

Chapter X

*Conclusion*¹

CHRISTINA GKONOU, JEAN-MARC DEWAELE and MARK DAUBNEY

Introduction

In this final chapter we would like to bring together the main themes emerging from all contributions to this volume in terms of recent developments in theorising about language anxiety, empirically investigating it and suggesting practical ideas for addressing it. As many authors in this anthology have acknowledged, research into language anxiety is not new to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (cf. Horwitz, 2010). In this sense, the present volume could be viewed as a compilation of new insights into language anxiety which, taken together, are indicative of a need to broaden the agenda on three fronts: theory, research and practice. In what follows we discuss what we feel are the most salient themes with regard to language anxiety and these three aspects.

Theorising about language anxiety

A common thread evident in most chapters in this volume is the recognition that language anxiety is not monolithic and uni-dimensional but might more usefully be conceived of as a complex construct. In his overview of language anxiety research and trends in its development, MacIntyre discusses the increasingly influential Dynamic Approach in which anxiety is conceptualised and investigated in connection with a complex set of language experiences. Additionally, strong interconnections were found to exist between anxiety and other language learning psychology constructs. For example, Horwitz suggests that language anxiety, motivation, autonomy and self-concept should be studied in tandem. Şimşek and Dörnyei propose new, self-based conceptualisation of language anxiety which they designate the ‘anxious self’, thus highlighting the link between anxiety and the self. Gkonou demonstrates that learner agency and extrinsic interest in the foreign language interplayed with language anxiety. Tóth found that there exists a strong, dynamic relation between high anxiety levels and self-perceived competence and ability. Mercer (2013: 376) has argued that ‘at present, SLA is undergoing what could be termed a “complexity turn” [...] as researchers

1 Pre-print version of Gkonou, C., Dewaele, J.-M. & Daubney, M. (2017) Conclusion. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp. 219-225.

become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the inherent complexity and dynamism involved in learning and teaching foreign languages'. For many contributors to this volume, language anxiety is seen as an inherently complex construct which cannot be meaningfully abstracted from other psychological variables.

Another new insight into theorising about language anxiety that is evident from the chapters is that, despite being a negative emotion, anxiety could be viewed through a positive psychology lens too. Oxford establishes a link between language anxiety and a range of positive psychology constructs such as flow, hope, optimism, emotional intelligence and positive emotions (e.g. pleasure, contentment, satisfaction etc.). She goes on to suggest a number of positive psychology interventions and activities that could help minimise language anxiety amongst learners such as hyper-reflection, situation analysis, signature strengths or the 'three-good-things' exercise among others. Horwitz also discusses flow in her chapter. In particular she questions the existence of 'facilitative' anxiety and advocates that under no circumstances should language educators exacerbate students' negative emotions in class. On the contrary, language teachers should increase their students' motivation and allow their positive emotions to flow. These points reflect current trends in the field of positive psychology in SLA (see, for example, Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014) and most importantly mirror Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014, 2016) conclusion that positive and negative emotions should not be thought of as opposite ends of the spectrum but rather as complementary constructs.

Upon reflecting on the theory underpinning language anxiety, we believe it is also necessary to refer to one of Horwitz's insights which – albeit not new – the author, understandably, feels is important to clarify and reiterate in this book. In their seminal paper, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) described three performance-related anxieties namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, in order to facilitate understanding of the nature of language anxiety. However, Horwitz *et al.* (1986) did not suggest that communication apprehension plus fear of negative evaluation plus test anxiety equalled language anxiety, as has been the case in a number of subsequent interpretations. We think it is important and indeed very useful to have this point clarified in this anthology. In addition, Rubio focuses on definitional concerns with reference to anxiety, stress and fear and to a range of self-beliefs, and through examples from individuals' general behaviour and language learning, he presents fine-grained conceptualisations of all relevant key terminology. It is hoped that these definitions will help clarify a number of overlapping constructs.

Researching language anxiety

Looking at this volume as a whole, one possible interpretation is that it marks the advent of mixed-methods research into language anxiety, mainly with a quantitative component preceding a subsequent, qualitative study. For instance, King and Smith used a structured observation instrument called the Classroom Oral Participation Scheme and collected quantitative data on students' classroom oral participation in Japan; they then selected eleven students who were interviewed twice. Şimşek and Dörnyei conducted a preliminary interview study which was followed by a survey and interviews with a purposefully selected sample. Tóth administered the Hungarian version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz *et al.*, 1986) to English university students and then purposefully selected a sample for follow-up interviews. However, this collection shows that psychometric instruments also have a central role to play in delineating aspects of language anxiety. In particular, Dewaele administered different surveys to three groups of participants in order to examine the links between perfectionism and language anxiety.

