NON-LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN CLASSROOM FOREIGN LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract. Applied linguistics has come under the sway of two seemingly antithetic views – one prioritizing the social, the other – bringing to the fore the individual dimension. The present paper is aimed at revisiting foreign language evaluation from a dialectical perspective which allows for providing insights into the role of affective factors. It reports on a socially-situated investigation of language performance that accounts for students' motivation and anxiety conceived of here as symbolic resources. A total of 50 high-school learners of English filled in R. Gardner's Attitude / Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) at two points in time and participated in a quasi-experimental study. A pretest – posttest control group design was employed. The findings furnish evidence of the significant effect of increasing L2 motivation and alleviating anxiety on classroom L2 achievement.

Keywords: foreign language performance; motivation; anxiety; task-based assessment; sociocultural approach

Introduction

A noteworthy tendency could be outlined in early applied linguistics research that may be summed up as searching either for an outer ground in the social, cultural and historical context or an inner ground in the mind of the individual person himself/herself. By constructing mind and external world as opposed poles, the Cartesian rhetorics oscillates continuously between the two extremes in search of an epistemological ground. As a result, within an individualistic paradigm, a foreign or second language learner (L2 learner) may be considered as a "bearer" or possessor of an identifiable number of attributes independent of the interactional context and social experience. Alternatively, by adopting a perspective that foregrounds socially, historically, and culturally situated processes, one eventually confronts the antithetical risk to that discussed above. As boundaries of mind protrude beyond the individual to include wider social, political and cultural constituents, there is the risk of sliding into a type of social determinism in which intrinsic factors play a limited role.

In exploring individual differences and their role in L2 achievement, this paper attempts to challenge the polarity of inner versus outer, endogenous mind versus

social environment and culture, emphasizing their situated and dynamic nature. I have adopted Gardner's socio-educational model in which personality and socially-conditioned aspects do not retain their fundamental separateness in conceptualizing learners' L2 motivation and L2 anxiety. The context of L2 learning and performance is examined in the present study as not only exerting influence on L2 motivation and L2 anxiety, but as an essential constituent component of these complex constructs. The same approach is adopted with regard to evaluating foreign language (FL) knowledge and skills. From a sociocultural perspective embedded within the Vygotskyan thought (Vygotsky, 1978), L2 learners' acquisition and use of the target language are conceived of as conditioned within interactional, inter-psychological processes which individual minds have appropriated. It is in this framework that the role of the non-linguistic factors becomes salient.

The present paper argues that an individualist approach to the understanding of both L2 performance and the contingent non-linguistic factors obscures the co-constructed, contextually-bound nature of these categories. It is based on the under-standing of human cognition and affect as being shaped, to a considerable degree, through social and cultural mediation of mind. From such a vertex, students and their immediate environment are seen in a holistic perspective. In what follows, I attempt to explore whether a *task-based assessment* perspective grounded on Vy-gotsky's theoretical framework can inform language evaluation research and lay the ground for reconciliation between the opposing poles.

The presented quasi-experimental study conducted in a formal Bulgarian L2 learning context is premised on the assumption that evaluation focused on social interaction and collaborative discourse creation in L2 classrooms could elicit cri-terion target language behavior. The starting point for this assumption is the con-ceptualization of competence as being "dependent upon both (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use" (Hymes, 1972: 282). This approach to evaluation is posited to per-form a twofold function – both providing a rich representation of learners' ability to actually use the acquired knowledge and influencing L2 students' non-linguistic variables in a positive direction. In view of this, I have attempted to examine these individual differences in their dynamics instead of relying on an approach limited to providing a snapshot of correlational relationships.

There is general consensus among researchers that in order to gain a thorough understanding of foreign language performance, extra-linguistic factors need also to be paid due regard. Accounting for the social dimension of communicative competence and L2 use requires a broader perspective from which inter-psychological factors are seen not as background but in terms of a front scene – so that the synergetic effect of the individual and the social could be more thoroughly explored. The complex constructs the present paper is intended to investigate entail affective, cognitive and interpersonal aspects. The study it reports on is grounded on the conception that the boundaries of L2 motivation and L2 anxiety protrude

beyond the individual to include its social, cultural and historical constituents. In taking this position, I foreground the dialectical tension between extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence L2 performance. Such an investigative lens allows for a focus on L2 students' interrelationships and engagement with the learning environment, which are constitutive for identity formation and trigger variation in L2 motivation and L2 anxiety.

The reciprocity and continuity between linguistic, personality, and social factors in L2 performance and evaluation present challenging questions related to the design, development and use of language tests as well as the interpretation of the results yielded. It has important implications for both empirical research in foreign language evaluation and pedagogical issues and considerations emerging in day-to-day teaching practice. The opportunities inherent in this research field raised my motivation to explore specific aspects of foreign language knowledge assessment in the dialectical relationship between individual and social factors played out in a local context.

In what follows, I will consider key theoretical formulations and taxonomies in the light of the way they reflect the dialogic dimension of the non-linguistic variables under examination.

2. The dialectics between the individual and the social

The variables, occupying a position at the intersection between students' internal and external worlds, are composite constructs that should be examined in their complexity and multi-dimensionality. These factors, pivotal for L2 success, play a crucial role in a system of interconnected processes. They exert a washback effect on an individual learner's self-perceived L2 competence. The latter idiosyncratic process could, respectively, project itself on subsequent stages of foreign language acquisition, and influence, in turn, L2 motivation and L2 anxiety.

