

What is the Interplay Between the Emotions of Enjoyment and Anxiety, Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in two Adult Migrants' English as a Second Language Learning Experience? A UK-Based Case Study

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ABSTRACT

While emotions, motivation, and willingness to communicate (WTC) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have been explored in various contexts, the interplay between these constructs in the language learning experience constitutes highly fertile ground for research. This case study thus examined the complex interaction between the emotions of anxiety and enjoyment, motivation, WTC, and the learning environment in an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) context. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System and Ushioda's (2009) person-in-context relational view were used as the motivation-related framework of the study. The participating students, Yasumi and Miguel, were adult migrants who were learning English in the United Kingdom. To gain insight into the relationship between these learners' enjoyment and anxiety, their motivation and their WTC in the ESOL learning experience, two data collection methods – interviews with the learners and their teacher, and classroom observations – were employed for one term. The results revealed that the two learners enjoyed interactive activities in the ESOL classroom and were motivated in the learning experience by visions of ideal L2 selves where the use of English was crucial. Nevertheless, they did not manifest WTC in English outside the ESOL classroom in certain situations. The findings of the study emphasise the deeply idiosyncratic relationship between the language learning aspects under investigation.

Keywords: adult migrants, anxiety, enjoyment, ESOL, motivation, willingness to communicate

INTRODUCTION

In the second decade of the 2000s emotions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) were described as “the elephants in the room – poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought” (Swain, 2013, p. 205); however, since then, emotions in language learning have been the focus of a growing number of pieces of research (e.g., Alrabai, 2022a; Dewaele et al., 2023; Fraschini & Tao, 2021; Li & Dewaele, 2024). Li and Dewaele (2024) conducted a study to conceptualise task-specific enjoyment and investigate how it is linked to general foreign language enjoyment, pointing out the importance for teachers to enhance learners’ enjoyment of tasks and of the overall language learning experience. Furthermore, motivation has also been a topic of much interest in applied linguistics (e.g., Al-Hoorie & Hiver, 2023; Lamb & Arisandy, 2019; Pawlak, 2012; Tanaka & Takeuchi, 2024). Lamb and Arisandy (2019), for instance, examined how Indonesian university students’ use of English online was linked to their motivation to learn English and to their attitude towards English lessons taught in the classroom. Another SLA construct that has been widely investigated is willingness to communicate (WTC) (e.g., de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Kubanyiova & Yue, 2019; MacIntyre, 2020; Reinders & Wattana, 2012). In a study with learners of French at an Australian university, de Saint Léger and Storch (2009) found that WTC in the second language (L2) was influenced by the participants’ perception of speaking activities and their self-perception as language learners in various ways. Although emotions, motivation and WTC have been investigated in diverse L2 educational settings, their interaction represents an underresearched area, which would thus benefit from more scholarly attention. Specifically, this paper responds to the appeal for more empirical research “examining the dynamic interplay between multifarious aspects of learners’ psychologies and the social context which they co-form” (Sampson, 2022, p. 16). As it has been pointed out, if various psychological dimensions of the language learner are investigated together rather than in isolation, a better understanding of learners’ behaviour can be achieved (Feng & Papi, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociocultural theory constitutes the framework of the present study. Within this theoretical framework learning

and cognition are viewed as being cultural and social (Kozulin et al., 2003). As Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) point out, according to sociocultural theory learning takes place in co-constructed communicative interactions “between socially constituted individuals” (p. 116). Moreover, Ushioda (2009) highlights that the learner is not a theoretical abstraction but “a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions” (p. 220), who is embedded in “micro- and macro-contexts” (p. 220). The relationship between the person and their contexts is not static and linear but rather “dynamic, complex and non-linear” (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218). In what she has called the ‘person-in-context relational view’ of motivation, Ushioda (2009) argues that motivation should be approached as a process which arises through interrelationships, more specifically through the interaction between real persons and the sociocultural context of their experiences. The current study views learners as social and emotional beings whose relationship with their contexts is highly complex.

