The complex emotions that drive or delay SLA

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Structure

• Affect & Emotions in SLA
• Making FL classes emotionally interesting
• Social Foreign Language Anxiety
• Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)
• FLCA: causes & consequences, variation
• Beating FLCA in the FL classroom
• Positive emotions: Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)
2010, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed in 2013 (pb)
Affect at the heart of foreign language (FL) learning & teaching process

- **Yet:** “affect & emotion are terms that have been in the shadows of discussions of classroom foreign language learning, where the primary focus has been on the development of knowledge and use of the language”

(Garrett & Young 2009: 209)
Emotion & SLA

- **MacIntyre (2002)**: “attitudes alone are not sufficient to support motivation! To understand differences between un/engaged learner, researchers need to delve into emotions students experience during language learning”

- **MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément (2009)**: "emotions are fundamentally important motivators”

- **Swain (2011)**: Emotions are like ‘the elephant in the room’. Everyone is aware of them but they reflect an unspoken truth: that they have a significant impact on what has happened in the past, what is happening now, & what will happen in the future.
Robert Murphy: Why should SLA study incorporate the study of emotion? What is the connection between emotion and learning (beyond motivation)? *THE LANGUAGE TEACHER* 34, 2010

Zoltan Dornyei: *I propose that we completely rethink the role of emotions in SLA*, and in the discussion of learner characteristics in Chapter Five *I treat the emotional system as equal to the cognitive and motivational systems.*
Affective factors linked to use & learning of LX

Mercer (2006): advanced tertiary level learners over course of 1 semester, learners kept journal focusing on their emotional experience of FL classroom

Garrett & Young (2009): longitudinal case study on development of affect, based on Garrett’s experience in a Portuguese course for beginners in Brazil (8 weeks)

Bown & White (2010): Case studies of 3 students learning Russian, importance of regulation of affect to learning experiences & choices

Arnold & Fonseca Mora (2011): Special issue Focus on Affect in Language Learning in Anglistik 22

Emotions drive FL

• **MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément (2009):** “emotions are fundamentally important motivators” (p. 47)

• **Kramsch (2009):** “desire” is at the heart of FL; = close to affect, “but in more concrete sense than just emotional reactions or metaphysical illuminations of the soul” (p. 16)

• Desire to learn a new TL reflects, “urge to escape from a state of tedious conformity with one’s present environment to a state of plenitude and enhanced power” (p. 14)
Lack of emotion in FL classes

• Why are emotions so conspicuously absent in foreign language teaching? Don’t learners need to be able to express & recognize anger, sadness, shame, happiness in the L2?

• Moreover, because vocabulary of emotions & emotion scripts are different from language to language (culture to culture), it seems doubly important to focus on differences & similarities between L1 & TL (Dewaele 2005, 2010, 2011, 2014)

• => make FL curriculum emotionally richer!
• => make it intrinsically more interesting
Anxieties during first FL class

- **Dörnyei & Murphey (2003)** initial mixed emotions that learners experience: general anxiety, social anxiety, FL Anxiety

- => relate less to the TL or teacher than to other members of the group: “it is comparable to walking into a party when you hardly know anyone there” (p. 14)

- Learners on their guard, unsure, observing each other, avoiding embarrassment, wondering what hierarchy will be established within new group

- Concerns about ability to do well, worry about fact that others may be more proficient

- + lack of confidence, restricted identity, certain awkwardness

- Budding positive emotions: expectation / anticipation of learning something new
Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

- **MacIntyre & Gardner (1991)**: “the worry & negative emotion reaction aroused when learning a using a L2” => takes on significance in a classroom where self-expression is paramount (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013)
- “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986)
- Negative link with L2 performance (Horwitz 2001)
- High levels of FLCA in classroom => abandonment of language study (Dewaele & Thirtle 2009)
- FL teachers need to identify learners who struggle with high levels of FLCA (Gregersen 2007)
Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

• **Lower levels of FLA linked to:**
  – Knowledge of more languages, higher frequency of use of TL, stronger socialization in TL, use of TL with a larger network of interlocutors, higher level of self-perceived proficiency, knowledge of typologically related languages (Dewaele Petrides & Furnham 2008, Dewaele 2010).

• **Lower levels of FLA linked to psychological factors:**
  – Higher Trait Emotional Intelligence (Dewaele Petrides & Furnham 2008), lower Neuroticism, higher Extraversion & Psychoticism (Dewaele 2013)
  – Higher Tolerance of Ambiguity (Dewaele & Tsui 2013)
  – Lower levels of Perfectionism (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, Dewaele et al, in preparation)
Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

Macro- & micro Affective factors:

- **attitudes toward TL** (historical & political context: Russian in Poland, French in Flanders)

- **attitudes toward language teacher & his/her practices**: “Instructors who believe their role is to correct students constantly when they make any error, who feel that they cannot have students working in pairs because the class may get out of control, who believe that the teacher should be doing most of the talking and teaching (…)may be contributing to language learning anxiety.” (Young 1991:428)

**Oral** class presentations, **oral** skits, **oral** quizzes & **oral** responses in class = most anxiety-producing (Koch & Terrell 1991)

Phillips (1992): Anxious learners who are **disturbed by evaluation** are less likely to demonstrate positive attitudes toward language class and are less likely to continue language studies (p.22)
Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

Role of the teacher:

**Acknowledge existence of anxiety** (Horwitz 1997). Overt teaching of anxiety management strategies like relaxation techniques, positive self-talk & breathing exercises, as well as offering advice about language learning is recommended (Horwitz 1997, Kim 2009)

**Systematic Desensitization**: confront trigger(s) that provoke FLA, give learners a means to practice coping efforts (MacIntyre & Gregersen 2013)
FLCA-free classroom?

