

## Art and the Motivational L2 Self System in a University Course

大学授業におけるアートと L2 セルフシステム論

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### Abstract

This article reports on the use of art in a 15-week English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course for students to understand and interpret Zoltán Dörnyei's tripartite second language (L2) motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2009). Four Japanese male and three international female university students took the elective ESP course and studied the tripartite L2 motivational self system held once a week for 90 minutes. They collaboratively learned about how this motivational framework is connected to their language learning through note taking on reading assignments, learner-led discussions, and support from the instructor. Successively, each learner drew a pictorial representation of their language learning based on the three parts of the L2 motivational self system: their learning experiences, their ought-to self, and their ideal self. Afterwards, they presented and explained their drawings to each other, and then they wrote an academic paper based on the readings, their presentation, their artwork, and their reflections. The article explains how these students became more aware of their language learning by using art in this course. It also reports how these particular classroom practices helped the students grow as self-directed learners.

### 要旨

本稿は、15週にわたる English for Specific Purposes (ESP): 目的別英語教育の授業で、Zoltán Dörnyei's の提唱する第2言語習得を動機づける L2 セルフシステム(Dörnyei, 2009)を成す三要素を指導するにあたり、学生の理解や解釈を深めることを目的に用いたアートに関する報告である。本授業(選択科目)は週1回90分の授業形態で、4名の日本男子学生と3名の女子外国人学生が履修し、L2 セルフシステムの三要素について学習した。そして、この動機づけの枠組みが、リーディング課題のメモ、学習者主導で行った議論、そして教員からのサポートを通じた自分たちの語学学習がとやかに結びつくかを協働的に学んだ。続いて、L2 セルフシステムの「学習経験」、「義務自己」、「理想自己」の三要素と照らし合わせ、学生個々の語学学習を絵で表現させた。そして、学生たちは自身の絵を互いに説明し合い、リーディング、プレゼンテーション、内省もふまえて論文を書いた。本論ではアートを用いることでいかに自分の語学学習を意識し自覚することができるようになったかを明らかにするとともに、本実践が自律した学習者としての成長も促すことに繋がったかを考察する。

### Keywords

learner development, L2 motivational self system, motivation, self-directed learning 学習者ディベロップメント、第二言語習得を動機づけるセルフシステム、動機、自主学习

### Introduction

In 2001, as a Master of Arts candidate in a TESOL course taught by Nanci Graves and Alan Mackenzie, I noticed my in-service teacher classmates and I were able to learn from expressing our ideas creatively through art by drawing pictures about what autonomy in language learning meant to us. Because the practice of utilizing art was beneficial for creating greater self-expression while

learning new concepts, I have been encouraging undergraduate English as a foreign language (EFL) students to depict language-learning concepts through art. In a 15-week term, I wanted to find out if four Japanese male and three international female students who were taking an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) elective course on Zoltán Dörnyei's tripartite second language (L2) motivational self system would find

value in exploring their language learning through art. In this article, I will briefly describe the motivational framework, and the classroom procedures of the 15-week course. I will also share samples of note taking, and the art of two students accompanied with their reflections in hopes that the reader might explore ways to incorporate and adapt art in their own EFL classrooms.

### A Concise Overview of the L2 Motivational Self System

I will briefly describe the L2 motivational self system and its relation to learning a second or other language for the unfamiliar reader. In a series of case studies from 2005, Dörnyei (2009) provided convincing evidence using a tripartite L2 motivational self system that described the self in relation to one's motivation for learning a language. First, he defined the *ideal L2 self* as the degree to which the learner would like to become a user of their L2 target language; second, the *ought-to L2 self* is the extent to which the learners believe they need to meet others' expectations to work around any negative learning outcomes; and third, the *L2 learning experience* is the motivation related to the learners' learning environments and experiences (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). Since the creation of Dörnyei's framework, teacher-researchers in Japan have replicated his hypothesis of the tripartite model (see Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009) or have modified the self system model slightly for research in their specific contexts (see Apple, Falout, & Hill, 2013; Falout, 2013; Irie & Brewster, 2013; Kaneko, 2012; Munezane, 2013; Murray, 2011; Yashima, 2009). Next, I will describe the course and the students' representations of their learning depicted in their L2 motivational art.