As Horwitz (2010) has emphasised, language teachers and learners, as well as researchers, have long shown an interest in anxiety given that this emotion may hinder the language learning process. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been described as “a unique form of anxiety that some people experience in response to learning and/or using an L2” (Horwitz, 2010, p. 154). Gregersen (2020) has pointed out that anxiety is a dynamic learner variable which shapes and is shaped not only by cognitive and linguistic variables but also by other individual difference variables such as self-concept, motivation, and WTC. Stroud and Wee (2006) have distinguished between competence-based and identity-based anxiety, pointing out that, with regard to the latter anxiety type, “an individual may be more concerned with maintaining his or her relationship with particular groups than with his or her language abilities” (p. 300). Scholars such as King and Smith (2017) investigated silence and social anxiety with 924 students who were taking English classes at universities in Japan. The results showed that the participating learners felt that they were closely examined and judged by their classmates during the lessons and that social anxiety was a key factor in the students’ silent behaviour. Anxiety and silent L2 behaviour in the Japanese university English as foreign language (EFL) context were also examined by Maher and King (2020), who found that silence had the facilitative function of cognitive processing

for the participating students but was also used out of fear of being negatively evaluated by peers.

Inspiring research on positive emotions in language learning, Positive Psychology constitutes “an exciting addition to the SLA literature” (MacIntyre et al., 2019, p. 262). The positive emotion of enjoyment, defined as “a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216), has become the focus of increasing research work. Employing a sample of 1,603 adult foreign language learners, Botes et al. (2021) developed and validated the short form of the foreign language enjoyment scale, where three lower-order factors emerged: teacher appreciation, personal enjoyment, and social enjoyment. Foreign language enjoyment has been researched in diverse language learning contexts. In their research with adults who were studying EFL at private language institutes in Iran, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2024) found that a quicker increase in enjoyment over time was experienced by the participants who had lower initial foreign language enjoyment. Wang et al. (2024) investigated Chinese university students’ perspectives on what made the learning of English enjoyable to them and found that the participants’ foreign language enjoyment was shaped by factors such as independent learning, informativeness, interestingness, and collaborative work.

Foreign language learning enjoyment and anxiety have been examined by several researchers. Dewaele et al. (2018) investigated the link between enjoyment and anxiety, and learner and teacher variables in the learning of foreign languages by 189 British high school students. Their findings showed that enjoyment was related to factors such as attitudes towards the language and towards the teacher and amount of time spent speaking the language. Furthermore, anxiety was found to be significantly linked to relative standing among peers. The emotions of enjoyment and anxiety towards EFL as experienced by Chinese undergraduate students constituted the focus of the study carried out by Jiang and Dewaele (2019), who found that enjoyment was related more to the teacher, whereas anxiety was linked more to the participating learners.

Motivation, described as “a phenomenon that explains the direction, vigor, and persistence of actions in the learning process” (Papi & Hiver, 2022, p.113), has been

zoomed in on by much research. In addition to the use of the person-in-context relational view, the present study approaches motivation by employing Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, which comprises three components: the Ideal L2 Self (the imagined L2-related self that the learner aspires to), the Ought-to L2 Self (the L2-related self the learner thinks is needed for others’ expectations to be met and for negative consequences to be prevented), and the L2 Learning Experience (factors linked to the L2 learning environment). As Dörnyei pointed out, the key element of the ideal L2 self is imagery or the vision of a desired future. Dörnyei’s L2 motivation framework has been employed in various contexts. In Kim’s (2009) case study on the interface between the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self in two Korean study-abroad English as a second language learners in Canada, he found that it was internalisation which determined whether the instrumental goal of obtaining a job was subsumed into the ought-to L2 self or the ideal L2 self. In a research project with Chinese middle school and university learners of English, Magid (2011) found that the principal predictors of motivated effort were the Ideal L2 Self and attitudes towards learning English. Similarly, in investigating the motivation to learn English of 1000 undergraduate students studying at several Pakistani universities, Islam et al. (2013) found that the Ideal L2 self and attitudes towards the L2 learning experience were the strongest predictors of effort. In her study conducted with women who were learning English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in a multilevel class in Britain, Sidaway (2021) found that the ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience seemed to have the greatest impact on the participating learners’ motivation. To widen the scope, the current study investigates how adult ESOL learners’ motivation is intertwined with other psychological elements of their language learning experience and includes both male and female participants. Employing relational theory, the study by Moskowitz et al. (2022) has gone beyond the self and has emphasised the vital role of the teacher-student relationship in language learning motivation. Cooke (2006) reported on a project in which adult migrant learners of ESOL in the United Kingdom (UK) were interviewed and four cases were analysed in depth. The results of the case studies uncovered that, although the participants had high levels of motivation to learn English, institutional factors such as the methods used in trying to meet individual learner needs did not take into account the students’ real-life experiences.

