

New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications

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Language anxiety (LA), as one of the key factors in individual differences in second language acquisition (SLA), has been studied for about 40 years. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) brought the research to a stage where anxiety in language learning was being explored in specific contexts. With the dynamic turn in SLA (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009), LA research has been taking on a new look with the emergence of interdisciplinary theory-guided and multiple methods-driven studies. The volume under review is committed to the mission of clarifying the confusions and misunderstandings about LA in the past, presenting the latest studies, and highlighting theoretical and pedagogical implications for future research. It thus brings together new insights to make yet another beginning in the journey of LA research.

This volume opens with an introduction, where the authors present the aims, major themes and the structure of the book. The rest of the book is divided into three parts: (1) theoretical discussions about past and present trends in the development of LA research and interpretations of misreadings of Horwitz's classical research (Chapters 2 and 3); (2) empirical investigations into LA in light of recent theories, for example, the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS, Dörnyei, 2005) (Chapters 4 to 9); and (3) implications for practice, such as designing some activities based on positive psychology to reduce LA (Chapters 10 to 12).

In Chapter 2, McIntyre proposes a dynamic approach to studying LA. He classifies the development of LA research since 1978 into three phases. The first one is what he calls the confounded phase, where scholars started to research LA with guidance from psychological theory, paying less attention to situating anxiety within the language learning context. The second is the specialized period, marked by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) which centered on LA from an SLA angle. The third is the dynamic stage, which situates anxiety 'among the multitude of interacting factors that affect language learning and development' (p. 23). In Chapter 3, Horwitz explains that the purpose of the FLCAS (Horwitz *et al.* op. cit.) was to focus attention on studying anxiety in the language learning context. She emphasizes that LA should be further studied using factor analysis in different situations, rather than be treated as a simple composite of

communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Furthermore, she believes that helping anxious learners to reduce their anxiety is more important than figuring out the nature and components of FLCAS.

In the second part of the book, six empirical studies are reported, showcasing the frontiers of present LA research. Şimşek and Dörnyei (Chapter 4) use a mixed-methods approach to explore the 'anxious selves' of 94 Turkish learners of English. In doing so they draw on L2MSS and McAdams' 'New Big Five' model (McAdams and Pals 2006). This model consists of three levels (namely, dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations and integrative life narratives), and treats personality as the interaction of these three tiers. The study included three stages: firstly, interviews were carried out with 20 students with high levels of anxiety; then 74 students were asked to fill in a questionnaire on FLCAS; and finally, 16 of them took follow-up interviews. The self-images when students felt anxious in their language were put into the 'New Big Five' model to depict an 'anxious self'. Şimşek and Dörnyei found that the anxious self related to the anxiety facets at all three tiers of the 'New Big Five' model. Dewaele, in Chapter 5, presents a study on the link between students' perfectionism and FLCA, finding a strong correlation between the subscales 'concern over mistakes' and 'doubts about action'. In Chapter 6, King and Smith, employing Clark and Wells' (1995) seminal model of social anxiety, investigate university students' silence when learning English and uncover social anxiety as a prime factor that makes learners avoid talking. In Chapter 7, Gregersen, MacIntyre and Olson take an idiodynamic approach to explore moment-to-moment fluctuations in participants' language anxiety. Six participants were asked to record their physiological heart rate data while delivering presentations in a Spanish class. The moment the class was over, they were asked to watch their presentations and idiodynamically self-rate their moment-to-moment flux of anxieties on a computer. The analysis of the heart monitors and self-rating of LA demonstrated changes in LA moment by moment, and uncovered factors affecting LA (e.g. instant emotion) that could not be elicited in traditional approaches. In Chapter 8, Gkonou undertakes a novel exploration of the language anxiety of seven highly anxious adult Greek EFL learners through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecosystems model. Weekly diaries and interview data revealed that the complex ecosystems interplay dynamically to cause LA. Chapter 9, by Tóth, explores how LA impacts advanced learners' experiences of using the target language, showing that LA is the product of the interplay between learners' higher expectations to

become like L2 native speakers, and the fear of lacking in competence to approach this goal. In Chapter 10, Oxford puts forward new ways to look at LA by taking positive psychology into consideration, and proposes several interventions for dealing with anxiousness and related emotions. In Chapter 11, Rubio-Alcalá talks about the relationship between self-esteem and LA, analyses how self-esteem and anxiety interact in the foreign language classroom, and lists a range of applicable anxiety-reducing programs and activities in classroom teaching. The final chapter, co-authored by the three editors, concludes that LA is a complex construct rather than a single monolithic factor, which is in great need of interdisciplinary perspectives to gain a holistic view via multiple research methods.

