

EWA PIECHURSKA-KUCIEL  
Opole University

## TASK DIFFICULTY AND THE USE OF COPING STRATEGIES IN THE FL CLASSROOM

Learning a foreign language in the context of formal education often imposes on students the management of difficult tasks. This demands an adoption of adequate coping behaviour (achievement vs. avoidance). Easy tasks reduce learning opportunities, while too difficult ones lead to escape-motivated problem behavior. For the purpose of the present research it is proposed that the level of FL task difficulty is related to coping behaviour. The empirical results demonstrate that students who perceive FL tasks as difficult apply more avoidance strategies. Apart from that, students with higher and lower levels of task difficulty use similar amounts of achievement strategies. It follows that the implementation of achievement coping is independent from the level of task difficulty.

The aim of the paper is to analyze the relationship between foreign language (FL) task difficulty and the application of coping strategies in the secondary grammar school context. For this purpose, the nature of the phenomena in question will be presented, followed by an outline of the results of an empirical research on the aforementioned issues and a discussion. The paper finishes with implications for further studies and the EFL classroom practice, as well as with the study limitations.

### **1. Introduction**

The process of second/foreign language acquisition is as a deeply “unsettling psychological proposition” (Guiora, 1983: 3) which can seriously threaten self-concept and destabilise the learner’s worldview (Brewer, 2006). This is the reason why the use of strategies that help the student deal with difficulties may be of key importance for the understanding of the FL learning process.

The necessity to cope with problems evoked by a stressful situation, such as acquiring a language, demands an adoption of adequate *coping* behaviour, under-

stood as “the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980: 223). They serve two basic functions: they manage or alter the person-environment relationship (*problem-focused* coping) and they regulate the emotional consequences of stressful events (*emotion-focused* coping).

The first type of strategies aims at changing the nature of the stressor itself or the individual’s perception of the consequences of the stressful event. It encompasses a whole range of behaviours, like “aggressive interpersonal efforts to alter the situation, as well as cool, rational, deliberate efforts to problem solve” (Folkman, Lazarus & Gruen, 1986: 572). The aim of emotion-focused coping is to regulate stressful emotions by means of distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, escape-avoidance, accepting responsibility, and positive reappraisal.

There is another framework of coping proposed by Roth and Cohen (1986), according to which coping is divided into *approach* and *avoidance* strategies. The first focus on the stressor (moving towards it), and signifies a person’s tendency to attend to a stressor by seeking information. The latter are oriented away from it (ignoring). Avoidant coping strategies induce activities (e.g., seeking social support, alcohol use) or mental states (e.g., self-controlling, withdrawal, minimizing threat, seeking emotional support, wishful thinking, and self-blame) that keep individuals from directly addressing stressful events. Both frameworks presented above are similar, because problem-focused and approach coping aim to affect the stressor directly, while emotion-focused and avoidance coping help to avoid the stressor and control its emotional effect (Moos in Causey & Dubow, 1992).

The choice of a strategy type is determined, in part, by personal style (e.g., some people cope more actively than others) and by the type of stressful event. In other words, problem-focused coping is employed to deal with potentially controllable problems, whereas more emotion-focused coping is prompted by stressors perceived as less controllable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Generally, avoidant coping is found to be correlated with poor adjustment and impatience-aggression, together with low self-set achievement standards and low self-esteem. Achievement coping, though, is associated with good adjustment and competitiveness. It is also connected with leadership, positive self-esteem or a developed sense of responsibility (Gomez, 1998). Nevertheless, the relationship between coping and performance outcomes has not yet been clearly defined (Gallagher, 1996).

