotions associated with language learning contexts.” (p. 67). The findings from the present study highlight the detrimental emotional reaction from the discrepancy, consistent with previous research (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2009). In addition to the cognitive dimension of the self-discrepancy, emotional reactions from the discrepancy are worth considering for future investigation in L2 motivation research.

This study focused on Vietnamese learners of the Korean language in an intensive degree programme in Hanoi, Vietnam. The sociocultural context of Korean language learning is worth taking into consideration. It has been repeatedly reported that the Korean language learning context in Vietnam has strong integrative and instrumental purposes (Han, 2021; Han & McDonough, 2018, 2021). Korean pop-culture has become popular in Vietnam as well as in other countries worldwide, thereby attracting a large number of Korean language learners. In addition to the initial attraction and desire to assimilate the target culture as a consumer of Korean media, students expect to work in the Korean community in Vietnam. Due to the close ties with the target-language community and expected monetary rewards related to Korean language learning, Vietnamese learners of Korean language can be strongly motivated, but at the same time, frustrated and anxious if they perceive that their desired outcomes are unlikely to be attained.

This study is not without limitations. First of all, the learning context may have changed since the data were collected in 2016. For example, Korean studies have been added to the degree programme, potentially reducing the perceived importance of the language proficiency. With regards to career prospects, the covid pandemic may have affected motivation and emotional experience due to the economic uncertainty and shrinking job market of Korean business in Vietnam. Also, the participants were highly skewed towards female, reflecting the student population learning Korean. The gender influence lurking in the data as well as the contextual change from the data collection point may limit the scope of generalisation of the findings.

**Conclusion**

During the last two decades, L2 motivation research population has been highly skewed towards learners of Global English in East Asia, Europe and North America (Boo et al., 2015). The bias of research populations and locations may be problematic for generalising research findings to non-English learning contexts or other geographical locations. This study, along with other chapters in this book, contributes to diversifying the research population with a focus on Asian learners learning an Asian language. The intensive language learning environment in this study is somewhat unique compared to the previous studies on LOTEs motivation (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). The findings cast doubts on the key assumption of the self discrepancy between the current and future, which can be applied to other intensive L2 learning contexts.

A geological location cannot decide ‘culture’, and it is controversial to decide factors that constitute ‘Asia’. However, there should be some commonalities across so called Asian learners of Asian languages, such as crafting the edge for the job market, philological similarities between the target language and mother tongue, and exam pressures (Apple et al., 2016). Aligned with the previous research in the Asian context, this study provides a new perspective on emotional experiences, which need further scholarly attention in other LOTEs contexts.

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**Appendix A**

*L2 selves questionnaire*

**Ideal L2 self**

*Imagine yourself reaching your goals as an L2 speaker in 10 years. What would you like to do with the language proficiency? And who would you like to be? Please fill in the following table.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *I would like to …* | *I would like to be a person who…* |
|  | *A)* |
|  | *B)* |
|  | *C)* |
|  | *D)* |

<Follow-up questions>

* **Significance of L2 self**

*How much does each answer from A) to D) matter to you?* *Circle the appropriate numbers from 1 (slightly important) to 5 (extremely important).*

(5-point Likert scale)

* **Distance of L2 self**

*How close do you think the person you are currently is to the person in the future? Circle the picture that best represents the distance.*

*Diagram

Description automatically generated*

* **Plausibility of L2 self**

*How likely are your answers from A) to D) to happen in future? Circle the closest number that best represents the plausibility.*

(5-point Likert scale, 1 = 10%, 2 = 30%, 3 = 50%, 4 = 70%, 5 = 90%)

**Ought L2 self**

*During and after you learn L2, what expectations do people around you have about you? List 4 expectations they have about your L2 learning and the people who have these expectations.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Expectation | People |
| A) |  |
| B) |  |
| C) |  |
| D) |  |

<Follow-up questions>

* **Significance of L2 self**

*How much does each answer from A) to D) matter to you? Circle the appropriate numbers from 1 (slightly important) to 5 (extremely important).*

(5-point Likert scale)

* **Distance of L2 self**

*How close do you think the person you are currently is to the person in the future? Circle the picture that best represents the distance.*

*Diagram

Description automatically generated*

* **Plausibility of L2 self**

*How likely are your answers from A) to D) to happen in future? Circle the closest number that best represents the plausibility.*

(5-point Likert scale, 1 = 10%, 2 = 30%, 3 = 50%, 4 = 70%, 5 = 90%)

Appendix B

*Principal component analysis of the items constituting the L2 dejection scale*

*(Promax oblique rotation, pattern matrix; three-factor solution*

*Lack of L2 learning self-efficacy, α = .81; Disappointment in L2 use, α = .77, learning fatigue, α = .65; factor loadings under .3 are not shown in the table for readability)*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Lack of L2 learning self-efficacy | Disappointment in L2 use | | Learning fatigue |
| Learning Korean is not interesting to me. |  | |  | .73 |
| I feel unmotivated in Korean classes. |  | |  | .74 |
| I don’t feel very energetic in Korean classes. |  | |  | .72 |
| \*I feel alert in Korean classes. |  | |  | .57 |
| I don’t make any progress in Korean learning. | .84 | |  |  |
| I don’t think I have capacity to learn Korean. | .71 | |  |  |
| So far, my Korean results have been unsatisfactory. | .73 | |  |  |
| I am getting behind my peers in Korean class. | .75 | |  |  |
| Being fluent in Korean is beyond my capacity. | .70 | |  |  |
| I feel disappointed in myself if I don’t understand Korean conversations. |  | | .74 |  |
| I feel disappointed in myself if people don’t understand my Korean. |  | | .89 |  |
| I feel disappointed in myself if I make mistakes in Korean conversations. |  | | .85 |  |

\* reversed order scale (Liker-scale 1 to 5 is reversed for the analysis, i.e. higher scale means less fatigue)

Appendix C

*Principal component analysis of the items constituting the L2 anxiety scales*

*(Promax oblique rotation, pattern matrix; three-factor solution*

*Fear of negative evaluation, α = .80; test anxiety, α = .84; communication apprehension, α = .76; factor loadings under .3 are not shown in the table for readability)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fear of negative evaluation | Test anxiety | Communication apprehension |
| I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking Korean. |  |  | .88 |
| I don’t feel confident in speaking Korean. |  |  | .85 |
| I feel anxious when I don’t understand what Korean people say. |  |  | .75 |
| I am afraid of getting low marks in Korean test. | .88 |  |  |
| I worry about experiencing failure in learning Korean. | .88 |  |  |
| I feel anxious by a large number of grammar rules and vocabulary I have to study. | .65 |  |  |
| I am afraid that I would disappoint my parents. | .70 |  |  |
| In Korean test, I get so nervous that I forget things I know. |  | .81 |  |
| I can’t concentrate on Korean tests because I am so anxious. |  | .90 |  |
| I can’t handle my anxiety while taking a Korean test. |  | .90 |  |