

Variability and Stability in Foreign
and Second Language Learning Contexts:
Volume 2

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Edited by

Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel and Liliana Piasecka

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P U B L I S H I N G

Variability and Stability in Foreign and Second Language Learning Contexts:
Volume 2,
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PREFACE

Stability and variability are concepts that reflect important characteristics of reality, which have pushed humans forward in many spheres of life. On the one hand, we all would like to live in a safe and predicable world where, free from fear and danger, we can pursue our daily activities. On the other hand, many associate stability with stagnation, which is the enemy of progress and creativity. But stability does not have to be interpreted in such a way. Recent decades have brought about many changes in countless manifestations of human activity, the most impressive being the development of information and communication technologies. Not only have they made interpersonal communication easy but they have also enabled communication among people from different, frequently very distant parts of the world. However, communication by means of the Internet, for example, has not changed the fact that it is based primarily on language – a stable though variable feature of *homo sapiens*. In addition, many people can use more than one language, which makes them more versatile communicators. Contributors to this book are all concerned with how stability and variability work in the context of language, language learning and teaching.

The brief overview (below) of individual chapters included in the two volumes implies a wide spectrum of topics organized within a relatively fixed framework of Applied Linguistics theory and practice, revolving around the concepts of stability and variability, which capture the dynamic nature of the phenomena characterizing language, learning and teaching. The indisputable strength of the papers lies in the fact that the vast majority report original empirical studies that were carried out in diverse second/foreign language learning contexts, investigating interesting issues across various nationalities, ages, and educational and professional groups of language learners and teachers. The issues under scrutiny embrace the ‘classical’, stable topics related to language learning and teaching, such as communicative competence, input, orality and literacy, learner characteristics and strategies, and teacher development, to mention just a few. In addition, ‘recent arrivals’, to borrow a marketing metaphor, are also present, as the authors consider learning and teaching implications resulting from the status of English as the language of international communication, and when they discuss related concepts of intercultural competence along with language learners’ identity and creativity.

The contributors to the present volumes are researchers – foreign and second language learners and teachers themselves – who offer the reader a range of methodological designs that are successfully used in Applied Linguistics research. Last but not least, the multilingual and multicultural character of the contributors and their contributions needs to be underscored. In addition, the framework of stability and variability suggests that changes leading to progress and development derive from stable foundations that account for the sense of continuity and belonging in the applied linguists' communities of practice.

This book is divided into two volumes. **Volume One** focuses on language and language teaching. Part One of the volume comprises chapters related to such issues as English as an International Language, language in mass media, translation, interpreting, etymological aspects of dictionary-making, and acquisition of English articles.

Joanna Kapica-Curzytek, following Umberto Eco's (2002) search for a universal language, discusses English from this perspective, arguing that a change in the status of the language from national to international imposes a new role on the language teacher, namely that of a "broker of global (universal) values". Recognizing the role of English as International Language (EIL), or English as the *lingua franca* (ELF) of today, Karen Jacob discusses the current role of cultural information in English language learning and teaching (ELT). She is concerned whether Spanish learners of English as a foreign language perceive the cultural content of English language courses within the traditional EFL language paradigm or within the more recent proposal of a Global English paradigm. Elizabeth Woodward-Smith, in turn, shows how advertising discourse has evolved from informative to humorous techniques in response to historical, social, cultural and economic factors, basing her analysis on audiovisual advertising from television and the Internet, and on incongruity theory. Language use in mass media is also of concern to Sylwia Wrześniewska, who presents variable linguistic means employed to pass negative information in press headlines. Lech Zabor shares with readers the findings of his study on the acquisition of English articles by Polish learners through the lenses of definiteness and specificity. The shift of interest from morphology to meaning is evident in the chapter by Mariusz Kamiński, whose analysis of the history of general English lexicography shows how the etymological bias of dictionary makers was changed by empirical and systematic studies of words based on a large multi-lingual corpus, allowing lexicographers to separate meaning from etymology.

Two other chapters in this part of the volume refer to translation and interpreting. Searching for translation universals, Łukasz Grabowski has

compared translated and non-translated literary Polish texts and found that translated texts are more lexically complex and contain more precise and explicit sentences than the non-translated texts. The former also feature a higher lexical variety of bottom-frequency words than the latter. Grabowski suggests that these two differences may be regarded as T-universals. Aleksandra Wachla-Gierałtowiec, meanwhile, is concerned with simultaneous interpreting – a multitask requiring the use of a number of cognitive tasks – from the perspective of the quality of memorized and retrieved information in novice interpreters.

Part Two is devoted to current thinking and practice connected with foreign/second language teaching from the point of view of teaching contexts, input features that enhance language learning, the growth of implicit knowledge, as well as the role and development of foreign language teachers across the range of contexts in which they are active.

