



Exploring Effects of the Second Language Motivational Self System on Chinese EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate in English and Implications for L2 Education

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Abstract: This study explores how the three components of L2 motivational self-system (Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 self and Learning experience) influence Chinese college students' willingness to communicate in English using a mixture of methods which include a questionnaire survey and individual interviews. Results show that Chinese college students' ideal L2 self and learning experience would influence their L2 WTC significantly. Students who have a high level of ideal L2 self and more positive English learning experiences are more willing to use English to communicate inside and outside the classroom. Students' ought-to L2 self has no significant correlation with their L2 WTC. Findings of the study offers some possible implications to improve Chinese college students' low motivation in English learning and low willingness to use English to communicate.

Keywords: L2 motivational self system, L2 willingness to communicate, L2 education, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Nowadays, as English is widely used in China, Chinese college students increasingly encounter situations when they need to use English to communicate with others. The cultivation of students' oral English skills is stressed in English teaching at school. However, Chinese learners of English have been known as "reticent learners" for years (Wen & Clément, 2003). They have been good at passing written exams but poor at speaking English and lack the willingness to communicate in English.

According to McCroskey and Richmond (1991), the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) is perceived as a predisposition based on personality. L2 WTC is defined as "a readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p.547). They propose a heuristic pyramid-like model of L2 WTC, suggesting that over 30 linguistic and psychological variables may have a potential impact on L2 WTC, including confidence, motivation, communicative competence and so on.

Among those variables, motivation is a key one. Dörnyei (1998) considers it to be one of the determining factors that influences the rate and success of L2 learners' learning. Motivation continually provides the learner with impetus to involve themselves in learning actively in order to develop their L2 skills (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). In L2 motivation studies, the L2 motivational self system theory (L2MSS) proposed by Dörnyei (2005) has received increasing attention. This theory consists of three parts: the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learners' learning experience. It provides the concept of possible selves which "focuses on L2 learners' self-perception, particularly the perception of their desired future self-states" (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013, p.438). Many researchers have conducted empirical studies to support this theory (e.g. Magid, 2009; Papi, 2010; Peng 2015a; Zhan, 2018).

In recent years, Several researchers have investigated whether there is a correlation between L2 learners' L2 WTC and the L2 motivational self system and if the correlation exists, how the three parts of L2MSS influence learners' L2 WTC (Lee & Lee, 2019; Peng, 2015b). However, given the crucial role that motivation plays in L2 learners' learning and the low willingness of Chinese college students to speak English, more studies are needed to examine the correlation and influences of three parts of L2MSS on learners' L2 WTC in the Chinese context.

This study is an attempt to fill in this gap and offer some possible implications for increasing Chinese college students' motivation in English learning and their willingness to communicate in English. Two research questions are addressed in this paper: (1) To what extent does the L2 motivational self system correlate with Chinese college students' L2 WTC? (2) How do the three components of L2 motivational self system influence Chinese college students' L2 WTC?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The development of L2 motivational self system theory

Motivation is essential to L2 learners' learning process because "it provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117). Before the 1990s, studies on L2 motivation were mostly conducted from the perspective of social psychology. For example, Gardner (1985) proposed a socio-educational model of second language learning from the social psychological perspective. In his view, L2 motivation consists of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The former is concerned with the willingness of L2 learners "to be like valued members of the target language community" (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 271), while the latter is about the willingness to acquire the pragmatic value of learning the target language, for example, people would work hard to learn English in order to have better job opportunities. Gardner's model greatly contributed to the development of L2 motivation research after it was proposed. However, it has been challenged later by many researchers who believe that the stress of integrativeness leads to the neglect of the impacts of the language learning environment and learner's differences, and therefore new models of L2 learning motivation are needed (Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

The L2 motivational self system theory, proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009), is seen as a redefinition of Gardner's integrative motive concept. The theory is composed of three components: the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self is defined as "a desirable self-image of the kind of L2 user one would ideally like to be in the future" (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 456); the ought-to L2 self is concerned with "attributes that one believes he should have in order to meet others' expectations and to avoid negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009, p.29); and the L2 learning experience is recognized as "situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have concluded that there are three primary sources of L2 learners' motivation: the learner's vision of him/herself as a competent L2 user, the outside social pressure, and positive learning experiences.

