



JALDA's Interview with Professor Jean-Marc Dewaele

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Jean-Marc Dewaele

Jean-Marc Dewaele (Ph.D. in Romance languages and literature, Free University of Brussels, 1993) is *Professor of Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism* at the Department of Languages, Cultures and Applied Linguistics, Birkbeck, University of London. He does research on individual differences in psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, psychological and emotional aspects of Second Language Acquisition and Multilingualism. Professor Dewaele is particularly interested in the interface between applied linguistics and psychology. He has published widely on multilingual emotions and Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety. He has published over 300 papers and chapters, seven books and seven special issues. Professor Dewaele is the author of the monograph *Emotions in Multiple Languages* in 2010

(2nd ed. in 2013). He is founding member and former president of the International Association of Multilingualism (2016-2018), Convenor of the AILA

Research Network Multilingualism, former president of the European Second Language Association (2007-2011), and member of Executive Committee of the International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning (2016-2022). He is the former General Editor of the International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism (2013-2018) and current General Editor of *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Jean-Marc Dewaele won the Equality and Diversity Research Award from the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (2013) and the Robert C. Gardner Award for Outstanding Research in Bilingualism (2016) from the International Association of Language and Social Psychology and the Best Paper Award (2017), and the Distinguished Scholarship Award (2022) from the European Second Language Association. Professor Dewaele has answered JALDA's questions about emotion research in SLA studies in an offline interview with Davoud Amini, Associate Professor of TEFL at Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University.

DA: --- Dear Professor Dewaele, thank you for accepting our invitation to take part in this interview.

J-MD: ---- My Pleasure.

DA: ---- Applied linguistics and language education emanated in the mid-20th century mainly from linguistic studies which were then complemented by the research on social aspects of communication. An extensive and rigorous attention to the psychological phenomena in language learning and teaching has been only the latest adjunct in this area. Today, a major portion of conceptualizations on the processes involved in language acquisition and use are overridden by the theoretical inspirations from such psychology-based fields as cognitive psychology, educational psychology, social psychology and psycholinguistics. The recent surge of interest in affective aspects of L2 learning and teaching has been viewed as the “affective turn” (Pavlenko, 2013) and “emotional turn” (White, 2018). From a historical point of view, how has the research on psychological dimensions of language learning contributed to the redefinition or rebirth of Language Education Research giving the way to TESL or SLA studies to be recognized as distinct academic disciplines?

J-MD: ---- This is an interesting question but it carries some unfounded assumptions: the word “overridden” implies that it was imposed by force, against better judgment. This is certainly not the case for the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) where researchers are free to choose their framework. Of course, the ubiquity of cognitive approaches means that young researchers may be unaware of different views. I did draw attention to the importance of emotions and personality variables in applied linguistics in Dewaele and Pavlenko (2002), Dewaele (2005, 2011). It is not that they had been completely ignored in earlier research but the research had never reached a wider audience. The tide started to change in the early 2010s, partly because of an influential paper (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) that introduced Positive Psychology to SLA researchers. It provided an excellent theoretical basis and a wide range of “positive” variables that could be linked with measurements of proficiency and progress in the L2. I explained in Dewaele (2021) how this interest in emotions and the psychology of SLA resulted from fortuitous and happy encounters at conferences with like-minded researchers who felt that their research interests were not reflected in the programs of conferences or in the mainstream SLA journals.

DA: ---- In your insightful review article “The flowering of positive psychology in foreign language teaching and acquisition research” (Dewaele et al., 2019), you have contended that the year 2016 celebrated a full integration of positive psychology into the mainstream applied linguistics research due to TEFL researchers' remarkable focus on positive emotions and positive personality traits. We know that the affective concerns in language education had already been observed by the proponents of humanistic language teaching (e.g., Arnold, 1998, 1999) without leaving a profound impact on mainstream English pedagogy. To what extent, in your opinion, the broadening of our views on L2

learning—from linguistic development to the whole person development in lights of positive psychology this time—is going to be reflected in the actual practice of language pedagogy?

