
Personality traits and language anxiety: intrinsic motivation revisited

Cechy osobowości i „uczucie niepokoju językowego”:
analizując ponownie motywację wewnętrzną

Larysa Sanotska
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Abstract

This paper reports on the outcomes of the comparative study on motivation of learners of English in further-education English Philology programme in Ukraine and Poland. The research aims to determine principle characteristics of intrinsic motivation, which is among the most effective personal management strategies and as such helps build appropriate L2 study skills. Alongside with inborn personality features, such as extraversion/introversion, such traits as conscientiousness, openness, risk-taking and self-efficacy are formed by sociocultural, and in some cases, historical factors. The students from Ukraine and Poland were chosen for the reason of similarities in historical development of the two countries, as well as relatively different ‘paths’ of development in the more recent period. Similarity and diversity factors retrieved from observation, interviews with students and answers to an open-ended questionnaire provided data which allows to determine the scale of influence of social and historical aspects on decision making and performance of the students alongside with their personal beliefs and expectations. The study also aimed to establish the connection between the systems of individual beliefs of the learners of both countries in the sphere of L2 learning.

Key words: intrinsic motivation, conscientiousness, openness, risk-taking, self-efficacy, individual beliefs.

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł został poświęcony wynikom badania porównawczego motywacji osób uczących się języka angielskiego w toku dalszego kształcenia na Wydziale Filologii Angielskiej w Polsce i na Ukrainie. Celem badania jest określenie zasadniczych cech motywacji wewnętrznej, która z pewnością należy do najbardziej skutecznych osobistych strategii a dodatkowo pomaga ona rozwijać umiejętności potrzebne do opanowania języka obcego. Razem z wrodzonymi cechami osobowościowymi, takimi jak ekstrawersja lub introwersja, zdolnością do podejmowania ryzyka, samoefektywnością i innymi, takie cechy osobowości jak uczciwość, otwartość, zdolność do podejmowania ryzyka i inne, są kształtowane przez czynniki społeczno-kulturowe lub historyczne. Studenci z Polski i Ukrainy zostali wybrani ze względu na fakt, że podzielają pewne cechy historycznego rozwoju obu państw, a w pewnym momencie w historii najnowszej te drogi rozeszły się. Czynniki podobieństwa i odmienności sformułowane na podstawie danych uzyskanych z obserwacji, wywiadów, badań otwartego typu pozwoliły określić skalę wpływu aspektów społecznych i historycznych na zdolność do podejmowania decyzji oraz na inne cechy osobowościowe, a także na osobiste przekonania i oczekiwania. Moim celem jest ustalenie związku między systemami osobistych przekonań studentów obu krajów w dziedzinie nauki języka angielskiego jako języka obcego.

Słowa kluczowe: wewnętrzna motywacja, sumienność, otwartość, zdolność do podejmowania ryzyka, samoefektywność, osobiste przekonania.

Introduction

Personality factors are important for intrinsic motivation because they refer to emotions and feelings, thus form an important sphere of affective domain of human behavior (Brown, 2000: 142-143). It is evident that extrinsic motivation is generally formed by sociocultural variables

(Woodrow, 2010: 302; Gardner, 1985). However, according to theories of social and collective behaviour, individuals are influenced by social factors (Smelser, 1962, 1972; Sullivan & Thompson, 1986). It is observed that certain personal traits of L2 learners are shaped by social and historical aspects, e.g. conscientiousness, openness, risk-taking, self-efficacy, etc. Ushioda also states that motivation in foreign language learning has “distinctive social-psychological nature” (2012: 59). Research shows that two kinds of motivational orientation, integrative and instrumental, play an important role in learning foreign languages. The first reflects interest in the ‘new language’ people and culture, while the second reveals the practical value and advantages of learning a new language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 132; Ushioda, 2012: 59). According to Ushioda, students are motivated and engaged in learning by cognitions such as their goals, beliefs, expectancies, self-perceptions, evaluation of success and failure.