Maria Juan-Garau discusses variable effects of three different SLA learning contexts (formal instruction, content and language integrated learning, and study abroad) in terms of the opportunities for contact with the target language, opportunities for practice, and linguistic benefits they offer, but also in terms of learning outcomes. Context and input are relevant to Marek Kuczyński, who presents the case of two children, born and living in Poland, who have acquired English via natural communication at home (conversations with their father, TV programs and English language texts), and consequently developed a fluent oral communicative competence despite limitations in their L2 vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Agnieszka Pietrzykowska is concerned with the influence of enhancing visual input by means of highlighting or boldfacing target language forms (for example, grammatical structures) on the process of noticing. The findings of the study she reports imply that increasing the saliency of a given form results in a higher level of noticing. The issue of variability is also explored by Mirosław Pawlak, researching the employment of implicit knowledge as a function of task type, proficiency level, and targeted linguistic form. On the basis of the research findings the author concludes that though the same type of knowledge was elicited, it also varied due to task difficulty and language proficiency, which required different types of processing.

Anna Nizęgorodcew provides the reader with an insightful analysis into a workshop carried out within the European Master for European Teacher Training Project (EMETT), one of whose objectives was to train intercultural language teachers. Nizęgorodcew describes how a workshop based on Czesław Miłosz's poetry was an attempt to develop the intercultural competence of international students. The issue of

intercultural competence is related to the status of English as the *lingua franca* of the multicultural world. Aleksandra Wach, then, explores the attitudes toward ELF expressed by Polish teachers of English as a foreign language, which range from enthusiastic to skeptical. A deep concern for teacher qualifications and development is evident in the chapter by Marek Derenowski, who examines students' and teachers' subjective perceptions of the roles that teachers perform, their professional development, the teachers' actual classroom practices, and the possible relations between teaching experience and professional development. The role of the teacher as a facilitator of the learning process and a group member is one of the leading themes in Dagmara Gałajda's chapter. The author explores how activities facilitating group dynamics, fundamental to the process of learning a foreign language, enhance classroom interaction, goal-orientedness, group identity and the skills of working as a team.

Volume Two focuses on the language learner. This perspective is quite meaningful as it highlights a large variety of factors that may have an impact on learning a foreign language. It also reflects the shift of interest from the language and the teacher to the learner – the most important actor engaged in the language learning process. The sixteen chapters address a wide gamut of factors, divided into three subsections. Part One covers individual cognitive and affective learner differences, Part Two centers around learning language skills and subsystems, while Part Three concerns learners with special educational needs (developmental dyslexia and autism).

In Part One (learner variables) Danuta Gabryś-Barker delves into multilinguals' learning stories with the intention to find out how their L2 and L3 learning experiences in a formal instructional context affect their motivations, attitudes, learning styles and strategies, perceived relations between the languages, and difficulties encountered when learning these languages. Gabryś-Barker's text introduces a very broad field of individual learner differences that have been investigated by the authors of other chapters in this section. Marina Mattheoudakis focuses on language aptitude and discusses the relationship between aptitude and young learners' English proficiency, stressing the dynamic nature of aptitude. Adriana Biedroń analyzes the personality of gifted foreign language learners, locus of control, and the style of coping with stressful and upsetting situations as variables modifying foreign language aptitude (FLA). Although she has found no significant relations between personality and cognitive factors, she concludes that her results evidence a dynamic and non-linear interaction between personality and cognitive factors, which is in line with dynamic systems theory.

Liliana Piasecka's chapter, in turn, is devoted to foreign language learners' identity, which is intertwined with and inseparable from the languages they use. Knowledge of an L2 can be viewed both as cultural and symbolic capital, therefore learning an L2 is an investment into one's present and future, and as such it may be a powerful motivating factor for language learners. While Piasecka discusses identity within a post-modern framework, Anna Mystkowska-Wiertelak elaborates on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System theory and discusses how the tension between one's actual and ideal/desired self motivates the learner to learn an L2 and how this may affect his or her identity.

Gender – another important individual learner difference – is addressed by Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel and Ewa Jocher. The first author is concerned with communication skills in L2, and therefore she analyzes the relationship between gender and willingness to communicate in a foreign language. Her research findings reveal that female foreign language learners show higher levels of willingness to communicate in the L2 both in the classroom and outside than males. While Piechurska-Kuciel deals with oral communication, Ewa Jocher examines the possible influence of adolescents' gender and major (their main subject of study, such as humanities or science) on their L1 and L2 reading motivation, thus linking orality and literacy. On the basis of her study Jocher shows that females are more positively motivated to read in L1 and L2 than males, and that humanities majors have higher reading motivation than science majors, regardless of the language of the text.

In Part Two pronunciation is tackled by Magdalena Szyszka, who investigates pronunciation learning strategies and tactics that might improve the learners' pronunciation and, in consequence, their communicative competence. Arkadiusz Rojczyk and Andrzej Porzuczek report a study that shows how Polish learners of English cope with contexts that require vowel reduction, and compare their results with the results of native speakers of English. As regards language skills, Aleksandra Maryniak discusses reading effectiveness in a blended learning context that combines new technologies with traditional ways of teaching. Though the participants of Maryniak's study prefer to read from a piece of paper rather than from a computer screen, the mode of text presentation had variable effects on comprehension.