The language learning situation is characterized by a variety of factors that need to be taken into consideration while examining coping in the FL classroom. The focal point presented in this paper is connected with *task difficulty*, understood as “one’s beliefs regarding how much effort would be needed to succeed at a task, and whether success is even possible” (Horvath, Herleman & McKie, 2006: 171). It can also be defined in terms of three different factors: code complexity (linguistic complexity/variety and vocabulary load/variety), cognitive complexity (cognitive processing factors such as information type and organizational structure as well as the familiarity of task topic discourse and genre) and communicative

stress (the logistics of task performance; e.g., time pressure, nature of the prompt and number of participants) (Skehan, 1998). It follows that more complex tasks direct learners' attention to context and divert it away from form. Consequently, simple tasks generate more fluent and accurate speech, while more complex tasks generate more complex speech at the expense of accuracy and fluency. Furthermore, as Robinson (2001) proposes, complexity and difficulty are independent, because complexity is a feature of the task, while difficulty is operationalised in terms of perceptions of task difficulty on the part of learners.

Task difficulty can be analysed from the point of view of attributions, i.e., explanations of outcomes of situations (Weiner, 1986). Instead of clarifying direct causes of a success or failure, individuals tend to give explanations to characteristics that trigger the cause of the outcome and that have motivational significance. There are three types of attributions: *causality*, *stability* and *control*. Causality (or internality) defines explanations that involve internal or external factors. Stability specifies explanations of stable and unstable things. The third attribution is control. It distinguishes between controllable and uncontrollable things.

According to this typology, task difficulty is considered external locus of control (derived from factors outside the individual) and stable (consistent over time). It means that FL learners who perceive learning tasks as difficult have a tendency to consider the language learning situation beyond their control, and resistant to change.

Difficult tasks can be detrimental to a learner, because they are associated with higher anxiety, under-achievement and looming failure; they also demand greater attention (Panayiotou & Vrana, 2004), causing performance drawbacks. Furthermore, together with the ability of the achiever, they turn out to be a significant predictor of future achievement (Graham, 2004), contrary to effort which is inconsistent and unstable.

Task difficulty is a factor whose importance needs to be taken into consideration while discussing causes for success and failure in the FL classroom, because when tasks are too easy – they become boring, and lead to off-task behaviour problems. Students manage them quickly and accurately, and spend the rest of the assignment period off task. Such a situation not only decreases academic-engaged time, thus reducing learning opportunities, but also creates a context in which problem behaviors are more likely to occur (Umbreit, Lane & Dejud, 2004). On the other hand, tasks that are too hard can be very frustrating and demotivating. They induce aversive stimulation, and students often respond to them by engaging in escape-motivated problem behavior (Gunter et al., 1993). It is expected that a moderate level of task difficulty is optimal for learning. Hence, any departure from this optimal level in either direction (too high or too low) results in task processing and behaviour problems.

Hence, for the purpose of the present research it is proposed that the level of FL task difficulty is related to coping behaviour in a way that difficult tasks co-exist with avoidant coping and lower levels of achievement coping. More specifically, the hypotheses proposed hereby are as follows:

H1: *A high level of FL task difficulty is correlated with a greater reliance on avoidance strategies.*

H2: *Students who assess FL tasks at a higher level use less achievement strategies in comparison to students who assess FL tasks at a lower level.*

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The informants were 565 students from 18 classes (natural groups) of the six three-grade secondary grammar schools in Opole (353 girls and 212 boys). Their average age was 17.7 with the minimum of 16 and maximum of 19. They all attended English classes as the second compulsory foreign language (three to five hours a week), while German or French was their primary compulsory foreign language. The classes were chosen at random, on condition that English was not the priority language. Its lower-stakes status was expected to correlate with lower tension.

On the basis of the task difficulty scale results (Schneider, 1999), the sample was divided into 3 groups: the lower quartile ( $\leq 24$  points) formed a group of 161 students who perceived FL tasks at a lower level (LTD), the upper quartile ( $\geq 32$  points) with a group of 127 students who perceived FL tasks at a higher level (HTD). The remaining group of students (middle quartiles) was excluded from further analysis.

