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PERSONALITY[1]

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Second language teachers and researchers have long been fascinated by the idea that personality might be responsible for "success" in SLA: "The idea that particular behaviors, dictated by underlying personality dimensions, are more conducive to the learning of foreign languages seems intuitively appealing" (Dewaele, 2009, p. 625). Yet, as Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) explain, "the curious situation is that while all parties to the language learning process agree that personality factors play a significant role in successful L2 learning, there has been a major disconnect between this perception and research findings" (p. 29). Is it the perception that is misguided, the authors wonder, or do SLA researchers, for some reason, fail to explain the link? Thirty years ago, Furnham already pointed out that the difficulty facing both SLA researchers and psychologists is finding an appropriate level of analysis for both the psychological and the linguistic variables (Furnham, 1990). The difficulty has not disappeared since, because of a continuing absence of:

> parsimonious, consistent, fruitful theories described specifically for, or derived from, the personality markers of speech… the theories that do exist are frequently at an inappropriate level—too molecular in that they deal specifically with the relationship between a restricted number of selected variables or too molar in the sense that by being overinclusive they are either unverifiable or unfruitful in the extent to which they generate testable hypotheses.
> Furnham, 1990, p. 92

In the present chapter, I propose to briefly consider the field of personality psychology before focusing on five higher-order personality traits and a number of lower-order personality traits that have been shown to be relevant in SLA research. After that, I will look at research that has measured the effect of psychological variables on SLA and L2 performance. This will be followed by implications for practice and research, and then I will reverse the assumption of causality, asking to what extent the learning of new languages may shape the personality of the learner. I will conclude with a number of suggestions for further research and will point to some of the fundamental obstacles that need to be taken into account in this area of research.

Personality in Psychology

Cloninger (2009) traces the origins of the scientific field of personality back to Allport (1937). He points out that since then psychologists have adopted definitions that reflect the unique concerns of their perspective (psychodynamic, trait, learning, humanistic, cognitive, and biological). Allport himself defined personality as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine their unique adjustments to the environment" (p. 48). Cloninger (2009) explains that a frequent assumption in these

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definitions is that innate biological components are at the basis of personality, which can be shared with others or which are distinct because of heredity and other influences, and these tendencies are shaped over time by a multitude of other factors, including family and culture, which leads to "habitual behaviours, cognitions, emotional patterns, and so constitute personality" (p. 5). This suggests a dynamic rather than a static view of personality.

Psychologists, who adopt a trait perspective, suggest that traits "summarize a person's typical behavior" (Pervin & Cervone, 2010, p. 229) but can also include thought and emotion. Traits are assumed to be relatively stable over time and are contrasted with states, which are more transitory. Trait psychologists agree on a hierarchical organization of traits with five broad, orthogonal dimensions at the apex (the so-called Big Five: Extraversion versus Introversion; Neuroticism versus Emotional Stability; Conscientiousness versus Negligence; Agreeableness versus Disagreeableness and Openness-to-Experience/Intellect versus Unsophisticated) and a larger number of "lower-order" personality traits, which are often correlated with Big Five traits but also explain unique variance (Pervin & Cervone, 2010). These traits are universal; in other words, the same dimensions emerge from questionnaires around the world, independent of language and culture, after the use of factor analysis (a statistical technique) to numerous datasets with personality items (Pervin & Cervone, 2010).

Personality inventories extensively rely on self-report questionnaires in the form of Likert scales. Researchers calculate individual scores on the various dimensions. Traits are thus continuous dimensions of variability and scores are normally distributed. This means that most people are in fact in the middle of a dimension rather than at it poles. For example, there are more ambiverts than either extraverts or introverts.

Eysenck (1967) argued that personality could be best described by three dimensions: Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism. He linked Extraversion and Neuroticism to physiological causes. Extraverts have low levels of cortical arousal and introverts have high levels, leading extraverts to seek out more stimulation (louder music and brighter lights at parties, for example) to be more gregarious and thrill-seeking. Introverts, on the other hand, avoid strong external stimulation which would push them over their optimal level. The optimal level of arousal is thus different for each person (Eysenck, 1994). The second personality trait to have a neurological cause according to Eysenck is Neuroticism, which depends on levels of arousal in the limbic system. Just as for Introversion, activation thresholds vary between individuals. People who score high on Neuroticism are thus more likely to exceed this threshold when exposed to minor stressors, whereas people at the opposite end of the dimension (Emotional Stability) will typically remain below the threshold, even when dealing with large stressors. This view is not shared by proponents of the Big Five approach, who think that people's position on the various dimensions is linked to genetics and environmental factors without any specifics (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The first personality trait in Big Five Models is Extraversion. Extraverts have been described as being sociable, active, talkative, person-oriented, optimistic, fun-loving, assertive, and affectionate. They are gregarious and eager to engage in social interactions, driven by optimism and a love of taking physical and social risks. Introverts, on the other hand, are typically reserved, sober, aloof, thoughtful, task-oriented, retiring, and quiet (Costa & McCrae, 1985).