Because school FL assessment is a deeply social event, it cannot be fully equated to assessment in other school subjects. Thus, it is not concerned only with educational issues, as Dörnyei (2001, p.46) rightly observes, but involves also interactional, psycho-social, and cultural issues. An additional aspect of the multilateral interactive nature of L2 evaluation is related to the circumstance that students inevitably bring the "baggage" of their individual personality, as well as personal and sociocultural experience, in the learning of and performing in the foreign language. Another intricacy that has repercussions in the area of L2 assessment is the interrelation between L2 performance in an evaluation context and the variability in the levels of the constructs under examination. The assessment of students' L2 communicative competence influences the intensity and variation of these constructs, and vice versa – their state determines the way L2 knowledge and skills would be acquired and used.

The confluence of all these unavoidable pre-conditioning factors accounts for the reason why the process of L2 evaluation cannot be captured in its entirety by

a single overarching panaceic approach. In view of the inherent complexity of the interrelations between the socio-psychological variables and learning as well as performing in the TL, the considerable diversity observed in the multiple theoretical and empirical perspectives being increasingly pursued, should not come as a surprise.

Corresponding to the specific research priorities, scholars investigating socio-psychological factors that influence L2 performance have emphasized concrete aspects of the *multi-dimensional construct*s. In this research endeavor, details are often brought to the fore at the expense of a general, integrative view.

In this section of the paper I provide a theoretical background to set the scene for examining individual differences and the way they interact with evaluation processes focused on collective L2 use activity. In what follows, I provide a brief synopsis of published research on two of the key determinants of success in language learning and performance in assessment contexts. I summarize the findings produced by influential research paradigms and discuss issues relevant to the topic of the interplay between non-linguistic factors and features of L2 testing and evaluation.

2.1. Motivation

Irrespective of the theoretical and research perspective adopted, empirical evidence indicates that motivational factors are among the main variables to exert significant influence on the rate and success of learning a second or foreign language. The concept of motivation, however, proves to be too complex and contradictory to be truly understood in its entirety and encompassed by a single definition. Therefore, it could hardly be measured in a precise and accurate way by using a single scale (Gardner, 2010a). To make the matter even more complicated, there are a number of variables that influence motivation (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995), and they should all be accounted for in examining this construct.

Generally, a motif has been conceptualized as a complex driving force inherent in a person who sets himself/herself, more or less consciously, a goal to achieve. Motivation refers to the action taken to achieve it (Heckhausen, 2006). In broad terms, the motivation construct explains why and how an individual's behavior in specific situations is oriented towards achieving concrete goals. (Fröhlich, 2010: 328).

Dörnyei (1998) rightly observes: "[A]lthough 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of the concept". It takes a considerable number of theoretical and empirical perspectives embedded within various scientific fields to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of its diverse aspects, sources of origin and effects.

The complexity of the concept of motivation lies in its primary function – to explain persons' behavior and actions (Dörnyei, 2000). The construct of foreign language learning motivation (L2 motivation) is best understood when looked upon from a broad perspective that accommodates insights from general, educational,

cognitive, and social psychology, on the one hand, and general educational and social theories as well as sociolinguistic theories, on the other. The notion of motivation entails also dimensions that could be accounted for and examined within neurobiological and physiological frameworks.

The issue of this "dustbin", as McDonough (1981) puts it in ironical terms, becomes even more complicated when the focus is placed on a specific aspect of the concept – motivation for learning and using a second language in a formal school context where learners' behavior is constantly being observed and evaluated. In this institutional setting the miscellaneous aspects of motivation interact with an array of other factors of idiosyncratic or social nature, such as individual differences, cognition, situational features, social and cultural factors, and their covalent bonds pre-condition the final effects on learners' L2 performance. In view of this, it is clear that motivation is not something that individuals possess, as Ellis (1997) puts it. Rather, it varies from one moment to the next, as the learning context or task change.

The way a learner interacts with the contextual features of the L2 situation and the way he/she approaches the specific goal are closely related to the kind and intensity of motivation. Johnstone (1999, p.146) considers this complex construct as a stimulant for achieving a specific target. Ellis (1994, p.715) identifies motivation as the attempt made by individuals for acquiring a foreign language because of "their need or desire to learn it". Lightbrown and Spada (2001) define motivation for learning a second language as "a complex phenomenon which can be defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the second language community".

In the field of language testing and evaluation, the term is commonly used to refer to the force that drives test takers to manifest their L2 knowledge and abilities in the best possible way. There is a substantial and growing body of research evidence showing that the higher the learner's level of motivation, the truer the reflection of language ability indicated by test performance (Davies, 1999). This in turn results in a lower amount of error. Respectively, scores received on tests administered to individuals not motivated enough to invest substantial time and efforts into improving their performance are likely to be less reliable, as compared to testing situations instigating more intensive motivation.

It has been pointed out that a measurement instrument could in itself have a motivating influence on L2 learners pushing them to study hard. This effect is accounted for and represented by the construct of *washback*. Increased motivation could be triggered by the consequences for the individual of the test.