It could be said that this theory has inspired L2 motivation researches by shifting from the learner's identification with an external reference group to the internal process of identification within their self-concepts (Zhan, 2017). Many scholars have adopted this theory as the theoretical framework within which empirical studies have been conducted in EFL contexts such as in China, Iran, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong (Kong et al., 2018; Magid, 2009; Papi, 2010; Peng, 2015b; Yashima, 2009; Yung, 2019).

2.2 Related studies of L2MSS in China

A significant number of researchers have confirmed the validity of using the L2 motivational self system in their L2 motivation studies in China (Liu, 2012; You & Dörnyei, 2016). You and Dörnyei (2016) conducted a large-scale survey of English language learners' motivational disposition in secondary schools and universities in China. It turns out that their findings are "broadly compatible with results obtained from other countries" (p. 22). Thus, they believe that although this model has been developed in the western context, it is applicable to the analysis of EFL learners in East Asia. Liu (2010) conducted an empirical study to examine the validity of the theoretical model of L2MSS among five groups of L2 learners in China. She has come to the conclusion that Dörnyei's L2MSS could be used as the framework to analyze Chinese EFL learners. "Compared with the concept of integrativeness, the ideal L2 self has a more prominent correlation with L2 learners' L2 learning motivation in the context of L2 learning among Chinese learners of English" (p. 6).

Many researchers have confirmed the motivational effects of the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience. However, the influence of ought-to L2 self on L2 learners is still too complex to be confirmed. Liu (2010) found that for lower-level L2 proficiency learners, their learning motivation is mainly predicted by their English learning experience, whereas higher-level L2 proficiency learners' motivation is mainly influenced by their ideal L2 self. You and Dörnyei (2016) found that Chinese students tend to "have positive ideal self-images associated with English, positive attitudes towards L2 Learning and report high levels of intended effort that they were ready to invest in the learning process" (p. 22).

Magid (2009) adopted a mixed method to compare the L2 motivational self system of Chinese mainland middle school students and university students. He found that the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and attitudes towards learning do influence the participants' efforts spent in learning English. He points out that when analyzing Chinese learners' L2 learning motivation, aspects related to family such as responsibilities and pressures, and the concept of 'face' are the key factors. The research conducted by Liu, Yao and Hu (2012) suggests that influenced by Chinese social culture, Chinese college students' ideal L2 selves and ought-to L2 selves significantly interact with each other and the ought-to L2 self would make students feel more anxious about their English learning.

Peng (2015a) found that ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience directly influence Chinese college students' intended

efforts to learn English. In contrast, the effect of ought-to L2 self on students' intended efforts is insignificant. She explained that college students have become mature and developed the ability of independent thinking. The pressure from the family and society may not be a direct driving force to their learning behaviors.

2.3 Related studies of L2 WTC in China

MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a heuristic model of L2 WTC which assumes that over 30 linguistic and psychological variables that may have potential impacts on L2 WTC including personality (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Shi, 2008), L2 self-confidence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002), self perceived communicative competence (Liu & Jackson, 2008). This model has greatly influenced the L2 WTC research.

Liu and Jackson (2008) found that Chinese EFL learners' willingness to speak English is low and the lack of willingness is closely connected with their learning anxiety, self-perceived proficiency and access to English learning resources. Shi (2008) found that Chinese students' willingness to speak English lies between "Probably not willing" and "Perhaps willing". Their L2 WTC is affected by factors such as communicative competence, situational factors such as teacher's evaluation, and trait-like factors. These factors exert their influences either independently or by interacting with other factors. Cao (2011) suggested that in English classes, Chinese students' willingness to communicate is jointly influenced by individual characteristics, classroom environmental conditions and linguistic factors.

Peng (2007) conducted an empirical study to analyze Chinese students' WTC from a cultural perspective. She identified eight factors that may cause the fluctuations of students' WTC such as communicative competence, language anxiety, classroom climate, teacher support, and so on. In her following study, Peng (2015b) suggested that L2 WTC is composed of two factors: L2 WTC inside and outside the classroom. In class, Chinese university students' WTC is predicted by their anxiety, learning experience, and desire to integrate into the global community, such as their interests in international affairs and desire to study or work abroad, etc. When they are outside the classroom, their L2 WTC is mainly influenced by their strong desires to be integrated into the global community.

The role of classroom environment in Chinese students' L2 WTC is essential since the classroom is a key platform for them to use English to communicate. Peng and Woodrow (2010) suggested that the classroom environment directly affects Chinese EFL learners' WTC, communicative confidence, and learner beliefs. Besides, students' perception of the class environment largely depends on teacher support (e.g., asking open-ended questions), task orientation (e.g., planning practical and attractive tasks), and student cohesiveness. For example, if students think the teacher's guidance is helpful or the learning tasks help their learning, they will be more willing to participate in the class discussion.

