

*Dialogic investigations:  
Motivation in Japanese language learning*

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Abstract

Over the past 15 years, the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) has been a dominant framework in the field of second language (L2) motivation. Yet, since the model's introduction, there has been a theoretical discordance between the two components associated with future self-images (the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self) and the third component related to the actual process of learning (the L2 learning experience). To remedy this shortcoming, this study draws on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theory of dialog. Bakhtin claims that any use of language is a dialog between self and others and that language is learned through the assimilation of speech genres used by others for similar purposes in typical situations of social communication. The analysis of interview data obtained from three Japanese-as-a-second-language learners shows how situation-specific and future-oriented motivations are related to each other. The learners' engagement in dialog with imagined Japanese speakers is developed through their engagement in dialog with actual Japanese speakers, and regardless of whether the dialog is actual or imagined, the participants orient themselves to speech genres of the language that correspond to particular social contexts.

*Keywords:* L2 motivational self system; engagement; dialog; speech genres; Mikhail Bakhtin

## 1. Introduction

Theories of second and foreign language (L2) motivation have undergone an evolution since the 1960s. One of the most frequently employed paradigms in the past decade has been Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self system (L2MSS). The motivation model is made up of three main dimensions: 1) the ideal L2 self, which is a future self-image as an L2 user that one would ideally like to become; 2) the ought-to L2 self, which refers to a future self-image as an L2 user that one should become; and 3) the L2 learning experience, which is represented by the situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning experience (e.g., the influence of the teacher, the curriculum, and the peers). While the model has been widely employed to investigate the motivational power of future L2 self-image (e.g., Bobkina et al., 2021; Papi et al., 2019; Taguchi et al., 2009; You & Dörnyei, 2016), one of the limitations of the model has been a lack of a robust framework to link the two future-oriented components (ideal and ought-to L2 selves) with actual learning processes associated with the L2 learning experience (Ushioda, 2011). Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) dialogical theory as the analytical framework, the current study explores the motivational disposition of Japanese learners who study in a Japanese university, with a focus on how motivation is derived from actual L2-related experience and links with motivation fueled by future aspirations.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Future-oriented and situation-specific motivations

Over the past 15 years, the L2 motivational self system has been a dominant framework in the field of second language motivation (see, e.g., Boo et al., 2015). Yet, as Dörnyei (2019) himself recognizes, since the introduction of the model, there has been a theoretical discordance between the two components associated with future self-images (the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self) and the third component related to the actual process of learning (the L2 learning experience). This is because while the first two dimensions are conceptualized as future self-guides based on Markus and Nurius' (1986) possible selves theory, the third component focuses on the learner's present experience (Dörnyei, 2009).

To address this issue, Dörnyei (2019) employed the concept of engagement taken from educational psychology. According to Martin et al. (2017, p. 150), "motivation is defined as the inclination, energy, emotion, and drive relevant to learning, working effectively, and achieving; engagement is defined as

the behaviors that reflect this inclination, energy, emotion, and drive.” Drawing on the concept of engagement, Dörnyei (2019, p. 25) proposed a definition of the L2 learning experience as the “perceived quality of the learners’ engagement with various aspects of the language learning process.” Adopting the concept of engagement allows us to capture the nature of the L2 learning experience because the verb ‘to engage’ is followed by the key aspects of the learning experience, such as school context, teaching materials, peers and teacher (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Dörnyei (2019, p. 27) further claims that the concept of engagement has the potential to “link the situated processes associated with the L2 learning experience with the future-oriented dimension of possible selves.” Yet, the relationship among the three constitutes of the L2MSS has not been fully explored. This paper argues that Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) dialogical theory, which has the capacity to extend the concept of engagement, may provide a useful framework for understanding the relationship between the motivation directed towards future goals and the motivation deriving from the actual learning process.

## 2.2. Bakhtin’s theory of dialog

Dialogical theory (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) presumes that the concept of *dialog* has implications for the way we understand human communicative and psychological processes. Dialog is not a mere verbal communication between speakers; any use of language can be understood as a dialogical process between self and others. When we produce utterance, we do not only describe events but also enter into an active dialog with others. Every utterance is a response to preceding utterances of the given context. In producing utterances, a speaker always invokes the language of others and the language shapes what the speaker can say. Bakhtin (1981) claims that the speaker can produce his utterance only through *appropriating* words and ways of speaking from others:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294)

In other words, it is impossible to express oneself without appropriating others’ words. In dialogical theory, linguistic forms have already been used by others in diverse social settings, and language users have to populate them with their own intonations.