The link between motivation and emotions in SLA has been investigated by a number of researchers. Dewaele and Meftah (2024) examined the relationship between motivation and enjoyment as it emerged in online questionnaire data collected from 502 Moroccan EFL learners whose proficiency levels were beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The results of their study suggest that at higher skill levels there is a gradual mutual reinforcement of language learning motivation and enjoyment. Emotions and motivation have also been explored by authors such as Méndez López and Fabela Cárdenas (2014), who found that, in the Mexican sociocultural context, the negative emotions experienced by university students had motivational force in their learning experience.

In the 1980s, WTC was referred to as a predisposition that does not change depending on the communicative situation (see McCroskey & Baer, 1985). However, in more recent research WTC has been investigated as a dynamic construct. As it has been argued, “the dynamic turn in WTC research has presented a treasure trove of issues relevant to understanding L2 communication” (MacIntyre, 2020, p. 127). This situated view of WTC is present in research such as MacIntyre et al. (2011), whose participants - junior high school students in a French immersion programme in Canada - described situations when they were most and least willing to communicate in French. In their research with pupils studying foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and German in two secondary schools in London, Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) found that the strongest predictors of WTC were foreign language classroom anxiety, the teacher’s frequent use of the foreign language, a positive attitude towards the foreign language, and high social foreign language enjoyment. To describe the language learner who is on the verge of orally communicating in the target language, Dewaele and Dewaele used the metaphor of “a swimmer standing near the edge of the water, adopting the correct posture and body position to dive into the water” (p. 24). Ducker (2022) investigated the link between WTC and learner talk in a Japanese university context where dual-language study programmes (English and Japanese) are offered. The study, aimed to zoom in on the circumstances in which WTC results in observable communication in the classroom, found that factors such as motivational forces, listening- and topic-related issues and language production issues had an impact on the relationship between WTC and learner talk.

The relationship between positive and negative language learning emotions (enjoyment, grit, anxiety, boredom), motivation, and WTC has been the focus of Arabai’s (2022b) study conducted with 328 university students in Saudi Arabia who were majoring in English. The results uncovered that motivation and anxiety were the strongest direct predictors of the participants’ L2 WTC. The present study complements Arabai’s questionnaire-based research by utilising qualitative methods to gain deeper insight into the ways in which the link between the emotions of enjoyment and anxiety, motivation and WTC emerges in adult migrant learners, in a context that is not the students’ country of origin.

METHODS

Aim and Research Questions

While the constructs of emotions, motivation, and WTC have been examined in international sojourners’ language learning experience (Pavelescu, 2023), the current paper delves into the connection between these language learning aspects in adult migrants’ L2 learning. Since each learner is unique, the ways in which these elements are related to each other in a learner’s experience are also individual. Therefore, this multiple case study aimed to investigate further the link between these psychological constructs by examining the English learning experience in the UK of two adult migrants.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors in the participating adult migrants’ English learning experience are the emotions of enjoyment and anxiety linked to? How are enjoyment and anxiety related to these elements in the students’ learning environment?

RQ2. What is the relationship between the emotions of enjoyment and anxiety, motivation and WTC in these adult migrants’ learning experience in the context of learning English as a second language in the United Kingdom?

