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# Japanese JHS students' Ideal L2 Selves: Confidence, anxiety, and willingness to communicate

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This paper reports the results from an exploratory study which tested for Japanese junior high school student self-determination theory-based (SDT) motives toward EFL learning ( $N = 140$ ), plus confidence, anxiety, and willingness to communicate in EFL (EFL WTC;  $N = 120$ ). The purpose of this paper is to show the influence of the Ideal L2 Self items on anxiety, confidence, the SDT intrinsic motives for knowledge (IM Knowledge), and EFL WTC. Two survey instruments were used in the study. The SDT instrument results indicate the students are eager to become proficient in EFL. This is based on the high mean score for the three identified regulation items, which refer to motives to learn English for future goals (i.e., an Ideal L2 Self). The WTC instrument results indicated a low level of confidence and willingness to speak English, and much anxiety toward using English. To test the influence of the Ideal L2 Self items on WTC, a regression analysis of the SDT and WTC sub-scales was conducted (dependent variable: WTC). Accordingly, a structural equation model (SEM) of the Ideal L2 Self items, IM Knowledge, anxiety, confidence, and FL WTC was created. The SEM results indicate the Ideal L2 Self has a strong, statistically significant ( $P = < .01$ ) negative influence on anxiety and a stronger positive, statistically significant ( $P = < .01$ ) influence on IM Knowledge and between confidence and WTC; no path was found between IM Knowledge and WTC. The findings are discussed in relation to Dörnyei's (2005) Ideal L2 Self theory.

本論は、日本の中学生140人を対象に、自己決定理論 (SDT) に基づくEFL学習への動機と、外国語としての英語 (EFL) でのコミュニケーションへの自信、不安、意欲 (WTC) を分析した予備的研究報告である。本論の目的は、不安や自信への「目的言語を駆使する理想的な自分像 (Ideal L2 Self)」と、英語の知識獲得への内発的動機 (IM知識) の影響を検証することである。SDTとWTC (従属変数) の回帰分析を行った結果、SDTの調査では、学習者は英語が堪能になることに意欲を示した。これは将来の目標への動機づけ (すなわち理想の英語学習の自己) に関連する3つの項目の平均値の高さからわかる。WTCの調査では、英語を話すことへの自信と意欲が低く、英語使用への不安を示した。コミュニケーションへの意欲 (WTC) における理想学習者像の影響を調査するために、SDTとWTC下位尺度の回帰分析を行った (従属変数-WTC)。よって、理想学習者像項目、IM知識、不安、自信、およびFL WTCの構造方程式モデル (SEM) を作成した。SEMの調査の結果では、理想自己は、不安に対しては統計的に強い負の有意性 ( $P = < .01$ )、またIM知識と信頼内とWTCには統計的に強い正の優位性 ( $P = < .01$ ) を示した。IM知識とWTC間の相関関係はなかった。本論では調査結果をDörnyei (2005) の「理想的な学習者像」理論との関連において論じる。

Studies on Japanese EFL (JEFL) learners have shown that motives and motivation influence proficiency (Yashima, 2000). Research has also shown that anxiety and intrinsic motives to learn English based on self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) are interrelated (Yashima, et al., 2009). The influence of proficiency and affective variables such as international posture, motivation, and confidence on student willingness to communicate (WTC; McCroskey & Baer, 1985) in a JEFL university setting has been reported on (Yashima, 2002). Finally, affective variables have been shown to influence WTC amongst high school students (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004). This paper adds to the literature on EFL research by exploring the influence of SDT-based motives for learning English for a future goal, that is an Ideal L2 Self, on anxiety and confidence regarding English use, and WTC in English amongst Japanese junior high school (JHS) students ( $N = 140$ ).

