



## The Interplay between Iranian EFL Learners' Motivational Selves and Their Sociopragmatic and Pragmalinguistic Competence: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

**Maryam Esmacili**<sup>1</sup>**Azizullah Mirzaei**<sup>2\*</sup>**Ali Roohani**<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Despite the surge of interest in exploring the interface between second/foreign-language (L2) learners' pragmatics and motivational profiles, empirical research that holistically captures their interrelationship remains in its infancy. The current study explored the interplay between L2 learners' motivational selves and their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence using structural equation modeling (SEM). It sought to elucidate the mechanisms within the theoretical framework of the L2 Motivational Self-System that underpin this relationship. A cohort of 260 participants learning English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) from three public universities in Iran was assessed using an online L2 motivation questionnaire and an oral discourse completion test (ODCT) to evaluate their L2 motivational selves as well as sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. The SEM analysis indicated that the learners' sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics were associated with some motivational subcomponents. Specifically, the students' Ideal L2 Self exhibited significant positive predictive power in relation to their sociopragmatics. Their L2 Learning Experience contributed significantly to their pragmalinguistic knowledge. However, the participants' Ought-to L2 Self appeared to predict their sociopragmatics negatively. Overall, those students who

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1. Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL, Shahrekord University, Iran; [esmaeilmaryam99@yahoo.com](mailto:esmaeilmaryam99@yahoo.com)2\*. Associate Professor, English Department, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, Shahrekord University, Iran; [mirzaei-a@lit.sku.ac.ir](mailto:mirzaei-a@lit.sku.ac.ir) (Corresponding Author)3. Associate Professor, English Department, Faculty of Letters & Humanities, Shahrekord University, Iran; [roohani-a@sku.ac.ir](mailto:roohani-a@sku.ac.ir)

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possessed a more robust Ideal L2 Self and an enriched L2 Learning Experience exhibited greater sensitivity to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects and demonstrated better pragmatic production. Conversely, their Ought-to L2 Self which is inundated with obligations had a preventative function. These findings underscore the significance of integrating motivational constructs into L2 language pedagogy to enhance the learners' Ideal L2 Self and their L2 Learning Experience, thereby optimizing their performance pragmatically.

**Keywords:** L2 Motivational Self-System, Motivational Selves, Pragmalinguistics, Sociopragmatics

In 2009b, Dörnyei expanded the second/foreign-language (L2) motivation framework by introducing the L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS) that integrates different contemporary conceptualizations of motivation (Dörnyei, 2009b; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). His tripartite model conceptualizes motivation through three principal aspects of the L2 ideal self, the L2 ought-to self, and the L2 learning experience. Dörnyei (2009a) conceptualized the L2 ideal self as an integral part of a person's self-image specifically pertaining to L2, the L2 ought-to self as the qualities an individual considers essential to fulfill expectations and prevent undesirable outcomes, and the L2 learning experience as situational, goal-driven drives connected to the current educational setting. Consequently, three motivating factors to acquire an L2 are identified: the inherent drive of the learners to be proficient L2 users; external constraints within the context that drive learners to achieve proficiency in L2; and the real exposure and engagement in the L2 learning journey (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). It is thus necessary to take a comprehensive theoretical basis in L2 motivation studies in order to investigate how these motivational constructs are shaped in different contexts (Papi & Hiver, 2020).

Pragmatic competence pertains to the capability of L2 learners to understand and generate form-function-context mappings that are both pragmalinguistically and sociopragmatically appropriate (Taguchi, 2019). Pragmalinguistics concerns the use of linguistic forms to carry functional aspects of the language, while sociopragmatics points to the evaluation of the circumstances in which those linguistic forms are utilized (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). The enhancement of L2 pragmatic performance entails the integration of several factors, including individual identity, deliberate intention, personal agency, and sociocultural and institutional variables (Gasiorek, 2016). In fact, learners' self-perceptions, dispositions, and self-concept constructs substantially influence their

choices sociopragmatically and pragmalinguistically, thereby influencing their pragmatic development (Al Rubai'ey, 2016; Inagaki, 2019). Therefore, an in-depth longitudinal inquiry into the situational and individual attributes that influence L2 learners' pragmatic competence is worthwhile to propel existing approaches into the field of acquisition studies.