The leading role, however, is preserved for the teacher, who is conceived of as a facilitator, mediator: "In der neueren Literatur zur Motivation wird dem Lehrer eher die Rolle eines Mediators zugebilligt, der den Lernprozess nicht direkt steuert, sondern ihn unterstützt und durch geeignete Maßnahmen anregt" [In recent literature

on motivation, the teacher is more likely to be assigned the role of a mediator who does not manage the learning process, but supports it and encourages it by means of through appropriate action."] (Kleppin, 2002: 29). Essential functions are attributed to the teacher in the versatile process of scaffolding learning within which the individual student is constructed not as an object, but in terms of an autonomous subject: "Lehrer sollen Lerner dabei unterstützen, Selbstwirksamkeit zu empfinden, indem sie Aufgaben geben, über die Lerner eine eigene Kontrolle ausüben können und die ihnen die Gelegenheit zur Selbstevaluation bieten. Sie sollen kooperatives Lernen fördern, informatives Feedback geben oder auch für ein angenehmes Gruppenklima sorgen" ["Teachers should support learners to be self-efficacious by giving them tasks that learners can use to exercise their own control and give them the opportunity to self-evaluate. They should promote cooperative learning, provide informative feedback or even foster a pleasant group climate."] (Kleppin, 2002: 29).

Following these lines, we could refer to the way Emma Ushioda synthesizes the relationship between the agentive, autonomous individual and the motivated learner: „Autonomous learners are by definition motivated learners" (1996). This point is discussed in depth on a theorethical ground by Leslie Dickinson (1995). She conceives of the autonomous learners as "those who have the capacity for being active and independent in the learning process; they can identify goals, formulate their own goals, and can change goals to suit their own learning needs and interests; they are able to use learning strategies, and to monitor their own learning" (1995, p.167). This theme forms the narrative thread of Malcolm Knowles' book *Self-directed Learning: a Guide for Learners and Teachers*: "there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation" (1975).

An influential FL motivation theory has been put forward by Robert Gardner and his colleagues (1959). His research endeavors are focused on the interrelationships between motivation and L2 learning behavior. In his later work, Gardner (1985) conceptualizes motivation as the combination of effort, willingness to achieve the goal of learning the target language, and favorable attitudes towards learning and using that language. Additional factors, such as attitude towards the learning situation and integrativeness, are in turn rendered as powerful multipliers of the effects of these attributes.

A major concern in the theory of L2 motivation proposed by Gardner is the relation between the terms "motivation" and "orientation". The multiple psychological approaches divert from one another to a considerable degree as regards the functions and effects of the established "goal". While in goal theories, expectedly, the *goal* is at the center of attention, self-determination theory, for example, does not assign any important role to goals in the multi-dimensional motivation concept.

Gardner's theory could be assumed to be closer to the latter approach in conceptualizing the interrelations between *motivation* and *orientation*. Yet, paradoxically, the concepts that have constituted a landmark in his work, and in the whole field of L2 motivation, in general, are *integrative* and *instrumental orientation*. Gardner and Lambert consider a second language in the light of a mediating factor that is a means of communication among various ethno-linguistic groups in dynamic multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings. In view of this, the scholars posit that motivation to acquire the language spoken by other communities is the main impetus behind effective intercultural communication and exchange.

Integrative orientation is associated with a positive affective disposition toward the L2 community and willingness to interact and affiliate with members of that group. *Instrumental orientation* is related with perceived practical gains that could potentially be brought about by L2 knowledge and skills. The two concepts instigate a vast body of research, and space limitations allow only for a few highlights to be reviewed in this theoretical discussion. A number of investigations have provided evidence that L2 achievement depends to a significant degree on these two kinds of motivation (Lightbown and Spada, 2001). It makes intuitive sense that the two major types of motivation should be considered as complementary to each other, rather than as distinct or dichotomous, since learners can be both instrumentally and integratively motivated at the same time (Ellis, 1997).

Four distinct areas could be distinguished in Gardner's motivation theory – the construct of the *integrative motive* defined as a "motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language"*,* the *socio-educational model,* which is an overall learning framework integrating motivation as a major cornerstone*,* the standardized instrument *Attitude Motivation Test Battery,* and a revised *L2 motivation construct* that has been developed together with Paul Tremblay (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995). Their extended model could be conceived of as a clear move towards adopting an expectancy-value framework, which is represented by the "valence" component.

Among the most important developments in motivational psychology over the past decades has been the shift in research emphasis attributing the central role to the sociocultural dimension rather than to the individual one. A key feature of the new paradigm for theorizing and research has been the growing awareness that the whole range of environmental aspects exert a considerable amount of influence on human cognition and behavior, in general, and in particular on L2 achievement. In line with this recognition, the theoretical accounts of motivation have increasingly forsaken the assumption of environmental generalizability, and various contextual facets have been integrated in the respective research frameworks as separate variables. There has been a growing body of research pursuing more situated approaches that prioritize the social context (Paris and Turner, 1994; Hickey, 1997; Urdan, 1999; Hickey and Granade, 2004).

Pintrich and Maehr (1995) make the observation that although early research on the relation between motivation and achievement has been focused on sociocultural factors, scholars' interest in the sociocultural origins of achievement has "waxed and waned" in the course of time. The recent decades, however, have seen increasing attention to these aspects of motivation. Interest in social and contextual issues is evident in the work of researchers (Turner et al., 1998; Turner and Meyer, 2000; Pintrich, 2000, among others) who have provided motivational perspectives having many points of contact with a sociocultural framework.