Various scholars identify three or two-level motivational frameworks, which have much in common. For example, traditional intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are echoed in Williams & Burden’s (1997) two-level model of internal factors (intrinsic interest, sense of agency, perception of success and failure) and external factors (interactions with significant others, features of the immediate learning environment, broader social and cultural context) (Ushioda, 2012: 62). At the same time, Dörnyei (1994) suggests three levels of motivation, which are language level (integrative & instrumental subsystems), learner level (individual motivational characteristics, e.g. self-confidence, need for achievement), and learning situation level (situation-specific motives relating to the course and social learning environment) (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011: 49-60). But in spite of the fact that scholars look at motivation from different perspectives, analysis of motivation is inseparable from “other areas of research inquiry on learner cognitions, as well as associated affective processes or emotions... and social influences and dynamics” (Ushioda, 2012: 63).

In the process of learning foreign languages it is important for students to identify their concept of ‘self’, which represents their better

understanding of themselves, their abilities and skills. Researchers firmly established the connection between the students' understanding of their skills and their willingness to develop new ones. Higgins suggests that concepts of 'self' in future-oriented dimension can function as self-guides which give direction to current motivational behaviour (Higgins, 1987). Learners become aware of 'what they might become', 'what they would like to become' and 'what they are afraid of becoming' (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Motivation research into L2 acquisition also suggests that motivational subsystems include certain cognitive, behavioural and affective processes, which are closely associated with it. And language anxiety, as a complex of subjective feelings and fear in language learning and use, is one of the essential components. Dewaele (2007), Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) demonstrate that higher levels of language anxiety lead to lower levels of language achievements. Ushioda (2012) connects language anxiety with lower levels of perceived competence and lower self-efficacy. Anxiety interferes with cognitive processing at the input stage, processing stage and the output stage (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012.). Anxiety also affects the 'error correction' aspect of learning, because anxious students respond less effectively to their own errors (Gregersen, 2003). Despite the fact that the majority of studies refer to anxiety while speaking (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Saito, Garza & Horwitz, 1999), recently the role of anxiety has also been examined in all four major skill areas: speaking, writing, reading and listening (Gregersen, 2007, 2009; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). The connection between language anxiety and cognitive processes is demonstrated in Figure 1.

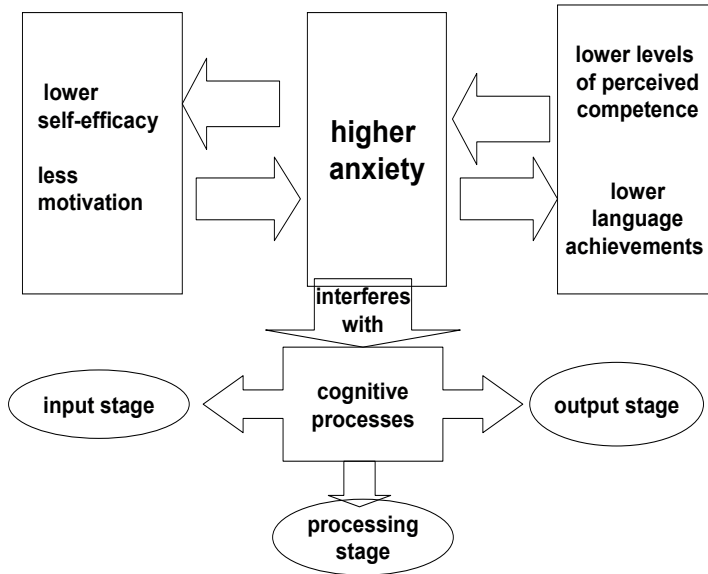


Figure 1.
Language anxiety and cognitive processes

As far as causality of language anxiety is concerned, there is evidence that anxiety is related to broad dimensions of the learner, such as learning styles (Bailey & Daley, 1999; Castro & Peck, 2005) or emotional intelligence (Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham, 2008). However, anxiety is still a matter of dispute in terms of its correlation with language abilities. Sparks & Ganschow (1995, 2007) provided evidence that anxiety be seen as a cause, which is argued by MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), who made a strong case of anxiety being an effect of the language ability. The latter research demonstrates that anxiety leads to decrease in performance at input, processing and output stages and can affect the process of acquiring L2 vocabulary.