Motivation is a pivotal determinant in the evolution of L2 pragmatics since it influences students' levels of attentiveness and persistence in acquiring pragmatic information (Yang & Ren, 2020). This heightened focus facilitates the noticing and awareness of L2 features, which is essential for transforming information into internalized knowledge (Schmidt, 1993). Furthermore, motivation generates psychological arousal, direction, and persistence, all of which are vital for the learning of pragmatics (Mirzaei & Parhizkar, 2021). Learners' self-images or reflections are manifested through various modalities, including linguistic and pragmatic preferences, which reflect their understanding of their self-identity. These pragmatic decisions are instrumental in presenting their self-images (Al Rubai'ey, 2016). It is thus essential to explore the interaction between the students' motivation and their knowledge of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects (Tajeddin & Zand-Moghadam, 2012).

L2 practitioners have recently striven to explore the frameworks that portray pragmatic development in accord with their individual characteristics, interlanguage intercultural dynamics, and contextual factors (e.g., Taguchi, 2019; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). The interface between L2 learners' pragmatics and motivational profiles has also been the topic of an ongoing discussion (e.g., Inagaki, 2019; Takahashi, 2015; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Welesilassie & Nikolov, 2024; Yang & Wu, 2022). Nevertheless, there has been a limited amount of studies investigating the interaction between L2 motivation and pragmatic competence from the viewpoint of motivational self-system theory (e.g., Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Yang & Wu, 2022). The limited evidence also suggests that, while motivation may predict learners' pragmatic production, it has not been clearly established how it serves as a true indicator of learners' pragmatic variation. Therefore, the current study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) as a statistical technique to uncover the underlying

association between Iranian EFL learners' L2MSS and their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence.

## Literature Review

### L2 Motivational Self-System

Recently, the issue of L2 motivation (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015) has been examined through various theoretical perspectives. These encompass Dörnyei's conceptualization of motivational subcomponents (Dörnyei, 1994), motivation processes (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998), task motivation (Dörnyei, 2003), the L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2005), and guided motivational flows (Dörnyei et al., 2016); as well as Noels's implementation of self-determination theory (Noels, 2001). Dörnyei (2009b) illuminated the difference between learners' L2 ideal self and L2 ought-to self in his L2MSS and asserted that motivation involves the drive to decrease the differences between a person's authentic self and the behavioral norms projected by his ideal and ought-to selves.

Dörnyei (2020) explained that the ideal L2 self exactly developed from integrative motivation. It deals with developments, progress, and achievements and focuses on achieving a specified outcome (Jang & Lee, 2018). In contrast, the L2 ought-to self is an image of a prospective self that reflects others' anticipations, including family members or instructors. It describes the localized aspect of the student's self-image in which he understands L2 learning as a pathway to come across others' expectancies (Jang & Lee, 2018). The L2 ought-to self emphasizes security, obligations, and commitments and prioritizing the avoidance of an undesirable outcome (Jang & Lee, 2018). Additionally, the L2 learning experience explores perspectives on L2 learning and is greatly linked to the authentic educational setting (Papi & Teimouri, 2014). It also focuses on some aspects such as the educator, the instructional material, peers, and the previous exposure to prosperity (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2015) and is considered as the least well studied component of the L2MSS but the most pertinent component in performing tasks (Dörnyei, 2009a; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013).

This three-componential system has been validated across various L2 learning contexts, such as Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden. A plethora of empirical studies has centered on the function of the ideal L2 self in explaining L2

learners' motivation (e.g., Amini et al., 2023; Dörnyei, 2020; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2015). Khany and Amiri (2016) claimed that besides the ideal and ought-to L2 selves, which proposed reasons for learning L2, the L2 learning experience plays a crucial role in sustaining motivation. Wang and Liu (2017) emphasized the significance of supporting language learners in cultivating their ideal and ought-to selves to enhance their L3 motivation. Nevertheless, research has shown that the ought-to L2 self exhibited a positive but weak correlation (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Papi, 2010) or no relationship with the learners' motivated behavior (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2014). Despite the surge in interest to discover the nature of L2 motivational selves, empirical research that seeks to capture the contextual and individual factors is still in its infancy (Duff, 2017).

### **Sociopragmatic and Pragmalinguistic Competence**

Pragmatic competence encompasses the capability to employ linguistic resources effectively to achieve communicative goals and function effectively within social contexts (Taguchi, 2017). Pragmatic awareness pertains to an individual's understanding and intuitions about the conformity of utterances to established pragmatic norms (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). However, the production of pragmatics differs from comprehension and perception as it requires both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge and the skill to combine the knowledge while dealing with the immediate production requirements (Taguchi, 2011). Pragmalinguistics involves using language tools to accomplish different language tasks, whereas sociopragmatics involves evaluating the circumstances under which these linguistic forms are utilized (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). In an EFL context, pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication, though its development depends on various intrinsic and extrinsic learner attributes (Cohen, 2019; Taguchi, 2019).

