

# The Influence of Global English on Language Learners: Beyond the Instrumentalist View of Language Learning

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## **Abstract**

This study reviews past research on language learning motivation that reflects the status of English as a global language. Current situations surrounding English as a de facto global language have influenced learners not only of English but also of other languages, as well as research on these learners. Under these circumstances, publications on the motivation to learn English has increased drastically. In contrast, research on the motivation to study languages other than English is insufficient, and some report the negative influence of English on the motivation to learn languages other than English. After reviewing both types of studies, this paper discusses both theoretical and pedagogical implications, including the possibility to go beyond the merely instrumentalist view of language learning.

## **Introduction**

The spread of English as a global language in the era of globalization has impacted both language learners and language learning theory. For second language (L2) learners, having English as a global language means that they have clear pragmatic reasons to study the language. It is not too much to say that most learners of English feel the necessity, sometimes pressure, to be competent in the language, regardless of the actual need for such competence. A downside of the spread of English is a negative influence on learners of languages other than English (LOTEs), for it may be much more difficult to be motivated to study LOTEs. Theoretically speaking, one of the areas that is strongly influenced by the status of global English is language learning motivation. Given the spread of global English researchers have tried to explain learners' motivation to study the language, which led to proposals of new motivation theories, e.g., the

L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

In this paper, past studies regarding language learning motivation that reflected the status of English as a global language are reviewed, followed by a discussion of both theoretical and pedagogical implications. It is hoped that by doing so more learners feel harmonious in their motivations to study English and LOTEs.

## **Language Learning Motivation Theories**

Recent development of language learning motivation theories has close relationships with situations of English as a global language. As one of the individual difference factors language learning motivation is one of the most researched topics in second language acquisition. It is considered to influence both the rate of L2 attainment and the ultimate attainment of an L2 (Ortega, 2009). Although, as detailed later, originally conceptualized to be related to positive feelings toward “the target language community” (Gardner, 1985), in recent theories language learning motivation has been conceptualized in distinct ways due the emergence of English as a global language.

The theory that laid the cornerstone of language learning motivation is the socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985). In this theory, positive feelings toward the target language community, or the community that speaks the language that a learner studies (called integrativeness), is an important factor influencing the intensity of motivation. Gardner and his associates mainly examined Anglophone learners of French, and their studies indicated that learners who had positive feelings toward the French community in their contexts and had positive learning experiences put effort into studying French and reached high competence. These factors are the tenets of “integrative motivation,” which they argued is an important type of motivation that led to competence in the L2.

However, in the following years the model met with some criticism particularly in terms of its (in)applicability to learners of global English (e.g., Au, 1988; Dörnyei, 1990). Unlike in the Canadian context, for example, where the target language community was easily defined, it was not easily defined in the case of global English. The language was used for communication with both native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English as a common language, and it became less clear what the target language community included.

In trying to accommodate the deficit Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed the L2 motivational self system, which is now the most utilized theory of language learning motivation. It is comprised of three constituents: (a) ideal L2 self; (b) ought-to L2 self; and (c) L2 learning

experience. Among them, the construct of ideal L2 self seems particularly suitable for explaining learner's motivation to study global English.

Ideal L2 self is defined by Dörnyei (2009) as “the L2-specific facet of one's ‘ideal self’” (p. 29). It is one's idealized future self-image regarding an L2 and tried to broaden the construct of integrativeness. Thus, it could include such self-mages as someone who proficiently communicates in English with both NSs and NNSs of English, which well describes learner's motivation to study global English. It could also include someone who wants to be integrated with a specific English-speaking community, in which case it is related to integrativeness. Thus, integrativeness can be explained as “one local manifestation of a wider sense of affiliation with the values associated with a language and the language community” (Ryan, 2009, p. 132). Ideal L2 self is wider than integrativeness in the sense that it could also include someone who is identified as a member of the international community rather than of a particular local community.