Sociocultural perspectives on motivation (Sivan, 1986; Hickey, 1997; Paris and Turner, 1994; Brophy, 2010) have considered the impact of tools and artifacts, the zone of proximal development, intersubjectivity, as well as the social and physical context of learning, on motivation in academic contexts (McInerney and Etten, 2002). Classroom-based studies (Forman and McPhail, 1993; Oldfather and Dahl, 1994) have also examined motivation within a sociocultural paradigm. Research endeavors have furnished evidence of the positive effect cooperative forms of work have on learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 1994: 279; Schwerdtfeger 2003: 254 – 257, among others).

The dialectical tension between the social and the personal domain is palpable when considering in parallel various lines of research stemming from different theoretical frameworks. In what follows I will briefly outline the two main traditions in psychology informed by the research interest in the driving forces underlying human behavior – motivational psychology and social psychology. The former anchors action around motives originating from within the individual, while the latter considers behavior in a wider interpersonal context, thus reaching beyond human mental processes and emphasizing the social dimension of motivation.

The tension between the individualistic and the societal perspective has constituted one of the main dilemmas in social psychology. Motivational researchers have adopted either individualistic or societal perspective in investigating the construct conditioned by the relationships between the individual person who initiates action and the physical, social, cultural, and symbolic setting in which the action is inscribed.

In the individual-centered perspective, the constellation of interpersonal, social, and cultural factors is not important in and of itself, but is considered in the light of a mere projection on one's internal cognitive and mental processes. The emphasis in the societal perspective is on wider social processes and macro-contextual factors, such as sociocultural norms, inter-group relations, acculturation/assimilation processes, and inter-ethnic conflicts (Dornyei, 2009).

Weiner (1994) terms the combination of motives that are immediately related to a person's sociocultural environment *social motivation*, underscoring the interpersonal nature of this kind of motivation. Social motivation could be seen in opposition to *personal motivation*, which is associated with concerns such as fulfilling

personal wishes and desires, acquiring information to satisfy one's own personal needs deriving from inherent curiosity as well as the effects of self-confidence and self-efficacy on one's idiosyncratic goal strivings.

Some of the leading theoretical frameworks in motivational psychology are subsumed under the label expectancy-value theories. They are underpinned by the assumption that striving for knowledge is an inherent feature of human beings. Individuals are conceptualized as active and curious learners whose behavior is driven by the impetus to acquire information coming from the surrounding reality. The main concern of the theories that belong to this paradigm is limited to the driving forces that control and shape the inborn motivation, leaving aside the issue of what it is precisely that motivates learning.

Among the most common distinctions that have been made in the theoretical literature on L2 motivation is that of *intrinsic / extrinsic motivation.* The former is concerned with action taken for its own sake intended to bring about pleasure and satisfaction, for example satisfying one's natural, inherent need for acquiring new information and eagerness to engage in their environments. The latter kind of motivation entails carrying out some action as a means to an end. It is aimed at receiving extrinsic reward or avoiding punishment. A further kind of motivation has also been theorized – *amotivation*, to denote the lack of any regulation, whether of internal or external origin.

A theoretical perspective that is focused on the influence of the individual difference characteristics of L2 learners on acquisition and performance is presented by the socio-educational model. It draws clear dividing lines between the different aspects of the L2 acquisition process – antecedent factors, learners' individual differences, contexts of acquiring the target language, and learning outcomes. The key variables encompassed by the model are intelligence, aptitude for learning foreign languages, learning strategies, as well as the factors that are the focus of attention in the present text – L2 attitudes, motivation for learning, and anxiety related to learning and using foreign languages.

A theory proposed by Crooks and Schmidt (1991) provides increased explanatory opportunities that could be unfolded in diverse L2 learning and evaluation contexts. Drawing on a four-component model developed by Keller (1983), the authors pull together an array of lines of research in motivational psychology to arrive at a general system viable for various educational scenes. Four levels of motivation and motivated learning are formulated: the micro level, related to the motivational influence on the learner's cognitive processes, the classroom level, concerned with specific activities and techniques, the syllabus/ curriculum level, and the extracurricular level, going beyond the formal, classroom-based factors, i.e., long-term learning. Their taxonomy exemplifies a successful educational model for studying L2 motivation whose practical utility mirrors the intricate interrelatedness of threads to be traced to both the internal, idiosyncratic world of the L2 learner and his/her social, shared world.

Another theoretical model that reflects the dialectical relation between the social and personality domain is Dörnyei's tripartite division proposed to conceptualize the main dimensions of L2 motivation. Dörnyei (1994a) adopts and further develops the approach to exploring motivation presented by Crooks and Schmidt (1991). His motivational framework encompasses the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level, with each of these functioning relatively independently of the other two dimensions. In response to the calls for developing a broader research agenda in the study of L2 motivation, Dörnyei proposes a comprehensive construct. The three dimensions outlined are informed by the major components of L2 learning and use – the linguistic, the individual, and the social one, i.e. – the language itself, the learner, and the context of L2 learning.

This comprehensive model is intended to synthesize different lines of research. It draws on the theoretical work of Gardner and Clement, supplemented with the findings of Dörnyei (1990), as well as on empirical data presented in the educational psychological literature. Dörnyei's categorization is in keeping with the efforts put into establishing an alternative tone in the field of L2 motivation research, and could be assumed to fit into what is called a "paradigm-seeking spirit" on both a theoretical and an empirical level.