Research methods and tasks

Woodrow claims that the most common design in motivational research is cross-sectional study, which often involves questionnaires (Woodrow, 2010: 304). The questionnaires which were administered for this study were in most cases open-ended. Also other qualitative methods of data collection were applied, such as observation or interviews with students. The following tasks were set:

- to determine correlation between social and historical aspects, decision making and performance of the students;
- to explore students' personal beliefs, expectations and expectancies;
- to establish the connection between the systems of individual beliefs related to L2 learning in two groups of students in similar educational context but from different social environment.

Preliminary observations showed that both groups demonstrate certain common and certain different features of language confidence and anxiety in all four skills at all three stages. Unlike Polish students, Ukrainian students tend to be more reserved and passive, with relatively low self-esteem and self-efficacy; they sometimes show traits that could be provoked by social dimensions. Ukraine and Poland share similarities in historical development but in the more recent period their 'paths' of social development have been relatively different. While Ukrainian society is still outgrowing conventional restrictions on expressing one's own opinion different from the mainstream, Poland is far ahead in the formation of democratic society. Those trends affect students' personalities, and 'older' generation of Ukrainian students still possess individual features shaped by the 'society of closed doors'.

The population is formed by adult students of Further Education English Philology Departments. They already have educational experience of different kind (secondary schools, colleges), alongside with working experience. They decided to change their professions or get promoted in their current work and need more profound knowledge of English (and English-related disciplines) as well as a diploma. Some details of their collective profiles are demonstrated in Table 1.

		Polish group		Ukrainian group	
Gender	Female	90%		70%	
	Male	10%		30%	
Place of residence	City/town	60%		50%	
	Village	40%		50%	
Age		35 — 37 years		20 — 48 years	
Period of time they studied English before the course	1 — 5 years	20%		20%	
	6 — 15 years	30%		70%	
	16 — 20 years	50%		10%	
If their parents know foreign languages		40%	English, Russian, Hungarian, German	70%	Russian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Slovak, Armenian
If their parents influenced their decision to study English		20%		70%	

Table 1.
Collective profiles of the two groups of population

As far as the students' expectations and expectancies are concerned, all Ukrainian students are convinced that knowing English as well as having a university diploma of English Philology will improve their social status. However, less than half (40%) are not sure that the diploma itself will substantially increase their income. At the same time half of the Polish students have the opposite opinion about the social status, but 90% hold with their Ukrainian counterparts as far as the financial status is concerned. More than a half of the Polish group (60%) is certain that not just 'English' but possessing the diploma of English Philology will put them higher on

the social ladder, and even more Polish students (70%) believe that they will benefit financially from it.

Students' learning styles and preferences

Collaborative learning has long been very popular in the international foreign language classroom and has been a central attribute of TEFL. As learners share their knowledge bringing their previous experiences to the group and learning from the group existing practices, it seems obvious that such a style of instruction encourages students' creativity, motivation, enhances their language and study skills, at the same time developing their collaborative skills. That is the reason why lately collaborative learning has been implemented in some higher-educational contexts in Ukraine. And the majority of Ukrainian learners (60%) admitted that they enjoy collaborative activities on the whole. They provided the following reasons: effectiveness of learning L2 through speaking and listening, the role of collaboration in raising self-esteem and self-confidence, the fact that collaborative activities are more engaging than non-collaborative, and others. About a third part of the respondents feel that interacting during the lesson and cooperating in groups help overcome shyness and develop analytical skills.

However, only 30% of the Polish learners like studying in groups, while the rest (70%) of Polish and 40% of Ukrainian students prefer to work in the lesson alone. They believe that it is better when the teacher focuses on one person, especially when the teacher corrects one's mistakes more frequently and gives them the possibility of working at one's own pace. Some students, especially the shy ones and with low self-esteem, claim that group work makes them feel awkward and discourages them.

