



Christina Gkonou, Mark Daubney, Jean-Marc Dewaele,
New Insights into Language Anxiety:
Theory, Research and Educational Implications
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The book edited by Christina Gkonou, Mark Daubney, and Jean-Marc Dewaele entitled *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* provides a very interesting overview of current theory, research, and practice in the field of language anxiety. It brings together a range of perspectives concerning this very complex and dynamic psychological construct that, for approximately four decades, has consistently attracted the attention of second language acquisition (SLA) researchers who have widely acknowledged that language anxiety described as “the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning and using a second language” (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 3) can impede the learning of the target language and consequently hinder academic success. Apart from that, it has also been shown to diminish the willingness to communicate and have a “corrosive influence on the very lifeblood of L2 learning itself—the enthusiasm and motivation necessary to engage and embrace another language other than one’s own” (Daubney, Dewaele, & Gkonou, 2017, p. 1). At the same time, as the Editors have rightly noted, even though language anxiety has been studied for about forty years, not many books on the topic have been published over the same period. Consequently, we might say that the main objective of the monograph in question is to fill this gap and clarify the many confusing aspects about language anxiety by presenting the latest studies by renown language anxiety researchers, focusing both on the theoretical and pedagogical implications for future investigation,

as well as making useful suggestions for reducing the influence of language anxiety in a classroom setting.

The more than two hundred pages of this volume encompasses twelve well written, separate chapters, each of which is authored by a distinguished scholar/s, and which are grouped into three parts. The first section (Chapters 1, 2, & 3) offers a theoretical discussion of current trends in language anxiety research but also addresses the misinterpretations of the Horowitz et al.'s (1986) concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. The second part of the book (Chapters 4–9) analyses several empirical studies on language anxiety focusing on diverse research designs and instructional settings. In the third part (Chapters 10–12), we can find some pedagogical implications in the form of practice activities and coping strategies.

The volume under review starts with Chapter One that serves in lieu of a formal Introduction by focusing on the aims and objectives of the book, as well as its major themes and structure. The Editors decided to assemble a collection of perspectives that rises to the challenge of conceptualizing and addressing anxiety from fresh perspectives, through different lenses and in relation to areas that have been little studied. They advocate a more varied and fine-grained approach to studying language anxiety as well as taking a more interdisciplinary perspective concerning the topic.

The book continues with Chapter Two: An Overview of Language Anxiety Research and Trends in its Development, written by Peter D. MacIntyre who proposes an overview of approaches regarding language anxiety dividing them into three phases, reflecting both historical trends and assumptions about the topic. The first one is called the Confounded Approach, as the research on language anxiety was adopted from various sources without focusing that much on situating language anxiety within the language learning context. The second phase is described as the Specialized Approach, in which researchers focused much more on placing and studying language anxiety from a language learning perspective. The third and the most recent phase has been contextualized as the Dynamic Approach in which anxiety is studied in connection with a complex array of language learning experiences.

Chapter Three entitled On the Misreading of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and the Need to Balance Anxiety Research and the Experiences of Anxious Language Learners by Elaine Horwitz offers a literature review on the components of language anxiety utilizing a facilitative–debilitating dichotomy and describing the relationship between anxiety and language learning achievement. It highlights the fact that focusing on offering assistance to anxious learners is of crucial importance as “[...] it is essential to remember that research on Language Anxiety was initiated from the experiences of anxious language learners and its ultimate goal is to make language learning more comfortable for vulnerable learners” (Horwitz, 2017, p. 44). The Author also addresses the

misreading of the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety proposed in 1986 (Horowitz et al., 1986) stating that simplifying the construct of Language Anxiety to just a composite of Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation results in failing to grasp the essence of the experiences of anxious language learners.

The second part of the book, which focuses on the empirical studies regarding language anxiety, opens with a very interesting chapter titled *Anxiety and L2 Self-Images: The “Anxious Self”* by Erdi Şimşek and Zoltán Dörnyei. The Authors of the chapter used a mixed-method approach to explore the “anxious selves” of English language learners in Turkey. They based their research on McAdams’s “New Big Five” model (McAdams & Pals, 2006), which consists of three levels (namely, dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations and integrative life narratives), and treats personality as the interaction of these three tiers. Their findings suggested that “conceiving anxiety in terms of a dynamic combination of three relatively distinct facets offers a more nuanced understanding of how anxiety affects the learners’ performance across various communication situations, language tasks, content areas and contextual conditions other than the traditional dichotomy of trait and state anxiety” (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 65). According to the Authors, the novel aspect of McAdams’s model helps in viewing the way learners form cohesive verbal accounts of their relevant experiences as an integral part of the overall holistic anxiety construct.

The next chapter entitled *Are Perfectionists More Anxious Foreign Language Learners and Users?* by Jean-Marc Dewaele is, as noted by the Author, the first systematic quantitative investigation into the link between Perfectionism and Foreign Language (Classroom) Anxiety (FLCA). His study on three different samples of informants from various countries, linguistic backgrounds and sociobiographical variables (age, gender, education level, number of languages known) revealed a significant positive relationship between perfectionism and FLCA showing a relationship between FLCA and the ‘Doubt about Actions’ and ‘Concern over Mistakes’ subscales, which suggests that the more concern over mistakes and the more doubts that participants have, the higher levels of reported FLA/FLCA.