For Bakhtin, not only producing but understanding an utterance also involves active participation in the dialog. As Voloshinov (1973, p. 102) explains, “(t)o understand another person’s utterance means to orient oneself with respect

to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context. . . . *Any true understanding is dialogic in nature*" (emphasis in original). This implies that learning a language can be viewed as an active participation in dialog with the speakers of the target language. Here, it is important to note that the addressee of the speaker includes not only those speakers in the present moment but also "an indefinite, unconcretized *other*" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 95) who are temporally and spatially distant. Bakhtin (1984, p. 197) wrote:

Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in such a way that the general sense is not at all violated. The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker.

Dialogical theory assumes that one's whole life is dialog. We respond to others' concrete or unconcretized discourses: some discourses are acknowledged and affirmed through appropriation and interwoven with our own voices, whereas the other discourses that do not matter to us are rejected. We selectively assimilate others' words and perspectives. The incorporation of others' perspectives into our own is significant in the development of our consciousness and maturation (Bakhtin, 1981).

### 2.3. Speech genres

An essential concept that Bakhtin (1986) proposed to explain the link between individual use of language and social use of language is *speech genres*. When a speaker constructs an utterance, the speaker selects words not from the system of a given language (lexical composition and grammatical structure) but from speech genres used by other speakers for similar purposes in typical situations of social communication (Bakhtin, 1986). Bakhtin claims that the categories of speech genres include various everyday genres of greeting, novels, dramas, scientific research, business documents, social/political commentary and so forth:

A speech genre is not a form of language but a typical form of utterance; as such, the genre also includes a certain typical kind of expression that inheres in it . . . Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and to particular contacts between the *meanings* of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 87)

Speech genres are more changeable and flexible than national languages, and there is wide variation in the speaking and writing genres (Bakhtin, 1986, p.

60). Although different speech genres serve different functions, they look more or less alike in that they appear within a national language (Wertsch, 1991). In bilingual studies, Grosjean (2008) argued that all bilinguals manifest differing language use patterns covering life domains such as parents, work, sports, religion, school and hobbies and that their language-specific self-concepts are developed in these domains. These domain-specific patterns of language use may correspond to the concept of speech genres (see Nakamura, 2019b).

Bakhtin also argued that our *self* emerges through the acquisition of speech genres. As discussed earlier, we appropriate speech genres of a language by selectively assimilating the utterances of others, and at the moment when we re-produce the speech genres, we imbue them with our own intonations (Bakhtin, 1981). We can establish various types of self through this appropriation of speech genres used in various types of social communication. In other words, the development of the internal self is restricted by external context and the source of the self is embodied in the voices of others (Vitanova, 2013).

#### 2.4. Language learning motivation as dialog

From a dialogical point of view, learning a foreign/second language can be viewed as a learner's active participation in dialog with a concrete or unconcretized other who speaks the target language or responds to the preceding utterances of others. As Kramsch (2000, p. 139) posits, in the L2 classroom, "(l)anguage learners' utterances address and respond not only to their current teachers' questions and assignments but also to former teachers' expectations and demands, to prior utterances heard and read, to imagined reactions of potential listeners or future readers." They assimilate multiple ways of speaking about the target language (speech genres) that correspond to typical situations of social communication (e.g., informal conversation, business conversation, academic writing, letters and novel) both at school and in their everyday life. Learners establish their self-images of the target language, which are necessarily varied because they are acquired in different activity settings or domains of life (Nakamura, 2019a, 2019b). These self-images suggest that language learning motivation is a responsive phenomenon involved in the process of engagement in dialog with others (present or imagined) and appropriation of speech genres of the language.

As discussed earlier, Dörnyei (2019) considers situation-specific motivation (i.e., L2 learning experience) as associated with learners' engagement with various aspects of the actual learning process. The Bakhtinian perspective enables us to see both situation-specific and future-oriented motivations as related to learner's *engagement in dialog* with other who uses particular speech genres

of the target language: the L2 learning experience can be considered as associated with learner's engagement in dialog with *actual* other, whereas the ideal and ought-to L2 selves can be viewed as part of the learner's engagement in dialog with *imagined* (or unconcretized) other.