Types of personality and students' skills

Many researchers assert that learners with extravert features are successful L2 students (Dewaele, 2012; Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Talkative, optimistic and sociable learners prefer social strategies, for example, cooperation. They also tend to take risk in language studies more frequently than introverts. They eagerly use new vocabulary and "engage in risky emotional interactions" (Dewaele, 2012: 46). Accor-

ding to Allwright & Bailey, openness means receptivity or defensiveness on the part of the learners (1991: 158). As openness is a language attitude, and the question of language attitudes is a background issue of L2 teaching and “has major implications for language teaching policy” (Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 159), openness to the new language as well as openness-to-experience and risk taking are paramount factors that provide success in L2 acquisition. Various studies (Arnold, 1999; Oxford, 1992) discuss the positive role of risk-taking in learning languages. Ely and Dewaele claim “that learners’ willingness to take risks in using their L2 was linked significantly to their class participation which in turn predicted their proficiency” (Ely, 1986; Dewaele, 2012: 48). Samimy & Tabuse state that risk-takers also tend to obtain higher grades in the L2 (Samimy & Tabuse, 1992). Risk taking interacts with other factors, such as self-esteem or learning styles to produce certain effects in language learning (Oxford, 1992: 30).

The vast majority of Polish students and a half of the Ukrainians believe that they are extraverts and open people. The learners from Poland genuinely understand that openness is a positive feature for several reasons. First, it means to be open to new ideas, suggestions, proposals; second, an open person can follow other people’s ideas and advice; and third an open person lives in everyone’s world, not in his own only. The Ukrainian respondents also believe that if a person is open other people feel comfortable with them. They learn from other people, they are interested to hear their opinions, do not have problems communicating. But there are also learners in both groups who feel awkward being with other people, who do not feel comfortable in group activities, and certainly will not benefit from them.

We have been observing the population throughout the course and have found that the Polish students’ level of language proficiency is generally higher than in the case of Ukrainian students, they are also much better at listening and speaking than their Ukrainian counterparts. However, Ukrainian students try to be more accurate while demonstrating productive skills. They also show more profound knowledge of language systems, for example, pronunciation or grammar.

Another important personality trait is tolerance or intolerance of ambiguity. SLA research links it to success in language acquisition

(Dewaele, 2012: 49). This lower-order personality feature is related to perfectionism in language education. We observed that Polish students feel less anxious in ambiguous situations and demonstrate highly effective receptive skills. They are not bothered with a certain amount of unknown words, which is why they are better listeners and readers. On the other hand, Ukrainian students are more likely to be discouraged in similar situations. They should be constantly stimulated to try out a guess and persistently guided throughout a number of optional guesses. The source of this problem may be a relative sociopolitical isolation of Ukrainian students, who do not visit other countries so often as their Polish counterparts. Dewaele & Li Wei state that “the knowledge of more languages and the experience of having lived abroad have been found to be positively correlated with tolerance for ambiguity” (Dewaele, 2012: 49). 70% of Polish students have been abroad: 50% worked in Ireland, the USA, the UK; 10% often visit relatives in the USA; 10% constantly travel to other countries on business. But only 50% of the students from the Ukrainian group have been abroad for short recreation trips to Turkey, Slovakia and Poland.

	Polish	Ukrainian
Ready to take risk?	60%	80%
Ambitious?	90%	70%
Open person?	90%	70%
Express what you think freely?	30%	10%
Conscientious person?	80%	20%
Do you believe in yourself?	80%	50%
Do you do what you plan?	90%	60%

Table 2.
Students' types of personality

Table 2 shows the data of students' self-evaluation of their personality features. We can see that Ukrainian students claim that they are more ready to take risk, but their Polish counterparts are more ambitious and open. The Polish learners are more conscientious; the vast majority belie-

ves in their skills and do what they plan more often than the students in the Ukrainian group. They also more often express what they think freely. However, the percentage of 'free speakers' is relatively small in each group (30% and 10%). There are several reasons for concealing their thoughts. In both groups a number of the learners are afraid of the consequences. But there is another category of students who do not always speak their mind for empathetic reasons. In an interview one student from the Polish group said: *I wouldn't like to say anything that could offend or make somebody suffer...* There are also students who do not consider their own extreme openness a positive feature: *I can never hide my real thought although sometimes I know I should...*

A possible implication of *don't know* answers can include a hesitating type of general behaviour or failure to identify one's concept of self. It can lead to several underdeveloped features, such as lower self-efficacy, self-determination, self-worth, self-regulation, self-belief and self-esteem. Consequently it will result in language anxiety as a feature of language behaviour. Generally, half of the Polish group answered 'don't know' to certain questions. 10% of Polish students do not know if they are ready to take risk, and about a third of Polish respondents are not sure if they are decisive. In the Ukrainian group the percentage is much higher (90%). Over a third of the Ukrainian respondents do not know if they believe in their skills, about the same number of people are not sure if they do what planned, or if they are decisive, which implies low self-efficacy according to self-evaluation.

