This research aimed to explore the content and influence of
other-expectations on the motivation of Japanese undergraduates studying in compulsory English as a
Foreign Language lessons. The project used action research to uncover how activities that encourage
students to reflect on their ideas of expectations fromsignificant others regarding English impact
on their motivation. The main outcomes were insights to: (1) Mismatches between industry needs for
English and students' own beliefs; (2) Messages fromsignificant others and society that students
have about English; (3) Felt-expectations fromthose around students; (4) Classroomactivities
focusing on hopes of peers; (5) Student feelings in the classroomas a confluence of perceptions of
activities, individual transportable identities, and understandings of the actions of others; (6)
The use of action research; (7) The use of complexity perspectives.

Language learning psychology

Possible self theory Ought-to L2 Self Motivation EFL study Action research Classroomres
earch Higher education Complex systems theory

The effectiveness of English as a foreign language (EFL) education in Japan is a frequently debated topic, with a large volume of research devoted to examining the motivation of Japanese EFL learners. Much of this research has found widespread demotivation towards English study (Kikuchi, 2013). Indeed, some international researchers in the field of second language learning motivation have contended that the low level of motivation amongst Japanese EFL learners "seems to be a major educational concern" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 150).

Recent language learning motivation theory has revolved around Dörnyei's (2009) now seminal 'L2 Motivational Self System.' This system is composed of three elements: Firstly, the *Ideal L2 Self* is our own image of who we wish to become. Secondly, the *Ought-to L2 Self* is an imposed image about perceived expectations of significant others or society. Lastly, the *L2 Learning Experience* concerns the motives generated through the situated learning environment – elements such as the teacher, curriculum, lesson style, and so on. Dörnyei (2009) argues that these three subsystems interact to form language learners' motivational dynamics. There has been a range of quantitative empirical work conducted exploring the validity of parts of the L2 Motivational Self System framework (see, for e.g., Csizér & Lukács, 2010; Taguchi, Magid & Papi, 2009). However, there is a paucity of research investigating the *interaction* of the three elements and how learners *qualitatively* perceive these interactions as affecting their motivation.

My past research in the Japanese context had gone some way towards revealing the importance of interactions between the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System (see, for e.g., Sampson, 2012, 2014). One vital aspect of these interactions was the perceptions of expectations from significant others (i.e., an Ought-to L2 Self) that students bring with them to the language learning classroom. For example, Sampson (2014) uncovered students' perceptions of expectations about English ability from their families, teachers, as well as possible future places of work. Yet, whilst there was a rapidly expanding field of research focusing on the effects of learners' ideas of an Ideal L2 Self, the influence of the Ought-to L2 Self on students' classroom motivation (or demotivation) remained under-theorized and under-researched.

Based on these past research groundings, the research set out to explore the detailed content and influence on motivation of the Ought-to L2 Self of Japanese students newly arrived to the university setting (i.e., 1st grade students). As life-transitions have been found to be a particularly sensitive time for constructing ideas of self (Oyserman & James, 2011), the research worked to uncover how activities that encourage students to reflect on their ideas of expectations from significant others regarding English might affect their motivation. Additionally, considering the complex interaction between students' ideas of self in the past, present and future with their ideas of other-expectations and experience in the EFL classroom, the research utilized and assessed the applicability of complex systems theory (see, for e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) to understanding dynamic changes of L2

motivation.

The four research questions addressed were:

(1) What ideas of an Ought-to L2 Self emerge among the participants from past experiences and present learning experiences in the classroom?

(2) In what ways do these ideas of an Ought-to L2 Self interact with participants' ideas of an Ideal L2 self and their experiences in lessons?

(3) How do participants perceive as affecting their motivation activities fostering reflection and discussion about their ideas of expectations regarding their EFL learning?

(4) How well does complex systems theory enable a deeper understanding of EFL motivation?

This research applied an action research / case-study approach by considering both individual learners and two class groups as complex system cases.

Year-by-year research breakdown:

AY2015: Developed classroom activities that would focus students' attention on their perceptions of expectations about English language learning. Developed qualitative instruments to collect data from learners and teacher-researcher (participant journals, activity worksheets) regarding perceptions of activities. Piloted materials and data collection methods. Made applicable revisions;

AY2016: Collected journal data and activity worksheet data from two university class groups over one year. Conducted focus groups with participants (end of semester guided group discussions). Initiated ongoing qualitative analysis. Presented initial results at conferences, started writing research articles;

AY2017: Continued qualitative analysis. Compared qualitative analysis of data from two classes, participant journals and focus groups to arrive at answers to central research questions of the study. Continued presenting results at conferences and writing research articles.

(1) One of the primary findings of the research was the mismatch between industry needs for English, and students' own beliefs about how they might be using English in the future upon transition to university. Industry noted practical, occupational uses of English; students noted uses connected to their transportable identities, such as for travel, hobbies, making friends. Results have been disseminated through two articles and a presentation.

(2) Another vital understanding was the insight gained into messages that students bring into the classroom with them about English. The project uncovered the (frequently erroneous) content of such messages, their sources, the periods of life that students come into contact with such messages, and their feelings connected to messages. Results have been disseminated through an article and presentation.

(3) The research also illuminated the ways in which students feel obligations about studying English and their future use of English from the expectations of those around them. The project enabled the creation of classroom activities for students to share these ideas, as well as the development of their own visions of using English in the future. Results have been disseminated through two presentations, and an article manuscript is currently in preparation.

(4) The project facilitated the development of

classroom activities wherein students defined their hopes for their classmates' actions, and then acted on the hopes of others. An integral finding was the way in which students' actions were influenced by their perceptions of the actions of their peers, as well as their peers' appreciation (or not) of their transportable identities. Results have been disseminated through a presentation, and an article is currently in press.

(5) An unexpected finding from the research was with regards students' feelings in the classroom. Analysis revealed students to be constantly experiencing a variety of feelings (both positively and negatively valenced) within lessons. These feelings were a confluence of students' perceptions of activities, interactions with their individual transportable identities, and their understandings of the actions of others in the classroom. Results will be disseminated through two upcoming (2018) presentations, and an article manuscript is currently in preparation.

(6) The research process itself also revealed insights to the situated use of action research as a research methodology for practitioners. In particular, the researcher gained a better understanding of how to present the results of action research, and more feasible ways of using action research for teachers in the classroom. Results have been disseminated through two articles.

(7) Finally, the project assisted the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the applicability of complexity perspectives for researching and understanding the situated psychologies of language learners. Results have been disseminated through an article in press. Further, results will also be disseminated

through two upcoming presentations (2018), and an edited research methodology volume is in preparation.

5

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7

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(3) <u>Sampson, R. J.</u> (2017-4-22). *Messages about English: Absorbed understandings and motivation.* Presentation at the ELTRIA Conference, Barcelona, Spain.

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