Three chapters on academic writing in a foreign language reflect three different perspectives on this manifestation of literacy. The authors agree that writing in an academic context is demanding and difficult because of the need to satisfy formal and linguistic conventions, and present one's own viewpoints and opinions while reflecting critical thinking, originality

and creativity. Magdalena Trepczyńska argues that the writers' critical thinking, originality and creativity are best developed through a dialogic interaction with a teacher who provides supportive feedback. Małgorzata Adams-Tukiendorf takes a closer look at creativity in academic writing and thoroughly discusses creative potential against the background of her research findings. Jan Zalewski gives the perspective of an academic who is concerned about the inadequacy of his students' academic literacy skills, which may seriously impinge on their participation in the academic community and on their independent writing of master's theses. Using his personal experience he suggests solutions to the problem, bearing in mind exosemiotic and endosemiotic aspects of literacy.

Part Three addresses learners with special educational needs. Aleksandra Schwierz introduces and defines the problem of these needs and presents contemporary practices in the Polish educational system on the basis of the views and opinions collected from special education teachers. Joanna Nijakowska discusses the actions that teachers can take in order to include students with dyslexia into regular activities in a foreign language classroom setting. She also stresses the need to raise the teachers' awareness of the problems that dyslexic learners face in order to prepare them to offer appropriate supportive activities. Beata Wiechula-Napiórkowska describes autistic spectrum disorder, its various manifestations, methods of coping with it, and first and second language acquisition by autistic children, many of whom overcome problems with communication and may become good second language learners, though to a limited extent.

The book market is rich in numerous publications that concern the topics included in this proposal. Yet, despite competition, the proposed work will be of value to scholars and libraries because of the contributors, the cross-sectional nature of the chapters and the applied framework of stability and variability.

Since this book represents a slice of foreign language learning reality at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it may be valuable and inspiring reading for foreign and second language teachers, college and university students of language and education, as well as for researchers and scholars who never cease asking questions about the human condition, which is so strongly connected with the ability to successfully communicate across languages and cultures.

Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel
Liliana Piasecka

PART I:
FOCUS ON THE LANGUAGE

CHAPTER ONE

STABILITY AND VARIABILITY OF GIFTED L2 LEARNERS' PERSONALITY WITHIN A DYNAMIC SYSTEMS THEORY PARADIGM

ADRIANA BIEDROŃ

Abstract

Dynamic Systems Theory, according to Dörnyei (2009), accommodates these issues concerning individual differences which are neglected in the traditional approach, namely their lack of stability, their context-dependence, their multicomponential nature and their multiple interactions with each other and the environment, which result in non-linear dynamics. The study presented in this chapter focused on personality characteristics of gifted L2 learners as correlates of foreign language aptitude. Two methods of analysis were applied: quantitative and qualitative. The following factors were tested: foreign language aptitude, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience, locus of control, and a style of coping with stressful and upsetting situations. These factors were submitted to quantitative analysis. In line with Dörnyei's perspective on individual differences reflecting the dynamic systems theory, personality factors of a gifted L2 learner are presented as the qualitative part of the study. A suggestion that the case of gifted foreign language learners' personality can be more effectively described in terms of an individual-level analysis within the dynamic systems theory is discussed.

1. Introduction

Contemporary psychologists define giftedness in broad terms of multiple intellectual and non-intellectual qualities (Sękowski 2004; Gagné 2005; Sternberg and Davidson 2005; Housand 2009). In addition to cognitive abilities, such factors as motivation, emotions, personality and environmental influences are regarded as key qualities in talent development. In line with the psychological approach to giftedness,

Dörnyei (2009) opts for a new approach to the problem of individual differences (ID) in second language acquisition (SLA) termed as *dynamic systems theory paradigm* (DST) (cf. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2009). In DST interactions between cognitive, personality and motivational factors are multi-leveled and temporal, and cannot be explained by a simple cause-effect relationship. Therefore, there is a call for an individual-level analysis next to group-level data to explain the problem of ID.

The purpose of the study presented here was to analyze the personality of gifted foreign language learners as variables modifying foreign language aptitude (FLA). Personality factors were tested according to the Five Factor model which includes extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience (openness) (McCrae and Costa 2003). Other tested factors included locus of control (Rotter 1954) and a style of coping with stressful and upsetting situations (Endler and Parker 1990). The chapter consists of two parts: the theoretical and the empirical. The theoretical section presents the DST theory for ID, research on gifted L2 learners' personality, the Five Factor model of personality, locus of control and coping styles. The empirical part presents findings of a study conducted on gifted L2 learners.

2. Dynamic systems theory

The term DST, which has its origins in science—mathematics, physics, chemistry, neurology and psychology—has been continually adopted in applied linguistics for the last two decades (Larsen-Freeman 1997; Herdina and Jessner 2002, Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2006; Ellis 2007; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Jessner 2008; Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2009). The main assumption guiding DST is that all factors and processes that come into play in SLA are dynamic, open to change and mutually affect each other. Any change in a complex system is non-linear. What is more, agents, elements, processes in a complex system may themselves be complex systems. Complex systems, which operate on multiple levels and within multiple timescales, are fuzzy, ambiguous, uncertain and emergent. They, however, exhibit self-organization and ordered patterns of change (Herdina and Jessner 2002; Ellis 2007; Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2009). A complex system is in a continuous process of change; a constant interplay of stability and variability. Changes in a system occur over time, are non-linear, complex, and can be reversible (e.g. language attrition) (Herdina and Jessner 2002). Variability is not

“background noise” in data, but it is treated as a measure of stability. An increased level of variability is observed at transition points (Herdina and Jessner 2002; Dörnyei 2009). According to Ellis (2007) and De Bot et al. (2007), FLA theories also fit in with DST.