As explained, the L2 motivational self system includes two other constructs. First, ought-to L2 self “concerns the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess to meet expectations and to *avoid* possible negative outcomes” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29, original emphasis). It is a less internalized type of instrumental motive than ideal L2 self. Second, L2 learning experience is related to a more immediate learning environment and experiences, e.g., the impact of a teacher and peers, teaching materials, etc. It is defined as “the perceived quality of the learners' engagement with various aspects of the language learning process” (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 26).

## English and LOTE Education in Japan

As English functions as a de facto common language for communication among speakers of various first languages, the importance of English education has been emphasized in many contexts, including English as a foreign language contexts like Japan. Some argue, on the other hand, that there is too much emphasis on English education, leaving LOTE education behind. The balance between English and LOTE education needs to be carefully examined.

English and LOTE education in Japan, especially at the tertiary level, drastically changed after the standards for establishing universities were relaxed in 1991. Until then, university students typically had to earn eight credits of English and six or eight credits of a LOTE. However, after the change, universities themselves could decide which courses to offer, so many of them decided not to offer obligatory courses in LOTEs (JACET, 2002, p. 20). In a series of nationwide surveys of universities on English and LOTE education in Japan (JACET, 2002, 2003), it is reported that 35% of the participating universities offered no obligatory cours-

es on LOTEs; if they included junior colleges, the number rose to 51% (JACET, 2002, p. 21).

LOTE instructors also reported being dissatisfied with the situations of LOTE education in Japan. JACET (2003) reported that 77.4% of LOTE instructors who participated in the study were either “dissatisfied” or “somewhat dissatisfied” with LOTE education in Japan (p. 21). The main reason for this dissatisfaction, among other things, was that they did not consider Japan to have a concrete foreign language education policy (p. 21).

Compared to LOTE education, English education has long been emphasized by the government. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) describes that, in the era of globalization, it aims to have the citizens’ English competence among the top levels in Asia (MEXT, 2016). In order to accomplish such a goal, English became one of the main subjects starting in the fifth grade in elementary school in 2020. Under such circumstances, many Japanese learners will likely, willingly or unwillingly, feel obligated to study English. This will have a tremendous influence on their motivation to study English, as reported in past studies as reviewed below.

### **Studies on Language Learning Motivation Focusing on the Influence of Global English**

Various influences of global English are reported in past studies on language learning motivation. Over 72% of L2 motivation studies conducted between 2005 and 2014 surveyed in a review (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015) focused on English as the target language, a fact that reflects the status of global English: the authors described that the trend toward English motivation studies is no surprise because it reflects “the growing dominance of Global English in language education” (p. 151).

Interestingly, the authors also explained that Japanese and other East Asian learners of English dominate as research participants: the Japanese ranked second as the most studied nationality (p. 151). This is attributed to a discrepancy in Japan “between the significant efforts and resources invested and the rate of success in English language learning” (p. 151). In other words, so much research on English learning motivation has been conducted in Japan precisely because Japanese learners of English still have a long way to go to reach high competence in the language despite the various attempts at English education. Researchers feel it necessary to untangle the discrepancy, which is likely to be related to the issue of motivation.

Among the many studies on English learning motivation, both quantitative and qualitative, the majority have utilized the L2 motivational self system as the framework (e.g., Apple, Falout, and Hill, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2014; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009; Ueki & Takeuchi,

2017; Yashima, Nishida, & Mizumoto, 2017). First, quantitative studies, mainly examining correlations or structural relationships between (a) the constituents in the system, (b) intended learning effort and, in lesser cases, (c) L2 proficiency, report that ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience are closely related to learning effort (e.g., Apple et al., 2013; Taguchi et al., 2009). Although the relationships with L2 proficiency are less examined, some studies report that the constituents of the L2 motivational self system lead to L2 proficiency via L2 learning effort (e.g., Yashima et al., 2017).