A further theoretical framework that could be said to pertain to the "new wave" is the *social constructivist model* put forward by Williams and Burden. As with the previous frameworks embedded in this paradigm, their approach is valuable in emphasizing the multidimensional nature of L2 motivation.

Williams and Burden's efforts to summarize the effects of the various dimensions of motivation are grounded in the social constructivist tradition. The construct they propose is centered on two important motivational aspects – the challenge of context and the challenge of time. Williams and Burden (1997) look at the idiosyncratic nature of motivation mainly from the perspective of the social and contextual effects on learners' behavior, thus reinforcing the assumption of the dialogical interrelationship between external and internal factors in L2 learning and use: "However, an individual's motivation is also subject to social and contextual influences. These will include the whole culture and context and the social situation, as well as significant other people and the individual's interaction with these people".

Among those who lay down the building blocks of the new, broader perspective to L2 motivation research are Oxford and Shearin (1994). They are among the first authors pointing to the growing gap between L2 motivation theories and the range of new concepts and insights in the motivational psychology. Oxford and Shearin indicate the need for the *social psychological approach* to be further developed. The scholars survey a number of motivations constructs in various branches of psychology – general, educational, cognitive developmental and sociocultural psychology, and draw on them to build new L2 models. The new comprehensive perspective encompasses need theories, expectancy-value theories, reinforcement

theories, social cognition theories, achievement goal theory, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, and sociocultural theory.

It is easy to be seen that the construct of motivation lends itself to analysis from multiple perspectives. Over the last decades, researchers have increasingly adopted multi-contextual frameworks to explore the intricate socially-conditioned process of inciting and maintaining motivation. On the basis of the theoretical and empirical work summarized above, we could draw two general conclusions. First, the motivational basis for L2 achievement is most appropriately viewed as one of a number of variables in a dynamic model of interrelated personality and social factors that are unique for each foreign language learner. Also, L2 motivation itself consists of a number of components that are constituted by the dialogic tension between the intra-personal and the social dimension.

2.2. Anxiety

Anxiety triggered by learning and using a foreign language has been in the focus of research interest since the 1970s (Dörnyei, 2005; Horwitz, 1990). The past decades have seen a considerable increase in the number of studies concerned with anxiety in the L2 domain. Attempts have been made to develop a firm theoretical basis for clarifying the construct of language learning anxiety, its development and maintenance, as well as its dimensions (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989, 1991a, 1994a).

The profound consequences of anxiety have long been an important object of interest for L2 teachers, researchers, professionals working in the field of language assessment, and L2 learners themselves. A review of the empirical literature indicates the contradictory results produced by the early research on the interrelationship between L2 anxiety and success in L2 learning and use, especially in official testing and evaluation contexts. But when the specific aspect of anxiety that is in the focus of research attention is clearly defined, the empirical data derived from concrete pedagogical situations show unequivocally the strong influence of this factor on the way learners interact with the target language.

The multi-faceted concept of anxiety has been classified into different categories, depending on the intensity and duration of the feeling, or state, and partitioned into different components – trait anxiety, state anxiety, achievement anxiety, facilitative-debilitative anxiety, etc. As early as in the 60's, it has been divided into two general kinds: a transient psychological state, an immediate response to a specific anxiety-provoking stimulus, on the one hand, and a personal trait variable related to a general predisposition to experience anxiety, on the other. Obviously, the demarcation line is constituted by the complex personal – contextual relationships. L2 anxiety is not a unidimensional, unitary construct, as Scovel (1978) rightly observes, and therefore it could not be conveniently quantified in terms of simplified "high" – "low" values. The specific aspect of anxiety commonly referred to as language anxiety, or foreign language anxiety, has been determined as a situation-

specific anxiety, similar in type to other manifestations of this individual difference variable, such as communication anxiety or stage fright.

State anxiety, a term used to denote the "moment-to-moment experience of anxiety" (MacIntyre, 1999), is related to an unpleasant emotional state or a specific situation. It is a transient condition perceived at a particular moment. Anxious states may vary in intensity and fluctuate over time as a function of the amount of stress experienced in a specific context (Spielberger, 1983). In contrast, trait anxiety is associated with a person's relatively stable individual characteristics. Spielberger (1983) defines this aspect of anxiety as "relatively stable individual differences in anxiety-proneness, that is, to differences between people in the tendency to perceive stressful situations as dangerous or threatening and to respond to such situations with elevations in the intensity of their state anxiety reactions". Trait anxiety is seen as one of the personality traits that are of paramount importance, as presented by personality psychologists (Dörnyei, 2005). Situation-specific anxiety has been theorized as a kind of trait anxiety related to a repetitive pattern in a concrete situation, for example – evaluation in a FL classroom.

A considerable body of criticism has been leveled at the trait view of anxiety. A number of scholars have argued that, since anxiety is perceived by an individual in a particular context, traits are to be considered in the light of their dynamic interaction with the situations in which anxiety has been induced (Endler, 1980; Mischel and Peake, 1982, among others). A number of studies have been focused on the particular facet of anxiety that is triggered in classroom settings (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Phillips, 1992).