While there has been a growth of interest in Bakhtin's work within the field of second language acquisition (Dufva & Alanen, 2013), very few L2 motivation studies have employed dialogical theory as a theoretical framework (e.g., Harvey, 2017; Nakamura, 2019b, 2021). For instance, Harvey (2017) investigated motivation of a Russian learner of English as a second language. The author employed Bakhtin's notion of *ideological becoming*, which refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world through "selectively assimilating the words of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 341). It was found that the learner's motivation for learning English was developed through engagement in dialog with others in the process of ideological becoming. They concluded that language learning motivation, which is a process of finding own voice through interaction with other voices, can be seen as a part of motivation towards broader personal and social development (Harvey, 2017).

Nakamura (2021) drew on the concept of speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986) to investigate the motivation of two Japanese language learners who study in Japan. The analysis of interview data indicated that one of the participants' motivations for learning Japanese was maintained by his desire to read Japanese books. In Bakhtin's terms, the participant's study of Japanese was directed to dialog with imagined book authors in an imagined community, and he oriented himself to a written book-related genre of Japanese and sought to appropriate it. By focusing on speech genres as a mediational means between self and others, it revealed how individual future L2 self-image is linked to the L2 speaking community (Nakamura, 2021). Despite such empirical evidence, to what extent dialogical theory is capable of explaining the relationship between future-oriented and situation-specific motivations is still unknown. By using dialogical theory, this study examined how Japanese language learners' motivation is linked to their engagement in dialog with others (present or imagined) in various social contexts, and how their future-oriented and situation-specific motivations are interrelated. The two research questions guiding this study are:

- RQ1: What are the situation-specific and future-oriented motivations of Japanese language learners, and how do these motivations relate to each other?
- RQ2: How do these motivations develop through their engagement in dialog in various types of social communication?

### 3. Methods

Given the lack of studies examining language learners' motivation through the lens of dialogical theory, a qualitative approach was chosen. Qualitative studies can reveal the complex interaction of social and psychological factors within individuals (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), and are highly suitable "to analyze and explore aspects of motivation that are not easily accommodated within the dominant research paradigm" (Ushioda, 2001, p. 96). As the current study investigated the situation-specific and future-oriented motivations from a Bakhtinian perspective, a qualitative design was deemed to be suitable.

#### 3.1. Research context and participants

This study was carried out in a private university in Japan. The university has around 760 students, of which around 150 are international students. The university offers Japanese language courses for international students at all levels, from introductory (*Japanese 1*) through to advanced (*Japanese 8*). After obtaining the university's approval to gather research data, a flier with the researcher's contact details was distributed to students at Japanese introductory and intermediate levels. Three participants agreed to participate in this study (see Table 1; participants' names have been changed to protect their identity and privacy). Olivia and Michael were placed in *Japanese 1*, and Eun-jung was placed in *Japanese 4*, which is equivalent to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages A2* level of Japanese. Only Eun-jung had visited Japan (for sightseeing) before commencing her study.

Table 1 Participants' profiles

Pseudo-nyms	Sex	Home country	Year level	Major	Family languages	Sojourn experience	Japanese course	Duration of study abroad
Eun-jung	F	Korea	3	Design	Korean	3 times (sightseeing)	Level 4	1 semester
Michael	M	US	4	Mass communication	English	N/A	Level 1	1 semester
Olivia	F	US	3	Biology & Physics	English German	N/A	Level 1	1 year

#### 3.2. Data collection

A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used for data gathering. Interviews were deemed to be the most effective tool for this study, because

interviews “hold out the possibility of understanding the lived world from the perspective of the participants involved” (Richards, 2009, p.187) and can provide insights into their experiences and motivations at a depth which is not possible with questionnaires. The first round of interviews was conducted on the university campus in April 2019, at the beginning of the first semester. Prior to this, pilot interviews were conducted to formulate and review the question format (see Appendices A and B) and methodology. Participants were asked to fill in a brief questionnaire before the commencement of the first interview regarding their previous experiences with Japanese. The interview aimed to understand how the participants’ motivation for learning Japanese had developed through their engagement in various Japanese-related activities in and outside of the classroom. They were asked about their learning experience of Japanese, reasons to study in Japan and goals for learning Japanese. For the purpose of investigating the dialogical relationship between future-oriented motivation and social context, the participants were asked about their perceived future use of Japanese in relation to four life domains (leisure, interpersonal, education and career). The categorization system of four life domains was developed by Nakamura (2019b) based on a Bakhtinian assumption that language learners’ L2 self-images are tied to particular life domains and develop through their learning of domain-specific speech genres of the language. The average length of the interviews was around 50 minutes.