J-MD: ---- It was wonderful to observe the growing interest in the emotional aspects of foreign language learning and use. It is true that researchers like Jane Arnold had looked at some aspects of this, using the word “affect” rather than emotion, in publications aimed at teachers with a clear pedagogical angle. Our own work (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) was explicitly addressed at researchers, offering them new concepts and instruments – like Foreign Language Enjoyment – that allowed them to test our hypotheses in their own countries with different language combinations. The studies had obvious pedagogical implications, but they were based on hard data that allowed replication. This is irresistible to any good researcher: Can a new instrument be used to dis/confirm the findings in an influential previous study? Also, our research extended existing research (including our own) on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). We argued in favor of a more holistic approach, including not just negative emotions but also positive ones in the research design. We realize now that the call for such a balanced approach was exactly what the field needed at that point in time. There was a growing realization that fighting anxiety in the classroom was a dead end. Indeed, teachers whose only focus was to lessen their students’ anxiety may have forgotten that boosting their students’ enjoyment in the course and helping them manage their anxiety in a positive and safe emotional environment was more likely to lead to success. Anxiety is very much linked to personality and hence hard to reduce. Removing the challenge in the classroom, for example, in order to reduce students’ anxiety, has the unfortunate consequence of eliminating students’ basis for enjoyment, namely finding the delicate balance between increasing skills and increasing challenge. The result would be low anxiety but also low enjoyment and high boredom; a lethal emotional combination that guarantees low engagement, reduced motivation and weak performance. The year 2016 was a milestone because MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer edited the book *Positive Psychology in SLA*, which put the topic on firmly on the map. It acted as a flag and a rallying cry, and it coincided with the creation by the same editors and contributors of the *International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning* that organized a conference every two years since its creation.

DA: ---- **Emotion researchers within instructed second language acquisition have tried to come up with convincing justifications for the relevance of emotions. What are some of the mechanisms through which language classroom emotions such as achievement emotions, academic emotions and moral emotions impinge upon second language achievement?**

J-MD: The words “tried to come up with convincing justifications for the relevance of emotions” has some unfortunate connotations and incorrect assumptions. It implies that emotion researchers tried but did not actually succeed in producing a convincing case. The word “justification” implies that they did something wrong in explaining the relevance of emotions. The simplest way to answer this is to point to the thriving field of psychology where multiple journals have the word “emotion” in their title. Just because it took applied linguists some time to look over the fence and to enlighten their fellow researchers does not mean there is any doubt about the relevance of emotions in all contexts of society. The term “achievement emotions” comes from educational psychology. Some applied linguists have adopted the Control Value Theory as a theoretical basis for their own research; others have adopted the Broaden-and-Build theory from Positive Psychology. Meta-analyses have shown that Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is moderately negatively correlated with FL performance (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020) and that Foreign Language Enjoyment is moderately positively correlated with FL performance (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, to appear). We have compared positive emotions with the fuel that powers FL performance and progress, and anxiety as the cold shower that can leave learners shivering and silent in a corner.

DA: --- SLA theories inspired by the Dynamic Systems Theory, Chaos theory and Complexity theory argue for dynamic interactions between a set of social, instructional and individual difference variables and an unstable relationship between them over time. In such a view, a trivial change in one of those factors can potentially end up with an immense alteration in the outcome of learning. This is conceivable in reference to the Butterfly Effect which can somehow support the central role of emotional experiences in language learning. Can we think of a hypothetical situation where a single emotional experience –let’s say contempt– leads to a profound and lasting effect on the learner’s course of language development?

J-MD: --- One of the most important findings on the relationships between emotions, FL performance and ultimate progression in the FL is that they are highly dynamic, constantly fluctuating and hence that there is always a degree of unpredictability because of the complex interactions between learner-internal and learner-external variables (MacIntyre, 2017). This means that even if two individuals had identical personality and linguistic profiles, they would still have their own unique FL learning journeys. It is impossible to know in advance what event might turn out to have an effect. It might not necessarily be emotional at the time. In Dewaele (2013), I referred to the character Raimund Gregorius in Pascal Mercier’s novel *Night Train to Lisbon*, in which Raimund, a Swiss-German teacher of Latin, ancient Greek and Hebrew lacks interest in modern languages until one morning, on his way to school, he encounters a mysterious woman about to jump off a bridge. He convinces her not to be through with the suicide and, detecting a foreign accent in her French, he asks her what her mother tongue is. She answers

‘Português’ and the sound of that word acts as a trigger for him. He develops a passion for Portuguese. It is a nice illustration of how one innocuous word can act like a butterfly and have both a small immediate effect and long after-effects.

DA: --- In your highly-cited paper “The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom” (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2014), you have argued for the coexistence of the two prototypical positive and negative emotions, i.e., anxiety and enjoyment in the language classroom. Elsewhere, you have described the two emotions as the right and left feet of the language learner (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). A similar argument about the interactions between positive and negative phenomena in the language learning context has been encouraged by MacIntyre et al. (2019). How can positive and negative emotions coexist and interact with each other in a language learning classroom?

