L2 depression and anxiety in relation to L2 self

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Recent L2 motivation studies have shown that learners’ perception of themselves in the future (i.e. future self) may strongly influence L2 learning. A condition for the future self to exert motivation is having an adequate gap between the current status and the future self (Dörnyei, 2009). However, taken from self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), a future self can potentially be a source of depression and anxiety if learners perceive a big gap. In this study, it is hypothesized that learners would feel depressed if their current status is distant from their ideal L2 self (i.e. a person they would like to become) and anxious by the distance from their ought L2 self (i.e. a person they ought to be).

This study compared two groups of learners who perceive big gaps or small gaps from ideal and ought L2 selves on L2 depression and anxiety. 533 Vietnamese university students studying L2 Korean participated in this study. L2 depression and anxiety scales were developed and validated by principal component analysis (N =276) and confirmatory factor analysis (N =257). The extracted subcomponents of L2 depression were self-inefficacy, communication depression and classroom vitality. Under L2 anxiety, learning anxiety, test anxiety and communication anxiety components emerged. L2 selves were measured by open-questions, and coded thematically. Each open-answer is followed by the Likert-scale pictorial measure of the closeness of current and future selves.

The independent t-test based on the two groups showed that self-inefficacy under L2 depression was strongly interrelated to big gaps from both ideal and ought L2 selves. As for L2 anxiety, communication anxiety and test anxiety were associated with ideal L2 self and ought L2 self, respectively. The qualitative findings showed that the most frequent ideal L2 self is intrapersonal domain (e.g. happy), whereas for ought L2 self, career was the most frequent.

Keywords: emotion, self-concept, L2 motivation.