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Chinese university students' multilingual learning motivation under contextual influences: A multi-case study of Japanese majors

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This study closely examined the motivational language selves of Chinese university students in the process of multilingual learning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve Japanese specialist majors. The qualitative data revealed the complex interplay between the participants' language selves and complicated contextual influences. The participants seemed to have strong ideal English self especially in the workplace and relatively weaker ideal Japanese self. They had strong ought-to Japanese self and their ought-to English self was suspended to some extent. Apart from their English and Japanese selves, they also constructed a multilingual self. The cultural, social and pedagogical contexts in which the participants were embedded exerted mixed influences on their self constructions. The findings suggest the neoliberal emphasis on the instrumental value of language and the negative impact of English as a global language on Japanese learning in such social discourse. This article is concluded with some pedagogical implications for language teachers.

Keywords: English as a global language; instrumental; motivational self; multilingual learning motivation; neoliberal

Introduction

In the context of the presently ongoing multifaceted globalisation and the intensifying economic and cultural interconnectedness of the world (Block, 2012), English has undoubtedly achieved and sustained its status as a global language. In the realm of education, English has also become a dominant foreign language in school curriculum around the world (Graddol, 2006). For example, in the field of second language (L2) motivation research, 73% of the empirical investigations during the past ten years have focused on the learning of English as the target L2 (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015).

However, as the world is increasingly moving to multilingualism, the learning of languages other than English (LOTEs) has become an increasingly common phenomenon and has caught the attention of researchers in applied linguistics. In many

cases of LOTE learning, multiple or simultaneous language learning is taking place, since it often occurs together with English learning, especially in non-Anglophone contexts. Motivation in multilingual learning is a complex issue, as motivation is unlikely to be evenly distributed among languages and the interaction between L2 and L3 motivation can be complicated, especially when the L2 is English (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Henry, 2011, 2014).

The impact of English on the learning of LOTEs in multilingual education has become a growing concern in the present historical process of globalization. The learning of English as a global language is increasingly associated with a nation's economic competitiveness and its citizens' economic benefits, which underscores an instrumental view of language (Kubota, 2011, 2016) and is fundamentally underpinned by the neoliberal ideology of treating language as a commodity in the new globalized economy (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Heller, 2010; Tan & Rubdy, 2008). In such a context, Ushioda (2017) makes us reconsider the prevailing instrumentalist view of language learning under the influence of neoliberal discourse. However, how such social discourse interplays with individual learners' LOTE motivation remains relatively unexplored. Therefore, the present study directs attention to contemporary Chinese society and examines a group of Chinese university students' L2 (English) and L3 (Japanese) motivational selves mediated by the social discourse of FL learning.

Foreign language learning motivation

In motivational research on language learning, the self-related perspective, particularly the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), has become the mainstream framework that conceptualizes L2 learning motivation (Boo et al., 2015). The L2MSS subsumes three components, namely the ideal L2 self (what language learners wish to become), the ought-to L2 self (what language learners feel obliged to

become) and the L2 learning experience (the situated motives related to the learners' immediate environment and experience). This framework is used as the main theoretical lens in the following section to examine previous research.

English learning motivation

L2 English self has been widely investigated across a range of geographical contexts including Austria, Hungary, Chile, China and Indonesia, and across different educational levels, including secondary school, undergraduate and postgraduate students (e.g. Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2015; Lamb, 2012; Mercer, 2015; You & Dörnyei, 2016). The mainstream research on English learning motivation has been quantitative rather than qualitative, regardless of the qualitative tradition of possible selves research (MacIntyre, Mackinnon, & Clement, 2009). Despite its contribution to the field, the linear research paradigm may not be able to capture the contextualised and situated nature of foreign language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and also the complex and dynamic relationship between learner and context (Ushioda, 2015). In other words, the linear approach 'depersonalises learners, who are treated simply as bundles of variables' (Ushioda, 2011: 12) and therefore qualitative methods of data collection are suggested for future self-related motivational research.