In addition to language anxiety being regarded as a complex variable, contributors to this volume also see it as non-linear and dynamic. Gregersen, MacIntyre, and Olson examine emotion and anxiety as a dynamic system which is in a constant state of flux. To this end they used the idiodynamic method (Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Meza, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) to look at moment-to-moment fluctuations in participants' language anxiety levels in real time. Therefore, their chapter is in line with current thinking and recent developments in the field of SLA in terms of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Further, Şimşek and Dörnyei report that there were times when the highly anxious students in their study would not feel anxious at all but would instead enjoy the task being undertaken and feel relaxed. Gkonou notes that some of her participants could identify occasions that would cause little or no anxiety at all to them.

In addition to a range of methodological designs, language anxiety was empirically investigated on the basis of prominent psychology-based frameworks such as McAdams's (2006) New Big Five model (see Şimşek & Dörnyei), the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (1990; see Dewaele), Clark and Wells's (1995) model of social anxiety (see King & Smith) and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecosystems model (see Gkonou). The first two studies reveal strong links between language anxiety and personality traits such as neuroticism and perfectionism respectively. Indeed, previous research has revealed

significant correlations between neuroticism and language anxiety (Dewaele, 2002, 2013). The last two studies elucidate the importance of the interplay between wider contextual factors such as the education system in Japan and Greece respectively, specific language skills, communicative tasks and situations such as speaking in a foreign language, and learner-internal variables such as language anxiety, emotions, learner agency, reticence and silence.

Ideas for mitigating language anxiety

Broadly speaking, language anxiety seems to interfere with different stages of the process of acquiring and using a second language and understandably the potential challenges facing teachers may be varied and complex. The present volume also offers a range of classroom activities and teaching strategies which language educators and teacher trainers across the globe might wish to incorporate into their own practice. More specifically, Gregersen, MacIntyre, and Olson stress the importance of raising teachers' awareness of nonverbal cues as indicators of language anxiety and of how these can be meaningfully interpreted. They conclude that body language, vocalics, emotion and their respective manifestations are closely linked. Oxford draws on suggestions from general psychology and positive psychology and suggests a series of interventions for classroom use and for independent, autonomous learning and self-awareness. Indeed, negative emotions such as language anxiety can be counterbalanced by maintaining and increasing the positive ones. Rubio suggests that teaching strategies for language anxiety should be part of school curricula and teacher training programmes. He goes on to describe three different types of classroom-based activities for reducing language anxiety and boosting students' self-esteem, namely implementation based on rapport, methodology and the type of learning activities. King and Smith also suggest useful strategies for combating social anxiety and silence, with classroom rapport and group dynamics being the main 'weapons' in this battle. Finally, Şimşek and Dörnyei suggest that teachers ask their learners or help them to produce constructive narratives about their language anxiety symptoms and episodes with a view to urging them to verbalise their negative emotions whilst in the classroom. We believe that introducing explicit discussions of language anxiety during lessons might not only be of help in creating a greater sense of community among students but also in bringing about a heightened awareness on the part of anxious students that they are, in fact, not alone and that other classmates may well experience similar feelings to themselves.

Final thoughts

To conclude, this volume, as its title also suggests, could be viewed as a wide-ranging collection of chapters which offers new insights into and directions in theorising about, analysing, researching and addressing language anxiety. Within SLA, this is the third anthology to tackle language anxiety (see also Horwitz & Young, 1991; Young, 1999) and we hope it has gone some way to capturing many of the recent trends and developments within the field, thus showing its wide-ranging diversity and complexity. It is hoped that this rich collection of chapters will help add to the growth of the field, by encouraging researchers to undertake new projects drawing on the new theoretical and methodological frameworks discussed here and by inspiring educators and teacher trainers to try out new ideas and techniques for alleviating anxiety.

Reflecting on possible future directions that language anxiety theory, research and practice could take in the field of SLA, our position is that focusing on fluctuations in language anxiety levels by taking into account changes in time, place, teaching situations, specific skills and different groups, could be a fruitful trajectory. It would also be of interest to see action research projects conducted in a variety of geographical areas and educational contexts, depicting language learners' emotions and language anxiety in class. Another possibility concerns how and which constructs from both language learning psychology and general educational psychology might have a role to play in conceptualising language anxiety. Future research may also want to explore the intriguing and complex links among motivation, anxiety and identity. Rather than acting as a brake on motivation, Yan and Horwitz (2008) have difficulties envisaging a motivated learner free of anxiety. Block (2007) suggests anxiety could be a 'by-product' of identity work, whilst Stroud and Wee (2006) discuss 'identity-based anxiety' and 'competence-based anxiety', that is, learners are just as concerned with peer pressure and teacher reaction, as they are with their language proficiency per se. Drawing on the 'narrative identity level' considered by Şimşek and Dörnyei in this volume, for example, could yield further insights into these areas and how anxious individuals co-construct and narrate their emotional experiences by deploying identity types in their discourse, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the overall experience of anxiety. Finally, the present volume, and also much of the previous research (with the exception of Bekleyen, 2009; Daubney & Araújo e Sá, 2012; Horwitz, 1996; and Tum, 2014), has only centred on anxious language learners but not on anxious language teachers.