Many cross-sectional and longitudinal researches in L2 pragmatics have analyzed the developmental aspects of pragmatic competence, aiming to capture changes and explain the situational and personal aspects influencing these changes (e.g., Cohen & Wang, 2018; Taguchi, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2024). Taguchi and Li (2017) argued that different learners' characteristics and contextual factors attributed to pragmatic learning

and development. Some participants think of emotional aspects as pivotal for their pragmatic decisions, while others view the educational connection between them and their teachers as a key factor in their pragmatic performance (Al Rubai'ey, 2016). Therefore, the intricate characteristics of pragmatic competence entails the necessity to design diverse information storage system and conduct a multi-layer examination of the environment, people, and practical enhancement (Taguchi, 2018).

### **Interface between Motivation and L2 Pragmatics**

L2 pragmatics has emerged over time as the result of the intricate and evolving interaction between an L2 learner's ID factors and contextual aspects (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The field of ILP has observed research on the way different IDs contribute to the enhancement of L2 pragmatic knowledge. According to the literature (e.g., Cohen, 2019; Shakki et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2019), IDs have prominent roles in pragmatics development. Taguchi and Roever (2017) evaluated the evidence-based studies on the way variations among individuals influence the acquisition of pragmatic competence and considered language competence, incentives, cognitive ability, proficiency, and personal characteristics as the prominent factors that affect pragmatics. Takahashi (2001) carried out the first systematic investigation into the possible impact of motivation on L2 pragmatics. Takahashi hypothesized that motivation is considered as a crucial element affecting learners' ability to notice specific request strategies. In a subsequent study, Takahashi (2005) found that within the Japanese EFL setting, learners' pragmalinguistic understanding was more closely linked to their inherent motivation than their language skills.

In the same line, Chiravate (2012) found that learners with high motivation demonstrated a greater awareness of pragmatic errors and indicated more progress in their pragmatic awareness compared to those with low motivation. Ueki and Takeuchi (2015) and Inagaki (2019) also showed that the L2 ought-to selves motivated the participants' learning behavior and led to their meticulous examination of the interactions within the intended society. Concurrently, Yang and Wu (2022) revealed that learners with a positive disposition toward English learning and the L2 community were more attentive to various facets of pragmatics in the target language. Yang and Lian (2023) also indicated

that self-efficacy and L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) had a significant and direct relationship with EFL learners' pragmatic production. However, their L2 WTC mediated the influence of their L2 ideal self on pragmatic production indirectly. In the same vein, Welesilassie and Nikolov (2024) indicated that the high school students' L2MSS demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect on their L2 WTC, both within and beyond the educational setting, as well as their evaluation of their own language skills. However, the learners' ideal L2 selves were not significantly linked to their L2 WTC outside of school.

These studies suggest that EFL learners' motivation helps them to attain an elevated degree of pragmatic awareness and realize pragmatic errors meticulously (Kasper & Rose 2002). However, there is a notable scarcity of data that particularly concentrate on how motivation serves as a true indicator of learners' pragmatic variation. Lack of evidence between pragmatics and motivation also illustrated that no research has been conducted on the relationships between the three subcomponents of motivational self, sociopragmatics, and pragmalinguistics simultaneously in a single analysis. The present study sought to address this neglected area by adopting a SEM approach that led to an in-depth examination of the interplay between Iranian EFL learners' motivational selves and their L2 sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge.

### Research Questions

The current study aimed at exploring the interwoven interactions between L2 learners' motivational selves and their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. Hence, the study addressed the subsequent research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learners' L2 motivational selves and their L2 sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence?
2. To what extent does Iranian EFL learners' self dynamics predict sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of their pragmatic competence?