This paper reports an examination of the effect of the three variables from the SDT identified regulation scale

which refers to an “Ideal L2 Self” (Dörnyei, 2005) on WTC via anxiety, confidence, and intrinsic motives for knowledge (IM Knowledge). The three items which make up the SDT identified regulation scale are (a) *Because I want to be a person who can speak a foreign language*, (b) *Because I think it is important for my personal development*, and (c) *Because I want to be a person who can speak English*. These are statements that refer to a future self—a self which can speak a foreign language, specifically English. Therefore they are referred to as the “Ideal L2 Self” items in this paper (see Dörnyei, 2005). The author is unaware of any studies which have specifically explored the relationship between the Ideal L2 Self and confidence, anxiety, and foreign language (EFL) WTC amongst Japanese JHS students. It is hoped that this paper will add to the literature on EFL motives and motivation in Japan and affective variables in L2 learning in general.

### Language learner ideal L2 selves

Based on their large-scale longitudinal survey, Dörnyei and Csizer (2002) speculate that the process of personal identification theorized to make up the construct of “integrativeness” might be more readily explained as an internal process of identification within the person’s “self” concept, rather than identification with an external reference group (p. 453). Dörnyei (2005) developed this line of thought further by drawing on the psychological theory of “possible selves” (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Accordingly, this theory provides that as a basis of self-identity, possible selves represent an individual’s idea of “what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” and therefore “provide a conceptual link between the self-concept and motivation” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 157).

Dörnyei (2005) builds on this theory of possible selves to develop a new conceptualization of L2 motivation, known as the “L2 Motivational Self System” (p. 105). The central concept is the *ideal self*, which refers to the L2-desired speaking ideal self. According to Dörnyei (2009), “(t)raditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives would typically belong to this component” (p. 29). Yashima, Zenuck-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) postulate that students “who clearly visualize ‘possible’ or ‘ideal’ English-using selves are likely to make an effort to become more proficient and develop WTC” (p. 143). Dörnyei (2009) has postulated that “if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘Ideal

L2 Self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves” (p. 29). Teachers and education specialists who have learned to take advantage of this discrepancy with classroom materials and activities are often the most successful in helping their students learn an L2 (For examples, see Dörnyei, 2014).

The counterpart to the ideal self is the *ought-to self*, which is an identification with the attributes that an individual believes he or she ought to possess, such as one’s duty, obligations or responsibilities. A central tenet of this hypothesis is that if proficiency in the target language is an integral part of one’s *ideal* or *ought-to self*, the desire to “bridge this gap” provides the motivation to learn the language. As a result, the individuals wish to become more like their desired “future” L2 speaking self, and students are willing to invest the time and energy to learn the L2 (see Dörnyei, 2001).

The third component of the L2 Motivational Self System reflects directly on teacher practice: the L2 Learning Experience. This component concerns situated, “executive” motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience. For example, the influence of the teacher, the curriculum, one’s peers, the experience of success all contribute to the L2 Learning Experience. In research studies on motivation, the Ideal L2 Self was found to explain the criterion measures of *Language Choice* and *Intended Effort to Study the L2* better than other motivation constructs. Furthermore, the Ideal L2 Self “seems to work equally well for different age groups, from secondary school pupils through university students to adult language learners” (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 521). The results presented in this paper support this point of view.

For L2 research purposes, the identified regulation items on the SDT instrument refer to carrying out an activity to achieve a specific goal, such as learning an L2. These items “appear to capture a positive motivational disposition and conceivably relates to the kind of self or self-image that a person identifies with” (Yashima et al., 2009, p. 55). The use of the SDT survey in this specific study will help us understand if JEFL students as young as the second year of JHS are already developing an Ideal L2 Self. Do they already envision themselves as future L2 speakers?

**The L2 learning experience: SDT motives in EFL**  
Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985) has been used in a variety of fields over the

past twenty-five years with consistent results. According to Dörnyei (2001) regarding SDT in educational contexts, there are three distinctions on the SDT continuum. First, there is *amotivation* (AM; having no desire to perform a task or engage in an activity). Next is *extrinsic motivation* (EM; engaging in an activity in order to achieve an external reward such as good grades, a raise in salary, or to please others). Finally, and of particular interest for this study, there is *intrinsic motivation* (IM) which is the motivation to engage in a task for the “inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56).