Dörnyei’s DST for ID (2009) is presented in the next section.

3. Dynamic systems theory paradigm for individual differences

Modern SLA theorists view affect and cognition as two complementary, inextricably linked facets of the human mind, neither of which takes priority over the other in mental processes (Dörnyei and Skehan 2003; Leaver et al. 2005; Dörnyei 2005, 2009). Nevertheless, statistical analyses of the effect that personality factors have on foreign language learning outcome are disappointing. Personality factors usually stand for only 15 % of variance in academic performance (Dörnyei 2005). In line with Dörnyei, these factors interplay with foreign language learning outcome in a non-linear way and their effect on the process of learning is dynamic.

Dörnyei (2009) proposes “a radically new approach in order to understand the complexity of learner-based performance variation” (2009, 180), that is, the DST paradigm. His review of research on ID in the fields of SLA and psychology raised several doubts related to defining and measuring these factors. First and foremost, traditional ID research involves a quantitative approach, which focuses mainly not on differences, but on statistical averages that group together people sharing common characteristics. His criticism of the quantitative approach is based on a claim that it focuses on a central tendency, neglecting individual deviation from the norm which is treated as irrelevant “background” noise. This is a major inadequacy because a generalized description resulting from this method might, as a matter of fact, not match any of the studied subjects. In contrast, individual-level analysis takes into account apparently irrelevant pieces of information that are capable of producing a more complete description of a subject’s profile.

His argumentation is in line with contemporary researchers who advocate the need for individual-level paradigm in ID research (Ellis and Larsen-Freeman 2006; Jessner 2008; Dewaele 2009). Dewaele, for example, holds that: “learners are more than bunches of variables” (2009, 637), whereas Ellis and Larsen-Freeman argue that “What generalizations exist at the group level often fail at the individual level” (2006, 564).

Consequently, any attempt to describe this three-(or more) dimensional, highly complex system, one which remains in constant fluctuation, by a two-dimensional cause-effect relationship cannot produce any fruitful findings. This argumentation inevitably leads to methodological inferences. Because the interaction between factors is dynamic and non-linear, it cannot be analyzed by a simple correlation analysis.

Should, therefore, all research on regularities be abandoned? As Ellis has it, "the truth usually lies somewhere in between, in the dynamics of the dialectic" (2007, 23). There are certainly regularities in language development and general tendencies, which can be predicted from cognitive and affective factors. Ellis emphasizes their importance in SLA research "Cognitive factors such as attention, working memory [...], consciousness and explicit learning are the heart of SLA, as social, affective, and cultural factors are its soul" (2007, 24). All those factors can be reliable predictors of learning a foreign language.

Dörnyei (2009) postulates that researchers focus on individual level analysis integrating cognition, affect and motivation in multidimensional longitudinal studies. These qualitative, in-depth studies will take into account all neglected, apparently irrelevant modifying variables thus complementing the traditional, quantitative analysis.

The idea of multidimensionality is often considered in modern studies on ID, also those primarily and deliberately focusing on statistical analysis (e.g. Dewaele 2009; Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2008, 2009). Dewaele puts forward an emic perspective, that is one taking into consideration an individual's personal perception of his/her process of learning, as well as individual characteristics interpreted in a dynamic interaction with the social environment (2009). Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam in their ongoing study of the phenomenon of native-like proficiency, present biographical data and even parents' opinions on the first language development of their subjects (2008, 502-503). In this case, the qualitative aspect supplements quantitative analysis of the linguistic data and FLA test results.

The next section presents theory and research on gifted L2 learners' personalities.

4. Gifted foreign language learners' personalities

The first complete FLA theory that took into consideration personality and motivational (conative) characteristics was Richard Snow's (1987, 1994) cognitive-affective-conative triad of FLA. This theory was further extended by Corno et al. (2002). Aptitude, according to Snow, refers to

being equipped to work at a particular kind of a task in a particular kind of a situation. It is a term referring to the power to carry out some type of undertaking, which is not limited to abilities. Personality aspects such as achievement motivation, freedom from anxiety, positive self-concept and control of impulses are aptitudes as well contributing to coping with challenges. Consequently, the aptitude construct must consider affective and conative processes as well as abilities.