## Materials and Methods

### Participants

The study comprised 260 Iranian university students, both graduate and undergraduate, who were majoring in English Translation, Literature, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The participants included both female and male EFL students from Shahrekord ( $n = 150$ ), Isfahan ( $n = 50$ ), and Shiraz ( $n = 60$ ) Universities, within 19-27 age range ( $M = 22.50$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ). Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic and educational profiles. To guarantee consistency in language proficiency, an Outcome Placement Test, with established validity and reliability, was administered. Although primarily designed for placement, the test was deemed appropriate for approximating learners' proficiency levels in this study. Additionally, participants were required to provide informed consent via an online signature on the first day of class, indicating their consent to participate in the research project. These participants' motivational selves and their pragmatic performance were measured using a questionnaire and a test, which are detailed in the subsequent section.

Table 1.

*Participant's Information*

	N	Age Range	Gender		Learning Experience	
			Male	Female	Less than 3 years	More than 3 years
Participants	260	19-27	31.9	68.1	70.4	29.6

### Instruments

#### L2 Motivation Questionnaire

The participants' motivational profiles were ascertained through an online L2 motivation questionnaire that consisted of two main segments. The first segment comprised of questions regarding the participants' personal and academic background information notably age, gender, and L2 learning experience. The second segment consisted of 30 items that assessed participants' L2 ideal self, L2 ought-to self, and their L2 learning experience. The items were adopted from Dörnyei and Chan (2013) and Taguchi et al. (2009) motivational instruments and were assessed based on a 5-point



Likert scale with anchor points set at one 'strongly disagree' to five 'strongly agree' The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for the subcomponents ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ,  $\alpha = 0.88$ ,  $\alpha = 0.72$ ) confirmed the questionnaire's internal consistency. The questionnaire was available in the online Google Docs platform and its link was shared in different online groups in WhatsApp.

### Oral Discourse Completion Test

An oral discourse completion test (ODCT) was employed to assess the variations in the participants' pragmatic performance, specifically their capacity to perform request speech act with appropriateness and fluency. The ODCT included eight request-making scenarios with three sociopragmatic variables (power (i.e.,  $\pm P$ ), social distance (i.e.,  $\pm SD$ ), and relative imposition (i.e.,  $\pm RI$ )) which were adopted from the previously published questionnaires (Li, 2014; Taguchi, 2011). The request speech act was being selected since it is regarded as a common speech act in naturalistic conversations (Garcia, 2004). This questionnaire acted as a tool to examine the participants' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. The ODCT link was sent to the participants through WhatsApp. Students were supposed to read the descriptions of each scenario in English and answer as if they were in that situation. They sent their responses through WhatsApp platform using the voice prompt.

The questionnaire enjoyed satisfactory reliability ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and validity (Li, 2011). Two trained raters analyzed and scored the students' pragmatic performance on the ODCT. Their pragmatic competence was operationalized by analyzing their ability to produce request speech acts both appropriately and fluently (Li, 2014; Taguchi, 2014a). A 5-point Likert scale, with ratings ranging from 1 'very inappropriate' to 5 'very appropriate', was employed to evaluate the sociopragmatic appropriateness of the responses from participants. The assessment of pragmalinguistic accuracy was conducted using two complementary subscales. The first subscale was a binary (0-1) accuracy scale, which determined the linguistic accuracy of the responses. The second subscale was an analytic, multilevel pragmalinguistic scale (1-4) that assessed the specific pragmalinguistic strategies used for each item. The scoring rubric was based on established rating scales used in pragmatics studies, ensuring that both pragmalinguistic

and sociopragmatic facets of the request speech act were addressed (e.g., Li, 2011; Taguchi, 2007; Mirzaei et al., 2012).

### Procedure

Initially, the participants were briefed on the research purposes and guaranteed that their responses would remain private, utilized solely for the study's objectives and would not influence their course grades. Then, they were introduced to the ideas of the L2 ideal self and L2 ought-to self and the L2 learning experience in a way that seemed understandable to all of them. After the initial introduction, the participants answered a questionnaire that measured their motivational selves. They were also given an ODCCT to complete. The questionnaire and the test links were provided to the students via social media and they were requested to complete the questionnaires online.

## Results

### Assessing Data Normality

In order to screen the data, the SPSS 24 was employed before testing the hypothesized model. Using multiple imputation, the missing data were processed and resulted in a total sample size of  $N = 260$ . The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was utilized to estimate the normality of data distribution. As it is shown in Table 2, the significant values for ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experience, sociopragmatic, and pragmalinguistic were above .05. Therefore, the assumption of normality in the tests was not violated and they could be utilized for analyzing the research data.

Table 2.