Furthermore, EM has been subdivided into three categories: *external regulation* (i.e., motivation coming entirely from external sources such as rewards or threats); *introjected regulation* (i.e., externally imposed rules that students accept as norms they should follow in order not to feel guilty); and *identified regulation* (i.e., activity involving choiceful behavior that is fully assimilated with the individual's other values, needs, and identity).

SDT research in the JEFL environment involving university students by Yashima et al. (2009) has used an SDT survey in Japanese, which was adapted from one used by Noels, Pelletier, Clément, and Vallerand (2000). These surveys include three sub-categories of IM: one for knowledge (i.e., doing an activity for the feelings associated with exploring new ideas and developing knowledge), for accomplishment (i.e., for the sensations related to attempting to master a task or achieve a goal) and finally, stimulation (i.e., for the sensations stimulated by performing the task, such as aesthetic appreciation or fun and excitement; see Noels et al., 2000, pp. 84-85). For this study, the results of the SDT survey will determine whether there are differences and/or

similarities in the responses amongst the subsections as shown in previous studies (Ockert, 2012).

In SDT research in education, much of it has consistently pointed to the importance of intrinsic motivation (see Deci & Flaste, 1996; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). This *motivation from within* is believed to sustain the learning process more effectively than motivation that is externally regulated or controlled by the teacher and the research evidence thus far supports this view (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000). For educators this indicates that in order to help our students, we need to have ways of finding, supporting, and maintaining students' own motivation to learn (Ushioda, 2006).

### Confidence, anxiety, and foreign language willingness to communicate

McCroskey and his associates have researched and reported extensively on WTC and the implications for language learning (see McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; 1991). WTC captures the major implications that affective variables such as anomie, communication apprehension, introversion, reticence, self-esteem, and shyness have regarding their influence on communicative behavior (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). These variables influence and determine the individual's “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2,” according to MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998, p. 547). McCroskey (1992) has broken down the interactions into contexts (public, meeting, group, and dyad) and receiver (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). In his research, the results for the various contexts differed by culture (McCroskey, 1992, pp. 19-20).

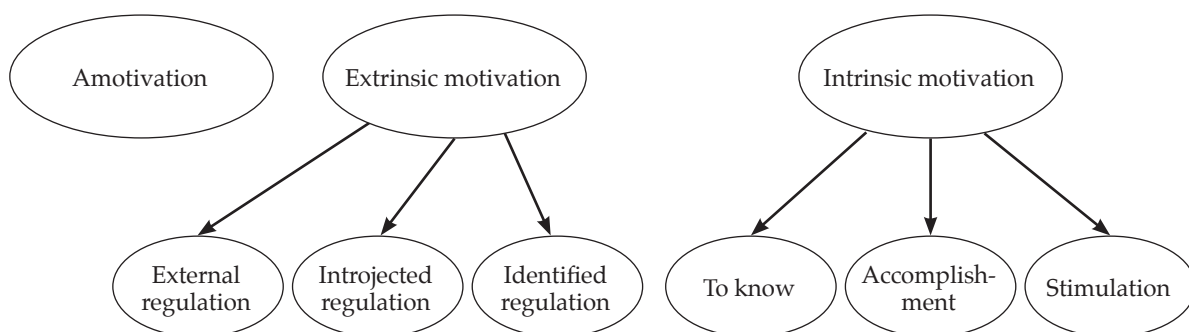


Figure 1. The self-determination theory-based motives for learning (Vallerand, 1997).

Yashima and her associates have conducted research on WTC in the JEFL context. For example, the relationship between motives, motivation, and proficiency has been reported (Yashima, 2000). Also, the relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate amongst university students (Yashima, 2002), in addition to the influence of attitudes and affect on WTC and L2 communication amongst high school students (Yashima et al., 2004). Finally, they have reported on research involving the interplay of classroom anxiety, intrinsic motivation, and gender amongst university students (Yashima et al., 2009). In her 2002 study, Yashima found a positive, causal relationship between a latent variable, motivation (comprised of two indicator variables, desire and intensity) and the latent variable, communication confidence (comprised of two indicator variables, communication anxiety—that is nervousness—and perceived communication competence) in the L2, which led to WTC. In addition, Yashima, et al. (2004) found that “self-confidence in communication in an L2 is crucial for a person to be willing to communicate in that L2” (p. 141).

