ANXIETY AND L2 SELF IMAGES
THE ‘ANXIOUS SELF’

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Contents

- The need for new ideas in anxiety research
- The study
- The ‘anxious self’
- McAdams’s theory of personality
  - Dispositional traits level
  - Characteristic adaptations level
  - Narrative level
- Archetypical combinations
- Conclusion
Anxiety: confusion about the nature

- ‘I am an anxious person’
- ‘I am anxious when at the dentist’
- ‘I feel anxious’.
- ‘I avoided the party because I was anxious about meeting people’.

(Edelmann, 1992: 1)
Anxiety: confusion about the nature

- Part of personality (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Simpson, 1980)
- A primary emotion (Dewaele, 2010; Gray, 1982; Spielberger, 1972)
- A key motivational component (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

‘Whatever else anxiety is, it is undoubtedly an emotion; sometimes, reading the work of psychologists, one is tempted to think that it is the only emotion’ (Gray, 1982: 5)
The need for new ideas in anxiety research
The study

Phase 1
- 4 universities in Turkey
- Students exhibiting some of the well-known symptoms of debilitating language anxiety
- Snowball sampling method
- 20 participants
- 20 Turkish students of English at an upper-intermediate level

Phase 2
- A combination of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) and the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991; 2008)
- 15 upper intermediate Turkish learners of English from a pool of 74 students, all experiencing high levels of debilitating anxiety
- Face-to-face interviews
The ‘anxious self’

When I am anxious, I am aware of myself and my behaviours yet I cannot control my movements and I often ask myself: ‘What am I going to do now?’ ... I cannot reflect my inner speech while performing. I keep telling myself that I should always smile but I have an anxious side and I cannot deny it. I believe that I can control the anxious side of me more and more, yet I do not know exactly how.

Normally I can do whatever I want but the person who presents (herself in English class) cannot do what she wants.
## McAdams’s theory of personality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispositional traits</th>
<th>Characteristic adaptations</th>
<th>Integrative life narratives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality features, (such as extraversion, neuroticism, friendliness, dominance, dutifulness and depressiveness)</td>
<td>Context-dependent constructs containing ‘motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality’ (McAdams &amp; Pals, 2006: 208).</td>
<td>‘A person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose’ (McAdams &amp; McLean, 2013: 233).</td>
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Dispositional traits level

- Relatively consistent across different circumstances
  
  *No matter what I do or which subject I study, I will become anxious as it is one of my main characteristics.*

- Cues about the heritable nature
  
  *My mother has always had anxiety. She often tells me that we are similar to each other in terms of anxiety.*

- The more anxiety tendency the more realisation it in the language classroom setting
Characteristic adaptations level

- **Communication situation (e.g. stage fright)**
  
  *I can easily become anxious in front of a group of people. I also feel anxious if there is an authority – you know, the feeling of being evaluated.*

- **Instructional task (e.g. test anxiety)**
  
  *I am anxious not only in classes in English but also in others, especially during exams. Sometimes I cannot even focus on the questions.*

- **Fear of negative evaluation**
  
  *Others might think that I am not enough. I might fail and others might laugh at me.*
Content

The lesson started with what we already knew, for example with Facebook. …I was very relaxed. I could answer everything.

Expectations

I have to express my ideas freely and I have to answer when people ask questions. I am a second year university student. People have expectations. This is what an educated person should do. When I cannot answer I feel like an idiot.
Characteristic adaptations level

- **Anxiety experience in adolescence**
  
  *I think I started to be anxious in high school when social relationships became more serious. I am generally comfortable in the school but when I feel that the outcome of my task performance may be negative, then I start feeling anxious. I can’t help thinking what others might think about it.*

- **Anxiety at a younger age**
  
  *When I was 10 years old there were classroom representative elections. I gave a speech and I started crying*
Narrative identity level

- **Fighter**
  
  Now I am more aware of myself. I am not as anxious as I was before. Only in a few circumstances – I am going to be a teacher of English. English language will be my job. So I cannot be an anxious teacher, right?

- **Quitter**
  
  I do not think I can change. It is typical me. I have always been anxious and I will, I know.

- **Safe player**
  
  If I noticed an item I bought from a store was damaged I would never go there to ask for a new one. It is the same in the classroom. I never take responsibility and answer a question. Most of the time I sit at the back of the classroom.
Narrative identity level

- Redemptive impact

1. Painful memories
2. Sharing personal narratives
3. Fighting disposition

ANXIETY GIRL!
A new approach to understanding the nature of language anxiety by adopting McAdams's three-tiered framework

Adding a narrative component to our understanding of language anxiety has practical implications

The anxious self might offer a way to link anxiety research to other areas of SLA

Several unanswered questions