J-MD: --- I think all of us are constantly experiencing a range of both positive and negative emotions, except maybe in a state of deep meditation. I may feel happy and elated when walking in a beautiful park but a nagging little pain in my feet may temper the joy, and a loud conversation of two walkers just behind me may irritate me. The walkers may overtake me, the pain may subside, but a sudden burst of rain may drench me. Coming home wet, I may still feel that overall it was a good walk and that a cup of hot tea will make me fully happy again. In other words, emotions are complex and highly dynamic. It is therefore not surprising that learners may go through a rollercoaster of emotions when they have to perform in the FL class. We defined Foreign Language Enjoyment as “a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that can reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks” (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216). By “complex” we meant that it could include joy, excitement, pride, social support, laughter, interest, creativity, and a sense of belonging. Some participants described how they were simultaneously feeling very anxious, very excited and very happy to be presenting in front of their classmates. The crucial point was that the presence of one emotion did not imply the absence of other emotions. Others explained that they felt neither anxiety nor enjoyment because they were utterly bored and disengaged. We found a weak negative relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which allowed us to claim that these are truly independent dimensions. The same pattern emerged in most studies since (for an overview, see Dewaele, 2022).

DA: --- My next question regards the specific focus of JALDA, i.e., the relationship between literature and language teaching. Theoretically-speaking, imagination, play, art and literature can play key roles in language learning and teaching. You have underlined the role of “imagination for future self” (Dewaele et al., 2019, p. 3) which has also been discussed by Dörnyei (2009)

under L2 Motivational Self-System. This role becomes more interesting in lights of the “Simulation Theory” (Oatley, 2011, 2012) according to which engagement in art and literature can instigate identical emotional experiences as in the real world. What are your suggestions for the researchers interested in the interaction between art forms such as literature and music, on the one hand, and language teaching, on the other?

J-MD: ---- I have not done any research on the link between the arts and language teaching, but having been a FL teacher of French for many years, I know that literature and music can bring joy to the classroom, and can cause a deeper interest in the FL culture. Many FL learners fell in love with the novels of a particular author, or the films of a particular director, or the songs of a particular singer belonging to a specific FL culture. They then decided to find out more about that person, about that person’s geographical, cultural and sociohistorical context. It could include food, sports, religion, architecture, theatre, dance, etc. In other words, learners do not just want to acquire a FL as a neutral tool for communication, they want to be thrilled by new ideas, discover new horizons, and try out exciting new identities.

DA: ---- **Despite the fact that affective phenomena have proved to play a significant role in explaining second language teaching and acquisition, they hardly lend themselves to systematic examinations. This has posed some methodological difficulties to the researchers interested in affective aspects of language learning so that the research in this area seems to be in need of alternative approaches. For example, there has lately been an upsurge in structural equation modeling used to account for the complicated interactions between the emotional, motivational and cognitive dimensions of SLA. Boudreau et al. (2018) resorted to the innovative idiodynamic method for examining the relationship between anxiety and enjoyment. What are your suggestions to the researchers in the field for overcoming the methodological obstacles?**

J-MD: ---- I disagree with the statement that emotions don’t lend themselves to systematic examination. They do! Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) collected and analyzed data on learner emotions through an online questionnaire from 1746 FL learners from all over the world studying a wide range of FLs. My colleagues and myself have since collected data from thousands of participants and reported on sources of enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, as well as their combined effects on FL performance and progress. The search for alternative approaches is not because there is a problem with questionnaire-based research. Questionnaires are an essential tool in our field (Dörnyei & Dewaele, to appear). It is just good scientific practice to triangulate. In other words, it is helpful to use different methods to answer the same research questions. These can include different statistical methods, or the

idiodynamic method but also different epistemological and methodological approaches such as qualitative approaches and case-studies such as in Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021). We need studies with different degree of granularity, and studies with different time windows. The variety in approaches allows us to establish big universal patterns, interesting local differences, and unique individual patterns. All researchers face obstacles and the ones in the area of emotion and FL learning are not more challenging than in other fields. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. It's enough to make the most of them, to acknowledge the limitations and to combine them in different types of mixed-methods designs like the one we used in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) to overcome the limitations of a single method.

DA: ---- And as the last question, where does the research on language learning emotions go from here?

J-MD: ---- In Dewaele and Li (2020) and Dewaele (2022) we have pleaded for more longitudinal work and for more invention studies to optimize learner emotions. We need to find what teaching strategies can help learners experience the right combinations of emotions to allow them to perform well, to progress quickly and to thrive in the FL classroom (see for example, Li & Xu, 2019).

DA: ---- Thank you, dear professor Dewaele, for sharing your valuable insights with me and JALDA's audience.

J-MD: ---- You're welcome.

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