### Objectives of the present study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between the SDT instrument identified regulation scale Ideal L2 Self items, anxiety, confidence, and WTC. Two research questions motivate the present study:

1. Will the Ideal L2 Self items positively influence WTC via IM Knowledge?
2. Will the Ideal L2 Self items influence anxiety and confidence or vice versa?

It is hypothesized that:

1. The Ideal L2 Self items will positively influence IM Knowledge and WTC.
2. The Ideal L2 Self items will have a negative influence on anxiety and a positive influence on confidence.

### Methods

#### Participants

The participants were second year students at a junior high school in Nagano City, Japan. The cohort for this study consisted of 140 students ( $N = 140$ ) who filled in the first research instruments. Of these 140 students, 120 successfully completed the WTC instrument. The majority of

students were 14 years old and all were in the last semester of their second year at the time the surveys were administered. The student participants were evenly divided by gender.

#### Instruments

Two Japanese-language survey instruments were used to gather the data at this stage of the project. Back-translation was used to determine accuracy and comprehensibility. The materials used in the study consist of two sections:

1. A Japanese version of the amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation sub-scales of the Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS; Noels et al., 2000). This scale has been well validated and widely used in language learning research and the results reported in the literature (see Yashima et al., 2009). The scale items present a variety of statements representing different reasons for learning English based on the motivational orientations outlined in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The instrument consists of 21 Likert-type items. The students rated the items from 1 (*That is not applicable to me at all*) to 6 (*That absolutely applies to me*). Appendix A gives an English version of the SDT survey with item level descriptive statistics
2. A WTC instrument consisting of three scales. The first tests for *confidence* and asks the students to rate 30 scenarios related to using English in various circumstances from 1 (*I absolutely don't think I could do that*) to 6 (*I think I could do that easily*). The second scale tests for *anxiety* and asks the students to rate the same scenarios from 1 (*I would definitely not be nervous*) to 6 (*I'd be extremely nervous*). The third scale, for *desire to speak in English* (i.e., WTC), asks the respondents to rate the same scenarios from 1 (*If I could, I'd run away!*) to 6 (*I would absolutely want to try that!*). The reliability and validity of the three scales have been confirmed and reported in the literature (see Ockert, 2012, 2014). Appendix B gives an English version of the WTC survey with item level descriptive statistics.

#### Procedures

Both the SDT and the WTC survey instruments were completed in Japanese during regular class time in March, 2012. The questionnaires were completed without a time limit and participation was voluntary and anonymous—students were asked to provide their age and gender only. Grades

were not affected by participating in the project. All students agreed to participate in the study.

## Results

The highest scored sub-scale on the SDT instrumental is the one consisting of the three identified regulation items. The mean and standard deviations for the three items are provided in Table 1. These three mean scores are the highest of all the 21 item mean scores reported for the SDT instrument results.

**Table 1. SDT identified regulation items that refer to an ideal L2 self (N = 140)**

The three identified regulation scale items:	M	SD
Because I want to be a person who can speak a foreign language.	4.09	1.48
Because I think it is important for my personal development.	3.45	1.32
Because I want to be a person who can speak English.	3.91	1.51

The means, standard deviations, correlation coefficients, and Cronbach's *alpha* of the SDT survey sub-sections are presented in Table 2. The

highest mean score for the sub-scales on the SDT instrument is for the identified regulation (Ideal L2 Self) items. Unfortunately, the anxiety sub-scale items are the second highest. However, the strong correlations between the SDT and WTC sub-scales indicate that an increase in IM could influence WTC as hypothesized (see Table 2).