The second of the Big Five dimensions is Neuroticism versus Emotional Stability. Individuals who score high on this dimension are prone to psychological distress. They are worried,

nervous, emotional, insecure, impulsive, feel inadequate, and are more likely to display angry hostility. Individuals on the opposite end of this dimension (emotional stability) are calm, relaxed, unemotional, hardy, secure, and self-satisfied (Costa & McCrae, 1985).

The third dimension is Conscientiousness. This refers to the degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior. Individuals who score high on conscientiousness tend to be organized, meticulous, reliable, hard-working, self-disciplined, punctual, scrupulous, neat, ambitious, and persistent. They display principled behavior guided or conforming to their own conscience. People who score low on conscientiousness tend to be aimless, unreliable, lazy, careless, lax, negligent, weak-willed, and hedonistic (Costa & McCrae, 1985). It has been associated with the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex.

The fourth dimension is Agreeableness. People who score high on this dimension are compliant, trusting, empathic, sympathetic, friendly, and have a cooperative nature (Graziano & Tobin, 2002).

The fifth dimension is Openness-to-experience, which is composed of two related but separable traits, Openness-to-experience and Intellect (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2005). This reflects proactive seeking and appreciation of experience for its own sake as well as a willingness to explore the unfamiliar. It seems to be a good predictor of foreign language learning achievement. Individuals who score high on openness-to-experience have wide interests, and are imaginative and insightful. Those who score low on this dimension are conventional, down-to-earth, have narrow interests, and are inartistic and unanalytical (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Openness-to-experience is correlated with activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DeYoung et al., 2005).

Social psychologists van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2000) developed a Big Five personality inventory (the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire - MPQ) that was focused on multilingual and multicultural participants and was geared toward predictions of multicultural success compared with general personality questionnaires. It consists of 91 items with Likert scales. The first dimension is Cultural Empathy: the ability to empathize with cultural diversity and understanding feelings, beliefs and attitudes different from the ones one grew up with. The second dimension is Flexibility: the ability to learn from new experiences, adjusting behavior according to contingency, and enjoying novelty and change. The third dimension is Social Initiative, which shares characteristics with Extraversion, namely, the tendency to approach social situations actively, taking the initiative and engaging in social situations. The fourth dimension is Emotional Stability (i.e., the positive pole on the Neuroticism dimension): the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations, controlling emotional reactions. The final dimension is Openmindedness (close to Openness-to-experience): an open, unprejudiced attitude towards linguistic and cultural diversity. Even the MPQ dimensions that closely correspond with Big Five scales are more specifically focused on aspects that are relevant to multicultural experience. Cultural Empathy, for example, is quite similar to Agreeableness but also includes empathizing with and understanding the feelings of members of different cultural groups. van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, Ponterotto, and Fietzer (2013) examined the construct validity of the MPQ short form (40 items) and found positive and significant relationships with scales for well-being and emotional intelligence. They concluded that the short form was sufficiently reliable and showed sufficient content overlap with the original scales.

An intensely researched lower-order personality trait is Emotional Intelligence (see Chapter 14), sometimes defined as an ability (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), more frequently defined as a trait (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). It is defined as a constellation of emotional perceptions

located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies. It concerns people's self-perceptions of their emotional abilities. Petrides (2017) pointed out that Trait Emotional Intelligence is the only definition that recognizes the inherent subjectivity of emotional experience. Petrides maintains that Emotional Intelligence is not a mental ability or competence (that can be trained) but a trait. It consists of fifteen facets organized under four main factors: well-being, emotionality, self-control, and sociability (Petrides, 2017). The factor well-being is characterized by the ability to feel cheerful and satisfied with life (happiness), to be self-confident (self-esteem), and to look on the bright side of life (optimism). The emotionality factor is related to the ability of taking someone else's perspective (empathy), of being clear about people's feelings (emotional perception), of communicating feelings to others (emotional expression), and of maintaining fulfilling personal relationships (relationships). The self-control factor refers to the ability to control emotions (emotional regulation), to not give in to urges (impulsiveness), and to withstand pressure and regulate stress (stress management). The final factor is sociability, and it refers to the ability to influence other people's feelings (emotional management), to stand up for one's rights (assertiveness), and to establish networks thanks to social skills (social awareness).