*The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test<sup>a</sup>*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Ideal L2 Self	.071	260	.003
Ought-to L2 Self	.075	260	.001
L2 Learning Experience	.076	260	.001
Sociopragmatics	.071	260	.003
Pragmalinguistics	.98	260	.001

### The Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for L2MSS subscales and sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic questionnaires were presented in Table 3. It is revealed that, the means for the ideal, ought-to and L2 learning experience were 29.09, 27.79 and 31.98, respectively. Furthermore, the means for sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics were 25.16 and 33.00, respectively. In addition, the calculated coefficient alphas for each of the scales exceeded 0.70, indicating the appropriateness of their internal consistency. The measures of skewness and kurtosis were also within  $\pm 1.5$  range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Table 3.

*Descriptive Statistics (N = 260)*

	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Ideal L2 self	10	50	29.09	8.36	-.25	.11	.87
Ought-to self	10	50	27.79	9.01	.29	-.49	.88
L2 Learning experience	17	50	31.98	7.12	.01	-.63	.72
Sociopragmatics	13	35	25.16	5.25	-.19	-.54	.79
Pragmalinguistics	20	40	33.00	4.88	-.44	-.39	.70

The first research question sought to determine if L2MSS subscales have significant relationship with the participants' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence. To address this question, a theoretical model regarding the relation between the L2MSS subscales, sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics was proposed drawing on the conceptual framework underlying the variables and a review of the existing research. Figure 1 presented the hypothesized model and its pathways.

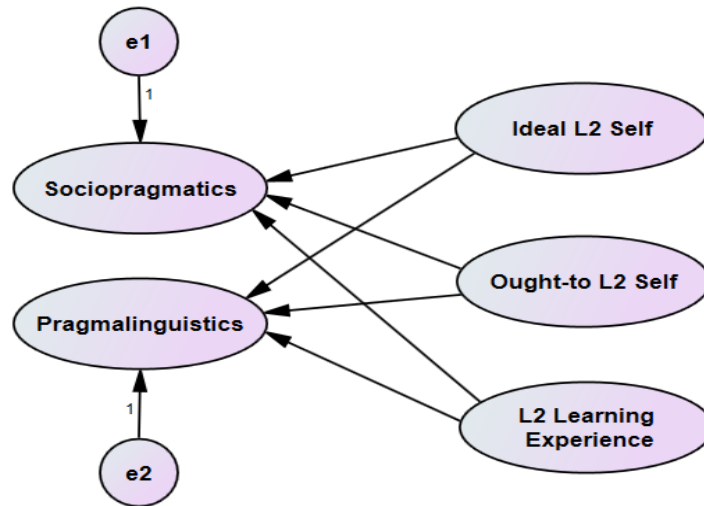


Figure 1. *The hypothesized model depicting the interrelationships among subscales*

### The Measurement Model

The data were subjected to SEM analysis, using AMOS 24 software. Two parts, as Kunnan (1998) proposed, were involved in conducting a SEM model (a) the measurement model and (b) the structural model. In the measurement process, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed to examine the structural validity of the measurement model. It is indicated that all items were significant at the 0.001 level, with standardized factor loading suppressing 0.3. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) values related to the five components were higher than 0.5 and the composite reliability (CR) indices exceeded 0.7. Therefore, it is shown that the measurement model enjoyed reasonable discriminant and convergent validity. The criteria to evaluate the model to fit the data contained chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df$ ), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). It is indicated that the data supported the theoretical constructs for measuring the latent variables. All the indicators were within the accepted range and the standardized regression coefficients all exceeded 0.7, demonstrating the reliability of the measurement model (Table 4).

Table 4.

*Fit Indices for the Variables in the Measurement Model*

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
L2 Motivational selves	1068	402	2.65	.90	.91	.08
L2 Pragmatics	300	103	2.91	.91	.96	.08

**The Structural Model**

To verify the overall model fit, goodness-of-fit indices were employed. Typically,  $\chi^2/df$  should not exceed five, ideally less than three or two, GFI, CFI, and NFI should exceed .90, and RMSEA should be below .08. As presented in Table 5, the evaluation metrics of the model was within the acceptable range, with  $\chi^2/df=2.30$ , GFI=0.92, CFI=0.93, and RMSEA =0.071. Therefore, the model fit yielded the conventional factor criteria loading criteria.

Table 5.

*Model fit Indices*

$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
2261.93	983	2.30	0.92	0.93	0.071

The model of the interrelationships among subscales of L2MSS and L2 learners' sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics was displayed in Figure 2. As it is depicted, ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience predicted sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics positively and significantly. However, ought-to L2 self affected sociolinguistics negatively.