In order to determine the antecedents of WTC in English, a regression analysis with WTC as the dependent variable was undertaken. Confidence, anxiety, and all of the SDT sub-scales were the independent variables. The only independent variable showing a strong predictive influence on WTC was confidence. IM Knowledge has a smaller predictive ability. The regression analysis data are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Regression analysis results for the SDT and WTC sub-scales (N = 140; 120)**

Step	Variables entered	R squared	beta	t	P
1	Confidence	.53	.53	9.86	.000
2	IM Knowledge	.57	.57	3.56	.001

Note: Dependent variable is WTC

**Table 2. SDT and WTC scales descriptive statistics and correlation matrix (N = 140; 120)**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Amotivation	2.41	1.33	(.75)								
2. External Regulation	2.64	1.30	-.15	(.68)							
3. Introjected Regulation	2.85	1.27	-.08	.60**	(.69)						
4. Identified Regulation	3.81	1.46	-.48**	.49**	.53**	(.75)					
5. IM Knowledge	3.10	1.28	-.33**	.65**	.57**	.70**	(.81)				
6. IM Accomplishment	2.99	1.22	-.39**	.63**	.52**	.70**	.81**	(.81)			
7. IM Stimulation	2.87	1.33	-.34**	.50**	.51**	.61**	.75**	.72**	(.83)		
8. WTC Confidence	2.66	1.52	-.25**	.32**	.28**	.34**	.48**	.41**	.63**	(.94)	
9. WTC Anxiety	3.78	1.68	.17*	.02	-.03	.04	-.09	-.04	-.22**	-.41**	(.96)
10. WTC Desire	2.34	1.38	-.21*	.37**	.33**	.43**	.53**	.42**	.60**	.73**	-.36**

Note: Cronbach's *alpha* reliability estimates are on the diagonal in parenthesis. WTC = .93; \**P* < 0.05 (2-tailed); \*\**P* < 0.01 (2-tailed)

These results indicate that none of the other IM variables had a direct influence on WTC. In order to check for the influence of IM Knowledge and confidence on WTC, a structural equation model (SEM) analysis was performed using the *Warp-PLS* software program. This software does not use a conventional “linear” regression algorithm, but rather a sophisticated series of algorithms to analyze the data, which allow for non-linear models (Kock, 2012). Therefore, typical model fitting indexes such as chi-squared test of goodness-of-fit, RMSEA, GFI are not provided, since they are not relevant. Accordingly, the software provides three model fit indices: average path coefficient (APC), the average R-squared (ARS), and the average variance inflation factor (AVIF). For the APC and ARS indices, the P values are provided. According to Kock (2012), the P values are calculated through a complex process that involves resampling estimations coupled with Bonferroni-like corrections. This is necessary since both fit indices are calculated as averages of other parameters. When assessing the model fit with the data, the following criteria are recommended by Kock (2012):

First, it is recommended that the P values for the APC and ARS be both lower than 0.05; that is, significant at the 0.05 level. Second, it is recommended that the AVIF be lower than 5. The AVIF index will increase if new latent variables are added to the model in such a way as to add multi-collinearity to the model, which may result from the inclusion of new latent variables that overlap in meaning with existing latent variables. Thus, the AVIF brings in a new dimension that adds to a comprehensive assessment of a model’s overall predictive and explanatory quality. (p. 30)

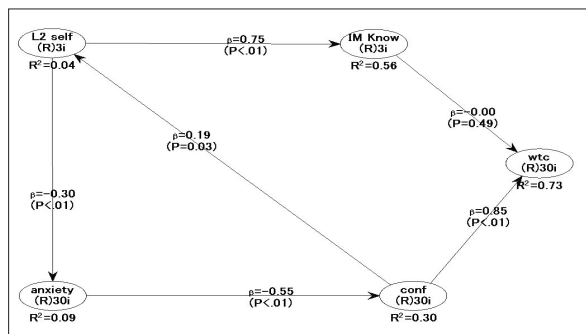


Figure 2. Structural equation model of the influence of the Ideal L2 Self items (N = 140; 120).

The results in Figure 2 show that the three items that make up the identified regulation sub-scale of the SDT instrument, the L2 Self items, have a very strong effect on both IM Knowledge and anxiety. The analysis shows that the L2 Self items have a negative effect on anxiety, which is in fact, a good thing. For this analysis, jackknifing was chosen as a re-sampling method since it is recommended for small sample sizes (Kock, 2012). The model fit indices are APC = 0.441, P = < 0.001; ARS = 0.344, P = < 0.001; AVIF = 1.041, Good if < 5.0.