LOTE learning motivation

With increasing multicultural interactions in the process of globalisation, learning LOTE has become increasingly common in the global village. In research on LOTE learning motivation, the current motivational framework is being questioned and the impact of English has come to researchers' attention (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). Due to the unique global status of English, motivation to learn LOTE is necessarily

different from motivation to learn English (Busse, 2017), but it does not receive sufficient attention in the academia. Studies on LOTE selves have been conducted in both Anglophone contexts (e.g. Busse & Walter, 2013; Lanvers, 2016; MacIntyre, Baker, & Sparling, 2017; Thompson, 2017) and non-Anglophone contexts (e.g. Henry, 2014; Siridetkoon & Dewaele, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2017) and have covered languages such as German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Gaelic.

Due to the dominance of global English in school curriculum, it is highly likely that LOTE learners in non-Anglophone contexts are simultaneously learning two languages – the global language English and LOTE. In this case, comparisons and competitions between languages are likely to occur in language learners (Henry, 2014). One major research concern in third language (L3) motivation is, as previously mentioned, the impact of English as a dominant language on motivation to learn a LOTE (e.g. Henry, 2014; Siridetkoon & Dewaele, 2017). Although simultaneous language learning is happening all over the world, most of the existent L3 research is based in Europe and research contexts outside Europe are underrepresented. Huang, Hsu, and Chen (2015), Siridetkoon and Dewaele's (2017), and Wang and Liu's (2017) are among the few recent studies on L3 (LOTE) motivation carried out in Asian contexts. All these studies have highlighted that the motivation to learn a LOTE in addition to global English is closely related to the perceived social status of the target LOTE and the learners' perception of social role obligations to achieve academic excellence or future success. It seems that Asian learners may be subject to the influences of the social discourse surrounding language learning in their specific contexts.

Neoliberal discourse in language learning

Of particular relevance to the discussion of individual learners' multilingual motivation

is the shifting meaning of multilingualism and multilingual learning under the globalised ‘new economy’, or neoliberalism. In this political economic theory, people are constructed as bundles of skills (Urciuoli, 2008) that can be marketed for productivity (Block, 2017; Shin & Park, 2016). Language is evaluated with regard to its economic values in the labour market (Heller, 2010) and learning a language is ‘justified in terms of its usefulness in achieving specific utilitarian goals, such as access to economic development or social mobility’ (Wee, 2008:32).

Among all the languages, English is placed in the centre of global/local marketplace as a commodity that can be traded for economic values and has become the ‘embodiment of neoliberal ideology’ (Holborow, 2012: 26). In other words, the macro-level neoliberal social discourse may impact and partly explain the instrumentalist view of English competence in micro-level individual English learning (Ushioda, 2017). There has been a range of research raising our awareness of the neoliberal ideology in English language education, particularly in Asian contexts (e.g. Kubota, 2011, 2016; Lee, 2016; Park, 2011). The prevailing instrumentalist view is a concern not only in English learning but also in language learning in general (Ushioda, 2017). However, despite of the emerging line of research in the impact of neoliberal discourse upon language learning (Shin & Park, 2016), the Chinese context has been under-examined. Although mainland China cannot be considered as a neoliberal society (Harvey, 2005), such prevailing neoliberal discourse is not uncommon in language education. China has indeed a long tradition of linguistic instrumentalism in both national language and foreign language policymaking (Lam & Wang, 2008). It would be of great interest to investigate its influence on Chinese learners’ motivation at the multilingual turn.

The study

The present study set out to focus on multilingual learning motivation in mainland China and look at the contextual and social influence on it. Specifically, we aimed to investigate Chinese learners' L2 English and L3 Japanese self images in relation to the multidimensional contextual influences. To foreground the person-in-context relationship view of language learning motivation (Ushioda, 2009), we opted for a qualitative research design. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- (1) What language-related motivational self images were constructed by the participants?
- (2) What contextual influences affected such constructions?

Research context

In mainland China (henceforth China), English is the dominant FL and Japanese is a rising regional FL. Among all the 416 million foreign-language learners in China, 93.8% learned English as the only FL (Wei & Su, 2012). English has been standardized as a compulsory subject in China's educational system. In the workplace, knowledge of English in forms of language certificates has become an entry requirement (Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). Japanese is one of the most popular FLs in China. 94% of Chinese who learned one or more foreign languages learned English, 7% learned Russian, and 2.5% learned Japanese (Wei & Su, 2012). Also, China has the world's largest number of Japanese language learners (1.046 million out of 3.985 million) in 2012, a 26.5% rise since 2009 (Lv, Gao, & Teo, 2017).