Of particular relevance to the discussion of global English influence is Munezane (2013), who investigated Japanese learners' motivations to study global English and the structural relationships between the following variables: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, attitude toward the L2 community, international posture (Yashima, 2002), motivation (as defined by motivational intensity and intrinsic motivation), and what the author labeled as the "valuing of global English." As a construct, the valuing of global English was introduced to "capture the learners' conception of English as a common language for understanding and as a means to tackle global problems" (p. 152). The results indicated that motivation was directly predicted by both ideal L2 self and the valuing of global English. A plausible explanation for the direct path from the valuing of global English to motivation is that the more aware a learner is of the role of English as a global language, the more effort they are likely to exert in studying the language.

In addition to quantitative studies, qualitative studies also demonstrate how English as a global language influences learners' motivation to study the language. For example, Ueki and Takeuchi (2017) conducted a longitudinal interview study with two Japanese university students who experienced a year-long study abroad in the U.S. and described how one of the interviewees came to realize what "World Englishes" meant to her by communicating with other international students while abroad. The experience helped the student feel harmony between her ideal and ought-to English selves, which lessened her English anxiety.

Compared to the overall positive picture of the influence of global English on the motivation to study it, it is less positive with LOTE learning motivation, particularly in those reported outside Japan. LOTE motivation studies outside Japan generally point to the trend that when studying more than one language, learners often experience "negative interferences" between languages (Csizér & Lukács, 2010, p. 3). In other words, having positive attitudes toward a certain language (in many cases global English) might negatively influence the learning of another language. For example, in a study involving a large sample ( $n = 8,593$ ), Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) investigated Hungarian learners of five different languages; by performing

cluster analysis, they found that the sample could be divided into four distinct types based on their motivational profiles. They described that even for the most motivated cluster of learners, there is a “competition” among different languages when learning more than one L2, and “in this competition the clear winner appears to be World English” (p. 657).

In another study, Dörnyei and Chan (2013) investigated 172 Chinese Year 8 students studying both English and Mandarin. They found that the participants’ ideal selves regarding the two languages are distinct, concluding that coexisting ideal L2 self-images can interfere with each other in both positive and negative ways (p. 455). This means that, in some cases, learners can transfer “linguistic confidence from one language to the other” (p. 455), but in other cases, there is competition “for space in the working self-concept” (p. 455).

Furthermore, Henry (2015) investigated the motivational trajectories of Swedish students learning French and described cases of learners who prioritized their English studies over their French studies. For example, one of the interviewees explained her reasons for prioritizing English studies over French studies, stating, “if you speak English so well, because. . . well, it feels a little unnecessary to learn French . . . because English is of course an international language” (p. 330). Furthermore, the participants in Henry (2015) frequently compared English with the motivation to learn French (p. 329), indicating that English might have a referential role for LOTE learners.

Taken together, LOTE motivation studies outside the Japanese context—although not as rich as English motivation studies—delineate a picture of LOTE learning motivation being affected by English studies, as English is now considered the primary global language. Learners’ ideal LOTE selves are not as developed as their English counterparts due to the fact that, even in contexts where LOTEs are spoken, they could get by with English.

LOTE motivation studies in Japan remain particularly scarce. Some have investigated the motivations to study LOTEs without accounting for the interaction between English and LOTE studies, and the picture is far from conclusive. For example, Matsui (2007) investigated university students’ changes in motivation to learn French after a semester. The results indicated that the participants had significantly higher amotivation after a semester of learning French, and their intent to persist in French studies lowered as well (p. 190).

One of the few studies that investigated ideal LOTE selves is Iwai and Nishida (2014), which is a year-long intervention study focusing on university learners of German that engaged in active learning using an iPad. The results showed that university learners studying German had higher ideal German self levels after a year, despite the fact that their amotivation level went up (p. 39). They pointed out the possibility that the change might be thanks to the

active learning using the iPad.