The second round of interviews was conducted in July 2019, at the end of the first semester, when Michael and Eun-jung were going to finish their semester abroad. The interview questions were designed to explore the participants’ learning experience and changes in the perceived future use of Japanese during the three-month period. Only Olivia participated in the third round interview in January 2020 as she extended her study abroad to a year, and the interview was conducted similarly to the second round. The average length of the second and third interviews was around 30 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English or Japanese as requested by the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Followed-up data was collected through emails.

### 3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis aimed to identify specific dialogical processes in the participants’ learning history of Japanese. The approach was based on the procedures outlined by Richards (2003). With the research questions in mind, coding began with identifying data associated with engagement in actual or imagined Japanese-related activities. While analyzing the dataset for the first round of interviews, basic codes (e.g., *initial motive to start with Japanese, current use of Japanese,*



*perceived future use of Japanese*) and categories (e.g., *dialog with imagined other*, *appropriation of family-related speech genre*) were generated. For generating the categories, the theoretical scheme of dialogical theory was used. The codes and categories were then reconsidered and revised while analyzing the data for the second interview (and third interview in Olivia's case) to facilitate the assignment of appropriate dialogical traits for each case (e.g., *dialog with book author*).

As Sullivan (2014) points out, it is sometimes difficult to identify speech genres as they can evolve over time through usage and mix with each other. In this study, however, a number of speech genres of Japanese (e.g., martial arts, written book-related and family communication) were identified according to the context of where they are used or what is being said. For instance, when Michael explained that he sought to learn Japanese expressions used in *kendo* and *aikido* (a martial art of weaponless self-defence similar to *judo*) classes, his statement was interpreted showing his appropriation of a speech genre, which is used for martial arts.

#### 4. Results

In this section, the three participants' Japanese language learning experiences are described from the standpoint of dialogical theory. The participants provided useful comments, which enabled the researcher to understand how they gained access to new speech genres in Japanese, and how their participation in dialog with different people who speak the language impacted on their motivation for learning the language.

##### 4.1. Michael's motivation: Dialog with friends

Michael is a native speaker of English who was born in the U.S. His intrinsic interest in particular traditional forms of Japanese culture (martial arts) significantly contributed to the commencement of his study of Japanese when in university. Michael reported, "I've always had an interest in Japanese culture . . . It's very different from my own. . . . I really like kendo and bushido, kyudo, I want to learn that."

After coming to Japan, Michael's interest in Japanese martial arts was further accelerated as he took kendo and aikido courses at the university. Since the instructors only spoke Japanese, he learned a lot of Japanese expressions used in kendo and aikido lessons, which include *shinai* (a bamboo sword), *ushiro* (back), *migi* (right) and *hidari* (left). In terms of L2MSS, Michael's positive L2 learning experience which is related to Japanese martial arts (kendo and aikido) can be viewed as an initial motivator. In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, Michael's initial

motivation for learning Japanese was derived from his strong desire to engage in dialog with people associated with kendo and aikido. He oriented himself to a speech genre of Japanese, which is used for martial arts and sought to appropriate it.

In the Japanese university, Michael made many Japanese friends and used Japanese every day in and outside the classroom. Michael reported that through communicating with his friends, he learned many informal Japanese expressions, which cannot be seen in the textbooks:

*They taught me maji [seriously] and urusee [shut up]. They taught me ochitsuite [calm down]. They've taught me quite a bit. But that's just what comes to my mind. Mm, and ayamare [apologize to me].*

Michael's comment indicates that he started a new line of dialog with Japanese friends in the university and appropriated a speech genre, which is used for casual communication between friends.

Michael also had another reason to start studying Japanese, which is associated with his future employment. When in the U.S., he met a student who had just come back from studying abroad in Japan, and the student said there are many opportunities to work as an English teacher in Japan. Michael reported, "She told us about teaching English as a foreign language. And so, that really pricked my interest and made me want to learn it (Japanese) even more." That is, even before starting his formal study of Japanese, Michael was able to project a future in which he might obtain employment in Japan.

In the Japanese university, Michael took the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course to make his career goal more plausible. In the first round interview, Michael explained his goals of studying Japanese as follows:

*Michael: I want to teach English here, so I just want to be able to communicate [in Japanese], basically. I guess that's my goal [for studying Japanese]. It's hard not being able to communicate sometimes.*

*Researcher: What languages do you think you might use for your job?*

*Michael: English and Nihongo [Japanese].*

*Researcher: In what situations?*

*Michael: I guess, like teaching, like a classroom, or maybe a private tutor.*

As Michael's comments show, he established a career-related ideal Japanese self-image in which he teaches English in Japanese in Japan. From a dialogical view, Michael established a dialogical relationship with imagined other (Japanese learners of English) in the situations of teaching English.