### The Context

In a 15-week, 90-minute elective course held once a week at a public university in the Kanto area, four Japanese male and three foreign female students at different stages in their undergraduate studies of various majors (five first-year students and two fourth-year students) agreed to participate in this

informal account of classroom practice with permissions. These students chose pseudonyms to conceal their identity. They studied Dörnyei's tripartite framework by exploring their own learning practices. The students' English levels also varied, and their most recent TOEIC placement test scores were approximately between 410-680.

This English for Specific Purposes 1 (ESP1) course was provided by the English Center during the 2014 academic year as one of eight first-year elective ESP1 content offerings. In addition, there were eight corresponding second-year ESP2 courses where the teachers chose the subject material, which ranged from genetics to the history of piracy. However, the common core goals in the ESP1 were to:

- (a) identify and discuss the theme of the course and established clear connections with related topics;
- (b) summarize, analyse, and synthesize the main arguments of the academic readings and lectures through pair and group discussions; and
- (c) express a critical understanding of the contents of the course in the form of a speaking presentation and a final research paper.

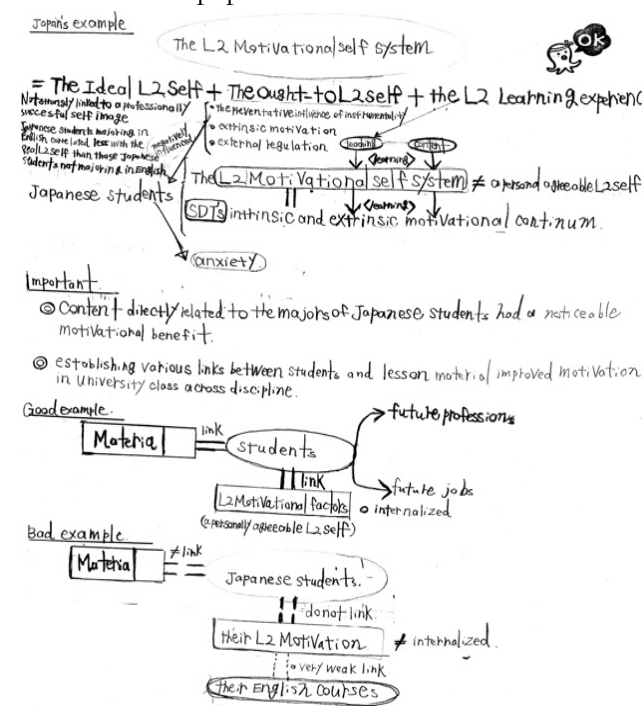


Figure 1. Masato's Note Taking A on Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009.

In the first month of the course, the reading assignments for Dörnyei's tripartite framework were from Edsall and Saito (2013) and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009). Owing to the level of difficulty of the readings, I assigned excerpts of each text, rather than the complete texts; for example, in Edsall and Saito (2013), I selected the brief section about L2 motivational self system research in Japan. Then, for each reading, note taking was assigned in preparation for learner-led discussions that gave support for students to internalize the meaning of the content. Samples of note taking from previous student coursework on other subjects were provided in order to help them visualize what was expected for their homework. Displayed below are random selections of two of the students' notes with self-chosen pseudonyms. Masato's Note taking A (see Figure 1) is a sample of a portion of his homework on the reading from the Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) chapter, while Eri's Note taking B (see Figure 2) is a section of her note taking from the Edsall and Saito (2013) article.

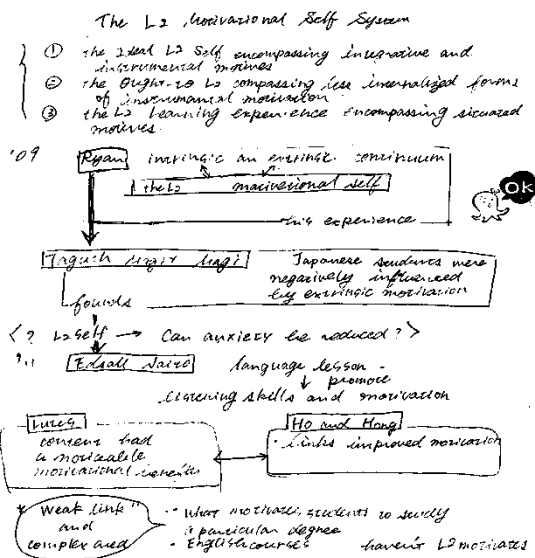


Figure 2 Eri's Note Taking B on Edsall and Saito, 2013.