Discussion, conclusions, and future research

Several of the results in this study merit particular attention. First, the three items that comprise the EM identified regulation scale refer to a future Ideal L2 Self with either English or other foreign language ability. The items on the identified regulation scale were endorsed the highest of all the SDT sub-scales. These results are similar to those of Noels et al. (2000) and Yashima et al. (2009, p. 51, Table 2). However, the Noels et al. (2000) and Yashima et al. (2009) studies involved college level students. This indicates that age may not be a significant factor for the SDT results; i.e., JHS students have already begun developing an Ideal L2 Self.

On a positive note, these results are similar to those found by other researchers in Japan. For example, in Yashima’s (2002) study, no significant path was found from L2 learning motivation to WTC. However, she found a significant path (.41, P = < 0.01) from motivation to L2 communication confidence. The high correlations within SDT survey and between the two instruments show that the two constructs are closely related. These results support Dörnyei’s (2005) theory of an Ideal L2 Self as a basis for their language learning during the duration of their studies. On the other hand, there was no meaningful path from the Ideal L2 Self items to confidence. The results in Figure 2 show a path in the opposite direction from confidence to the Ideal L2 Self items for reference purposes only. It shows a weak standardized beta result of .19, which shows a significance level at p = .03, which does not support the hypothesis. The path in from the Ideal L2 Self items to confidence was lower. Therefore, hypothesis two is supported regarding anxiety, but not so regarding the relationship between the Ideal L2 Self items and confidence.

Hypothesis one stated that the Ideal L2 Self items will positively influence IM Knowledge

and WTC. The SEM analysis confirmed what we learned from the regression analysis—that the Ideal L2 Self items had no direct influence on WTC. Also, the influence of these items on WTC was non-existent even via the IM Knowledge items. Therefore, hypothesis one has proven to not be true and is rejected based on these results.

It was also hypothesized that the Ideal L2 Self items will have a negative influence on anxiety and a positive influence on confidence. The SEM analysis does show that the path from the Ideal L2 Self items to anxiety is negative and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). The path from anxiety to confidence is also negative and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). This tells us that the “positiveness” of the Ideal L2 Self items has a negative influence on anxiety—that is anxiety is lowered by the influence of these items and this offsets the negative influence of anxiety on confidence, a strong precursor to WTC (see Yashima et al., 2004). So, while it was hypothesized that the Ideal L2 Self items would have a direct impact on WTC, the results show that even though this was not the case, there is an indirect path via anxiety and confidence to WTC. Furthermore, the Ideal L2 Self items appear to lower anxiety toward EFL use.

These results indicate that the Ideal L2 Self construct works equally well for different age groups of different nationalities. It is interesting that the Ideal L2 Self indirectly influences confidence via anxiety, and therefore, WTC. Teachers can take advantage of Dörnyei's advice on supporting student Ideal L2 Selves to help lower anxiety and improve student EFL WTC (for specific advice, see Dörnyei, 2014).

The ability to increase confidence by lowering anxiety may improve students' spoken language fluency—a primary goal of the Japanese education system (MEXT, 2003)—and future research can help answer the question as to what type of activities can best achieve this. Other possible areas for future research include the relationship between gender and the Ideal L2 Self and WTC, and the use of intervention activities to initiate changes in the affective variables (see Ockert, 2013, 2014). The results undoubtedly show that the students desire to be able to use English. There are several exciting and as yet unanswered research questions regarding the relationships between learner Ideal L2 Selves and confidence, anxiety, and WTC in English. The author encourages others interested in this area of inquiry to share their results with the global EFL community of educators and researchers.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the students and teachers who helped with this research project; Anthony Robins for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper; Bob Calfee for his invaluable assistance with the regression analysis; and the members of JALT, as this project was made possible with the support of a JALT Research Grant. Any errors are the author's.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: *The SDT Instrument Sub-scale Cronbach's alpha and Items' Mean and SD* and Appendix B: *The WTC Instrument Scales' Cronbach's alpha, and Items' Mean and SD* are available in the online version of this article on our website at <[jalt-publications.org/tlt/](http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/)>.