Given ever increasing levels of teacher burnout reported in the literature on general education, further research could look at language teacher anxiety and professional well-being and at possible links between teacher and learner anxiety. We hope that the book will open up these new agendas and many more.

References

- Bekleyen, N. (2009) Helping teachers become better English students: Causes, effects, and coping strategies for foreign language listening anxiety. *System* 37 (4), 664-675.
- Block, D. (2007) *Second Language Identities*. London: Continuum.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clark, D.M. and Wells, A. (1995) A cognitive model of social phobia. In R.G. Heimberg, M.R. Liebowitz, D.A. Hope and F.R. Schneier (eds), *Social Phobia: Diagnosis, Assessment and Treatment* (pp. 69-93). New York: Guilford Press.
- Daubney, M. and Araújo e Sá, M.H. (2012) On managing anxiety in foreign language learning: developing emotional literacy on the practicum. *Intercompreensão* 16, 119-136.
- Dewaele, J.-M. (2002) Psychological and sociodemographic correlates of communicative anxiety in L2 and L3 production. *The International Journal of Bilingualism* 6, 23–39.
- Dewaele, J.-M. (2013) The link between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism among adult bi- and multilinguals. *The Modern Language Journal* 97 (3), 670-684.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and MacIntyre, P.D. (2014) The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and Enjoyment in the Foreign Language Classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 4 (2), 237-274.
- Dewaele, J.-M. and MacIntyre, P.D. (2016) Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: The right and left feet of the language learner. In P.D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen and S. Mercer (eds) *Positive Psychology in SLA* (pp. 215-236). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Frost, R.O., Marten, P., Lahart, C. and Rosenblate, R. (1990) The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 14, 449-468.
- Gregersen, T. and MacIntyre, P.D. (2014) *Capitalizing on Language Learner Individuality: From Premise to Practice*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

- Gregersen, T., MacIntyre, P.D. and Meza, M. (2014) The motion of emotion: Idiodynamic case studies of learners' foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal* 98 (2), 574-588.
- Horwitz, E.K. (1996) Even teachers get the blues: Recognizing and alleviating language teachers' feelings of foreign language anxiety. *Foreign Language Annals* 29 (3), 365-372.
- Horwitz, E.K. (2010) Foreign and second language anxiety. *Language Teaching* 43 (2), 154-167.
- Horwitz, E.K., Horwitz, M.B. and Cope, J. (1986) Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal* 70 (2), 125-132.
- Horwitz, E.K. and Young, D.J. (eds) (1991) *Language Anxiety from Theory and Research to Classroom Implications*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. and Cameron, L. (2008) *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacIntyre, P. and Gregersen, T. (2012) Affect: The role of language anxiety and other emotions in language learning. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan and M. Williams (eds) *Psychology for Language Learning: Insights from Research, Theory and Practice* (pp. 103-118). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacIntyre, P.D., Gregersen, T. and Mercer, S. (eds) (2016) *Positive Psychology in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- MacIntyre, P.D. and Mercer, S. (2014) Introducing positive psychology to SLA. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 4 (2), 153-172.
- McAdams, D. (2006) The role of narrative in personality psychology today. *Narrative Inquiry* 16 (1), 11-18.
- Mercer, S. (2013) A complexity-informed pedagogy. *RBLA* 13 (2), 375-398.
- Stroud, C. and Wee, L. (2006) Anxiety and identity in the language classroom. *RELC Journal* 37 (3), 299-307.
- Tum, D.O. (2014). Foreign language anxiety's forgotten study: The case of the anxious preservice teacher. *TESOL Quarterly, Early View*.
- Yan, X.J. and Horwitz, E.K. (2008) Learners' perceptions of how anxiety interacts with personal and instructional factors to influence their achievement in English: A qualitative analysis of EFL learners in China. *Language Learning* 58 (1), 151-183.
- Young, D.J. (ed.) (1999) *Affect in Foreign Language and Second Language Learning: A Practical Guide to Creating a Low-anxiety Classroom Atmosphere*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