However, in the follow-up interview, Michael reported that he gave up on becoming an English teacher and decided to aim for another career, information

technology (IT). According to Michael, this is because he realized that teaching English does not fit him. He stated as follows:

*I came to this program [study abroad] to test out because they had the Teaching Foreign Language [course], and I wanted to see if that would be a good fit. But, the more I learned and the more I participated in this class, I realized that I like it, but at the same time, whenever I speak in front of many people, I get very nervous.*

Michael explained that after graduation, he would study Japanese by himself while working for an IT company in the U.S. Once he obtains a Japanese Language Proficiency Test certificate that is high enough to obtain a job in Japan, he plans to move back to the country, hopefully in two or three years. In the interview, Michael commented that he could imagine himself using Japanese at a prospective IT company:

*If I had a high enough Japanese level, maybe I might not even exactly work for a Japanese company. I might work for an American company, and they send me to Japan because maybe they have clients in Japan. And since I have the ability to communicate, they'll send me over, and then I'll communicate with the people in Japan.*

It is interesting to observe that although Michael abandoned his future direction of teaching English, he was still able to establish another career-related ideal Japanese self. This may be because he had a close relationship with Japanese friends and a strong interest in Japanese martial arts. In the second interview, he emphasized the importance of his friends in continuing with Japanese:

*I would like to be able to still communicate with my friends that I've made here. That's another reason to keep practicing [Japanese] . . . They don't want me to forget them. They ask me all the time for not forget them [sic]. I tell them 'No,' but they don't believe me.*

Michael's engagement in dialog with actual other (friends) appeared to facilitate him to participate in a new line of dialog with imagined other in an IT company.

In short, Michael's study of Japanese was directed to various types of dialog with actual and imagined other. Although Michael stopped to participate in initial dialog with imagined others associated with teaching English, his engagement in dialog with friends and people associated with martial arts appeared to facilitate him to participate in a new line of dialog with imagined others in an IT company. It should be noted that, regardless of whether the dialog is actual or imagined, he oriented himself to speech genres of the language that correspond to particular types of social communication, such as conversation with friends and martial arts classes.

#### 4.2. Eun-jung's motivation: Dialog with book author

Eun-jung was born and raised in South Korea and her first language is Korean. In the first interview, she reported that she was very fond of watching Japanese anime when she was in kindergarten:

*It was an anime called My Melody, which is similar to Hello Kitty. It was my first exposure to Japanese culture. I liked listening to Japanese in the anime very much. Although I did not understand Japanese, I just listened to it. I was very interested in it!*

While Eun-jung studied Japanese as an elective subject in secondary school, she also enjoyed consuming Japanese pop culture, such as manga, anime, video games and music. She learned various Japanese expressions, particularly through anime. In the interview, she gave an example of the expressions "Omae! Chikoku shitanoka?" (You! Were you late?) and "Sensei, sumimasen. Basu ga okurete. Uso janai desu" (Sir, I'm sorry. My bus was late. I'm not lying.). These expressions are typically used between a school teacher and a student in Japanese anime. From a dialogical point of view, it is possible to claim that Eun-jung oriented herself to a speech genre which is used in her favorite Japanese anime and sought to appropriate it.

Eun-jung majored in Design at her home university, and at that time, she did not expect to use Japanese for her future career. However, after coming to Japan, she started to think about working for an anime film company, though the career goal was not very specific. According to Eun-jung, her main reason for studying in Japan was to study *kanji* (Chinese characters) to be able to read Japanese novels. On the question of her future goal of studying Japanese, Eun-jung answered:

*To be able to read kanji like a Japanese. There are a lot of Japanese books that I want to read, but I cannot. It's a real shame . . . I want to read, for example, Japanese novels. But, it is too difficult to read them because they include kanji.*

In the second round interview, Eun-jung reported that her ability to read *kanji* had increased through her study in the classroom during the three-month period:

*I wanted to get better at kanji. So, I studied hard for vocab tests and remembering the vocab in the textbook . . . I can read Japanese books a little bit better than before. I think that is strange . . . For example, I did not know some Japanese words in the textbook, but now I can read them without furigana. [Japanese syllabaries]*

Partly due to improving her kanji skills, Eun-jung changed her career goal of working for an anime film company to a Japanese-Korean translator. When

asked about the possible situations in which she would use Japanese as a translator, Eun-jung said, "I expect that I would use Japanese when I read and write an email, and things like that." She also reported:

*While studying at this university, I became interested in (Japanese-Korean) translation and started to think about translator as a future job. I have been fond of collecting books. But, if I become a translator, my name will be written on the cover of my favorite book, right? I will become like a co-worker of the book author. I will be happy if it happens.*

It is possible to claim that because of her positive L2 learning experience in the classroom (improvement of reading skills), Eun-jung started to imagine an ideal L2 self in which she works with a Japanese book author and her name as a translator is written alongside the author's name on the book cover. In Bakhtin's terms, Eun-jung's expression "I will become like a co-worker of the book author" indicates that she entered into a dialog with imagined book author. As Braxley (2013) claims, language learners often seek to master a particular speech genre of a target language through their engagement in various kinds of dialog in and outside of the classroom. Eun-jung went through various dialogic processes in responding to the imagined authors' voices: in the Japanese classroom, she took part in dialog with her classmates, the instructors, and the texts. Outside of the classroom, she might engage in dialog with different people. All these opportunities for dialog with others in and outside of class might facilitate her mastery of written book-related genres of Japanese and dialog with imagined Japanese book authors.

Eun-jung's initial motivation to learn Japanese was derived from her engagement in dialog with actual anime characters. After entering the Japanese university, Eun-jung started a new line of Japanese dialog with imagined book authors. During the period of study abroad, her participation in dialog with actual others in and outside of class and appropriation of a written genre of Japanese facilitated her dialog with the imagined book authors and the construction of an ideal Japanese self. Eun-jung's case demonstrated that her study of Japanese was directed predominantly to the assimilation of speech genres of the language which are used in particular types of social communication (e.g., anime, book).

#### 4.3. Olivia's motivation: Dialog with fiancé

Olivia is a student from the U.S. who speaks both English and German at home. She started to study Japanese at her home university because she was interested in films by Akira Kurosawa and, similar to Michael, she was interested in a future career as an English teacher. Both Olivia and Michael commented that they had decided to study abroad to see if Japan is a good place to work. For

these beginner learners, studying abroad provides an important opportunity to experience life in Japan and clarify their career goals. In the first interview, Olivia reported that she really enjoyed studying in Japan and was “pretty motivated” to learn conversational Japanese:

*I want to be able to hold conversations with people when I'm talking in Japanese, to be able to express myself properly . . . I try to not hang out with the American people [in the Japanese university] because then I'm just gonna speak English. I tried to hang out with the Japanese students. So, even if I don't understand them, I'm learning by listening.*

Olivia's study of Japanese was driven by her desire to communicate with her Japanese friends, which can be viewed as her positive L2 learning experience. In Bakhtin's terms, Olivia engaged in dialog with Japanese friends and oriented herself to a speech genre of Japanese, which is used among friends in informal situations.

During the three-month period between the first and second interviews, Olivia spent time with her Japanese friends every day. Through the communication with her Japanese friends, she learned a lot of Japanese expressions spoken in daily conversation, including *futsuka-yoi* (hangover), *mushi-atsui* (hot and humid) and *otsukare* (informal word to show one's appreciation). In addition, Olivia decided to extend her study abroad for one more semester and received approval from her home university. She expressed, “I want to, perhaps in the future, live here and stay here because . . . I like people in Japan more than I do in America.”

Surprisingly, in the third interview, Olivia confessed that she got engaged to a Japanese boyfriend during the seven-month period between the second and third interviews. According to Olivia, she met her boyfriend in the first week of coming to Japan and soon entered a romantic relationship. Since Olivia was a very beginner at Japanese, they initially communicated in English. Still, they soon established a daily routine to use Japanese for at least an hour a day. She learned a lot of expressions such as *mecha-kucha* (informal expression of ‘very’) and *oishikatta* (casual style of ‘it was delicious’).

After Olivia became engaged, she started communicating with her fiancé's family in Japanese. She clearly stated that her current goal for studying Japanese is “being able to communicate with my husband's family,” who do not understand English. Olivia's expression *my husband* indicates that she has established a sense of self as a member of a Japanese family. Olivia said, “I speak Japanese every day when talking to my mother in law, and grandparents in law, his sister. His mother writes to me every day in Japanese, kanji, message in LINE [a social media platform].” In Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) sense, Olivia critically engaged in dialog with her prospective family. As the dialog extends into the future, it facilitates the establishment of her goal of learning Japanese.