There is a marked lack of research on personality factors in studies on gifted foreign language learners (cf. Schneiderman and Desmarais 1988; Obler 1989; Ioup et al. 1994; Bongaerts et al. 1997; Skehan 1998; Moyer 1999; Sawyer and Ranta 2001; van Boxtel et al. 2003; Morgan et al. 2007; Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2008). However, some researchers noticed the necessity of examining personality factors in gifted L2 learners. In studies by Bongaerts et al. (1995), Bongaerts et al. (1997) and Bongaerts et al. (2000) a group of highly motivated and advanced foreign language learners were chosen specifically for their exceptional abilities by teachers who identified them as excellent speakers and writers of an L2–English. The research provided evidence for their high proficiency; the selected subjects overlapped with native speaker controls with respect to their pronunciation skills. As the researchers concluded, little is known about their personality. The researchers suggested that some specific personality factors might, in connection with exceptional aptitude, affect these outstanding abilities. As a result, Bongaerts et al. (1995) and Moyer (1999) both emphasized the need for research on not only cognitive, but also affective factors in exceptional foreign language learners, which are capable of compensating for the late start (see also Sparks and Ganschow 2001; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2003).

The following sections present personality factors within the Five Factor model, locus of control and styles of coping with stress.

5. The Five Factor model

In psychology, the “Big Five” personality traits are five broad factors or dimensions of personality. The traits are also referred to as the “Five Factor model”. The five factors are openness to experience (openness), conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The neuroticism factor is sometimes referred to as emotional stability/instability. Each factor consists of a cluster of more specific traits that correlate with each other. For example, extraversion includes such

related qualities as sociability, excitement seeking, impulsiveness and positive emotions.

The factors are as follows:

1. Agreeableness, connected with altruism and affection. It is a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.
2. Extroversion, connected with energy and enthusiasm and the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others.
3. Openness, connected with originality and flexibility, expresses an appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, imagination, curiosity, creativity and variety of experience.
4. Conscientiousness, connected with control and constraint. It is a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement and plan behavior.
5. Neuroticism, connected with negativism and anxiety. It is a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. Sometimes called emotional instability. (McCrae and Costa 2003)

According to Dörnyei (2005), these factors are potential modifying variables in SLA. Openness to experience and conscientiousness seem to be positively correlated with language learning, anxiety involved in neuroticism produces negative learning outcomes, whereas extraversion is generally negatively related to learning outcome; however, it is likely to facilitate strategic competence. Factors associated with introversion, such as the ability to concentrate, higher resistance to distracters and better study habits are likely to facilitate learning. In contrast, Dewaele presents evidence that psychological studies have consistently shown extroverts' superiority over introverts at short-term and working memory. Extroversion scores have been found to correlate positively with oral fluency measures in the L2, especially in stressful situations. Moreover, extroverts, due to their risk-taking ability, are more willing to use colloquial and emotion words than introverts. Finally, Dewaele found negative, but statistically insignificant, correlations between extroversion and foreign language course grades (2009).

The factor of openness to experience seems to be the most powerful modifying personality variable in SLA. This factor includes a cognitive aspect, which means that people who score high on general cognitive ability tend to display openness to new experience and intellectual curiosity and flexibility (Corno et al. 2002). Its correlation with verbal intelligence is estimated at 0.30 (Nosal 1999). Young (2007, cited in Dewaele 2009) found that open-mindedness (a concept similar to openness

to experience) is a good predictor of foreign language learning outcome. Openness is a relatively stable and the most genetically dependent factor of all the Five Factors; the influence of genetic factors on openness is estimated at 0.61. (Nosal 1999). Openness involves a great potential for creativity (McCrae 1987), which is associated with multilingualism/multicompetence (Cook 2002).

6. Locus of control

Locus of control (LOC) refers to a person's beliefs system about his control over the events in his life. According to LOC theory, people can be divided into two main groups. Those who feel personally responsible for what happens to them are labeled *internals*, whilst those who believe that such external forces as fate, luck or objective difficulties determine their life are termed *externals*. Numerous researchers have proved a positive correlation between internal LOC and academic achievement. In their review of the literature, Findley and Cooper (1983) conclude that a feeling of being in control of events exerts a positive force on success in learning. Generally, students characterized by internal LOC are more independent, motivated, resourceful, persistent and active. On the other hand, externals are perceived as more dependent, compliant, inattentive and passive (Arlin and Whitley 1978; Drwal 1995).

Locus of control (LOC) is closely connected with other personality dimensions, among them a feeling of power, competence, a need for autonomy, a need for power, ego strength, ego control, self-actualization and defensive mechanisms.

Internal LOC also correlates positively with a high conformability between real-self and ideal-self. Subjects classified as internals more often use such verbs of self-description as "ingenious", "efficient", "independent", "ambitious", "potent" and "assertive" (Lefcourt 1981, Drwal 1995). These features correspond with the idea of autonomy and independence in language learning (cf. Benson and Voller 1997), in which such characteristics as responsibility, taking charge, learner control, freedom from external control, individualization and maturity are highly esteemed.

Finally, LOC can be approached from a motivational perspective. Needless to say, motivation is a key disposition when it comes to second language learning (Dörnyei 2001, 2005). Motivation is also intertwined with attribution theory and LOC. There is a presumed connection between LOC and achievement motivation; the stronger the internal control, the

greater the achievement motivation. However, this connection is probably not linear, because a person with high achievement motivation does not need to have a strong belief in his internal control. Some characteristics of people with internal LOC such as activity, a preference for performing in situations related to their skill rather than in random situations, high self-esteem and high aspirations, are typical of people with high achievement motivation. Students with internal LOC are more persistent when studying, have more self-responsibility, receive higher grades and declare more positive attitudes towards school (cf. Arlin and Whitley 1978, 989; Drwal 1995, 223). A construct related to LOC is style of coping with stress.