This summary of the different chapters shows how this volume offers new insights into LA research; I now discuss these new insights in the light of interdisciplinary theories guiding LA studies, and of multiple scientific ways of researching LA. In the current dynamic turn of SLA (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009), LA is never treated as a static psychological trait; instead, it is viewed as a complex construct formed in a non-linear situated context. Being complex indicates that we should not view LA separately but holistically; meanwhile, being dynamic highlights the importance of linking changing states of anxiousness to the immediate contexts or surroundings. This dynamic nature of LA calls for interdisciplinarity in terms of theories and diversity of research methods.

Starting with issues of interdisciplinarity, this volume bears witness to the way in which other disciplines, such as sociology, developmental psychology and positive psychology, have enabled researchers to achieve broader perspectives on LA. Şimşek and Dörnyei base their study on McAdam's 'New Big Five' model and L2MSS to foreground the role of 'self' in LA. King and Smith use a 'cognitive-behavioral model of a silent L2 learner's social anxiety' (p. 99), which derives from Clark and Wells' (op.cit.) social anxiety model. Gkonou builds her research on the ecological theory originating in developmental psychology and looks at LA and its interactions with the ecological macro-, meso-, exo- and micro-systems during different periods. Oxford, too, in her implications for practice, proposes suggestions for empowering learners to reduce their LA supported by the theories of positive psychology.

This interdisciplinary perspective on researching LA leads us to the second issue in that it also calls for multiple research approaches. Although traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods are still favored by researchers in the field of LA, mixed methods approaches and innovative methods, such as the idiodynamic approach, have started receiving

attention in LA research. The research presented in this book suggests that traditional questionnaire-based quantitative approaches still play a major part in examining LA: nearly all the research presented here takes the FLCAS survey as a sifter to label the participants as high, medium, and low anxiety learners (e.g. Dewaele). But having said that, qualitative approaches are receiving more attention because of their ability to observe changes in the learning process dynamically (e.g. the chapter by Gkonou, who analysed the weekly diaries and interview data of her Greek EFL participants to study the changes in their LA). The same is true of mixed-methods approaches such as the combination of interviews, questionnaires and follow-up interviews employed by Şimşek and Dörnyei, as reported above. Finally, in response to the weaknesses of questionnaires (which cannot capture the in-the-moment state of LA or record the experiences of feeling anxious) and the weaknesses of diaries or interviews (which can be influenced by the fading of memories), the idiodynamic method can 'collect language learners' self-ratings of moment-to-moment changes in their levels of language anxiety' (p. 116). Thus Gregersen, MacIntyre, and Olson report a two-phase study that observed the fluctuations in participants' emotions dynamically, finding out the unobservable parts of anxiousness cues and the features of nonverbal cues in participants' experience of LA.

In addition to the specific contents of the chapters, the structure of the whole book was another point I appreciated. The opening part removes the misunderstandings, uncertainties, and misreadings of LA and at the same time presents a clear suggestive route to visit the following empirical studies. MacIntyre's review chapter locates the current research of LA in a dynamic paradigm. Horwitz reemphasizes the purpose of inventing the FLCAS and underlines that LA is not a simple composite of three types of anxieties. With a clear understanding of LA, the reader can approach each empirical study in part two, experiencing the complex interactions of LA and other factors in different learning contexts.

This collection is recommended to anyone interested in learning about the latest progress of LA. Importantly, it can also be used as a reference for researchers to learn how to do LA research in the new dynamic era.

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