### 2.2. Instruments

The basic instrument used in the study was a questionnaire in Polish consisting of scales measuring the level of task difficulty, achievement and avoidance coping, the level of FL skills, and the length of FL experience.

The *level of FL task difficulty* was measured by means of a scale adopted from Schneider (1999). It focused on self-perceived difficulty of reading (silent and aloud), pronunciation of words, writing essays, understanding the teacher and others speaking English, and remembering vocabulary, etc. The scale followed a four-point Likert answer format, ranging from 4 – *very difficult* to 1 – *very easy*. The minimum number of points was 12 and the maximum 48. The scale's reliability was assessed by means of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .96$ .

The 13-item coping scale by Bokszczanin (2003) was composed of two subscales. Six items constituted the *achievement subscale* with the maximum number of points 24, and the minimum 6 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ) on a 4-point Likert scale (1 – *never* to 4 – *almost always*). The sample items were: *I wondered how to solve the problem* or *I tried to act rationally and as planned*. The *avoidant coping subscale* was composed of seven points (from 7 to 28), with reliability of .75. It included sample items, like: *I dreamt the problem would vanish* or *I blamed myself for what happened*.

Also utilised was a scale exploring *FL abilities*. It consisted of 18 items exploring self-perceived assessment of the students' ability to pronounce, to speak with others in class, to notice differences between sounds, to listen and understand the teacher, others and recordings, to repeat what the teacher said, to read silently and aloud, and to write notes and essays. Students also estimated their note taking in English, spelling, understanding of grammatical rules explained by the teacher or elaborated by oneself, remembering words, and in-class concentration (adopted from Schneider, 1999). A 6-point Likert scale from 1 – *very poor* to 6 – *excellent* was used with the minimum number of points being 18 and the maximum 108. Its reliability was estimated by means of Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha=.92$ ).

The information about the *length of FL experience* was supplied by the informants by means of pointing a relevant number of years; from 0 to 13.

### 2.3. Procedure

The design of the study was differential (Graziano & Raulin, 1993) because it focused on the comparison of two groups of participants: students who assessed FL task difficulty at a lower (LTD) and higher (HTD) level.

The data collection procedure took place in December 2003. The participants were asked to give sincere answers without taking excessive time to think.

The research was conducted by comparing means obtained on the scales measuring the use of achievement and avoidance strategies, self-assessment of FL skills and the length of FL experience.

There were three kinds of variables identified in the study. The *dependent* one was the level of FL task difficulty. The *independent* ones comprised the use of achievement and avoidance strategies, while the control ones – self-assessment of FL skill and the length of FL experience. All the variables were operationally defined as questionnaire items.

The data were computed by means of the statistical programme STATISTICA, with the main operations being descriptive statistics: *means* (arithmetic average) and *standard deviation (SD)* showing how far individuals vary from the mean. There were two kinds of *the student's t-test*. The one for independent groups shows differences between students who assess FL task difficulty at a lower and higher level (the between-group variation) on dependent variables. The correlated t-test compares two sets of scores for the same participants, such as the comparison of the use of achievement and avoidance strategies in students who assess FL tasks at a higher level (the within-group variation).

For the purpose of comparing the two coping scales which differed in the number of items, the 6-item achievement strategy scale was weighted by means of multiplying its results by 1.166. In this way the difference between the number of items in the two scales was eliminated.

### 3. Results

The means obtained by the two groups on the achievement and avoidance scales showed that the LTD group got a lower mean on the avoidance scale, while – higher means on the achievement scale, self-assessment of FL skills and the length of FL experience (see Table 1 for a summary).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics results in students who assessed FL tasks at a lower (LTD) and higher level (HTD)

	LTD (N=161)		HTD (N=127)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Avoidance strategies	12.10	3.96	15.11	3.91
Achievement strategies	19.55	5.93	19.43	4.46
Self-assessment of FL skills	82.49	10.83	55.79	11.90
Length of FL experience	6.97	2.59	4.82	2.62

Below there is a visual representation of the findings in regards to the use of achievement and avoidance coping strategies (Fig. 1).