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS'

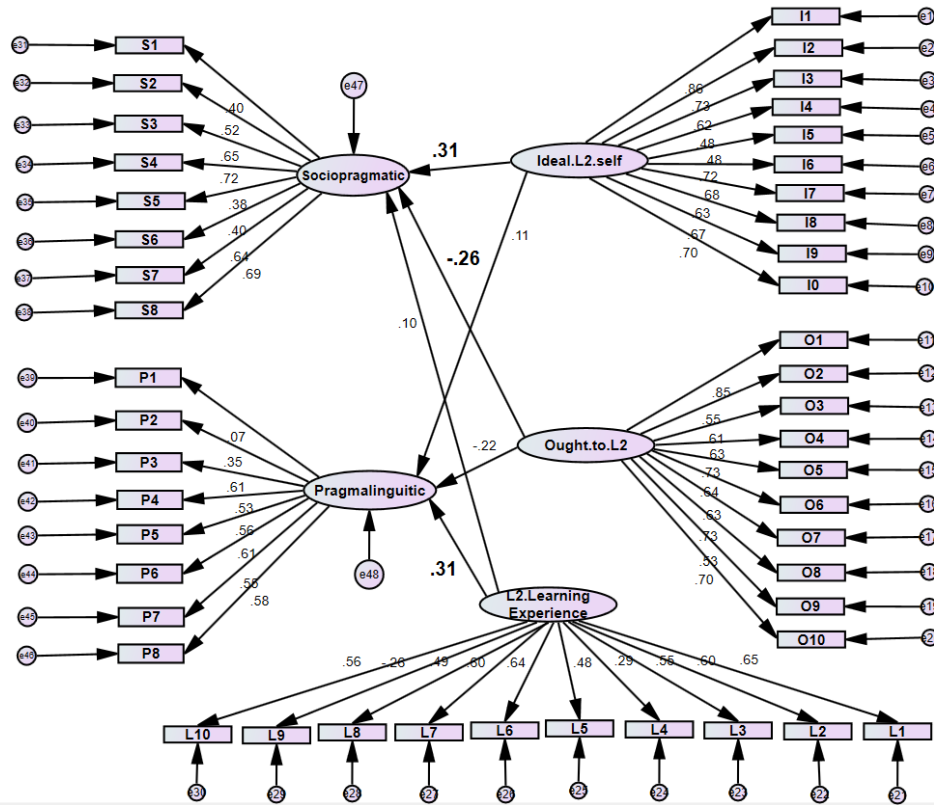


Figure 2. The SEM model of the interrelationships among variables (I = Ideal L2 self, O = Ought-to L2 self, L = L2 Learning experience, S = Sociopragmatics, & P = Pragmalinguistics)

### Discussion

This study probed the interplay between L2 learners' motivational selves and their L2 sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge by adopting SEM analysis. The study also aimed to investigate the extent L2MSS predicted sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics of Iranian EFL students. A model was developed by incorporating five elements: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, L2 learning experiences, sociopragmatics, and pragmalinguistics, considering the theoretical frameworks and empirical research existed in the literature. The SEM analysis demonstrated that the L2MSS significantly affected learners' pragmatic production.

It is anticipated that the two subscales of the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience had a positive and direct relationship with sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics respectively, which is substantiated by the previous research findings (e.g., Yang & Wu, 2022; Zhang & Papi, 2021; Zhang & Liu, 2024). One possible explanation for the interplay between the learners' ideal L2 self and their language use stemmed from the fact that students with a stronger ideal L2 self possessed a more favorable self-perception of themselves in L2 that this positive self-image positively affected their language performance. In addition, learners with positive disposition towards English learning and the L2 community were more inclined to establish the pragmatic competence, which, as Yang and Wu (2022) claimed, was required for functioning appropriately and effectively in definite social situations. However, the results revealed that indirect and negative path was proposed that led from ought-to L2 self to sociopragmatics. Therefore, some subcomponents of the L2MSS had a predictive power on learners' pragmatic production but not all motivational facets. Following is the representation of the pattern relations between the components.