However, unlike Michael and Eun-jung, Olivia did not make much effort in-classroom to study Japanese throughout her study abroad. She was often absent from class and managed to pass two introductory Japanese courses (Japanese 1 and Japanese 2). When asked about how much effort she puts into Japanese, she reported, "I feel like I am not as much with a textbook. But I did put a lot of effort into learning new kanji and just conversationally being good at listening, understanding." Olivia's comment echoes Fredricks' (2014, p. 65) argument that "(m)any students who show signs of disengagement in school show more positive emotion and stronger behavioral engagement in out-of-school contexts." From a dialogical view, Olivia did take part in dialog with her classmates, the instructors and the texts in the Japanese classroom. However, unlike Eun-jung, these opportunities for dialog with others in class might not facilitate Olivia's dialog with her fiancé and his family. This is probably because she oriented herself to speech genres of Japanese which are used in a concrete situation of family communication, rather than the genres in their neutral or dictionary form, of which the context of use is not specific.

Although Olivia's case may be very extreme, it clearly shows that motivation towards future goals is enhanced by motivation derived from an immediate learning environment. Olivia's motivation to learn Japanese was primarily generated by her desire to engage in dialog with her fiancé. She also engaged in continuous dialog with her fiancé's family and established a future goal of being able to communicate with them, which further enhanced her motivation. The contexts of dialog between Olivia and her prospective family extended into the future.

Overall, Olivia's learning of Japanese was directed to the assimilation of spoken and written genres of Japanese which are used in specific contexts of family conversation, rather than more general ways of learning, such as memorizing and practicing grammatical structures for future use in unspecific contexts. Olivia's motivation for learning Japanese was developed through this dialogical process of "selectively assimilating the words of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 341).

## 5. Discussion

The present study demonstrated that adopting a dialogical perspective, which broadens the concept of engagement, enables us to investigate different types of language learning motivations within a unified framework. The first research question concerned the relationship between situation-specific and future-oriented motivations. Michael's engagement in dialog with actual others (i.e., Japanese friends and Japanese martial arts) helped maintain his engagement in dialog with imagined others in his future employment. Eun-jung's participation in dialog with actual others in and

outside of class facilitated her dialog with the imagined book authors. These cases revealed that situation-specific and future-oriented motivations are complimentary, and both of which are generated by learner's desire to engage in dialog with other, actual or imagined, who uses the target language. The second research question pertained to how language learners' motivation develops through their participation in dialog with speakers of the language. Eun-jung started to construct an ideal Japanese self through appropriating a written genre of Japanese. Olivia's motivation for learning Japanese was closely linked to a process of assimilation of speech genres which are used for family communication. Regardless of whether the dialog is actual (situation-specific) or imagined (future-oriented), the participants oriented themselves to speech genres of Japanese which are linked to specific social contexts. From a Bakhtinian perspective, it can be concluded that language learning motivation emerges through selective assimilation to particular speech genres of the target language.

As Ushioda (2009) claims, language learning motivation emerges and evolves from relations between individuals and the cultural and historical contexts. Bakhtin's perspective, which views any use of language as a dialog with concrete or imagined others, makes it possible to explain various motivational types of language learners embedded in both formal and informal learning contexts. In the current digital world, where learners immerse much of their time in mobile communication and the virtual environment, a dialogical view may be particularly suitable for investigating motivations brought about by these sources.

It was also shown that the participants of the present study established their ideal self-image as Japanese language users through appropriating particular types of speech genres. Previous studies also reported that second language learners are exposed to, and sought to master, diverse speech genres of the target language both in and outside of the classroom, such as genres of academic writing (Braxley, 2013) and genres of pop songs (Nakamura, 2019b).

Research on language learning motivation has traditionally taken a Saussurean perspective according which a language is acquired, and an utterance (*la parole*) is constructed through selecting words from the language system in their neutral form. Bakhtin (1986) claims that people acquire a language, construct an utterance and establish self by taking words from other utterances according to their generic speech styles (speech genres). If we presuppose that language learning is a process of assimilation to particular speech genres (not in their neutral or dictionary form) of the target language, then it is reasonable to conclude that learners' various types of ideal L2 selves are constructed through the assimilation and, more or less, entail an image of themselves in which they are speaking or using the speech genres. This has important implications for language learning motivation research because it sheds light on how language-specific self-representation develops through language acquisition (Nakamura, 2019b).