Fig.1. The comparison between the use of achievement and avoidance strategies in students who assessed FL tasks at a lower (LTD) and higher level (HTD)

In the next step the means in both groups were compared in order to identify any statistically significant differences. The student's t-test demonstrated that both groups did not differ in their use of achievement strategies, yet the HTD group used distinctively more avoidance strategies. Their self-assessment of FL skills was drastically lower, and the length of their FL experience was shorter in comparison to the LTD group members (see Table 2 for the details).

Table 2. Between-group comparisons in the use of strategies, self-assessment of FL skills and the length of FL experience

	t(286)
Avoidance strategies	-6.44***
Achievement strategies	.19
Self-assessment of FL skills	19.88***
Length of FL experience	6.94***

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Finally, it was worthwhile to analyse the use of coping strategies within groups. The student's t-test for independent samples demonstrated that in both groups there was a discrepancy in the use of both types of strategies, though in the LTD group there was a greater difference in the use of achievement and avoidance strategies than in the HTD group (see Table 3).

Table 3. Within-group comparisons of the use of achievement and avoidance strategies in students who assess FL tasks at a lower (LTD) and higher level (HTD)

	LTD (N=161)	HTD (N=127)
Avoidance strategies vs. achievement strategies	-7.45***	-4.32***

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## 4. Discussion

The aim of the research is to examine the relationship between the use of coping strategies and the levels of FL task difficulty. The research results reveal that such a relationship exists, which exposes the role of task difficulty in the implementation of specific behaviour aiming at coping with problems in the FL classroom.

### 4.1. Hypothesis 1

According to the first hypothesis proposed for the purpose of this research, a high level of FL task difficulty is correlated with a greater reliance on avoidance strategies. As the results show, students who perceive FL tasks as difficult apply more avoidance strategies.

This result is primarily rooted in affective responses to stress. When problems arise in the foreign language learning process, it seems very likely that a student who is afraid of negative evaluation may react to them with evasive behaviour.

Thanks to it, they are able to elaborate a face-saving excuse that might disguise the real reasons for their eventual failure – lack of experience, real effort, or ineffective study habits.

Unfortunately, avoidant coping that takes the form of withdrawal or passivity in the classroom is very likely to bring negative time-effects for any language learner. Their reluctance to perform leads to their missing valuable opportunities to communicate. After some time, significant lack of language practice may give way to negative expectations of their own abilities and a worse self-image.

Another significant effect of evasive behaviour may be connected with growing feelings of learned helplessness, when the student learns to believe that they are powerless in the situation of language learning and communication. Students who perceive FL tasks as difficult may believe that they have no control over that situation and that whatever they do is futile. This is the reason why in the face of unpleasant, harmful or damaging situations, such as those created by mounting problems in the FL classroom, they will stay passive, even when they do actually have the power to change the circumstances. They will either try to remove or reduce aversive stimuli (escape) or prevent and postpone their occurrence (avoidance behavior). More specifically, students for whom FL tasks are difficult may disrupt class, escape school altogether by dropping out or apply an array of in-class avoidance behaviours, such as coming unprepared or late, squirm in a chair or appear unable to sit still, or they may laugh at inappropriate times. Still, especially in adolescents, cognitive forms of distraction are the most widely used coping tactic in uncontrollable situations: looking at the ceiling, day-dreaming or thinking about something else (Altshuler & Ruble, 1989). In the case of problems in the FL classroom, where no direct action modes of coping are possible, the most preferred avoidance strategies can range from dreaming that the problem could solve itself, blaming themselves and others for what had happened, through being angry, yelling and destroying things, not confiding in others, comforting oneself thinking that it would all work out, to avoiding the people involved in the problematic situation (the teacher and/or classmates).