The influence of Chinese culture is often stressed when considering Chinese EFL learners' L2 WTC. The culture of learning in the Chinese society is rather relevant and influential in explaining learners' learning behaviors (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). For example, in traditional values, students should be respectful to their teachers and keep quiet in class. Wen and Clément (2003) amended MacIntyre et al.(1998)'s heuristic WTC model to better examine Chinese students' English language learning. They suggested that Chinese cultural values, including other-directed self and submissive learning, significantly influence their perception, learning, and willingness to communicate in the L2 being learned. Chinese students often worry about others' opinions of their language behaviors and are used to acquiring knowledge from their teacher submissively. Thus, they are less likely to open their mouths in the classroom. Peng (2007) also suggested in her study that factors influencing their L2 WTC such as anxiety, learner beliefs and teacher support are more or less influenced by traditional Chinese culture.

Apart from those factors, the influence of exams on students' L2 WTC cannot be neglected in the Chinese context. Most English tests in China such as the College English Test (CET) do not examine students' English speaking abilities. Therefore, students' level of willingness to speak English becomes lower because they want to spend more time preparing for paper-based tests and get good grades. Peng (2012) believed that "the educational reality may not encourage students to improve their oral skills" (p. 210).

2.4 Combining L2 WTC with L2 motivational self system

A growing number of studies examined the relationship between EFL learners' L2 WTC and the L2 motivational self system (Peng, 2015b; Lee & Lee, 2019). In this way, researchers provided a new perspective to the analysis of L2 learners' willingness to communicate by examining their self-images. This could enable researchers to have a deeper understanding of the two areas of researches. The correlation between the three components of the L2 motivational self system and learners' L2 WTC has been observed by many scholars. More studies are needed to examine influences of L2MSS on learners' L2 WTC.

It is generally agreed that ideal L2 self and learning experience could strongly influence L2 learners' WTC. L2 learners

with a high level of ideal L2 self will be more willing to communicate in English. According to Wang's (2014) study, the three components of the L2 motivational self system were predictors of Chinese university students' WTC among which students' learning experience can be the most influential factor. Peng (2015b) suggested students' English learning experience would directly influence their WTC inside the classroom and indirectly affect their WTC outside the classroom.

However, for what kind of effect learners' ought-to self will bring about, no consistent conclusion has been reached. Lee and Lee (2019), using an explanatory sequential mixed methods, investigated the role of L2 motivational self system in L2 WTC of Korean EFL university and secondary students. They concluded that high proficiency students' WTC is positively associated with their ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. In contrast, university students who had a higher level of the ideal L2 self are more likely to speak more English inside and outside the classroom. But their L2 WTC is negatively associated with their ought-to L2 self.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and instruments

108 college students from a national key university completed the questionnaire survey. Among them, seventy-seven were undergraduates and 31 were postgraduates. Thirty-eight students took College English Test 4 (CET 4), while 38 passed CET 4 and took College English Test 6 (CET 6). Both tests do not necessarily require students to take the speaking test. Only 15 students took IELTS (International English Language Testing Exam), and three students took TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Both tests examine students' speaking skills. Seventy-seven students (28.7%) reported that they had overseas experiences.

Instruments used in the study include a questionnaire and interview questions. The questionnaire was used to measure participants' overall situation of L2MSS and L2 WTC. It comprises three parts: participants' demographic information, items for the L2 motivational self system, and items for L2 WTC. The first part was used to obtain students' background information, such as grades, English competence. Items in the second and third parts in 5-point Likert scale format were mainly adopted from the existing literature (Peng, 2012; Liu, 2012). Items in Part 2 examine the three aspects of the L2 motivational self system: (1) Ideal L2 self (6 items), measuring whether participants have an ideal image who can skillfully use English and whether they want to become a competent English user like the image in the future; (2) Ought-to L2 self (6 items), examining whether participants study English because of their obligations to avoid possible negative outcomes and evaluations, and (3) L2 learning experience (7 items), investigating participants' attitudes towards their previous English learning environment and experience. In Part 3, items for the L2 WTC were used to examine participants' L2 WTC inside and outside of the classroom, that is, to what degree participants are willing to speak English with their teachers and classmates in class and foreigners out of school.