However, in the process of data analysis certain ambiguity in decoding the 'don't know' answers to some questions could not be avoided. For example, "Will possessing the diploma of English Philology improve your social / financial status?" Those students could imply that the diploma is important, while the social/financial status is not. At the same time it may mean that each of those students embraces a future-oriented concept of 'self' just as a lucky diploma holder. The same data could be the evidence of the students' low self-evaluation of success after graduation, as well as insufficient self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

A separate and significant role in personality study plays decoding students' 'no answer' data. About half of the respondents in each group

provided 'no answer' to certain questions (40% — Polish, 60% — Ukrainian). This may be evidence of lack of openness, or low self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy as personality traits too. The students who did not answer the questions related to their own understanding of themselves will probably not be ready to construct future-oriented concepts of 'self', which would affect their motivation in L2 acquisition.

Learner cognitions and motivated engagement in learning

The majority of students in both groups want to become teachers of English; there are also those who will apply English in their current or 'dream' job. However, most Polish students want to get a university diploma, while most Ukrainian students prefer university education because they want to learn other English-related disciplines. In both groups there are students that do not trust the level of instruction in language schools, but there are more such students in the Ukrainian group.

The survey, the interviews, and the observation lead to the conclusion that in both groups the students are conscientious and hard-working. They are ready to dedicate time and efforts to overcome difficulties in learning English because they have their own reasons to do it. Although social and financial status is important for them, they have their personal challenges, desire to grow, improve, further self-educate.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that there are certain limitations of the study, such as a relatively small research sample derived from the societies with more similarities than differences, possible subjectivity of the observation, or occasional inaccuracies in the answers in the interviews and the survey, the analysis of personal characteristics and motivational guides of the group of Polish and the group of Ukrainian students of English Philology in Further Education Programmes allows to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the Polish students are more open than Ukrainian, more of them claim to be extraverts, while Ukrainian students are less ambitious and less tolerant of ambiguity. Polish students are more conscientious, they believe in themselves, and do what they plan, which may explain lower level of anxiety in

the Polish group. However, the Ukrainian respondents are more ready to take risk, which means they are decisive in their desire to experiment and to shape their future-oriented concept of 'self' with different personality traits, which may help reduce their language anxiety. Secondly, the data obtained by this contrastive analysis shows that formation of certain personal features is likely to be referred to diverse sociocultural environments, such as difficulties with travelling abroad and living there for Ukrainians, financial problems, political instability, stronger ties with older generation, and their participation in shaping their children's views and opinions, as well as guiding their decision-making strategies. And lastly, the outcomes of exploring a range of 'hesitating' answers ('don't know') or no answers to certain questions suggest that the first group are still at the stage of exploring their concept of 'self', while the concept of 'self' of the second group is still unclear. However, the observed risk-taking and decision-making tendencies will eventually allow the students to guide their formed or transformed individual characteristics into a more motivationally effective stage, which will help them eliminate their language anxiety.

References

- Allwright, D. & Bailey, K. M. 1991. *Focus on the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arnold, J. 1999. *Affect in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, P. & Daley, C.E. 1999. Foreign language anxiety and learning style. *Foreign Language Annals*. 32: 63 — 76.
- Brown, H. Douglas. 2000. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Pearson.
- Castro, O. & Peck V. 2005. Learning styles and foreign language learning difficulties. *Foreign Language Annals*. 38: 401 — 409.
- Cheng, Y. Horwitz, E. K. & Schallert, D. L. 1999. Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning*. 49: 417 — 446.