The present study was conducted in the School of Foreign Languages and Literature in a key comprehensive university located in Southeast China. As part of the graduation qualifications, Japanese majors are also required to pass the university English test. Notably, the Japanese department recruits a large proportion of the

students from foreign language secondary schools in China, through a scheme called ‘*Baosongsheng*’. In this practice, qualified high-school students are recommended to the university without taking the National Matriculation Examinations on the condition that they pass an interview organized by the university. These students uniformly learn English as a foreign language in their elementary and secondary school. Japanese is their L3 that they learn from scratch upon matriculation into the university.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were twelve female Japanese major students enrolled in the Japanese Department (due to the disproportion of gender in language majors). The first author contacted a faculty member of the Japanese Department and obtained permission to distribute an intent-to-participate form to all the Japanese majors to explain the purpose of the study. Those who were willing to participate were approached.

Participants from different years of study were recruited except third-year students because they were all on the study-abroad programme in Japan during data collection.

All the participants were coded for the purpose of privacy protection and clarity in discussion. For example, Y1S1 stands for ‘first year, student 1’. Detailed information of participants is presented in Table 1. The participants were aged between 18 and 21 years. They had been learning English for ten to fifteen years in pre-tertiary education, and Japanese for one month to three years as their university major. Some of them also undertook some casual learning in other languages, but they spent very limited time on this and their proficiencies were minimal.

Participant	Length	Appox. length of L3 learning	Foreign language background (in order of learning)	Self-assessed Japanese proficiency (out of 5)	Self-assessed English proficiency (out of 5)

Y1S1	36 minutes	One month	English, German, Japanese	4.2	1.1
Y1S2	21 minutes	One month	English, Japanese	3.6	2.1
Y1S3	26 minutes	One month	English, Japanese	3.3	2.3
Y1S4	23 minutes	One month	English, Japanese	4.1	1.2
Y1S5	31 minutes	One month	English, Japanese	4.0	2.4
Y2S1	21 minutes	One year and a half	English, Japanese	2.7	2.2
Y2S2	40 minutes	One year and a half	English, Japanese	4.2	3.0
Y2S3	27 minutes	One year and a half	English, Japanese	3.7	2.8
Y4S1	28 minutes	Three years	English, Japanese	3.5	3.8
Y4S2	50 minutes	Three years	English, French, Japanese	3.9	3.7
Y4S3	21 minutes	Three years	English, Japanese	3.7	3.5
Y4S4	18 minutes	Three years	English, Japanese, Spanish	3.5	3.0

Table 1. Participant background information

Data collection

To explore the complexity of multilingual motivation and contextual influences, we adopted the in-depth interview as the main data collection method. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and signed a consent form. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, audio-recorded on site, transcribed

verbatim and translated into English. The interview questions revolved around how the participants perceived themselves in L2/L3 learning, what they aspired to become by using L2/L3, as well as their multilingual learning experiences.

Analysis

Deductive and inductive thematic analysis were conducted. First, the two authors independently coded all the interviews deductively with reference to the three key elements of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System: the ideal L2/L3 self (e.g. I wish my English is as good as my Chinese), the ought-to L2/L3 self (e.g. I'm a Japanese major, so I have to work hard), and the FL learning experiences embedded in the cultural, social, and pedagogical context. In this way, we were able to put the participants in the immediate learning environment – 'teacher, curriculum, peer group, the experiences of success' (Dörnyei, 2009) as well as other contextual factors. In the meanwhile, themes emerging from the data were also noted down and coded correspondingly. Next, the two authors compared the coding, discussed and resolved any differences, and reanalyzed the data.

Findings

This section reports on qualitative findings of the participants' L2 and L3 motivational selves. We first present their language-specific motivations, and then interpret their self-image construction with reference to their situated experiences in the social, cultural, and pedagogical context.