The learner-led discussions of the readings were possible with the support of their notes and guidance from me when they had queries. Nevertheless, the students focused on the framework itself, rather than what the model meant for their own learning outcomes. Therefore, as best I could, I drew a simplistic representation of my L2

motivational self system learning for Japanese with definitions of the framework adapted from Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011). My ought-to L2 self was a small tree with a river flowing past it that prevented closer contact with a larger tree that depicted my ideal L2 self, and the weather in the drawing

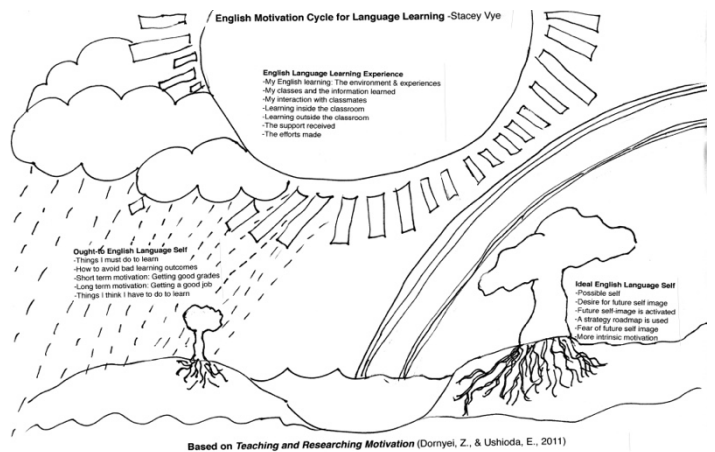


Figure 3. Stacey's Visual Representation of Her L2 Motivational Self System.

reflected my language learning experience with rough and pleasant weather patterns (see Figure 3).

This sample was provided before each student drew their own model in the hope that they would be able to personalize the framework for their own language learning experiences.

With the sample of my “dodgy” drawing in hand, each student borrowed a set of coloured pencils and drew how they felt the tripartite model expressed themselves and their L2 motivational experiences. After viewing the students' assignments, I was concerned they might have acted to put on “a mask of autonomous learning behaviours” to please the instructor, as Breen and Mann (1997) claim that learners might do. Most of the weather and tree images in their drawings were similar to mine, so I wondered if the students wanted their work to appear favourable to me. When I sought to clarify this concern with them, the students reported that during the pre-drawing stages, it was a struggle to conceptualize their L2 self-system in a concrete manner. Consequently, they may have preferred to adapt some visual metaphors from my

drawing, which they were then able to personalize their art with so that it reflected more of their own L2 identity. Successively, each learner drew a pictorial representation of the L2 motivational self system based on the three sections as it related to themselves. Afterwards, they wrote a paper derived from the readings, their visual representations, and their reflections on the subject.

### Two Students' Depictions of Their Motivational Self System

I will continue by displaying the visual representations of art with the corresponding writing passages of Maria, a fourth-year female student and Fumi, a first-year male student. These two students were selected because they described and referred to their art in their papers the most. Following their descriptions, I will briefly write my reflections about what I learned from their work.

#### *Maria's L2 Motivational Self System*



Figure 4. Maria's L2 Motivational Self System.

#### *Maria's Language Learning Experience*

...My interest in English emerged when I started to watch American's TV shows, because I needed to understand the scene by myself without translations. Have you ever watched some movies in English and noticed that some phrases are different than the subtitles? When they make the subtitles, they change some parts depending on the language and the audience. Even when my English was poor I noticed that, and I wanted to understand more English to know the real meaning of the story.