Consequently, the dominance of avoidance strategies in students from whom FL tasks are difficult suggests that for them the language learning situation is highly uncontrollable. This induces the application of coping strategies aiming at alleviating emotional distress through the use of avoidance tactics, rather than changing the situation. In effect, it can be concluded that the choice of FL tasks which mostly appear too complicated is not controlled by learners. This deprives them of chances for successful management of their learning process, inducing higher arousal levels, expectations of failure, and greater attention at the expense of fluency, because there are many cues that need to be processed.

These findings on the role of FL task difficulty in the preference for avoidance coping are corroborated by the impact of the control variables – self-assessment of FL skills and the length of FL experience. Indeed, students who assess FL tasks as difficult have lower levels of self-assessment of FL skills and have a significantly lower experience with the foreign language. It follows that tasks are perceived



as complicated when the student has poor familiarity with the language learning process, so, in effect, FL tasks are considered stressful and ambiguous, which leads to elevated levels of anxiety and other negative emotions.

Surrounded by more experienced and able peers, learners who perceive FL tasks as difficult may feel threatened and helpless, and, consequently, want to escape stress in any possible way (Pappamihel, 2002). Then their low self-perception of FL skills is grounded in their lack of substantial FL experience. Another important factor that must be taken into consideration is that in many L2 classrooms the dominant pressure is to converge upwards, which may significantly add to the student's feelings of threat, alongside with the need for attachment to groups and being liked by other peers. Consequently, inexperienced students may become extremely sensitive to the expectations of their more able colleagues, because they lack language skills and cognitive resources attributable to experienced students, of which they become soon aware. Their lack of familiarity with the specificity of the SLA process and their inability to select more relevant information for processing considerably add to their burden of negative experiences, caused by their inability to control attention and to avoid distraction (Han & Peverly, 2007).

#### **4.2. Hypothesis 2**

According to the second hypothesis adopted for the purpose of the study, students who assess FL tasks at a higher level use less achievement strategies in comparison to students who assess FL tasks at a lower level. Yet, the results of the study do not permit to corroborate this assumption. As far as achievement coping is concerned, both groups of students, i.e., those with higher and lower levels of task difficulty, use similar amounts of such strategies. It follows that the implementation of achievement coping is independent from the level of task difficulty.

There can be several reasons to which this finding can be ascribed. The primary explanation can be attributed to the fact that the coping behaviour is a developmental process that becomes more refined and situation-specific with age. According to the literature of the field, adolescents generally prefer using more achievement than avoidance coping in the classroom environment (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Hence, this observation can be extended to the FL learning situation. Moreover, the finding is corroborated by the literature of the field, where the use of achievement strategies is independent of task types (Yarmohammadi & Seif, 1992).

Achievement strategies have been assumed to consist of a variety of successive psychological processes. First, when people face a challenging situation, this typically evokes first expectations about what will happen, as well as related affects. These are typically based on individuals' experiences in similar kinds of past situations. If people expect to do well, then they typically set themselves task-related goals, construct plans for their actualization, and invest a high level of effort in carrying them out. Also, adolescents as language students expect to

do well, are motivated, try hard, concentrate on the task at hand, and actively think about ways to deal with it. Their behaviour is then characterised by internal control beliefs, positive affects, optimism, task-focused goals, intensive planning, high effort, and the use of self-serving attributions. Consequently, high school achievement following task-focused behavior and high self-esteem takes place (Onatsu-Arvilommi & Nurmi, 2000).

In the face of FL learning problems, even if tasks are taxing, students still actively seek for ways of solving them. Achievement strategies keep them focused on the situation: they confront, do planful problem-solving, accept responsibility, and selectively attend to the positive aspects of the encounter. In contrast, when the stressful situation simply has to be accepted, as in the case of the obligation to study a FL in mainstream education, escape-avoidance strategies are chosen, because they are forms of coping that allow the student not to focus on the troubling situation.