A pilot study was performed to make the questionnaire more suitable for Chinese college students. The validity and internal reliability of the questionnaire were assessed using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. The validity of the Questionnaire by KMO index and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

	KMO	0.909
		χ^2 3375.974
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	528
	P	0.000

Table 2. Reliability of the Questionnaire by Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Sub-scale/Whole scale	Cronbach's α	No. of items
Ideal L2 self	0.897	6
Ought-to L2 self	0.848	6
Learning experience	0.931	7
L2 WTC inside the classroom	0.967	7
L2 WTC outside the classroom	0.923	7
Questionnaire (Total)	0.959	33

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was posted online and 108 copies of the questionnaire were collected. After removing incomplete and invalid responses, 106 valid cases remained for data analysis. Quantitative data analysis was conducted through SPSS 20.0. Firstly, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation was calculated. Afterward, to answer the first research question, a Pearson's Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the three parts of the L2 motivational self system (ideal L2 self, ought-to-L2 self, learning experience) and L2 WTC.

For the interviews, five participants were recruited. Questions used in the interview were closely related to the participants' L2MSS and L2 WTC and were taken from previous studies (Peng, 2012; Liu, 2012) to guarantee the credibility and validity of the research. Then questions were asked to see what influences would participants' L2MSS bring to their WTC. The interview was conducted in Chinese via Zoom and recorded. The key concepts (ideal L2 self, ought-to-L2 self, learning experience, and L2 WTC) were used to analyze the data.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive analysis of Chinese college students' L2MSS and L2 WTC

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis of participants' L2MSS and L2 WTC, including the number of participants, the mean and standard deviation of the five variables in the study (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, learning experience, L2 WTC inside the classroom and WTC outside the classroom). The mean values of these variables' range from 2.799 to 3.388 on a 5-point scale. Among the three variables of the L2 motivational self system, the highest value is obtained for ideal L2 self ($M = 3.388$), followed by the value of learning experience ($M = 3.170$). The value of ought-to L2 self ($M = 2.799$) is the lowest. Overall, these data indicates that Chinese college students tend to imagine an ideal self who can speak English fluently. But most participants generally do not agree that they learn English for other people's positive evaluation or passing tests. As for the two variables of L2 WTC, the mean scores are similar. The value of L2 WTC outside the classroom ($M = 3.350$) is slightly higher than that of L2 WTC inside the classroom ($M = 3.236$). This suggests that students are generally more willing to use English to communicate in their extracurricular life rather than in class.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Participants' L2MSS and L2 WTC

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ideal L2 self	3.388	0.966
Ought-to L2 self	2.799	0.864
Learning experience	3.170	0.935
L2 WTC inside the classroom	3.236	1.017
L2 WTC outside the classroom	3.350	0.879

Note: $N=106$, $Min=1$, $Max = 5$

4.2 Correlations of three aspects of LMSS and L2 WTC

Table 4 shows the result of the correlation analysis between three components of L2 motivational self system and participants' L2 WTC. Chinese college students' ideal L2 self and learning experience are positively linked to their WTC inside and outside the classroom, while no significant correlation is found between students' WTC and their ought-to L2 selves. Of all three variables, the L2 learning experience correlates best with the dependent variables ($r=.656$, $p<0.01$), ($r=.729$, $p<0.01$). This result suggests that whether college students are willing to speak English is closely associated with their ideal L2 self and learning experience. This result is consistent with previous scholars' findings (Liu, 2012; Peng, 2015b Wang, 2014).

Table 4. Correlation Analysis of L2MSS and L2 WTC

	Ideal L2 self	Ought-to L2 self	Learning experience
L2 WTC inside the classroom	0.645**	0.098	0.656**
L2 WTC outside the classroom	0.716**	0.205*	0.729**

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

4.3 Interview results analysis

Individual interview results suggest that students' ideal L2 self is positively associated with their L2 WTC both inside and

outside the classroom. All interviewees agreed that they had an ideal L2 image which is being able to speak English fluently, and it does motivate them to speak English more often. The gap between students' actual self and ideal self would motivate them to spend more time and effort to reduce this discrepancy. (1) Interviewee 1 mentioned that she had some foreign idols as her role models of English learning who would inspire her to practice her English speaking. (2) Interviewee 2 said when she watched some popular English reality shows like *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, she would often imagine that she can speak English fluently like those on the show. Motivated by those TV shows and dramas, she would like to speak more English in her daily life. (3) Interviewee 3 admitted that she planned to study abroad so that she spent great efforts to practice her oral English. Whenever she dreamed of her life of studying abroad, her levels of willingness to speak English became higher.