In addition, as has been pointed out by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021), one of the most fundamental issues in the field of L2 motivation is that little is known about the connection between motivation and specific aspects of language acquisition. Ushioda (2016, p. 565) further explains that within the field, “the analysis of motivation and its role in language learning has largely been at the level of global learning behaviors and L2 achievement outcomes, and motivation research tended not to address more fine-grained process of language acquisition or linguistic development.” In this connection, Dörnyei (2020) introduced two approaches that have the potential to link the study of motivation to specific features of language learning: 1) A *small lens* approach (Ushioda, 2016), which emphasizes narrowing the research focus from the general level of measurable learner behaviors (e.g., amount of time spent on a task, degree of persistence in) to specific motivational issues (e.g., learners’ attention to particular features of the target language, learner’s metacognitive skill of regulating complex learning), and 2) studies on *task motivation*, which focus on learners’ engagement in particular learning tasks in the instructed classroom. Although both approaches provide many possibilities regarding research focus and scope, we still have a limited understanding of how motivation interacts with concrete elements of language acquisition. From a dialogical view, an alternative strategy of enquiry may be to sharpen the focus on analyzing the learner’s orientation with particular speech genres of the target language. The investigation of speech genres may offer a focused way of investigating the links between motivation and specific features of L2 development.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on Bakhtin’s dialogical theory, the present study broadened the notion of engagement and explained how situation-specific and future-oriented motivations are related. The findings showed that the participants’ engagement in dialog with imagined Japanese speakers was developed through their engagement in dialog with actual Japanese speakers in and outside of the classroom. Also, regardless of the type of dialog, the participants oriented themselves to speech genres of the language that correspond to specific social contexts, rather than the genres in their dictionary form, of which the context of use is not specific. It was also argued that dialogical theory might offer an alternative approach to understanding how L2 motivation is linked to specific features of L2 acquisition.

However, the present study is not free from limitations. One of them is that the analysis mainly focused on the relationship between the ideal L2 self and the L2 learning experience, whereas little attention was paid to the other

component of the L2MSS, the ought-to L2 self. While the ought-to L2 self has been considered to be a less internalized component compared to the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2009), a recent study (Papi et al., 2019) which investigated motivation of English learners reported that the ought-to L2 self was the strongest predictor of motivated behavior. From a dialogical perspective, motivation associated with the ought-to L2 self may also be interpreted as a dialogical process in the target language. Future research needs to elaborate on the dialogical aspects of the ought-to L2 self. Another important limitation in using a dialogical perspective is that Bakhtin did not develop a theory of language learning; therefore, it is challenging for researchers to incorporate dialogical concepts and synthesize them with existing motivational theories. In this regard, theoretical studies that unpack key concepts of dialogical theory and examine how they contrast with concepts in more established motivational theories are necessary.

Despite these limitations, our field could benefit from more dialogical investigations that explore the dynamic process of L2 learning. Longitudinal qualitative studies utilizing dialogical theory are a possible direction for future research. For example, narrative studies, which examine how learners' assimilation of particular speech genres of a target language affects the development of their genre-specific future self-images over a period of time, may better reveal the complex relationship between actual learning processes and future-oriented learning processes that impacts on L2 motivation.

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APPENDIX A

First round interview questions

1. Thinking back to the commencement of your study of Japanese at university, why did you decide to study Japanese?
2. At that time, did you think you might use Japanese in the future?
3. Did you have any chance to use Japanese outside of the classroom?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
4. What Japanese words or expressions did you learn through the experience?
5. Do you have any significant events (or people) in your learning history of Japanese?
6. Why did you decide to study in Japan?
7. How would you describe your present state of motivation for learning Japanese?
8. What are your goals for learning Japanese?
9. What do you want to do after you graduate?
10. When you think of your future career, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
11. When you think of your future relationship with your family members or friends, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
12. When you think of your future leisure activities, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
13. How long do you think you will continue to study Japanese?  
(Where? How?)

APPENDIX B

Second/Third round interview questions

1. A few months have passed since that first/second interview. Please describe your learning experience of Japanese in the classroom during the period.
2. Did you have any chance to use Japanese outside of the classroom?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
3. What Japanese words or expressions did you learn through the experience?
4. How would you describe your present state of motivation for learning Japanese?
5. What are your goals for learning Japanese?
6. What do you want to do after you graduate?
7. When you think of your future career, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
8. When you think of your future relationship with your family members or friends, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
9. When you think of your future leisure activities, do you think you might use Japanese?  
(If 'yes,' in what situations? How?)
10. How long do you think you will continue to study Japanese?  
(Where? How?)