Role of the teacher:
Break the ice, create a “safe” environment where learners are not afraid to speak up and gradually feel they contribute to a collective identity

Make sure to be comprehensible, convince learners of value of learning TL (Arnold & Fonseca 2007)
Keys to beat FLCA & create a positive mood

- **Use non-threatening techniques** + humor, employ pertinent & appealing subject matter immediately linked to learners’ concerns
- Support & promote group **solidarity** while “having fun” (Ewald 2007)
- Establish a good “**rapport**” => important element of learner motivation (“affiliative drive” : desire to please teacher)
- Crucial trait of effective language teachers: “ability to communicate freely & to radiate positive feeling” (Borg 2006)
- **Supportive emotional** environment (Arnold 1999, 2011)
- Develop relationship of **trust** with students
Teachers not all-knowing & fearless

- When learners realise that they do not risk being the object of ridicule for making errors, that the teacher may have suffered similar fears, & that the teacher will appreciate them trying something new in the FL, their levels of FLCA will drop
TL is more than a tool

- Dewaele (2011): “language teachers could use their own emotions & feelings, their own multilingual subjectivity by presenting the TL not just as a tool for communication, but as an opportunity for learners to expand their symbolic selves, get emotionally and cognitively involved in the FL process and develop tertiary socialisation” (p. 37).
Combating boredom!

- Even if we teach a syllabus that is not of our choice and texts we have not selected, we need to find something about them that we either love or hate, but that we are not indifferent to. If we are, our indifference will become or students’ boredom (Kramsch 2009: 208)
Fuel! Not cold showers!

- **Arnold (2011):** Positive affect is the fuel for the learning process, negative affect is like cold water dousing the emerging flames
• => positive emotion facilitates building of resources because positive emotion tends to broaden a person’s perspective, opening individual to absorb TL

• => negative emotion produces opposite tendency, a narrowing of focus + restriction of the range of potential language input

• “what could be healthier for language growth than learners who want to play, explore, integrate and establish relationships?” (p. 209)
Flow

- Environment where “flow” can occur - state of optimal experience characterized by intense focus & complete involvement on a task (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)
- Can emerge in writing, reading, & computer tasks (Ebert 2003)
- Can occur in different speaking tasks, especially when students work in groups/pairs (learner-centered tasks) (Rubio 2011)
The power of positive emotion

Negative emotions: anger => urge to destroy obstacles, fear => protective behaviours

Positive emotions: different type of response: joy, interest, contentment, pride, love share ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical & intellectual resources to social & psychological resources” (Fredickson, 2003, 2007)

• => can dissipate lingering effects of negative emotional arousal, promotes personal resiliency in face of difficulties
Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014)

To what extent do you agree with following statements? Strongly disagree=1/Disagree=2/Uncertain=3/Agree=4/Strongly agree=5

- 1) I can be creative
- 2) I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes in the FL
- 3) I don’t get bored
- 4) I enjoy it
- 5) I feel as though I’m a different person during the FL class
- 6) I learnt to express myself better in the FL
- 7) I’m a worthy member of the FL class
- 8) I’ve learnt interesting things
- 9) In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments
- 10) It’s a positive environment
- 11) It’s cool to know a FL
- 12) It’s fun
- 13) Making errors is part of the learning process
- 14) The peers are nice
- 15) The teacher is encouraging
- 16) The teacher is friendly
- 17) The teacher is supportive
- 18) There is a good atmosphere
- 19) We form a tight group
- 20) We have common “legends”, such as running jokes
- 21) We laugh a lot
Foreign Language Enjoyment

- **Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014):** Link between FLE & FLCA in FL Classroom
- 1746 current FL learners from around the world
- FLE, based on Likert scale ratings of 21 items, FLCA based on 8 items extracted from FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986)
- Significant negative Pearson correlation between FLE & FLCA ($r = -.36, p < .0001$) => these two variables share 12.9% of variance, very small effect size (Cohen 1992)
Emotions in the classroom

- Combination of teacher & student characteristics to predict achievement of the latter (Curcia, Lancianoa, Saracinoa & Soletia 2013)

- Junior high school teachers’ Emotional Intelligence (EI) abilities, self-efficacy, & emotional states and students’ self-esteem, perceptions of ability & metacognitive beliefs in predicting school achievement

- Teachers with high EI enhanced students’ self-perceptions of ability & self-esteem and led to better achievement
Gregersen & MacIntyre 2013: classroom is a dynamic environment

If we take a language classroom with students who have high levels of motivation, a talkative learning style, strongly imagined future success, & a hint of anxiety, we likely will have successful learning, most of the time. This combination of factors often does predict success; over a long period of time these are positive conditions for a classroom. But still the local situation changes on a day-to-day basis. Classrooms are more like weather systems, dynamic & somewhat unpredictable, than they are like recipes.
Conclusion

• FL teaching should include a component on communication of emotion in TL (vocabulary, idioms, scripts, prosody, intonation, non-verbal aspects) = inherently interesting! Write love letters!

• Lowering FLCA & boosting FLE: teachers need emotional thermometer! Learners can become more perceptive emotionally, they need to have fun (doesn’t exclude hard work)

• Acquiring FL = opportunity to expand symbolic selves, get emotionally & cognitively involved in FL process
Some references