The finding that the use of achievement strategies is not related to the level of difficulty of FL tasks is definitely an optimistic one. It follows that even in spite of their shorter FL experience and lower self-assessment of FL skills, all learners possess positive academic self-concept and internal attributional beliefs leading to the anticipation of positive outcomes in challenging learning tasks. They are ready to invest time and effort in their studies, which means that the probability of their FL success is high. More specifically, when problems arise in the FL classroom, they intend to understand them, wonder how to solve them themselves or talk to others about them, they act rationally and according to a plan, choose the best solution and operate in a systematic and gradual way.

Overall, there is a great chance for success in the secondary grammar school FL classroom. As forms of coping vary depending on what is at stake and the options for coping (Folkman et al., 1986), the choice of an appropriate strategy depends on the assessment of the situation, when the student can adapt their repertoire of coping strategies on the basis of clues obtained from the teacher's behaviour, academic tasks, evaluation or feedback (Ryan, Pintrich & Midgley, 2001). This may lead to the speculation that in the face of higher stresses and challenges in the foreign language learning process, the student will use the type of coping that will suit their self-image as language learners, and social expectations. This means that, as the study results show, even learners who perceive FL tasks as difficult rely heavily on achievement coping when facing problems with the foreign language, which indicates their possible success in spite of short FL experience and low self-assessment.

## **5. Implications and limitations of the study**

Attributions are the basis for task difficulty, so understanding and controlling their role is the key to manage more effective future behaviour (Forsyth & Forsyth, 1982). The findings of the study shed more light on the importance of the level

of FL task difficulty which, when not optimal, may induce behaviours that could, in the long run, generate dangerous and counter-productive outcomes in the process of FL acquisition.

One of the simplest, yet effective techniques the FL teacher may apply is to provide the attribution training that is likely to enable the teacher-student team to control the path to eventual language success (Miller, Brickman & Bolen, 1975).

The technique consists of two steps. First, after a student performs in the foreign language (reads, listens, writes or speaks), the teacher asks them to assess their performance and to give reasons for their judgment. The student has to think about the causes of their language behaviour and provide an attribution which may take on two forms: internal and external. In the case of the first one (reasons rooted in the students), there is no need to provide any further comments, because this kind of attribution is desired and allows for future success prospects, even if the performance was not satisfactory. Nevertheless, in case external attributions appear, a behaviour change cannot be expected. This is the moment when the teacher should interfere and comment the student's work in the following way: "You seem to know your assignments very well", "You really work hard in English" or "You're trying more, keep at it!" In this way, the explanations given for student behaviour shift from external to internal, and are likely to induce success that is controllable, together with higher levels of self-esteem. Such simple statements in effect improve the student's academic self-concept and facilitate future success.

Another valuable recommendation is to raise students' awareness of the coping behaviour that may help them study more effectively. First of all, it is worthwhile to familiarize students with the negative effects of avoidant coping in the FL class, which may deprive them of chances of obtaining beneficial language practice. Hence, the students have to be informed about the value of in-class communication and ways of participating in it.

Furthermore, the students may be trained in ways in which they could actively deal with FL problems. One of possible techniques is to teach students effective help seeking in case of FL problems, where the teacher models the role of a help seeker and asks the class to play the role of help givers. In this way, students can think of a variety of achievement strategies they might neglect or underestimate when dealing with their own problems. Apart from that, a conscious training of learning and communication strategies may greatly support the student's awareness of available achievement tactics.

The study has some limitations that need to be addressed. The instruments applied in the study followed a selected typology of strategies (achievement vs. avoidance). There is a wider variety of classifications and appropriate measurement instrumentation whose application might shed a different light on the studied problems. Apart from that, the student achievement was evaluated on the basis of self-assessment of the four macro-skills. This is the reason why it would be more informative to apply other instruments, like final grades, measures of scholastic competence or standardized proficiency tests, to control any confounding caused by instrument limitations.