7. Style of coping with stress

A model of human coping with stress was developed by Endler and Parker (1990). Endler and Parker assumed that the remedial measures that a subject undertakes in a particular stressful situation result from an interaction between this situation and the coping style of the subject. A coping style is not a trait, but a habit or a method used to resolve problematic situations.

Their construct differentiates three types of coping: emotion-oriented, task-oriented and avoidant. Task-oriented coping is a response leading to problem resolution by purposeful confrontation, cognitive restructuring or changing the situation. This style is the healthiest coping method. Emotion-oriented coping is a response, in which the individual remains self-preoccupied and tense, which does not lead to problem solving. Avoidance-oriented coping is a response that reduces stress by drawing back into a different activity. This style is not efficient in the long run because it leads only to a temporary relief (Endler and Parker, 1990).

A situation is evaluated as stressful when, for example, the individual perceives a lower ability to cope with it. Stressors perceived as controllable elicit more proactive (task-oriented) coping mechanisms (Karasek and Theorell, 1990), whereas those perceived as uncontrollable elicit more avoidance strategies (Anshel and Kaissidis, 1997; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Kariv and Heiman (2005) discovered that the subjective perception of academic stress acted as a restraining factor in students' employment of task-orientated coping behavior. This means that the more stressful and difficult a situation was, as subjectively assessed by students, the more likely they were to employ the avoidance-oriented style.

Academic performance and achievement goals might be related to an individual's style of coping. Santiago-Rivera et al. (1995) scrutinised the significance of achievement and the appraisal of stressful events as predictors of coping. The results of the study confirmed that those who regard achievement as important also tend to evaluate more events as challenging and use more task-oriented coping strategies, which, in turn, reverses the destructive effects of stress.

8. The study

The study addresses a problem which is weakly investigated in SLA, that is personality correlates of linguistic giftedness. The array of factors that can affect linguistic talent development is infinite; therefore, the present study will focus on selected personality characteristics.

8.1. Objectives and hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between FLA and personality in 44 gifted L2 learners. The selection criteria for the study were both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative criteria included: proficiency scores confirmed by certificates or other documents, the number of languages they had learned including at least 1 language at level C1/C2 in the case of younger (< 23 years) and at least 2 languages at level C1/C2 in the case of older (23-35 years) L2 learners, language learning history and recommendation of their teachers. All the participants represented an advanced level of English (C1/C2). The quantitative criteria included: the Modern Language Aptitude Test (Carroll and Sapon 2002) score (at least 95 percentile) and the Test Zdolności Językowych (Language Aptitude Test) (Wojtowicz 2006) score (at least 80 % of correct answers)¹. The primary assumption guiding the study reported in this article was that an analysis of correlations between personality tests and FLA components can provide remarkable insights into the domain of FLA and explain variance in FLA among learners.

The study consists of two parts. In the first part, the gifted L2 learners' FLA and personality scores are presented. Next, the gifted L2 learners' aptitude results are correlated with their personality tests scores. In the second part, a case study of a gifted L2 learner is presented. Apart from

¹ In fact, 31 participants (70 %) gained over 91 % of correct answers.

FLA tests and personality tests, the subject was also tested with the Wechsler Intelligence Scales (WAIS-R [PL]; Brzeziński et al. 1996).

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Gifted L2 learners will achieve above average scores on openness to experience and conscientiousness (Five Factor model)
2. Gifted L2 learners will be characterized by task-oriented style of copying with stress
3. Gifted L2 learners will be characterized by internal LOC
4. Gifted L2 learners' aptitude scores will reveal some correlations with personality scores.

8.2. Participants

The subjects were 44 talented multilingual foreign language learners examined with regard to their FLA and personality characteristics. The subjects were mainly philology students and post-graduates from Polish universities. Six were doctoral students. There were 31 females and 13 males in the group. The age varied from 21 to 35 (24.5 average). They were either appointed by their teachers or encouraged by co-workers or class-mates to participate; some responded to an invitation to participate in the study sent via e-mail.

The level of proficiency of the sample in at least one foreign language was advanced (C1/C2). All the participants were highly advanced in English. 14 (32%) were highly advanced in one foreign language, 19 (43%) in two languages, 8 (18%) in three, 2 (4%) in four, and 1(2%) in five languages. If they spoke more than two foreign languages their level of proficiency in the additional languages was usually communicative (A2/B1+). The number of languages they were learning varied from 1 to 11 (4.5 average) and included European and non-European languages. European languages included: English, German, French, Italian, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, Spanish, Portuguese, Irish, Welsh, Russian, Hungarian, Romanian, Croatian, and Latin. Non-European languages included: Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Hindi, Turkish, Arabic, Mongolian, Korean, and Hebrew among others. Altogether, the group consisted of 3 (7%) bilinguals, 13 (29%) trilinguals, 9 (20%) quadrilinguals, and 10 (23%) pentalinguals; 9 (20%) participants spoke more than 5 languages, the highest number being 11 languages. All the achievements were formally confirmed by official documents: certificates acknowledged in Poland and diplomas from universities in the case of advanced level of a language.