The issue of L2 anxiety is of particular significance in classroom-based evaluation framed by the existence of strong normative pressures. Although the anxiety-provoking potential of instructional situations is not restricted to one specific subfield, anxiety has been found to be most highly correlated with overt assessment situations, such as tests or examinations. In this context individuals are aware that their performance is being evaluated. It has been argued that test anxiety depends on students' personal interpretation or cognitive appraisal of the specific situation (Sarason and Sarason, 1990). Sarason defines test anxiety as "the tendency to view with alarm the consequences of inadequate performance in an evaluative situation" (1978). Anxiety theorists have further suggested that test anxiety is instigated by learners' outlook on the language test as a form of pressure to achieve high ratings.

In the L2 classroom it is related to worry over regular testing, which could turn into a source of frustration for students, as their proficiency is being evaluated in parallel with the process of acquisition. Pratically, the pervasive "evaluative threat" is unavoidable in a classroom environment, since everyday routines could all have evaluative consequences (Tobias, 1980).

Based on the inconsistent results of some studies, the key role of the social context clearly stands out. Gardner states that the construct of anxiety does not have a

general nature and is specific to the particular context of foreign language acquisition and performance.

In some conceptual frameworks the concept of anxiety has been employed as a separate, independent variable, while other theoretical views conceptualize it as a major constituent component of a larger construct. Irrespective of the approach adopted, the tension between the internal – cognitive and affective, processes and those engendered by contextual factors is reflected in both theorizing about, and researching on, the nature and effects of L2 anxiety.

3. Research perspectives
3.1. Background of the Study

The dialectics between inner, private factors and interpersonal, socially-driven forces provides the research focus of the present study. In this paper I intend to examine the two main sets of factors in their interrelatedness – those that are internal for the individual and factors originating from processes informed by, and within, the social dynamics. My approach is premised on the understanding that social events in general, including language evaluation, are most thoroughly understood in terms of the interaction between personal characteristics influenced by processes external for the individual, and the wider social context.

The general aim of the study is to investigate the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic factors in foreign language assessment at a micro-social level when attention is not directed to grammatical forms and structures but on meaning construction and negotiation. The objective of this paper is two-fold: outlining the progress made on understanding L2 learners' motivation and anxiety, and establishing whether influencing these individual differences in a positive direction results in high L2 achievement.

3.2. Research organization and methodology

In line with the formulated aim of the study, the **main objectives** are as follows: testing empirically the proposed theoretical model of L2 assessment, which entails its design, implementation and analysis, and making a cross-group comparison of the variation in L2 achievement. The latter has been rendered in quantitative terms by calculating the inter-group difference in the results of the formal evaluation as registered at two different points of the research period. The **main task** is to explore to what extent the variation in L2 success is triggered by the change in the levels of L2 motivation and L2 anxiety, as measured before and after the treatment was administered.

3.3. Research variables

The **variables** with which I operate are the socially-conditioned individual differences: **L2 motivation** and **L2 anxiety**, as well as **L2 achievement** as reflected by the formative and summative assessment.

The examined construct of *L2 achievement* is quantified and computed as the average of the scores obtained on standard evaluation forms. I have used as a

pretest measure the first-school term grades – as obtained before the administration of the treatment and the AMTB questionnaire, and as a posttest measure – the second-school term grades, as received after subjecting the experimental group to the treatment and after the AMTB questionnaire has been administered for a second time. Posttest measurement includes also the marks received by the subjects on the end-year exam. It should be noted that the grades obtained by the participants on the experimental tasks and procedures included in the newly integrated task-based assessment module are not taken into account in calculating the means values of the formal assessment grades for the purposes of the quasi-experimental study.

3.4. Participants

The study population is formed by eighth-grade students from a Sofia high school. The school involved in the quasi-experiment has been chosen through a random selection. Due to practical constraints related to the implementation of true random sampling in a classroom context, the subjects are selected on the basis of previously formed groups, that is, school classes. The **subjects** of the study consist of 50 students – 25 students participate in an experimental group and 25 students are included in the control group.

3.5. Research questions and hypotheses

In this study, I seek to establish, first, whether there is a statistically significant intergroup variation in the values of the **individual differences**, while controlling for the pretest between-group differences. Second, I want to find whether the group in which there is an improvement of the examined variables also indicates an increase in **L2 achievement.**

In particular, the research questions are as follows:

1. Will the experimental group show a statistically significant increase in the values of **L2 motivation**?

2. Will the experimental group show a statistically significant increase in the values of **L2 anxiety**?

3. Will there be a statistically significant increase in **L2 achievement** reflected in the results of the formal evaluation?

Based on the formulated research questions, the main **research hypotheses** are as follows:

The **first hypothesis** (**H1**) states that there would be an increase in the levels of L2 motivation in the experimental group;

The **second hypothesis** (**H2**) is that the experimental group would indicate an alleviation of L2 anxiety;

According to the **third hypothesis** (**H3**), when comparing the results of the formal evaluation in the control and the experimental group, there will be a considerable inter-group difference in the variation in *L2 achievement* rendered in terms of L2 grades.

3.6. Research design

A quasi-experiment is designed to examine the effect of the treatment condition which entails task-based L2 performance and is hypothesized to be the factor that might influence *L2 motivation* and *L2 anxiety*. The dependent variable is *grades* received on standardized classroom tests and procedures as the results of the formative and summative assessment are seen here as a straightforward way to operationalize the construct *students' L2 success*.

The research design includes applying a task-based model of performance assessment to the experimental group and administering a psychometric instrument to both EFL classes at the beginning of the research period and after the treatment has been administered to the experimental class. The major goal is making a cross-group comparison of the variation in the values of the explored individual differences and students' grades reflecting learners' FL progress, measured by variation in formal assessment grades. The gain scores are calculated for the experimental and the control group by subtracting the pretest scores obtained before the treatment from the posttest scores.