L2 English self

Data analysis showed that the participants had consistently strong ideal selves in L2 English, which is manifested by their positive attitude towards English as a global

language. This view was identified among participants across different years of study, as they all expressed their self-perceptions as future English-using career persons in a range of contexts:

You see, in the age of globalization, if I want to realize my own values, it is not enough if I can only speak Chinese or one language. I will need to use English. (Y1S3)

English will definitely be used. English, after all, is so [popular], right? If I work in a company or the government, I will surely need to use English, right? (Y2S1)

Because English now is still an international lingua franca. It is used more widely than Japanese. Therefore, it is likely that I will need English more than Japanese in the workplace. (Y2S2)

As for English, even if you are in a Japanese company, you still need English. It feels like, no matter what company you work for, be it a Korean, or a French one, [you] all need English. (Y4S1)

In their vague or clear visions of becoming an English-using person, their words implicitly or explicitly suggest their belief in English as an international language that connects people from all linguistic backgrounds, especially in the workplace, and thus an indispensable communication skill. As a result, if hypothetically given a second chance, both Y4S1 and Y4S3 would choose English if they were to start over, because they believed that English would ‘help [them] find a better job’ (Y4S3).

It seems that the participants’ native-speaker-dependent ideal image became prominent in their construction of their ideal L2 selves. The following extracts serve as examples:

As for English, I have a relatively high standard for myself, which is that I want to speak English in the way I speak Chinese. This is a relatively ideal standard. (Y1S4)

My English accent is horrible. [...] I’m okay with English reading and listening, but my spoken English is bad. I am very dissatisfied with myself. I need to take some measures to improve my English. (Y4S1)

They regarded native-speaker fluency as their ultimate learning goal and repeatedly emphasized the importance of ‘standard pronunciation’ and ‘spoken English’, whereas the inability to achieve this objective resulted in self-depreciation and discontent. The participants’ high expectation triggered their ought-to English self to avoid a feared state as manifested by their permeating anxiety about attrition in their English proficiency. Y1S5 noted L2/L3 interference during her multilingual learning and showed such concern:

As I’ve been learning Japanese these days, I find that the simultaneous learning of two languages brings forth some conflicts. I’d transfer the pronunciation and intonation of one language to another without noticing, so my Japanese accent negatively affects my English accent. Because I haven’t studied [English] for some time, my English level is decreasing. I’m very worried. (Y1S5)

Similar concern over English attrition was expressed by all the participants. To avoid further attrition, six of the participants reported taking English proficiency tests (such as IELTS and TOEFL) or obtaining English certificates as a self-motivating strategy to maintain their English level and continuously improve it.

The feared English self was particularly strong in fourth-year participants. The four participants all expressed strong dissatisfaction with their current English level as they realized that their ability to speak Japanese did not facilitate their job application while their lack of English proficiency restricted their job opportunities. Y4S1 explicitly pointed out that with Japanese as an additional language in her language repertoire, she did not see any advantage in job hunting. Comparatively speaking, English seems more relevant in the workplace: Y4S4 mentioned her ideal self as an English using career woman and thus her strong motivation, but she was also worried that ‘in terms of certificates, I’m not an English major, which makes things more difficult’.

L3 Japanese self

When the participants started from scratch in L3 Japanese learning, they could not construct a potent ideal self-image and were mainly motivated by their ought-to L3 self. Nine out of twelve participants indicated that Japanese was not their first choice of university major, and they were assigned to the Japanese department because their admission scores were not high enough. Y1S1, who entered the university via the *Baosongsheng* scheme, recounted the moment when she was informed of her admission into the Japanese major:

When I first heard that I passed [the interview], I was excited. But then I saw Japanese, I was thinking, where is my German? I felt very frustrated. I told my mom, and my mom asked me to not to accept the offer. [...] But this is a very good university. I simply wanted to get into the university, and didn't want to take *gaokao*. (Y1S1)

It seems that Y1S1 compared the unpredictable outcome of taking *gaokao* (the National Matriculation Test) and her unease of learning Japanese as her university major and decided the latter was more bearable. Similarly, Y2S1 was comforted by thinking of her future self as a student in the key university but at the same time was frustrated by the fact that she would become a Japanese major. It is in this way that their initial Japanese selves were established – in fear of unfavorable results from taking other risks.

After matriculation, the participants' ought-to L3 selves continued to motivate their learning. They gradually accepted their identity as a Japanese major and internalized it to some extent. Under such a circumstance, they felt that they were expected and thus obliged to spend most of their time on L3 learning (e.g. Y1S1, Y1S2, Y1S3, Y2S2). For example:

Now I hold a let-it-be attitude to my English learning. It's not because I don't want to study it, but because the burden in Japanese learning is heavier. I have to pass the Test for

Japanese Major Band 4, and then the N1 certificate, so I have to spend more time on it now.