*Then, I entered cram school .... One class that helped me a lot was the Newspaper article class because even though I was living in Japan, I studied ... when I was 14 years old so my Kanji was so bad and I did not know difficult words. However, in this newspaper class we needed to translate some articles, and then I could study English, Japanese, and what was happening in the world at the same time. At that time, I realized that knowing English is not enough. Reading some economics and business articles, I had interest in working at some company and make my knowledge base greater. Then I decided to study more business and I entered... University.*

#### *Maria's Ought-to Self*

*My ought-to self represents my ... University English environment. I must have to practice my English to be fluent in this language in order to have a good career, but I need to take credits of economics, so I do not have time to take English classes at university. In this environment, I have rainy days with some obstacles that look like a mountain [see Figure 4]. The rain represents this bad environment. Here I need to climb the mountain to go to my ideal L2 side, but I am afraid to walk in the rain and get wet. To avoid bad learning outcomes, I need to be confident and just go straight. It means, I do not have time to take classes, but I can practice outside of the class too. It is right to say that sometimes it is difficult to overcome these difficulties alone, so I use my umbrella that represents my English teacher Stacey. She always helps me inside and outside of the class. With confidence and my umbrella helps me so I can climb the mountain and go to my ideal L2 side [see Figure 4].*

#### *Maria's Ideal Self*

*At last I will explain my ideal L2 self. It represents me at the future with a lot of people around me [The people depicted on the sunny side of the mountain in Figure 4.], because I believe that when you know a lot of languages you can make a lot friends and know a lot of people because you can travel around the world, you can work with that languages, but the most important is if you know a lot of languages you can improve yourself. Being fluent in English, I could read a lot of articles that are related with my major, ... I also will watch TV shows without subtitles that was my first goal of be fluent in English. Therefore, improving myself I will be a better person, I can work*

*in a big company or have my own business and I can talk with people around the world using English, so I can attract people around me.*

### Fumi's L2 Motivational Self System

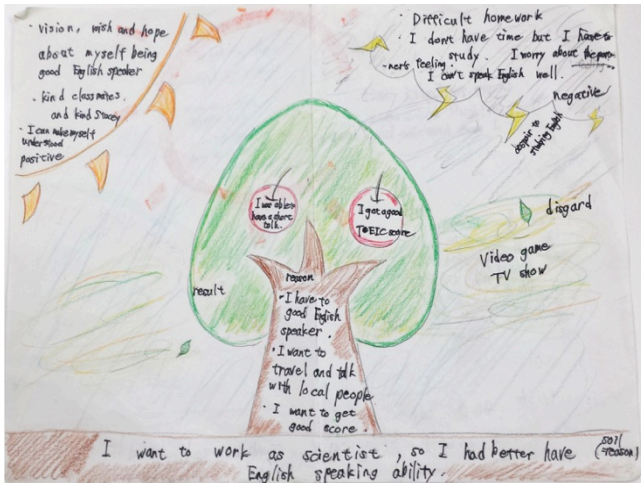


Figure 5. Fumi's L2 Motivational Self System.

### Fumi's Language Learning Experience

*I started to study English when I was in the sixth grade. At that time an American teacher came to my elementary school, and we repeated his words after he spoke certain words. It was enjoyable. When I was junior high school student, the teacher came to teach me English Grammar. But it was easy, and there was practice to speak, so I could still enjoy the subject.*

### Fumi's Ought-to Self Combined With His Ideal Self

*However, when I became high school student, Learning English became boring and difficult. The purpose of learning English changed from becoming a good English speaker to prepare for the entrance exams. And I had to do so much homework that I could not enjoy learning English. I think this is symbol of my "Ought to English Learning." Due to that, my motivation faded out. Explaining this with ...[see Figure 5], strong rain as "Ought to English Learning" don't stop and my tree as my will can't receive sunlight.*

*However, after I entered this university, my climate improved. My motivation appeared again. As you can see, we can select classes in university, so I can change my attitude about learning English from passive to active. Moreover, I have clear reasons to study English. For example, they are being able to speak with companies in laboratory or local people when I travel to foreign countries, getting high*