Tolerance/intolerance of ambiguity is a personality trait that was defined as the "tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable" (Budner, 1962, p. 29). Ambiguous situations entail three characteristics: novelty, complexity, and insolubility (Budner, 1962). An ambiguous situation is thus one with which an individual is unfamiliar and requires attention to multiple cues for how to behave, some or all of which may be contradictory or conflicting in some way. Tolerance of ambiguity reflects a person's comfort with dealing with novel, unfamiliar situations in which multiple, and sometimes conflicting, cues are present. Individuals who are intolerant of ambiguity are less likely to engage with ambiguous information or stimuli (Furnham, 1994).

Anxiety has been considered as a trait (see Chapter 26), namely, a general propensity to be anxious and also as a temporary state varying in intensity. To measure these concepts, Spielberger, Gorssuch, Lushene, Vagg, and Jacobs (1983) developed the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, consisting of 40 items with Likert scales that measure the strength of a person's feelings of anxiety. Trait anxiety has been defined as feelings of stress, worry, and discomfort that individuals experience across typical situations that everyone experiences on a daily basis. State anxiety has been defined as temporary fear, nervousness, discomfort, and the result of the arousal of the autonomic nervous system induced by specific situations that individuals perceive as dangerous.

Personality in SLA

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) highlight how confused SLA researchers can feel when faced with "a plethora of personality factors that sometimes differ only in label while referring to nearly the same thing, or—which can be more confusing—have the same label while measuring different things" (p. 17). I have compared those who went in search for the Holy Grail of the psychological profile of the good language learner (myself included) to "Arthur's knights, stumbling through the night, guided by a stubborn belief that something must be there, glimpsing tantalizing flashes of light from a distance, only to discover that their discoveries looked rather pale in the daylight" (Dewaele, 2009, p. 625). The fact that findings have been relatively modest is probably linked to expectations that were (or are) unrealistic, the difficulty of carrying out solid interdisciplinary research between personality psychology and SLA, and the fact that SLA is a volitional activity that implies that learners

with specific personality profiles many behave atypically, adding noise to the data. In other words, there is no psychological determinism in SLA. Having the "right" learner profile is no guarantee for successful L2 learning or achievement.

I have reported how random events can trigger a sudden desire or motivation to learn a new language, independent of the personality of the learner (Dewaele, 2013a, p. 9). The fictional character Raimund Gregorius, in Pascal Mercier's wonderful philosophical-linguistic book Night Train to Lisbon (2008), is a bilingual Swiss-German teacher of Latin, ancient Greek, and Hebrew with little interest in modern languages, who, one morning on his way to school in Bern, comes across a mysterious woman who is about to jump off a bridge. He convinces her to come down and to accompany him to class. Chatting in French, he discovers that she is a native speaker of Portuguese. The word "Português" acts as trigger: "The o she pronounced surprisingly as a u; the rising, strangely constrained lightness of the e and the soft sh at the end came together in a melody that sounded much longer than it really was, and he could have listened to all day long" (Mercier, 2008, p. 7). His passion for Portuguese starts right there and transforms his personality. The grumpy teacher who preferred the silence of dead languages discovers language desire, investment, a high motivation, combined with a social and geographical displacement (the journey to Lisbon). He learns to control his communicative anxiety in Portuguese and becomes both braver and wiser. The enthusiasm at his new-found linguistic skills connects him with the world and alters his sense of self.

Given the complex interaction of personality variables of language learners with dynamic socio-educational contexts, it becomes very difficult to isolate the effect of personality among the cognitive, social, and situational variables that contribute to SLA and L2 production (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Indeed, the effect of some personality traits can remain hidden in some situations or tasks, but may reveal itself in other circumstances. My own research, for example, has shown that while extraverts and introverts are roughly undistinguishable in terms of fluency in a relaxed conversation in the L2, the introverts' fluency drops significantly in a more stressful oral exam situation (Dewaele & Furnham, 1999).