(Y2S2)

The above extract also illustrates the competition between English and Japanese learning in the allocation of the student's limited time and energy. The strong ought-to L3 self, in terms of the heavy workload and the need to take exams and obtain certificates, offset the L2 self. As a result, English learning was suspended for the time being.

Also, the participants constructed their Japanese ideal self and could imagine themselves using Japanese in the future. Unlike their English ideal self, their Japanese ideal self was mainly mentioned in their future traveling plans but not career plans. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

At that time [of choosing a university major], I came across a travelogue about Japan. I was thinking that it would be fun if I could travel in Japan and spoke Japanese. Now I think I've achieved this goal. (Y4S3)

I think my Japanese is enough, because I won't work as an interpreter or anything, and when I visit Japan in the future, or when I take my parents to Japan, daily communication, I can handle... It is very likely that I will often travel to Japan. (Y4S2)

As can be seen, the imagined use of Japanese for travelling purposes distinguishes the ideal L3 Japanese self from the ideal L2 English self which is believed to be used in a wider scope of contexts. What is also distinctive is that their ideal L3 self did not incorporate any native-speaker element. They were satisfied with the ability to communicate with the Japanese-speaking people, and native-like fluency or accent was not a concern. In particular, Y2S3 invoked a successful FL-learner image in constructing her ideal L3 self by referring to a Japanese friend who spent fifteen years in China, and expressed the wish that 'my Japanese could be as good as her Chinese in the future'. This Japanese ideal self – having a model of a foreign language speaker –

seems to be more realistic compared to the native-speaker image of the English ideal self. Probably for this reason, the participants were all quite satisfied with their gains in proficiency after several years of learning.

Multilingual self

Although it did not take up a large part of the data, the theme of multilingual self was an interesting theme that emerged from the interviews. For example, Y1S4, Y2S1 and Y4S4 considered being able to speak two foreign languages – a LOTE and English – to be ‘cool’. The three participants also mentioned the possibility of adding another foreign language to their multilingual repertoire. To them, being trilingual is not the ultimate goal with regard to their multilingual self. Y1S4 wanted to learn Italian – the language she was originally interested in. Y2S3 planned to learn German in the future as an interest, because in her opinion, learning a foreign language brings ‘more fun than pain’. Y4S3 was considering learning Korean when her Japanese reached a certain level, as she assumed that Korean is linguistically close to Japanese so it probably would not be too difficult. Similarly, Y4S4 also had a plan to learn Korean afterwards. She was also considering pick up Spanish which she had studied a little before for the following reason.

I hope one day I can become a person who is able to speak multiple languages. I think I will be very happy then. I remember hearing this from a talk show: if you talk to someone with their second language, you are talking to their brain; if you talk to someone with their mother tongue, then you are talking to their heart. The speaker is twenty something and can speak more than ten languages. That is so cool. I want to communicate with people, and there are things you can only express in their own languages. (Y4S4)

Her multilingual self was close to the ideal multilingual self discussed in Ushioda (2017) – she wanted to extend her linguistic repertoire for the purpose of meaning-making and understanding in intercultural communication.

Multiple contextual influences

Influences from the cultural context

A further look at the interview data suggests that the participants' language-related self images can be explained to some extent in terms of the cultural context in which they were embedded. The participants encountered both English and Japanese cultural products before entering the university. They had access to a greater variety of cultural products in English, ranging from television series, Hollywood movies, popular songs and musicals, to novels and magazines. By contrast, their access to Japanese cultural products was mostly limited to TV dramas and entertainment shows, animations and some popular music. They held vastly different attitudes towards the English (particularly American) and Japanese popular cultures. When it comes to the English culture, they unanimously spoke highly of it and they commented on cultural items with great specificity and in elaborate detail:

I like *Harry Potter* very much. [...] I also like American TV dramas. [I] Have read some American and British literature, like works by Dan Brown. And also music, I don't have Chinese songs in my MP3 or smartphone. [...] I find American and British music unique, which has many genres and has its own choice. (Y1S5)

One thing also worth noting is that Y1S5 explicitly showed her preference in music: she like music in English more than music in her L1.