#### **Pattern Relation Between Ideal L2 Self, Sociopragmatics, and Pragmalinguistics**

A key finding of the present study indicated that students' L2 ideal self exhibited significant positive predictive power on their sociopragmatics (0.31,  $p < .001$ ) and positively related to their pragmalinguistics with surprisingly no significant predictive power (0.11,  $p = 0.16$ ). Specifically, the ideal L2 self demonstrated the most significant causal relationship recognized in this study. The rationale behind this finding can be ascribed to the motivational impact of the students' positive self-perception, which led to a greater propensity to perform better in their pragmatic tests. It lends support to the assumption proposed by Yang and Wu (2022) that learners with a vivid image of their selves and of appropriate communication in the target language try to get different pragmatic learning opportunities, are more conscious of pragmatic errors, and are more sensitive to various aspects of pragmatics in the target language.

This finding is aligned with that of Inagaki (2019). She demonstrated that the ideal L2 self directly affected pragmatic production. Bagheri, Nevisi, and Afsooshin (2019) also indicated that the students with a stronger ideal L2 self outperformed those with a stronger ought-to L2 self in their pragmatic performance on discourse completion tests.



In the same line, Zhang and Papi (2021) demonstrated that students' promotion focus, which is related to development, achievements, and progress, was a positive predictor of their pragmatic production. Tagashira et al. (2011) also revealed that self-regulated Japanese EFL learners could realize L2 pragmatic features better. However, this finding is incongruent with that of Yang and Ren (2020) and Yang and Lian (2023). They demonstrated that ideal L2 self did not predict L2 productive pragmatics.

### **Pattern Relation Between L2 Ought-to Self, Sociopragmatics, and Pragmalinguistics**

The finding indicated that the ought-to L2 self demonstrated a significant negative predictive effect on sociopragmatics ( $-0.26, p < .001$ ) and non-significant negative impact on the participants' pragmalinguistic knowledge ( $-0.22, p = 0.007$ ). It is demonstrated that the ought-to L2 self was the least influential aspect of the L2MSS considering its effect on students' pragmatic knowledge. This finding suggested that the students' ought-to L2 self, which is inundated with obligations and might have a preventive function, affected their pragmatic performance (Dörnyei (2009b). These students were motivated extrinsically and considered external factors such as societal pressure, others' expectations, the prospect of good grades, and better future career as factors that motivated them to learn English. This instrumental outlook can adversely affect their performance (Ren, 2018). The students might also try to avoid negative evaluations by adopting an avoidance strategy since they were more concerned about others' evaluations (Wei, 2022). A robust ought-to L2 self might also cause increased apprehension and made the learners reluctant to communicate in a foreign language (Martinović, 2018).

This result is in line with that of Higgins and Cornwell (2016). They revealed that those students with higher ought-to L2 self had a strong prevention focus and were cautious in L2 use and showed poorer achievement. In fact, individuals who primarily adopt a prevention focus prioritize security, safety, and stability. They are more inclined to exhibit an attentive strategic approach, as they aim to reduce the likelihood of incurring losses and exercise greater caution to avoid making incorrect decision and mistakes (Higgins & Cornwell, 2016). Dörnyei (2009b) also asserted that the students' ought-to L2 self might have a detrimental influence on their pragmatic performance and led to demotivation. In the same vein, Zhang and Papi (2021) showed that learners' prevention

focus, related to security, safeguarding, and tranquility, affected pragmatic production negatively. Papi (2010) also noted that the ought-to L2 self made the learners more stressful. The findings of this study contradict the conclusions drawn by Ueki and Takeuchi (2017) and Inagaki (2019), which indicated that the participants' L2 ought-to selves served as a motivating factor for their learning behavior and encouraged them to engage in meticulous observations of communication.

### **Pattern Relation Between L2 Learning Experience, Sociopragmatics, and Pragmalinguistics**

Another result of this study was that L2 learning experience had significant positive predictive power on pragmalinguistics (0.31,  $p < 0.001$ ) and positively related to the participants' sociopragmatics (0.10,  $p = 0.19$ ) with no significant predictive power. In fact, pleasant learning experiences and positive perception of the learning environment, as Mackay (2019) asserted, motivated the students' learning behavior, activated their initiation in L2 learning, and helped them to be more sensitive to the inappropriate utterances. It is thus confirmed that providing a positive classroom environment, using interactive teaching methodologies, creating meaningful materials, and encouraging communication, can strengthen students' motivation as well as pragmatics. This finding reverberated the notion that the learners' L2 experiences lead them to observe communication in the target community more carefully and have better performance in the test (Inagaki, 2019).