Integration of Psychological Concepts in SLA Research

Ehrman (2008) is one the main studies in SLA to have delved into the psychological profile of "good" language learners. Her 62 learners had obtained the highest level (i.e., "full professional proficiency, with few if any limitations on the person's ability to function in the language and culture" (p. 64) on an oral interview test. They were selected from a group of 3000 learners and thus represent "the true elite of good language learners" (p. 61). She used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to establish personality types. There are four scales—extraversion–introversion, sensing–intuition, thinking–feeling, judging–perceiving— combining into sixteen possible four-letter types. Since these variables are nominal, she used crosstabs analyses to determine which personality type was most frequent. She found that INTJ types (introverted–intuitive–thinking–judging) were the most frequent in her sample (p. 64), leading her to conclude that "the best language learners tend to have introverted personalities, a finding which runs contrary to much of the literature, and, even, to pedagogical intuition. The best learners are intuitive and they are logical and precise thinkers who are able to exercise judgment" (Ehrman, 2008, p. 70).

Extraversion has been the first choice of SLA teachers and researchers for its potential effect on SLA. They felt intuitively that the more talkative, gregarious extravert learners would

have an edge over their more introverted peers. Unfortunately, research on the role of extraversion in SLA got off on the wrong foot, with an influential and partially flawed study by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978) on personality and language learning. The authors expected that the more extraverted of their Canadian secondary school students learning French as an L2 would score higher on a Listening Test of French Achievement and an Imitation Test. When no significant relationship emerged, the authors questioned the independent variable, namely the construct validity of the Eysenck Personality Inventory which was used to measure extraversion (Naiman et al., 1978, p. 67) rather than questioning the adequacy of their dependent variables. Their widely publicized result turned applied linguists away from personality and Extraversion in particular. Dewaele and Furnham (1999) lamented that Extraversion had unjustly become an "unloved" variable in SLA research. They suggested that test results and written language were less likely to correlate with Extraversion than linguistic variables that reflected oral language. Indeed, extraverts have been found to be typically more fluent in oral L2 production, with higher speech rates, fewer disfluencies, lower values of lexical richness, more implicit/deictical speech styles, and shorter utterances than the introverts (Dewaele & Furnham, 2000; Wakamoto, 2009). Extraversion was not significantly linked to morpholexical accuracy rates, meaning that extraverts were not necessarily "better" language learners. The effect of extraversion was stronger in a formal conversation during an oral exam rather than in informal classroom conversations. Dewaele and Furnham (2000) argued that these differences are linked to the increased cognitive load that L2 production entails. In contrast, L1 production is more automatic and requires less Short Term Memory capacity. Because introvert L2 users have less STM capacity, it causes a slowdown in processing and in fluency. Extravert L2 users are more stress resistant and have more Short Term Memory capacity, which means they experience less disruption in L2 processing in stressful formal situations, and are able to remain flexible and fluent. To reach the optimal level of arousal, introverts prefer quiet familiar learning environments while extraverts prefer something more stimulating. This was demonstrated in MacIntyre, Clément, and Noels's (2007) study of the interaction between learning situation and extraversion on vocabulary test scores of Canadian French L2 learners. The introverts performed best after having studied in a very familiar situation, while the extraverts performed best in a situation that involved a moderate degree of novelty (2007, p. 296). MacIntyre and Charos (1996) found that introversion was linked to L2 anxiety among their 92 Anglo-Canadian students of French. A similar pattern was observed in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), who investigated the link between personality traits and FLCA (as well as FL enjoyment) among 750 FL learners from around the world. Social Initiative was found to be a strong negative predictor of FLCA (explaining 16 percent of variance) and a positive predictor of FL Enjoyment (9 percent of variance).