## References

- Altshuler, J. L. and D. N. Ruble 1989. Developmental changes in children's awareness of strategies for coping with uncontrollable stress. *Child Development* 60: 1337-1349.
- Bokszczanin, A. 2003. *Spoleczne i psychiczne reakcje dzieci i młodzieży na powódź 1997 roku [Social and psychological reactions of children and adolescents to the flood in 1997]*. Warszawa: Instytut Psychologii PAN.
- Causey, D. L. and E. F. Dubow 1992. Development of a self-report coping measure for elementary school children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* 21: 47-59.
- Fields, L. and R. J. Prinz 1997. Coping and adjustment during childhood and adolescence. *Clinical Psychology Review* 17: 937-976.
- Folkman, S. and R. S. Lazarus 1980. An analysis of coping in a middle-aged community sample. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 21: 219-239.
- Folkman, S. and R. S. Lazarus 1985. If it changes it must be a process: Study of emotion and coping during three stages of a college examination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48: 150-170.
- Folkman S., R. S. Lazarus, C. Dunkel-Schetter, A. DeLongis and R. J. Gruen 1986. Dynamics of a stressful encounter: cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50: 992-1003.
- Folkman, S., R. S. Lazarus and R. J. Gruen 1986. Appraisal, coping, health status, and psychological symptoms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50: 571-579.
- Forsyth, N. L. and D. R. Forsyth 1982. Internality, controllability, and the effectiveness of attributional interpretations in counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 29: 140-50.
- Gallagher, D. J. 1996. Personality, coping, and objective outcomes: Extraversion, neuroticism, coping styles, and academic performance. *Personality Individual Differences* 21: 421-29.
- Gomez, R. 1998. Impatience-aggression competitiveness and avoidant coping: Direct and moderating effects on maladjustment among adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences* 25: 649-661.
- Graziano, A. M. and M. L. Raulin 1993. *Research methods. A process of inquiry*. New York: HarperCollins College.
- Gunter, P., R. K. Denny, S. Jack, R. Shores and C. M. Nelson 1993. Aversive stimuli in academic interactions between students with serious emotional disturbance and their teachers. *Behavioral Disorders* 18: 265-274.
- Han, Z. and S. T. Peverley 2007. Input processing: A study of *ab initio* learners with multilingual backgrounds. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 4: 17-37.
- Horvath, M., H. A. Herleman and R. L. McKie 2006. Goal orientation, task difficulty, and task interest: A multilevel analysis. *Motivation, Emotion* 30: 169-176.
- Miller, R. L., P. Brickman and D. Bolen 1975. Attribution versus persuasion as a means for modifying behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31: 430-441.
- Onatsu-Arvilommi, T. and J. Nurmi 2000. The role of task-avoidant and task-focused behaviors in the development of reading and mathematical skills during the first school year: A cross-lagged longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 92: 478-491.
- Pappamihel, E. N. 2002. English as a Second Language students and English language anxiety: Issues in the mainstream classroom. *Research in the Teaching of English* 36: 327-366.
- Robinson, P. 2001. Task complexity, task difficulty and task production: Exploring interactions in a componential framework. *Applied Linguistics* 21: 27-57.

- Roth, S. and L. J. Cohen 1986. Approach, avoidance, and coping with stress. *American Psychologist* 41: 813-819.
- Ryan, A. M., P. R. Pintrich and C. Midgley 2001. Avoiding seeking help in the classroom: Who and why? *Educational Psychology Review* 13: 93-114.
- Schneider, E. 1999. *Multisensory structured metacognitive instruction*. Frankfurt am Mein: Peter Lang.
- Skehan, P. 1998. *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Umbreit, J., K. L. Lane and C. Dejud 2004. Improving classroom behavior by modifying task difficulty: Effects of increasing the difficulty of too-easy tasks. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* 6: 13-20.
- Weiner, B. 1986. *An attributional theory of motivation*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Yarmohammadi, L. and S. Seif 1992. More on communicative strategies: Classification, resources, frequency and underlying processes. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 30: 223-232.