3.7. Procedure

The students in the experimental class are assigned to a "treatment" condition (N = 25) which involves administering free production tasks designed to elicit open-ended responses. The students in the control class are assigned to a "standard" (N = 25) condition where L2 performance is elicited by standard forms and procedures – consisting mainly in constrained- response items. The pretest and posttest scores are processed in a univariate analysis controlling for the pre-existing differences. A questionnaire (R. Gardner's AMTB) employed to measure L2 motivation and L2 anxiety is administered in both groups at two points in time so that the levels of the examined variables could be established before and after the treatment. In parallel, the study involves also computing the within- and between-group variation in L2 achievement as reflected in the first and second term grades.

3.8. Tasks

In the course of seven weeks, L2 performance is elicited in the treatment group by interactive, socioculturally-grounded tasks developed to yield extended responses. These open-ended tasks, which provide for the experimental-group students to mediate and scaffold each other's performance (Lantolf, 2000), are given to the subjects in addition to the standard, psychometric instruments.

The first kind of tasks that has found place in the L2 evaluation system entails dictogloss tasks (De La Colina and Garcia Mayo, 2007; Swain and Lapkin, 2001). An audio recording is played through and students are allowed to take notes while listening to it. They are given 20 minutes to think together and share what they have heard with each other. Then, following the oral exchange of information and ideas, the participants are required to reconstruct the text in a written form.

The dictogloss technique provides for operationalization of the abstract idea that the class is a social network of interdependence, as well as representation of L2 classroom discussion as constituting a discursively created space that allows for self-regulation, exercising autonomy, and self-organization. The dictogloss tasks are selected for the purposes of this research study because they are directed at the metaskills that are indispensable for L2 learners to become autonomous agents capable of controlling and self-directing their language performance experiences.

The second type of tasks nested within a cooperative L2 evaluation approach comprises jigsaw tasks. The L2 learners are distributed in groups of four, with one group consisting of five students. The outcome of the task is a story collaboratively compiled by each student group. Participants are required to jointly manage components of the task accomplishment. In the process of working on the task, they are expected to construct collectively a scaffold for each other's L2 performance. As with the previous types of tasks described above, jigsaw tasks are posited to promote both the negotiation of meaning, the negotiation of form, and negotiation of subject position.

The jigsaw task is mainly aimed at encouraging learners to ask for information, to seek clarification, to use circumlocution as well as a whole range of linguistic and nonlinguistic resources they have mustered to negotiate meaning, to stick to the communicative task. Students' implicit, unconsciously-held knowledge is targeted in both kinds of free-response tasks.

3.9. Research tools

The tools used in this study vary in degree of explicitness with which data are elicited, as well as in degree of specificity with which items are formulated. In particular, data collection for this hypothesis-testing research has been performed by employing the following means: self-completed standardized questionnaires with close-ended response categories, semi-structured post-treatment interviews with teachers and focus group interviews with high-school students,

The self-report questionnaire offers limited response options. I have used a modified version of Gardner's AMTB (the Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery) – an instrument in which, instead of a single measurement dimension, multiple psychological constructs are involved. I rely on multi-item scales, so that the necessary data could be obtained by more than one item. The scores for the items addressing the same target are summed up. This instrument contains factual items designed to yield descriptive information, behavioral items aimed at eliciting data on students' L2-related activities, practices and habits, and items focused on non-factual matter, in particular – their attitudes, values, and opinions.

The rating instrument adopted is a six-level Likert-type scale, where the two end points are "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree". The instruments with which data have been collected are selected for this study primarily because of their established validity and reliability.

3.10. Ethics

The participation of learners in this research was voluntary and dependent on the consent of parents. They were informed that they could at anytime decide not to be involved in the study without any negative consequences. The personal information collected was confidential and its sharing did not have any negative effect on their ESL grades.

4. Results

4.1 Research hypothesis 1

In view of the **first research hypothesis (H1)**, an important goal of the study is establishing whether there is a statistical difference between the experimental and the control group as to the post-treatment scores for the *first variable* – L2 motivation. The results of the conducted univariate ANOVA analysis, with dependent variable of gain scores at the $\alpha = .05$ level, indicate that there is a statistically significant main effect for the AMTB subscales under examination, as follows: *Interest in foreign languages*, $F(1, 48) = 20.321$, $p < .001$, *Motivational intensity to learn English*, $F(1, 48) = 8.527$, $p < .05$, *Desire to Learn English,* $F(1, 48) = 15.260$, $p < .001$, as well as *English Course Evaluation*, $F(1, 48) = 26.423$, $p < .001$. Likewise, the result for the *Attitude Towards Learning English* scale is significant, $F(1, 48) = 72.464$, $p < .001$. Based on the analysis of the empirical data, while controlling for the pre-treatment scores, the **research hypothesis (H1)** is confirmed.

4.2 Research hypothesis 2

The ANOVA analysis for the *second non-linguistic variable* also demonstrates significant treatment effect, $F(1, 48) = 27.035$, $p < .001$. Based on the statistical analysis of the data obtained on the ESL Anxiety scale, the **second research hypothesis (H2)** is also accepted.