Neuroticism and anxiety have been linked to foreign language (classroom) anxiety (FLCA), defined by Horwitz (2017) as a

specific anxiety[y] [that has] characteristics of both trait and state anxieties. When individuals experience Language Anxiety, they have the trait of feeling state anxiety when participating in language learning and/or use. It is also likely that individuals who experience Language Anxiety would feel anxious simply thinking about language learning and/or use.
p. 33

No direct relationship was found between Neuroticism and Flemish students' foreign language grades (Dewaele, 2007). MacIntyre and Charos (1996) found that Neuroticism was negatively linked to integrativeness, which the authors interpret as an unwillingness to engage with members of the L2 community, possibly because their own anxiety is interpreted as evidence that something about the target language community makes them nervous. Dewaele (2013b) investigated the link between Eysenck's three global personality traits (Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism) and levels of FLCA in the second (L2), third (L3), and fourth (L4) language of a group of 86 students from London, and a second group of 62 students from Mallorca who were all were studying at least two foreign languages. Correlation analyses revealed a significant positive link between Neuroticism and FLCA in the L2 and L3 of both groups. In other words, Neuroticism and FLCA shared between 9 percent and 25 percent of variance, which can be described as small to moderate effect sizes. Dewaele and Al Saraj (2015) investigated the link between Neuroticism and FLCA among 348 Arabic learners of English in the Arab world. They found that FLCA was significantly and negatively correlated with Emotional Stability (the positive end of the Neuroticism dimension), sharing 21.1 percent of variance. Muehlfeld, Urbig, Van Witteloostuijn, and Garagalianou (2016) established a significant link between FLA in English L2 and Emotionality (which includes trait anxiety) among 320 adult Dutch L1 speakers (10 percent of shared variance). Tests of discriminant validity showed that trait anxiety was psychometrically distinct from FLA. Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2019) investigation showed that Neuroticism was the strongest predictor of FLCA (explaining 28 percent of variance). Thematic analysis of participants' descriptions of classroom episodes in which they had experienced intense FLCA showed that the most frequent cause of FLCA was the self in the social context of the classroom.

British FL learners of French who scored high on Conscientiousness have been found to be more likely to complete the course successfully than peers who scored low in this dimension (Wilson, 2008). Ehrman's (2008) description of her exceptional FL learners combining high scores on intuition and thinking corresponds to high Conscientiousness. These learners are merciless with themselves, working hard to gain mastery of the FL. They develop long-term metacognitive strategies (goal-setting, self-assessment, self-monitoring) to progress quickly and strive to be accurate in vocabulary use, idiomatic expressions, and grammar rules (2008).

Openness-to-experience/intellect has been found to be linked to perceived competence in French L2 (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Ehrman (2008) pointed out that openness to experience is linked to intuition. FL learners with high scores on this dimension "concentrate on meaning, possibilities, and usually accept constant change" (p. 66). They love to discover hidden patterns, are excellent readers, and can pick up L1-like ways of self-expression (2008). Openmindedness was also found to be a predictor of FL Enjoyment in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), explaining 10 percent of variance.

Agreeableness was one of the factors included in MacIntyre and Charos (1996) and was found to predict Willingness to Communicate in the L2. In other words, being pleasant increases the chances of wanting to have pleasant interactions with users of the L2.

Trait Emotional Intelligence has been linked to a number of positive outcomes in SLA. Ożańska-Ponikwia (2013) found that among her sample of 107 Poles who had settled in the UK and Ireland, those who scored high on TEI were more likely to engage in conversations in English L2. One possible explanation is that they suffered less from FLCA and were more confident about their ability to use the L2. Such results emerged from the analysis of an

international sample of 465 multilinguals from around the world (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008). High TEI multilinguals reported lower levels of anxiety when speaking their various languages, including their L1, which the authors attributed to their better ability to gauge the emotional state of their interlocutor. Similarly, Shao, Yu, and Ji (2013) also found that 510 Chinese EFL learners who scored high on TEI generally experienced a lower level of FLCA, and scored higher on English achievement and self-rated English proficiency. Li (2020) found that those of her 1307 Chinese EFL students who scored higher on TEI reported experience more FL Enjoyment and less FLCA. She also discovered that TEI and L2 learning achievement is partially mediated by FLCA and FL enjoyment. Li and Xu (2019) confirmed this relationship in a database of 1718 Chinese EFL high school students. Similarly, Resnik and Dewaele (2020) found positive relationships between TEI and Enjoyment in both German L1 and EFL classes of 768 secondary- and tertiary-level students. Resnik and Dewaele (2021) found a similar pattern in both in-person and online EFL classes of 510 European tertiary-level students. Choosing a qualitative approach, Gregersen, MacIntyre, Finegan, Talbot, and Claman (2014) observed spontaneous displays of EI on one FL learner and one pre-service FL teacher, to see how they mobilized aspects of their EI, such as awareness and regulation of their own emotions.

Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity (SLTA) is an advantage in SLA because learners who are comfortable with uncertainty are more likely to try out their guesses and accept that "change is an integral part of the language learning process" (Rubin, 2008, p. 11). Ely (1989) and Ehrman and Oxford (1990) defined SLTA as a cognitive style. Using the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI), Ehrman and Oxford (1990) suggested that sensers, judgers and thinkers have less SLTA than intuitive, perceiving, and feeling types, respectively (p. 319). Oxford and Ehrman (1992) argue that learners who have higher SLTA have a better risk-taking ability, guessing meaning based on background knowledge, which is useful and helpful in SLA. The authors point out that risk-avoiding behavior to avoid self-criticism or anticipated criticism from others may restrict language practice. Doughty, Campbell, Mislevy, Bunting, Bowles, & Koeth (2010) argued that learners who score high on SLTA may have a superior ability to retain incongruous fragments of input in memory, which may become important later on in the learning process. Learners with moderate to high levels of SLTA are more likely to persist in SLA (Ely, 1989). Ely (1995) summed up the advantages that the learner with moderate to high levels of SLTA has, being

neither inhibited by low tolerance of ambiguity nor oblivious to linguistic subtleties. The student who is aware of, but not threatened by, linguistic differentiation, and who treats it as an occasion for introspection, experimentation and, ultimately, learning, is the one for whom tolerance of ambiguity will be a help, not a hindrance.
p. 93

Dewaele and Shan Ip (2013) used an online survey to collect data from 73 secondary school EFL students in Hong Kong. They found that students with higher SLTA were less anxious in their EFL classes and they also felt more proficient.

To conclude, SLA researchers have gained a better understanding of psychological dimensions that might affect learner progress and performance and they have also adjusted their expectations about their explanatory power. It has become clear that just as there is no established psychological profile of millionaires, there is no neat psychological profile of the successful second language learner.

Implications for Practice and Research

The implications of research on personality and SLA are relatively limited for practice in language education. There are two main reasons for this: Firstly, any language class will consist of learners with unique profiles. Some will be talkative extraverts; others will be silent, shy, and anxious introverts. It would be absurd to create groups on the basis of personality dimensions for three main reasons: (a) Most students would have a score in the middle of dimensions so how would they have to be grouped?; (b) It would be impossible to decide on the dimensions to select for constituting different groups; and (c) It would be a highly ideological and logistical nightmare to organize. The only thing that teachers can draw from the literature on personality in SLA is the realization that different learners have different personality profiles that the teacher may be required to accommodate individually in interactions with students, depending on their profile. Crucially, all learners have the potential to make good progress. Teachers thus need to create a safe place, with a positive emotional atmosphere, where all students feel they belong, and where all get the opportunity to try out their new language skills with sufficient encouragement from teacher and peers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019).

Secondly, because personality traits are quite stable, there is nothing the teacher can do to change this (See however, Moyer, 2021). In other words, a highly talkative student might be told to allow a less talkative peer to participate in the discussion, but there is no magic formula to transform the personality of learners. I remember how during my time as a French L2 teacher, I sometimes had anxious students who stuttered. Having established group solidarity, I would appeal to students in the middle of a heated debate to be quiet for a moment, to allow the anxious student to express an opinion and hence participate, however briefly, in the group interaction. This worked well because it was understood that fairness, inclusiveness, and collaboration was at the heart of the language learning journey. Some lessons for research can be drawn from the literature review so far. The dominant view in psychology and much of SLA research on individual differences is that personality predicts students' learning and acquisition of new languages. In other words, personality is seen as the cause of learner behavior. I have argued that causality could in fact be bi-directional (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009). In other words, the number of languages a person has acquired—or is in the process of acquiring—and the level of mastery attained in these different languages may very well shape their personality. Research suggests that this is indeed the case (for an overview see Dewaele & Botes, 2020). Of the four studies that used the Multilingual Personality Questionnaire, all reported a positive link between the degree of multilingualism and Openmindedness, two reported a positive relationship between multilingualism and Social Initiative, one reported a positive link between multilingualism and Flexibility, and one found a positive link between multilingualism and Cultural Empathy. The link between multilingualism and Emotional Stability is less straightforward, with one study finding a positive link, the other a negative link. Dewaele and Botes (2020) pointed out that the consistent positive relationship between multilingualism and Openmindedness is no coincidence as it a trait that shares characteristics with the lower-order trait Tolerance of Ambiguity—on which people knowing more languages also score higher (Dewaele & Li, 2013; Van Compernolle, 2016; Wei & Hu, 2018)—and with Social Flexibility (Ikizer & Ramírez-Esparza, 2017). In other words,

multilinguals know from very early on that their own linguistic, cultural values, and practices may not be shared by the people with whom they interact. The awareness and the interest in these differences could lead to self-reflection and ultimately to acceptance that different people may have different values.
Dewaele & Botes, 2020, p. 820