In a series of studies, Takahashi (2014, 2017, 2021) interviewed two Japanese university students who studied not only English but also a compulsory second foreign language (*dai-2 gaikokugo*). The research indicated that, although it might be an exceptional case, one of the interviewees (Interviewee 11) balanced English and LOTE studies and engaged in studying various languages; he had both strong intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017), i.e., wanting to study the language because it is inherently interesting, and ideal English and LOTE selves of becoming an academic in his major, political philosophy. While this interviewee acknowledged the utility of global English, it was “only one of the languages he learned, and even for communicative purposes he considered other languages to be equally useful because they let him communicate with speakers of those languages” (Takahashi, 2021, p. 367). The interviewee further elaborated on “his emphasis on and appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity” (p. 363). Thus, the research shed light on the possibility of explaining the learner’s motivation with less pragmatic reasons and with more holistic reasons, which resonate with the contention that a language is not merely a tool for communication (e.g., Shibata, Naka, & Fujiwara, 2020).

Interestingly, although not through empirical studies, some Japanese researchers indicate that university students can be motivated to study LOTE because they have not experienced demotivation caused by university entrance examinations (e.g., Oiwa, 2012; Sakamoto, 2016); they had to study English for these examinations, so they may have experienced demotivation in their English studies. Taken together, although research shows that global English might negatively impact LOTE motivation, LOTE learners can also develop their motivations in distinct ways.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Partly because of the close relationships between global English and globalization, recent theorizing of language learning motivation, including the L2 motivational self system, has focused on purposes and goals of language learning that are tied to this era’s economic and pragmatic values. When considering LOTE learning motivation, however, such perspectives as pragmatic and economic values have less explanatory power than in the case of English learning motivation. LOTE learners, such as those in Takahashi (2021), study the languages for more intrinsic values and linguistic and cultural diversity. More comprehensive and holistic theoretical development is awaited.

Of course, for LOTE learners, pragmatic values of language learning can be one

aspect of their LOTE studies. This was the case of learners in Wang and Liu (2020), in which learners tried to gain a competitive edge by studying German because having high English competence may no longer be a competitive edge.

However, what is necessary is a theoretical account that explains the complexity of LOTE learning motivation as demonstrated, for example, by Interviewee 11 in Takahashi (2021). Interviewee 11 acknowledged the status of English as a global language and positively perceived its value for communication with both NSs and NNSs. However, his motivation cannot be explained by “goals” and “purposes” because he valued language and cultural diversity and “had ‘belief in reading in the original language’” (Takahashi, 2021, p.363). As such, past studies on LOTE learners have not been examined to the same degree as English learners. More research and theoretical development are necessary in order to explain the various aspects of learners’ motivation to study both English and LOTEs.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

Considering that the pragmatic aspects of language learning are only part of the picture of language learning motivations, LOTE instructors might explore the possibilities to motivate their students for other aspects. First, as the case of Interviewee 11 in Takahashi (2021) demonstrated, nurturing learners’ appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity is particularly important. Second, considering that the target language community might be more definable with LOTEs, raising students’ awareness of the relationships between a target language and its community might also be motivating for some learners. In a sense, motivating LOTE learners might be easier than motivating English learners because it does not interfere with their past demotivation.

For English instructors, the picture is a little different. Although it may sound contradictory in the era of globalization, emphasizing the intrinsic aspects of language learning and promoting a holistic view of language learning might help their students feel less pressure to study the language. As students are well aware of the status of English as a global language, overemphasizing the pragmatic aspects of their English studies might only help students’ ought-to L2 selves develop, which is likely to make these students more anxious (e.g., Ueki & Takeuchi, 2017). In order to help students balance their ought-to and ideal English selves, instructors can promote a holistic view of language learning, emphasizing not only how English will be important for their future but will also be a more enjoyable aspect of language learning.



## Conclusion

This study reviewed past studies on language learning motivation that reflects the status of English as a global language and how it has been theorized in past studies. In order to avoid the negative influence of global English on LOTE learning motivation, to balance English and LOTE studies, and to help students go beyond a merely instrumentalist view of language learning, instructors also need to go beyond it. Researchers also need to propose a theory that is more comprehensive than recent ones that mainly focus on the purposes and goals of language learning. As important as English might be as a communication tool, language learning has many other aspects that learners can appreciate.

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