Although some were attracted by Japanese culture – Y1S2 by Japanese history, Y1S4 by Japanese animations and Y2S2 by Japanese dramas, not all of the participants showed much interest in the Japanese popular culture. Y1S1 clearly showed her attitude:

I don't like animation. And I also don't like Japanese dramas. Maybe because [I've] watched too many American dramas, I find Japanese ones very stupid. I am not used to

them ... I think many Japanese dramas are too childish, and I can't stand their weird hairstyles. (Y1S1)

She used such pejorative adjectives as 'stupid', 'childish' and 'weird' in her descriptions of Japanese popular culture. Participants like Y1S3, Y2S1, Y4S2, Y4S3 and Y4S4 also explicitly expressed their disinterest in Japanese culture. Their negative or at least not positive perceptions of Japanese cultural products contrasted with their positive evaluations of English cultural products, and the constant comparison with English popular culture as the default reference point seems to consign Japanese cultural products to a disadvantaged position.

Another aspect of Japanese culture not favoured by the participants was its social culture, including corporate culture and marital culture. Some participants could imagine using Japanese in the workplace in Japanese companies and their subsidiaries in China, but many of them rejected such an imagined state. For example, Y4S3 reported a change in her thinking after she studied abroad in Tokyo for a year:

Living there, forget about it, too much pressure. I thought about working in a Japanese company before, but after my exchange in Japan, I gave up this idea. The atmosphere of the country is very different from what I imagined before. I thought it would be a modern city like Shanghai, but they gave me a feeling of centralised living, you know ... I wonder how people manage relationships in Japanese dramas, I don't think they will have time for it if they are working. That is horrible. I don't want to work in a Japanese company. (Y4S3)

Similar negative comments on Japanese corporate culture including its pressure and welfare were given in interviews with Y1S1 and Y1S2. It seems that the instrumental-promotion value of learning Japanese was entangled with negative appraisals of the Japanese corporate culture, preventing the participants from imagining themselves as Japanese-using professionals and ultimately weakening their L3 Japanese ideal self as a Japanese-using professional.

Y2S3 commented on the Japanese marriage culture:

I really can't accept the Japanese way of marriage. Girls need to give up their job after getting married, and adopt the husband's family name. This is unacceptable to me. (Y2S3)

This participant really appreciated traditional Japanese culture, such as the tea ceremony and the calligraphy, but she was not into their marital culture. This ambivalence seems to undermine her willingness to identify with the Japanese community.

Cultural interest is traditionally regarded as a component of integrativeness, contributing to the ideal self which works as the main motivator of active learning behaviour (Dörnyei, 2009). The relatively low level of interest in Japanese culture thus partially explains the absence of a Japanese ideal self from the beginning. Alternatively, their intense interest in and reception of a wide range of the English cultural products contributed to their strong L2 English ideal selves, sustained them in a variety of real-life scenarios (travelling, workplace, cultural experience), and probably led to unrealistic goals for native-speaker pronunciation. Other cultures were also briefly mentioned in the interviews: Chinese culture by Y2S1, Y2S2 and Y4S2, Korean culture by Y1S5, Y2S1 and Y4S2, and German culture by Y1S5. All these cultures the participants were acquainted with may be where their multilingual self comes from.

Influences from the social milieu

Data analysis also showed that the participants' Japanese and English learning motivational orientations were influenced by the social milieu consisting of the participants' significant others – parents, relatives, friends. The first source stemmed from peer competition, as 'some of the classmates were super hardworking' (Y1S1). A stronger source of pressure was family who overly favoured Western languages over Japanese:

My parents were supportive of my decision to take a language as my major. But regarding Japanese... at that time, they judged from their experience and wanted me to take a Western language, or let's say they wanted me to learn a language that is more marketable, such as Spanish. (Y1S4)

Among the few participants who voluntarily chose Japanese, their choice was also influenced by their parents. Y4S3 said:

My mom works in a Japanese company and my dad does business with Japanese people. They don't speak Japanese themselves, so when we were choosing the major, my parents believed that Japan was the most developed country in East Asia. So I should learn Japanese as a skill. (Y4S3)

Expressions such as 'marketable' (Y1S4), 'get a job' (Y1S1, Y1S2, Y2S2, Y2S3 and Y4S1) and language 'as a skill' (Y2S1 and Y4S3) recurred when the participants retold their significant others' comments on languages. It seems that their significant others invariably stressed the economic aspect of learning a FL or the importance of an FL as linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this way, the instrumentalist view of language learning influenced the participants' decisions to avoid or choose a specific language.