8.3. Instruments

Modern Language Aptitude Test MLAT (Carroll and Sapon 2002). This classic foreign language aptitude test designed to predict success in learning a foreign language is entirely in English. According to its authors, the MLAT is suitable for native and near-native speakers of English. It is regarded as a useful tool for predicting success in foreign language learning (Skehan 1998) as well as the best predictor of extremes, namely, extremely good and bad language learners (Ehrman 1998). It measures aptitude traits by 5 part scores:

1. Number learning. This part measures an aspect of the memory component of foreign language aptitude as well as “auditory alertness”, which might play a role in auditory comprehension of a foreign language;
2. Phonetic script. This part measures sound-symbol association ability, namely, the ability to learn the correspondence between speech sounds and orthographic symbols; it also measures memory for speech sounds and the ability to mimic speech sounds;
3. Spelling clues. This part score depends on the student's vocabulary knowledge; it also measures sound-symbol association ability but to a lesser degree than part 2.
4. Words in sentences. This part measures sensitivity to grammar structure and represents the student's ability to learn grammatical aspects of a foreign language;
5. Paired associates. This part measures the rote memory aspect of foreign language learning (Carroll and Sapon 2002, 7).

The American version of the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) was applied because all the participants were highly advanced in English (C1/C2). Moreover, at the time when the study was conducted there was no Polish version of the MLAT or its equivalent. Because all the subjects fall between the 95th and 99th percentile (mean 97th), the author decided to present raw scores to exemplify the variety among them.

Test Zdolności Językowych TZJ (Language Aptitude Test) by Wojtowicz (2006). The test was constructed to diagnose foreign language abilities. It includes three scales: Discourse, Vocabulary and Grammar. Because of the lack of norms for educated adults, raw scores are presented.

The Revised NEO-FFI Personality Inventory (Costa and McCrae 1992)—a Polish adaptation by Zawadzki et al. (1998) is a psychological personality inventory; a 60-question measure of the Five Factor model: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness.

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) (Endler and Parker 1990), adapted by Szczepaniak et al. (1996). The inventory consists of three scales referring to coping styles: task-oriented style, emotional-oriented style and avoiding-oriented style.

Delta Questionnaire by Drwal (1995) is a tool designed to examine the Locus of Control. The LOC scale (Locus of Control) comprises 14 statements accounting for controllability dimension in everyday situations. A high result in the controllability dimension (LOC) indicates externality of control.

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale WAIS-R (PL)—a Polish adaptation by Brzezinski et al. (1996). It consists of six verbal subtests: information, digit span, vocabulary, arithmetic, comprehension, similarities, and five performance subtests: picture completion, picture arrangement, block design, object assembly, digit-symbol coding. A general intelligence quotient, as well as verbal and non-verbal scale quotients, are obtained. At the second stage of analysis scores for three indices: verbal comprehension, perceptual organization, memory and resistance to distraction are determined. The test results are briefly presented only for the case study of a talented L2 learner.

The psychological tests were conducted by a professional psychologist to comply with the criteria of credibility and validity, as well as formal requirements (APA 1985).

9. Results and discussion

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the gifted L2 learners—FLA

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
MLAT1	41.09	28.00	43.00	2.90
MLAT2	28.27	25.00	30.00	1.59
MLAT3	38.02	29.00	47.00	4.94
MLAT4	30.90	19.00	38.00	4.55
MLAT5	22.22	13.00	24.00	2.42
MLAT G	160.52	149.00	178.00	8.75
Discourse	9.75	8.00	10.00	0.48
Vocabulary	17.34	15.00	18.00	1.01
Grammar	13.43	11.00	15.00	1.31
TZJ G	40.522	34.00	43.000	2.31

Note: MLAT1, MLAT2, MLAT3, MLAT4, MLAT5=subscales of the MLAT; MLAT G=MLAT general result; discourse, vocabulary, grammar=subscales of TZJ; TZJ G=TZJ general result.

The descriptive statistics that characterized the sample were mean, minimal and maximal scores and standard deviation (SD). SD shows how far individuals vary from the mean. The first table (Table 1) presents data for the FLA factor. All the results of FLA tests indicate high foreign language abilities of the participants.

Table 2 shows descriptive data for personality factors in the sample. In the NEO-FFI questionnaire the raw results are converted into *stens* (standard tens). Results from 1 to 3 are considered low, from 4 to 7 average, and from 8 to 10 high. It is evident that the participants fall within the average range of scores in all the tests.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the gifted L2 learners: personality factors

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Neuroticism	4.56	1.00	10.00	2.24
Extraversion	5.22	1.00	10.00	2.16
Openness	6.15	2.00	9.00	1.62
Agreeableness	4.95	1.00	10.00	2.27
Conscientiousness	5.81	1.00	10.00	2.48
Task-oriented	61.38	50.00	76.00	6.67
Emotional	45.29	18.00	66.00	10.91
Avoiding	42.88	27.00	63.00	9.28
Locus of control	2.90	0.00	9.00	2.29

Note: openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism=NEO-FFI (the Five Factor model) scales; task-oriented, emotional, avoiding=CISS (style of copying with stress) scales; locus of control=Delta scale.