- Dewaele, J.M. 2007. Predicting language learners' grades in L1, L2, L3 and L4: The effect of some psychological and sociocognitive variables. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. 4(3): 169 — 197.
- Dewaele, J.M., Petrides, K. V. & Furnham, A. 2008. Effects of trait emotional intelligence and sociobiographical variables on communicative anxiety and foreign language anxiety among adult multilinguals: A review and empirical investigation. *Language Learning*. 58: 911 — 960.
- Dewaele, J.M. 2012. Personality: Personality Traits as Independent and Dependent Variables.
- In Mercer, S., Ryan, S. & Williams M. (eds). 2012. *Psychology for Language Learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 42-57.
- Dewaele, J.M. & Pavlenko, A. 2002. Emotion vocabulary in interlanguage. *Language Learning*. 52: 265 — 324.
- Dörnyei, Z. 1994. Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78, 273 — 284.
- Dörnyei, Z. & Ushioda, E. 2011. *Teaching and researching motivation*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Ely, C. M. 1986. An analysis of discomfort, risktaking, sociability, and motivation in the L2 classroom. *Language Learning*. 36: 1 — 25.
- Gardner, R.C. 1985. *Social psychology and in second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R.C. & Lambert, W.E. 1972. *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R.C. & MacIntyre, P.D. 1993. On the measurement of affective variables in second language learning. *Language Learning*. 43: 157 — 194.
- Gregersen, T. 2003. To err is human: A reminder to teachers of language-anxious students. *Foreign Language Annals*. 36: 25 — 32.
- Gregersen, T. 2007. Breaking the code of silence: An exploratory study of teachers' nonverbal decoding accuracy of foreign language anxiety. *Language Teaching Research*. 11(2): 51-64.
- Gregersen, T. 2009. Recognizing visual and auditory cues in the detection of foreign language anxiety. *TESL Canada Journal*. 26: 46 — 64.

- Higgins, E. T. 1987. Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*. 94: 319 — 340.
- Horwitz, E. K. & Young, D. 1991. *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- MacIntyre P. D. & Gardner R.C. 1994. The effects of induced anxiety on cognitive processing in second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 16: 1 — 17.
- MacIntyre, P. D. & Gregersen, T. 2012. The Role of Language Anxiety and other Emotions in Language Learning. In Mercer, S., Ryan, S. & Williams M. (eds). 2012. *Psychology for Language Learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 103-118.
- Markus H.R. & Nurius P. 1986. Possible selves. *American Psychologist*. 41: 954 — 969.
- Oxford, R. L. 1992. Who are our students?: A synthesis of foreign and second language research on individual differences with implications for instructional practice. *TESL Canada Journal*. 9: 30 — 49.
- Orr, F. 1992. *Study Skills for Successful students*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Saito, Y., Garza, T. J. & Horwitz, E. K. 1999. Foreign language reading anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*. 83: 202 — 218.
- Samimy, K.K. & Tabuse, M. 1992. Affective variables and a less commonly taught language: A study in beginning Japanese classes. *Language Learning*. 42: 377 — 398.
- Smelser, N. J. 1962. *Theory of Collective Behavior*. New York: The Free Press
- Sparks R. & Ganschow, L. 1995. A strong inference approach to causal factors in foreign language learning: A response to MacIntyre. *The Modern Language Journal*. 79: 235 — 244.
- Sparks R. & Ganschow, L. 2007. Is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale measuring anxiety or language skills? *Foreign Language Annals*. 40: 260 — 287.
- Sullivan, T.J. & Thompson, K.S. 1986. *Sociology: Concepts, Issues and Applications*. Collective Behaviour and Social Change New York: Macmillan.
- Ushioda, E. 2012. Motivation: L2 Learning as a Special Case? In Mercer, S., Ryan, S. & Williams M. (eds). 2012. *Psychology for Language Learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 58-73.
- Williams M., & Burden, R. L. 1997. *Psychology for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woodrow, L. 2010. Researching Motivation. In Paltridge, B. & Phakiti A. (eds). 2010. *Continuum Companion to Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. London — New York: Continuum, 318 — 336.