Another source of the perceived low image of Japanese, especially among people in the same generation as the participants' parents, comes from nationalistic rhetoric due to the complicated history between China and Japan. Y1S3's comment alluded to such a 'national complex':

Like my parents' colleagues, when they heard about my admission into the Japanese major ... they held quite a negative view about Japan, the national complex ... they would think I made a bad choice. And Abe had been a nuisance these years, so at that time, I also had some sort of such complex. (Y1S3)

In Chinese society, social role obligations to family members and other members of the life circle stand out in the ought-to self of language learners (Huang et al., 2015;

Taguchi et al., 2009). Their significant others' negative appraisal of the instrumental value of Japanese may have inhibited the participants' construction of an ideal L3 self.

Influences from the pedagogical context

While the participants' cultural and social experience seem to reinforce their favourable English self and unfavourable Japanese self, the pedagogical context exerted more complex influences. On the one hand, the dominance of English in pre-tertiary education caused feelings of 'boredom' after 'such a long time' spent in English learning, in Y2S1's and Y4S4's words. On the other, the huge contrast in the curriculum design between the intense English learning in high school and the low English input in university, and between the absence of Japanese learning in high school and 'overwhelming' Japanese learning in university – triggered the participants' ought-to L3 self to study hard. For example,

English courses are not enough and Japanese courses are overwhelming. About one [English] course per semester, two class periods. But Japanese normally takes up seven times [the time of] English. One is two credits, the other is fourteen credits. (Y2S2)

Most of the participants' time was devoted to Japanese learning, or else they might face the undesirable outcomes of low scores or even failing the mandatory courses. From this perspective, the curriculum factor contributed to their much stronger ought-to L3 self and the L2 learning was temporarily suspended.

Also, the immediate learning experience in the pedagogical context fostered the participants' ideal L3 self to some extent. Some of the participants reported that their cultural knowledge exceeded the scope of Japanese popular cultural products in the mass media thanks to their multi-angled learning about Japanese culture in class. Some of their stereotypes were corrected and they started to appreciate the language and its culture without their old bias caused by the bitter history between China and Japan. For

example, Y2S2 observed that ‘the more I learn Japanese the more I recognize that every country, every culture has its pros and cons’. The resulting cultural open-mindedness can be seen as a product of their Japanese learning and a possible source of their ideal multilingual self. Here is another example of the positive learning experience reinforcing the ideal L3 self. Y4S1 gained a strong sense of achievement through her intensive Japanese learning:

I didn’t like Japanese at first. For some time I almost gave up. But after breaking through the bottleneck, I began to feel a sense of achievement. I had been learning English for more than ten years, and my English could not match my Japanese [after three years of learning].
(Y4S1)

Once again, the participants tended to compare their Japanese proficiency with their English and found the intensive L3 learning more rewarding. It may also be because their L3 learning goal was more realistic than their L2 English goal.

In addition, another discourse – teachers’ emphasis on learning Japanese for instrumental purposes also played a role in their construction of Japanese self images. As the participants started learning Japanese with quite low self-images, their teachers attempted to motivate the newcomers by drawing on the instrumental value of learning Japanese:

In my first Japanese classes, the teachers always started with something like, our Japanese department matches the market needs, our graduates usually find good jobs, and so forth. They say, in the future we either go to live in Japan or to work in Japanese companies.
(Y1S4)

A similar story was shared by Y1S2. Such message is also conveyed in the department’s online brochure: the demand for its graduates has been over the supply of the market for several years. However, for the fourth-year participants who had started job hunting, their actual experience in the workplace revealed that the promise of Japanese in the job

market was rather an illusion. For example, Y4S3 realized that ‘English and Chinese are used more often in my current internship, but not Japanese’, and Y4S2 found in vexation that ‘it seems that Japanese is not as marketable as [other people] advocated’. The conflicting discourses seem to offset the participants’ ideal L3 self by creating overt conflicts in their imagined selves.