*TOEIC score and so on. If we have imaginable goals and an active attitude, it is "Ideal learning English," I thought. In other words in ...[see Figure 5], my tree has strong trunk and rich soil. However, that continued for only two months and it was difficult to keep an ideal attitude. Therefore, I find students cannot have high motivation, and I think we need "Ought to English Learning" in order to continue studying. Of course, ideally speaking, it is the best to keep high motivation, but it is impossible unless we have strong wills or strong reasons. Almost all people cannot have both, so now I think we need both "Ideally" and "Ought to" in order to continue to study. In other words, tree needs water and sunlight to grow up [sic].*

### Reflections on the Students' Art and Their Motivational L2 Self Systems

Reflecting on Maria's and Fumi's art and writings, although their TOEIC levels and communicative English varied greatly, they both perceived their ideal self more than their counterparts. It seemed logical that Maria made the connection with her ideal self and her future work using English, Japanese, and Portuguese as a fourth-year student because she was nearing graduation and had given her future career a lot of thought. She reported that by engaging in art and the process of exploring one of her L2 languages, it was useful for her to obtain a better understanding of the value of her identity as a multilingual person in Japan who looks foreign in appearance. This is why she placed herself with a supportive group of people on the sunny side of the mountain in Japan in her drawing. In other words, rather than struggling to fully assimilate into Japanese culture, she embraced the idea that she had a lot to offer personally and professionally in society as a soon-to-be Japanese national who is multicultural and trilingual.

Like Maria, Fumi also had a much stronger connection between his ought-to self and his future ideal self than his first-year counterparts. He explained during in-class discussions with his classmates and in written reflections that he had created a positive English identity before he entered high school, but his English self became

damaged while doing drill-and-kill type exercises in preparation for the English examinations for university. He also suspected that if he took elective English classes in university, he could have more control over what he wanted to learn, so he chose this course. However, the process of looking at one's L2 self was more pleasurable than he imagined because he realized his English identity was, firstly, part of himself, and, secondly, had been damaged by English instruction in high school in Japan.

The remaining five students' perceptions of their ought-to-self also revealed some aspects of hardship from cramming in high school for university entrance exams, yet they did not have a strong connection to their ideal L2 self, although learning English was a desired learning goal of theirs. Nevertheless, the process of creating art, in-class discussions with classmates, writing weekly reflections, and writing a paper after their presentation helped them to better understand critically what the tripartite system was and its relation to their own self-directed learning. A take-away for the reader who is interested in trying this motivational L2 self-system process in class is that all students reported discovering more about the process of their language learning. Although for Maria and Fumi the discovery of new aspects of their own identity beyond simply learning a language was a particularly powerful experience, all seven students reported that the process raised their awareness about their language learning. A common realization among the students was that cramming for the English entrance examinations, where their ought-to L2 self seemed daunting, damaged their enthusiasm for studying English. Finally, although it is hard to generalize from such a small-scale study, the shared experiences of these seven students seemed to provide an opportunity for learner development because they were encouraged to look slightly more towards their L2 English ideal self and their self-directed learning. The reason for this is they seemed to realize they were not alone in feeling bad about their high school English instructional experiences and they gained

more confidence about learning English for their own reasons.

### Conclusion

To conclude, I considered whether students who took a 15-week English elective course on Zoltán Dörnyei's tripartite L2 motivational self system would find value in exploring their language learning through readings, note taking, and art. First, I displayed the artistic representation of the L2 self system and excerpts from the final papers of two students whose engagement with the task seemed to go beyond their language learning experience and to move toward visualization of their ideal L2 self as part of their emerging identity. Secondly, I found that all seven students had studied by traditional rote memorization of English in their high schools regardless of their nationality and educational context. This process of describing their shared experiences about prior difficulties learning English with drawings and note taking enriched the class discussions, which in turn encouraged the students to think more about English as it related to their future identity without worrying as much about how they ought to learn English. Lastly, this write-up of classroom practice using art was not intended as a formal study but, rather, was carried out in hopes that the reader might explore ways to incorporate and adapt art in their EFL classrooms to illustrate concepts that otherwise might be difficult to comprehend.

### Acknowledgements

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