Interestingly, no significant relationships have been uncovered between multilingualism and Trait Emotional Intelligence (Dewaele, 2021), but knowing more languages was linked to lower levels of anxiety in all the languages (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008). Finally, Tracy-Ventura, Dewaele, Köylü, and McManus (2016) found that the personality profile of 58 British undergraduate students changed after spending a year abroad. The researchers collected data through the Multilingual Personality Questionnaire pre-departure and post-return. Reflective interviews were also conducted on return to investigate whether students noted any personality changes. Participants were found to score significantly higher on Emotional Stability. More than three-quarters of participants confirmed that they felt more confident after their residence abroad, not just in the L2 but in their lives in general.

Future Directions

One of the intriguing questions is why there has not been more research published on personality and SLA. A possible answer is that a lot of studies did not lead to publication because the relationships between psychological and linguistic variables were too weak. The authors may have decided against submitting the paper to a (good) journal, or they may have tried and failed because editors and reviewers are typically less interested in null result papers. Another reason is that higher-order personality traits that may have significant relationships with a linguistic variable typically explain (very) small amounts of variance. The reason for this is probably the fact that the relationship is mediated by a number of intermediate variables and diluted by confounding variables. As Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) point out, "the relationship between personality factors and learning achievement is often not direct and linear but indirect as it is mediated by various modifying variables" (p. 27). A particular psychological dimension may only have an effect when the learner is performing an activity in a specific modality, in a specific situation, and at a specific moment. In other words, no effect might be detected in written speech, when the learner feels comfortable surrounded by friendly peers and a supportive teacher, performing a satisfying task at a moment of feeling fully engaged and motivated. Any variation in the intensity and/or alignment of independent variables could reduce the effect of a psychological variable. Also, because the emerging linguistic system and the emotions of the learner are in a permanent state of flux, it is very hard to measure exactly what has an in/direct effect on what, at any specific point of time as it is difficult to measure the learner's unpredictable volition. That is also why personality variables have relatively limited predictive value in SLA. So many potentially important variables fall outside the inevitably narrow window of research designs. Metaphorically, the SLA researcher could be compared to an astronomer gazing at the night sky from behind a porthole window. It is therefore important to abandon simplistic research designs (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 27) and exaggerated expectations. Qualitative approaches can do more justice to the richness and the complexity of the phenomena, but they do not allow generalization. Ideally, they need to be combined with a quantitative component, offering SLA researchers binocular vision of the glittering stars and meteor showers outside their window (Dewaele, 2019).

Reflection Questions

• Does the fact that learners have their own unique personality profile mean that they cannot enjoy the same classroom activities to the same extent?

• Could you develop a mixed-methods research design to focus on the effects of a single personality dimension on a linguistic variable in an L2?

• To what extent is the field of personality and SLA research constrained by the instruments used to measure personality and linguistic performance or progress?

Recommended Reading

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The Psychology of Second Language Acquisition. Oxford University Press. This is the original book that brought an excellent overview of the main psychological areas and theories in SLA research. Dörnyei includes psycholinguistic and neuropsychological topics including neuroimaging, the role of explicit/implicit learning and memory, the distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge, individual differences including personality traits, the critical period hypothesis, and educational psychology.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). The Psychology of the Language Learner Revisited. Routledge. This is the revised edition of the original book and is by far the best source in the field. The authors explain that the concept of individual differences had evolved fundamentally since the first edition, moving away from a "classic," static definition to a more dynamic conception inspired by the Complex Dynamic Systems Approach: "the study of individual differences is in a theoretical turmoil, with powerful arguments suggesting that individual differences do not exist as such and also that they do" (p. xiii). They also devote more attention to the role of emotions in SLA.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives on good language learners. TESOL Quarterly, 35(2), 307–322.

In this Forum piece, the authors criticize the traditional "modernist" conception of the profile of the good language learner in the late twentieth century and defend a sociocultural and poststructural approach that privileges case studies. It stands in marked contrast with the views of the social psychological paradigm in SLA research.

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