Discussion and conclusion

In alignment with Ushioda’s (2017) call to incorporate a macro-sociological perspective with the individual self-based approach to language learning motivation, this qualitative study closely examined language-related self images constructed by the twelve Chinese university L3 specialist majors. The findings showed that the participants constructed distinctive selves with respect to different languages, which co-existed, competed and conflicted with each other, confirming previous studies (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Henry, 2011; Wang & Liu, 2017). The finding about the participants’ temporary suspension of their L2 learning to focus on L3, due to the competition for limited time and energy, also resonates with Siridetkoon and Dewaele’s (2017) finding with Thai university learners. Apart from the L2 and L3 selves, the participants seemed to have an ideal multilingual self image which they considered to be ‘cool’, ‘fun’ and ‘happy’. We interpreted contextual influences in the participants’ cultural, social and pedagogical contexts as contributing factors to the construction of their motivational language selves. Although the pedagogical elements sustained a strong ought-to L3 self and fostered a partial ideal L3 and multilingual self, the widespread English-language culture and the importance that people in the participants’ social and pedagogical contexts attached to the instrumental value of English forcefully promoted the ideal and ought-to selves in L2 English while suppressing the L3 Japanese ideal selves. We argue that these contextual specificities in general embody the negative impact of global

English on L3 learning (Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Henry, 2010).

A unique finding of the present study is the impacts of the social discourse permeating the learners' multi-layered context upon the construction of their language-related selves. The findings seem to reflect the neoliberal emphasis on language as a marketable skill in the Chinese context. The language learners and their significant others all seem to approach FL learning as a way to add to the bundle of skills that can be marketed for economic benefits and advancement (Shin & Park, 2016; Urciuoli, 2008). English nowadays is fully acknowledged for its pervasive use as a contact language in a variety of domains including international travelling and business. However, a discursive paradox was identified between the assumed global English status and the reliance on the native-speaker standards. The participants recognized the significance of English as a global language, where it is supposedly neutral, but they could not break away from the native-speaker reverence in constructing their English ideal selves. In juxtaposition to the discourse of English as a marketable skill is the treatment of Japanese merely for its instrumentality. Japanese was constantly compared to English regarding the utilitarian value, which eventually assigns Japanese to a disadvantaged position. Our findings showed that the agents in the pedagogical context, mainly teachers, were aware of the low self-image of the new L3 Japanese majors, so they attempted to motivate them by drawing on the instrumental value of learning Japanese. However, similar to 'the fallacy of the promise of English' in the South Korean job market (Park, 2011), neither did the promise of Japanese seem to be fulfilled in the Chinese marketplace. The attempt to link learning a FL with better job prospects thus fails to motivate students' language learning and reflects the tensions arising 'in the space between language-as-skill and language-as-identity' as part of the

paradoxes inherent to the neoliberal view of language as commodity (Heller, 2010: 103).

Now that the findings have problematised this instrumentalist view of language that overemphasizes its economic value, we recognize the need to change the existing social discourse in order to boost language learners' multilingual learning motivation. We agree with Kubota's (2011: 259) suggestion that 'formal education needs to play a greater role in engaging learners in critical reflections on the role of English and other languages,[...] and the development of a cosmopolitan mind in the globalized new economy'. Thus, we give the following suggestions so that 'the impact of global English on motivation to learn other languages might be positively construed' (Ushioda, 2017: 469). For teachers of English, it is advisable that they help students to reduce their learning anxiety and critically reflect on their native-speaker dependence. Teachers of LOTE need to be more supportive when the students are confronted with negative influences from L2 English and devise motivational strategies within and outside classroom. Instead of drawing on the pure instrumental value of learning a FL, as teachers in this study did, teachers may focus more on the students' needs for self-expression and identity construction to motivate them in language learning, and on fostering cultural open-mindedness by delivering intercultural workshops or at least incorporating such training into their lessons to raise students' intercultural awareness. By gradually changing from an instrumental view to a holistic perspective (Ushioda, 2017) in language learning discourse, we hope that students will be more engaged in learning English as well as other languages.

Admittedly, this is a small-scale qualitative study on Chinese learners' construction of L2 English, L3 Japanese, and multilingual motivational selves in relation to the contextual influences. Although we interviewed students at different stages of study

(from Year One to Year Four), we have no intention to claim this study to be a longitudinal one or aim to track any change, despite that dynamic change in LOTE learning motivation can be an exciting future direction. Nonetheless, our findings highlight the impact of an instrumentalist view of language learning on individual learners' motivational self construction in relation to the wider contexts, thus opening up an avenue for future research that fully address the role of context in language learning motivation.

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