Consistent with the previous relevant research (e.g., Papi, 2010; Ueki & Takeuchi, 2017), the finding of this study was another confirmation to the power of the L2 learning experience as a predictor of the students' success in communication. It is corroborated that the L2 learners' favorable views associated with the learning environment, the teacher, the curriculum, and their peers have a positive influence on the learners' successful attainment (Csizer & Kormos, 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2014). This finding lend credence to the research conducted by Csizer and Kormos (2009) which identified L2 learning experience as a factor contributing to motivated learning outcomes. Taguchi and Li (2017) also asserted that contextual factors attributed to pragmatic development. The findings also support the research carried out by Zhou (2022) which demonstrated

that the students' perception of L2 learning experience was the prominent predictor of their L2 learning effort.

### Conclusion

This study has been conducted in the interface between Iranian EFL learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence and their L2 motivational selves. SEM was performed to process the data and evaluate the relationships between the variables. Certain subscales of the L2MSS in the model exhibited a statistically significant positive correlation with both sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics. The structural path was analyzed in detail to evaluate the strength of the relationship. The findings revealed that learners' sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics were linked to certain motivational factors but not to all subcomponents of motivation. Firstly, ideal L2 self contributed significantly to sociopragmatics. It was the primary contributor to pragmatic competence, as indicated in several other studies (e.g., Munezane, 2013; Papi, 2010), which confirmed the hypothesis that promoting a clear L2 ideal self is a crucial trigger for students to be successful in their communication. Secondly, the ought-to L2 self appeared to predict the learners' sociopragmatics negatively. Finally, it is shown that L2 learning experience was the predictor of the students' pragmalinguistic knowledge. It affirmed that pleasant learning experiences would enhance the students' communicative intentions and performance. Overall, the results demonstrated that those students who possessed a greater degree of the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience were more sensitive to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects respectively and developed better pragmatic production

To conclude, these findings corroborated several assertions made by previous researchers, notably the effect of the ideal L2 self (e.g., Yang & Wu, 2022; Zhang & Papi, 2021), its strong relationship with pragmatics, and the significant role of L2 learning experience on pragmatic abilities (e.g., Inagaki, 2019; Taguchi & Li, 2017). Additionally, the study highlighted the tenuous influence of the ought-to L2 self on pragmatic performance (Ueki & Takeuchi, 2017). By examining the relation between these specific motivational constructs and learners' pragmatic production, the research elucidated the nuanced relationship between these variables within the educational and cultural context

of Iran. These findings may support the assertion that by triggering language learners' motivational selves, they would set clear goals for their future, enhance their perception of the learning environment, and consequently achieve greater success in language acquisition. The results also suggest that multiple factors, including learners' ideal L2 self, their perspectives on English learning, their commitment to learning goals, encouraging educational setting, and possibilities for accurate and fluent language practice, may interact synergistically to enhance pragmatic production.

The results of this study hold substantial implications for L2 pedagogy. It is essential to develop the capacity to recognize where individual differences may affect the students' pragmatic performance. The study opens compelling research avenues for investigating the impact of various motivational subscales on students' pragmatic competence and their overall performance. By delineating the contributions of each dimension of L2 motivation, educators can better predict L2 learners' acquisition trajectories regarding their distinct aspects of pragmatic knowledge. Furthermore, it is recommended that instructors be equipped with strategies to enhance students' ideal L2 self, thereby positively influencing their perceptions of the L2 learning experience. The activities in the classroom should be tailored to be personally relevant to learners' future goals, thus fostering their motivation. Attaining such objectives will enable educators to design pedagogical interventions that encourage students to adopt more adaptive and effective language learning strategies. Ultimately, the results underscore the significance of taking into account fluctuations in both motivational selves and pragmatic performance for advancing theoretical frameworks in this domain.

The present study has its limitations. Firstly, it utilized a cross-sectional design, which involved gathering data at a specific moment in time. There is a necessity for longitudinal studies to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of how motivational selves influence the development of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge over time. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data for measuring motivational selves may lead to the emergence of response biases. Participants might have offered responses aligned with social expectations or might not have genuinely represented their actual motivational conditions. Incorporating alternative techniques, including interviews or observational data could provide a more comprehensive understanding. In addition,

sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge are multifaceted constructs. The study's instruments might not have captured the full complexity of these constructs. Future studies should also take into account using a wider range of assessment tools to capture different dimensions of pragmatic competence. Overall, these issues may provide deeper insights into the interplay between EFL learners' motivational selves and their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge.

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