4.3 Research hypothesis 3

In order to check **research hypothesis 3** (**H3**), I have examined whether there is a considerable inter-group difference in the variation in *L2 achievement* rendered in terms of L2 grades. The results of formal classroom assessment in the control and the experimental group have been analyzed in a *univariate analysis of variance* with *treatment effect* as the independent variable. I have used ANOVA to partially adjust for preexisting differences among the groups. The results obtained indicate that the increase in L2 achievement is greater for participants in the treatment condition ($M = .37$, $SD = .24$) than for those in the control condition ($M = .07$, $SD = .23$).

The calculation of the 95% gain score confidence intervals around each mean for the control and the experimental group (ranging from .155 to .288, *Table 1*) indicates that it does not overlap zero. This means that there is a significant improvement for the students who are subjected to the experimental treatment.

Table 1. Treatment Effect

Grand Mean			
Dependent Variable: GainScores			
		95% Confidence Interval	
Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
.221	.033	.155	.288

The results of the *F-statistic* reveal a significant influence $F(1, 48) = 19.812$, with a probability of chance occurrence $p < 0.001$ (*Table 2)*. A conclusion could be drawn that the obtained F-ratio is not likely to occur by chance. The statistical significance attained by the outcome results is high. It furnishes evidence of the probability that the observed effect, i.e., the statistically significant difference between the two research groups, is the result of the treatment, and is not due to random error.

Table 2. Results of Univariate ANOVA

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: GainScores						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1.078[a]	1	1.078	19.812	.000	.292
Intercept	2.446	1	2.446	44.983	.000	.484
Treatment Effect	1.078	1	1.078	19.812	.000	.292
Error	2.611	48	.054			
Total	6.135	50				
Corrected Total	3.688	49				
a. R Squared = .292 (Adjusted R Squared = .277)						

The results of the statistical analysis show that the group that indicated an increase in the levels of L2 motivation, as well as alleviation of anxiety, demonstrated a statistically significant increase in the grades obtained in the second school term. The results of the conducted **univariate ANOVA analysis** (*Table 2)* indicate that the **third research hypothesis** (**H3**) cannot be rejected **($\rho = 0.00$).**

5 Conclusions and implications
5.1 Final considerations and conclusion
Issues involved in testing and evaluating foreign language competence have often been discussed from perspectives that hermetically isolate intrapshychological from interpsychological processes that *ipso facto* mingle and interpenetrate one

another. The present research is grounded on a theoretical position that provides for exploring the role of two non-linguistic variables at the intersection between the personal and the social realm.

The context-bound variables under examination are not rendered in this classroom-based EFL study as monolithic, stable, invariable categories. The pivotal presupposition on which the research design was premised is that both individual differences and L2 competence manifest themselves, and could be explored, within a situational context when due regard is paid to the social dimension.

A dialectical view is offered in this paper arguing that L2 motivation and L2 anxiety are formed as one moves between private and public, individual and sociocultural. It presents the results of applying a conceptual framework for evaluating foreign language performance which provides for making assessment an integral natural part of L2 use. This perspective is in keeping with the general trend of moving from "testing learning of students to assessing for students learning" (Birenbaum and Feldman, 1998).

An integrative model of studying L2 performance is proposed. It utilizes elements of both Vygotsky's sociocultural tradition – for the purpose of designing the employed L2 tasks – and Gardner's socio-psychological perspective, which, I argue, could provide glimpses into the way affective variables interact with the larger social context. The main goal is exploring L2 motivation and L2 anxiety in a local L2-activity educational setting where participants are actively engaged in collaborative discourse creation relying on psychological, cultural and historical resources.

The quasi-experimental study the present paper reports on adds to the existing body of research. Two main conclusions have been drawn. First, a relation exists between enhancing L2 motivation and increase in L2 achievement. Second, the study proves that the learners whose levels of L2 anxiety decrease outperform the control group language learners who show no statistically significant variation. The empirical evidence reiterating the role of L2 motivation and L2 anxiety for Bulgarian high school students is in line with findings of previous research focused on the impact of motivational factors on L2 achievement.

5.2 Implications

The results of the study have important implications for pedagogical practice. They furnish evidence of the effect of non-linguistic factors on L2 success. Statistical analysis of the empirical data suggests that fostering L2 motivation and reducing L2 anxiety project upon pedagogical outcomes and could serve the purpose of a powerful catalyst for instigating learning. These findings could prove useful for FL teachers who might take them into consideration in the efforts to develop communicative, interactive and engaging L2 classroom environment.

5.3 Recommendations

The aim of this study was providing a non-dualist account of two non-linguistic variables and their impact on students' L2 performance, thus challenging any

antithetic tendencies in early applied linguistic investgation. Research attention may also be directed at achieving this aim based on other frameworks that make it possible to examine personal and interpersonal factors in their interrelatedness, in a non-dichotomizing way, from a relational perspective.

Further studies could be conducted to account for the degree to which variation in the levels of *non-linguistic factors* can result in improving concrete language skills, in order to establish the relationship between changing their values in a positive direction and the rate and success with respect to those skills. Subsequent research endeavors could also be directed at different tasks and procedures prompting L2 use while students' attention is not focused on grammatical forms and structures but on construction and negotiation of meaning.

Additionally, other researchers may carry out investigation oriented to specific aspects of the complex constructs under consideration to shed more light on the relationship between variation in their values and L2 achievement across different modalities and skills.

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