In the CISS questionnaire measuring styles of copying with stress scores from 35 to 65 are average. Hence, all of the participants' styles of copying fall within the average range.

Five subjects gained over 70 points (high) on task-oriented style, whereas none gained such a score on avoiding and emotional-oriented styles.

In the Delta questionnaire measuring locus of control, their mean score is 2.9 on a scale of 0 to 14. In this test low scores (1-3) indicate internality

of control and high scores (8-10) externality of control. Therefore, the participants are internals.

The parametric correlation (the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient) was applied to measure the correlation (linear dependence) between FLA and personality factors (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Correlation of the MLAT scores with personality factors

Factor	N	E	O	A	C	TS	EM	AV	LOC
MLAT1	.02	0.11	-0.05	0.22	-0.14	-0.04	0.17	0.11	0.15
MLAT2	-0.19	-0.11	-0.12	-0.02	-0.06	-0.03	0.02	-0.13	0.22
MLAT3	0.04	0.11	0.04	0.01	-0.17	-0.23	0.06	0.29	-0.03
MLAT4	-0.18	-0.09	-0.15	0.19	0.07	-0.10	-0.21	-0.02	0.01
MLAT5	-0.14	-0.15	0.08	0.25	0.04	-0.16	-0.12	0.15	0.02
MLATG	-0.14	-0.01	-0.07	0.24	-0.10	-0.25	-0.04	0.21	0.08

The analysis of correlation between FLA and personality factors revealed that these factors are not correlated.

Table 4. Correlation of the TZJ scores with personality factors

Factor	N	E	O	A	C	TS	EM	AV	LOC
Discourse	0.18	-0.14	0.29	-0.01	-0.08	-0.11	-0.01	0.01	-0.15
Vocabulary	0.27	-0.14	-0.02	0.03	-0.30*	-0.16	0.21	0.14	0.01
Grammar	-0.01	-0.08	-0.02	0.25	-0.02	0.04	0.02	0.02	-0.06
TZJ G	0.15	-0.14	0.04	0.15	-0.16	-0.07	0.10	0.08	-0.06

Note: N=neuroticism; E=extraversion; O=openness; A=agreeableness; C=conscientiousness; TS=task-oriented style; EM=emotional style; AV=avoiding style; LOC=locus of control

* $p < 0.05$.

9.1. Interpretation of the results

The results in all the aptitude tests indicate high foreign language abilities. Very high results were obtained in MLAT 1 (95.5 %), MLAT 2 (94.2 %) and MLAT 5 (92.6 %). In the case of the TZJ all the results were very high and the “ceiling effect” occurred—the test was definitely too simple for the participants. Besides, very small SDs indicate a high homogeneity of the sample with respect to particular abilities. The results presented in Table 1 distinctly show that the gifted L2 learners have strong

ability. Their mean MLAT score is 160.5 (99th percentile). The minimal result is 149 (95th percentile), the maximal 178 (99th percentile, 92 % of correct answers). In comparison to the results obtained by Ehrman (1998) in research on the language aptitude of participants in intensive language courses, these results are very high. In Ehrman's research, the mean general score for the participants who were the best at speaking (14 persons selected out of 295) was 151.2.

As far as personality factors are concerned, the participants scores are average. However, the highest scores were obtained for openness (6.15) and for conscientiousness (5.81). This indicates that the subjects can be intellectually open, curious and flexible on the one hand, and dutiful, planning and thorough, on the other.

The task-oriented coping style decisively dominated in the sample. This indicates that the participants do not avoid confrontation; in a stressful situation they establish a plan and follow it. Coping styles are connected with the locus of control. The participants are internals, that is they tend to ascribe results of their actions to themselves rather than to external, uncontrollable factors.

The analysis of correlation between FLA and personality factors revealed that these factors are not correlated. It is interpreted as evidence of a lack of a direct relationship between personality factors and cognitive abilities connected with learning a foreign language in gifted L2 learners.

9.2. Personality of a gifted L2 learner—a case study

In line with Dörnyei (2009), an individual-level analysis has an advantage over a statistical analysis in that it takes into account these apparently irrelevant pieces of information which are capable of producing a more complete description of a subject's profile. In order to provide a more detailed picture of a gifted L2 learner, a case study of one of the most talented participants, Alice, is presented. The data come from questionnaires, psychological observation and an interview conducted by the present author.

At the moment of the study Alice was a 31-year-old assistant professor in the Scandinavian Languages Department at one of the leading universities in Poland. She responded to an advertisement sent via e-mail to the Department by the present author. Alice was a perfect candidate for the study. She graduated in Norwegian and received her PhD in linguistics at the age of 29. She was a quadrilingual proficient in two foreign languages. Her native language was Polish. Her L2 was Norwegian which