However, how long students would keep practicing their oral English after being motivated by their ideal L2 selves is still unknown. It would take much time and patience to improve one's English communicative competence. Several interviewees admitted that they were busy with their studies and often failed to keep high level of willingness to speak English in the long run. For example, Interviewee 2 admitted that she lost interest in speaking English with others after stopping watching those English TV series or reality shows. So far, few scholars had focused on this topic and further research is needed.

The ought-to L2 has no significant influence on interviewees' L2 WTC. Most interviewees disagreed with the idea that they have to study English to gain others' approval. Some interviewees said they would care about others' opinions towards their speaking when they were about to speak English, while others suggested that they did not pay much attention to what other people thought of them. For them, other people's negative evaluations may not be so powerful and their willingness to communicate in English will not be greatly affected. Apart from the pressure from outside, the effect of test is also complicated. Interviewees admitted their language learning behaviors were test-oriented. They agreed that if they need to take speaking tests, they would increase their L2 WTC and work hard to practice their speaking. For example, Interviewees 3 agreed that when she needed to take the IELTS, her levels of willingness to speak English became extremely higher because she wanted to get a good score on the test. In China, non-English major students do not have many English classes and so they may not often have situations where they need to speak English. Therefore, some interviewees did not attach great importance to their English oral abilities, feeling that there was no need to speak English in their daily life.

In addition, interviewees' L2 WTC is strongly associated with their previous learning experience. Variables such as teachers' teaching styles, the class atmosphere, and students' perception of their English competence would directly influence students' L2 WTC inside the classroom. For example, Interviewee 4 said that when she was a freshman, her foreign teacher was very nice and amusing. The class was full of laughter and she felt relaxed when she was speaking English. But in another English class, the Chinese teacher required the students to answer the question and scores were given on the basis of their class performance. Interviewee 3 admitted that she felt so stressed and awkward when she said something in class and the whole class was always silent. That made her extremely uncomfortable, and she did not want to talk too much under such circumstances. This shows that positive English learning experience such as supportive teacher, relaxing atmosphere of the classroom would increase students' willingness to speak English.

5. Discussion

Based on data analysis results, the study found that Chinese college students' ideal L2 self and learning experience would influence their L2 WTC significantly. Students are motivated by their ideal L2 self images and positive English learning experiences to speak more English inside and outside the classroom. The ought-to L2 self has no significant influence on students' L2 WTC.

Ideal L2 self is concerned with one's internalized desire to become a competent English user. The passion for learning English, the willingness to integrate with foreign cultures, the desire to study or work abroad and other factors would jointly help students establish and strengthen their ideal L2 images. Moreover, this ideal image is constantly strengthened when learners interact with their teachers and classmates who speak perfect English, see favourite international celebrities on social media, watch famous English TV series, reality shows and talk shows. Then the gap between their actual self and ideal self motivates them to spend more time and effort in improving their English communicational skills. Therefore, their level of willingness to communicate in English would become higher. This positive correlation between ideal L2 self and students' WTC is supported by previous research studies (Kim & Kim 2019; Peng 2015b; Wang 2014). However, it should be noticed that how long the motivational effect of the ideal L2 self lasts still needs to be further examined. From the interview, some interviewees said that inspired by their ideal images, they have enjoyed practicing their oral English by communicating with others while some interviewees admitted that though they had an ideal image, this motivation did not last long. This variation of ideal L2's motivational effect on learners' intended efforts to learn English needs further study.

Another observation is that Chinese college students' learning experience could greatly impact their L2 WTC. The results of correlation analysis show that participants' learning experience is highly associated with their L2 WTC inside and outside the classroom. Data from the interview further explains that students' previous learning experience such as their teachers' teaching styles and the learning environment strongly influence their attitudes towards speaking English. If students feel stressed in their English class, their level of willingness to speak English become lower. In contrast, if they like the teacher's teaching style and the arrangement of the class, they would spend more efforts practicing their oral English inside and outside the classroom.

The strong effect of English learning experience on EFL learners' WTC has also been confirmed by numerous previous studies such as Peng and Woodrow (2010) and Wang (2014). Liu, Yao and Hu (2012) suggested that Chinese college students' positive L2 learning experience helps reduce their English learning anxiety. Wang (2014) believed that Chinese college students' English learning experience can be the most influential factor of students' WTC among the three variables of L2MSS. Peng (2015b) suggested that L2 learning experience is a predictor of Chinese English majors' L2 motivation and their learning behaviors. L2 learning experience influences students' WTC in the classroom significantly but its motivational effect becomes indirect out of the classroom.

