

Understanding Second Language Acquisition by Lourdes Ortega

Discussion Questions for Chapter 9: Affect and Other Individual Differences

1. The 5-factor model of personality was discussed in Thursday's class and is shown on page 194 of the text. Conduct a survey of your own personality using the short form of the International Personality Item Pool at <http://www.personal.psu.edu/~j5j/IPIP/ipipneo120.htm>. What does the survey report on your Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience? Can you relate the results to your foreign language learning ability?
2. Ortega states that "foreign language anxiety is a measurable, L2-specific, affective variable that is associated with a number of symptoms, including lower grades, lower proficiency performances, difficulty with processing and learning new L2 material, reticence and L2 risk-avoiding behaviors" (p. 213). After each group member has taken Horwitz et al.'s "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (sent to the class list on Thursday), discuss your results in comparison with your "symptoms." In your answer, discuss: (a) your group's conclusion as to the measurability of anxiety through a tool such as the "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale," giving specific examples from group members as to how the results coalesce (or do not coalesce) with individuals' symptoms, and (b) whether anxiety seems to serve a "facilitative" or "debilitating" effect for each individual (Ortega, p. 213).
3. Willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2 is defined as including "L2 communicative confidence" and "L2 attitudes" (Ortega, p. 202). Calling on Ortega as well as your own experiences as L2 teachers and learners, discuss how the social context of foreign language learning may affect WTC.
4. Ortega maintains that L2 learner strategy use in and of itself is not difficult to describe. However, it has been more difficult "to establish a link between strategic behavior and actual learning gains, to demonstrate that strategies are not culturally biased, or to explain why poor strategy users differ from good strategy users only in how they use strategies but not in the kinds or frequency of strategy they use" (p. 214). As L2 teachers and learners, discuss the importance (or lack thereof) in investigating these issues. In your answer, discuss your conclusions, making clear use of the constructs of cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective learning strategies.