In Chapter Six, *Social Anxiety and Silence in Japan’s Tertiary Foreign Language Classrooms*, Jim King and Lesley Smith focus on the relationship between social anxiety and the silence of second language (L2) learners within a Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context employing Clark and Wells’s (1995) seminal model of social anxiety. The Authors’ mixed-method data analyses uncovered that social anxiety is the main factor in learners’ avoidance of talking and “[...] this silence of social inhibition appears to be well supported by unhelpful pedagogical practices on the one hand and higher-level sociocultural themes relating to the value of discretion and caution in public encounters on the other” (King & Smith, 2017, p. 107). Their research

shows that Clark and Wells's (1995) model of social anxiety is a framework through which we can better understand the cognitive processes and in-class behaviors of silently anxious learners.

Chapter Seven titled *Do You See What I Feel? An Idiodynamic Assessment of Expert and Peer's Reading of Nonverbal Language Anxiety Cues*, written by Tammy Gregersen, Peter D. MacIntyre, and Tucker Olson, presents an idiodynamic approach to exploring recognizable nonverbal manifestations of language anxiety. The main objective of the study was to examine fluctuations in language anxiety operating in real time by analyzing the mentioned emotion as part of a dynamic system that is in a state of constant flux and which interacts with other influencing variables at any given moment. The Authors of the Chapter asked their participants, first, to record their heart rate while presenting during a Spanish class and, second, to watch their presentations and 'idiodynamically' self-rated the moment-to-moment fluctuations in their language anxiety levels. The analysis of findings pointed to a number of important factors affecting language anxiety that are very difficult to elicit in more traditional approaches.

In the subsequent Chapter Eight, *Towards an Ecological Understanding of Language Anxiety*, Christina Gkonou explores language anxiety through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecosystems model, thus adding a fresh empirical perspective to the investigation of this construct. Qualitative data analysis has revealed that environments which are not prominently linked to the microsystem or the present classroom (i.e., the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem) can play a key role in the experience of language anxiety in the microsystem.

Chapter Nine, *Exploring the Relationship between Anxiety and Advanced Hungarian EFL Learners' Communication Experiences in the Target Language: A Study of High- vs. Low-Anxious Learners*, written by Zsuzsa Tóth, examines how FLA impacts on and shapes advanced learners' experiences of using the target language (TL), focusing on oral communication. In her study, English major students with high and low levels of FLA were first asked to have one-on-one conversations with a native-speaking interlocutor and then to reflect on this experience immediately after the encounter. An analysis of the findings indicated that learners' higher expectations towards themselves as L2 speakers, together with a fear of not being able to achieve the desired level of competence after long years of language study, are key elements of anxiety at more advanced levels of proficiency.

The third part of the book features the pedagogical implications for lowering the levels of language anxiety and starts with Chapter Ten titled *Anxious Language Learners Can Change their Minds: Ideas and Strategies from Traditional Psychology and Positive Psychology*, by Rebecca L. Oxford. The Author explains that the nature of language anxiety is related not only to

social anxiety, but also to a more generalized form of anxiety, as well as to low emotional intelligence and lack of optimism, flow, agency, and hope. Consequently, she puts forward an array of interventions for anxious learners that could be used in a classroom setting.

In Chapter Eleven entitled *The Links between Self-Esteem and Language Anxiety and Implications for the Classroom*, Fernando D. Rubio-Alcalá explains the differences between anxiety, fear, anguish or stress and self-esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy and discusses the relationship between self-esteem and language anxiety. This very interesting chapter offers much needed analyses regarding the interaction of self-esteem and anxiety in the foreign language classroom context, as well as a range of applicable anxiety-reducing activities and strategies for classroom implementation, including guidelines for teachers' rapport, methodological orientations and learning activities.

The final concluding chapter co-authored by the three Editors brings together the main themes presented in the volume showing that language anxiety is in fact a very diverse and complex notion that needs to be examined from a number of different perspectives. Consequently, they advocate an interdisciplinary approach to language anxiety with the use of different research methods which will allow for a more holistic view of this complex notion.

The summary of the different chapters shows that the volume under review indeed offers new insights into research on language anxiety. It highlights the fact that language anxiety should be viewed as a dynamic concept that needs varied research methods, an interdisciplinary approach and a holistic perspective. At the same time, it could be argued that presenting some more detailed information concerning the psychological roots of language anxiety would strengthen the theoretical overview included in this volume.

All things considered, I strongly recommend reading *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* as it enables readers to obtain a broad and multifaceted perspective on language anxiety as such but also on the research designs and important trends one can consider while planning to study this complex notion. The book is essentially addressed to SLA researchers, teacher trainees, teaching instructors, foreign language teachers, but also to anyone with an inquisitive mind who wants to obtain an extended view on language anxiety and develop their self-awareness.