As for Chinese college students' ought-to L2 self, quantitative data shows no significant correlation between students' L2 WTC and their ought-to L2 self. The qualitative data analysis suggests that students' desires to avoid negative outcomes in performance-based tasks and exams would increase their L2 WTC. If they have to take exams that test their oral English abilities such as IELTS and TOFEL, they will expend more effort in speaking and their level of willingness to speak English becomes higher. Besides, in English classes, teachers would stress the importance of students' oral English abilities and see students' class performance as an important criterion for final exam results like requiring students to answer open-ended questions and do oral presentations. Under such circumstances, students would tend to be active in class to impress the teacher in order to get good grades. However, participants admitted that since they have more paper-based exams, they would spend more efforts on English writing and reading than speaking. Besides, most participants of this study disagreed with the idea that they learned English in order to gain other people's approval. For them, others' negative evaluations may not be so powerful and therefore their willingness to communicate in English will not be greatly affected.

The finding of ought-to L2 self's complex influence on students' WTC in this study is consistent with studies by Wang (2014) and Liu (2010). Liu (2010) believed that ought-to L2 self plays an important role in students' L2 motivation. However, in Kim and Kim (2019)'s study, they suggested that ought-to L2 self exerts a positive influence on Korean high school EFL students, but the correlation between Korean university students' ought-to L2 self and their L2 WTC is not significant. This difference may be due to the difference of nationality and age. In their study, participants were Korean secondary students and university students in the first or second year, while this study focused on Chinese college students, including undergraduates and postgraduates. As students grow older, they become mature and developed the ability of independent thinking. They have their own pursuit while the pressure from society may not directly influence their learning behaviors.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Major findings

This study explores how the three components of L2 motivational self system (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and learning experience) influence Chinese college students' willingness to communicate in English. It has been found that Chinese college students' ideal L2 self and learning experience would influence their L2 WTC significantly. Students who have a high level of ideal L2 self and more positive English learning experiences are more willing to use English to communicate inside and outside the classroom. In contrast, the ought-to L2 self does not significantly correlate with students' L2 WTC.

6.2 Pedagogical implications

This study offers some possible implications for English teachers and college students to better deal with students' low motivation in learning English and the low level of willingness to use English to communicate. Firstly, teachers could pay more attention to the construction of students' ideal images by means of presenting some role models in English learning, guiding them to realize the importance of English in today's globalized world. Then, given the significant influence of students' learning experience on their willingness to communicate, the teacher should take effective measures to mitigate students' nervousness and make them comfortable when speaking English. They can carefully design classroom activities and create a positive classroom atmosphere. Moreover, since students pay great attention to their exam results, English teachers can increase the proportion of class performance in test scores and encourage students to open their mouths in class. For Chinese college students, they can adopt more positive attitudes towards speaking English. Students could make full use

of their learning opportunities and try to build up confidence in their oral English abilities. They can use various resources to strengthen their ideal L2 image and then motivate themselves to use English to communicate with others, such as joining overseas exchange programs and watching more international news and English talk shows.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further studies

The study has several limitations that may restrict the validity of the findings. Firstly, this study only collected data from participants in one university. The limited number of participants may limit the accuracy and reliability of the study's results. To make the research more persuasive and rigorous, researchers should recruit more participants from diverse backgrounds in further studies. For example, researchers could further separate participants into the high-, mid- and low-level L2 proficiency sub-groups based on their CET 4 and CET 6 results. Additionally, the data used in the study was only collected from the questionnaire survey and individual interviews. The analysis of questionnaire data only adopted descriptive analysis and Correlation analysis. In future studies, researchers can improve the design of research method and consider using more ways to obtain and analyze data such as designing a structural equation model to thoroughly analyze participants' L2 learning motivation and WTC. Apart from that, the study only suggests that the ideal L2 self imposes a positive effect on motivating students to communicate in English but does not examine how long does this motivational effect last. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on this topic and conduct further studies to figure out the influence of ideal L2 self on students' language learning behaviors in the long term.

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List of Abbreviations

CET	College English Test
EFL	English as a foreign language
IELTS	International English Language Testing Exam
L2	Second/foreign language
L2MSS	Second/foreign language motivational self system
TOFEL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
WTC	Willingness to communicate