Qualitative methods were employed since the focus of this research paradigm is on the ways in which the studied phenomenon is experienced by the participants in a specific context and on the meanings of that particular phenomenon for those who experience it (Crocker, 2009). As Duff (2020)

points out, the case study is a research approach that “offers (...) analytic possibilities for illustrating a phenomenon in very vivid, detailed, and highly contextualized ways from different perspectives” (p. 145). This approach was also chosen since it is considered to be “an excellent method for obtaining a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context,” offering “rich and in-depth insights that no other method can yield (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 155). The two case studies in this paper are both descriptive and illustrative; as Duff (2014) points out, although description is provided for the phenomenon observed, the case represents an exemplar which allows for a deep understanding of that particular phenomenon. Therefore, the case study approach was viewed as being suitable for the current research. It is worth mentioning that, in the present multiple case study, the participating students’ experiences were considered together rather than separately when reporting the findings. Since generating insights in qualitative case study research that employs interviews and observations is a ‘social, situated process’,

the presence of the researcher is visible and shapes the data (Duff, 2014, p. 239). The researcher’s decision to closely examine this phenomenon was triggered by their interest in the interplay between these psychological aspects of language learning in a type of teaching context in which they had been working (i.e., ESOL / English as a second language).

Participants and Research Context

This study is part of a wider research project which explored the connection between emotions and motivation in adult ESOL students who were enrolled on a language programme at an educational institution in the United Kingdom. The author draws on the dataset of two learners. The participating students were learning English with the same teacher, and they had been studying ESOL at that particular institution for approximately four months.

Table 1. *Participating Students’ Background Information*

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Languages known	English proficiency level	Number of English classes per week	Occupation
Yasumi	40	Japanese	Japanese, English	Intermediate	2	housewife
Miguel	37	Colombian	Spanish, Portuguese, English	Intermediate	2	software engineer

Yasumi had worked as a nurse in Japan. She was married to a British man and had been in the UK for 4 years. As for Miguel, he had been in Britain for 6 years and was working in IT at an educational institution. Yasumi and Miguel were learning English in an integrated skills class. Each of their English classes lasted for two hours. Yasumi and Miguel’s ESOL teacher, Jill (pseudonym), also participated in the study. She was from the UK and had been teaching ESOL for over ten years. The study was carried out throughout an academic term, which lasted for approximately three months.

Data Collection and Analysis

The teacher and students received both verbal and written information about the study, and they signed an informed consent form before the research started. The researcher first talked to the teacher, and the study’s purpose, data collection methods and other necessary information were explained. When she agreed to participate and provided written consent, learners were recruited from the classes that she was teaching.

The research methods employed to collect data were semi-structured interviews with the learners and their teacher and lesson observations. The interviews were conducted in person, in English, and were audio-

recorded. The students were interviewed twice during the term: the first interview took place at the beginning of the term, after participant recruitment, and the second one was held towards the end of the term. The participating students were contacted via email with regard to scheduling the interviews. The focus of the learner interviews was on English-related emotions, motivation, and WTC and on what had been observed in the classroom. As for the teacher interview, it focused on her perception of the learners' emotional and motivational dimensions. Since they were intended to be more exploratory and responsive in nature, the lesson observations were not structured; rather, they involved describing what the participating learners were doing in class and commenting on these descriptions (the on-the-spot researcher's interpretation of the observed behaviour). As it has been emphasised, "triangulation involving multiple sources can add to the texture and multidimensionality of the study, providing different vantage points from which to consider the phenomenon in question" (Duff, 2014, p. 241).

The interview audio recordings were listened to several times and manually transcribed verbatim. The author read the interview transcripts multiple times and typed notes (margin comments). Each interview transcript was summarised. The coding was grounded in the data and was guided by the research questions, the methodological approach, and the theoretical framework. As it has been pointed out, "a qualitative case study of a person presents a contextualized human profile" (Duff, 2014, p. 233). Thus, the codes contained contextual factors linked to the constructs explored (the emotions of enjoyment and anxiety, motivation and WTC). Highlighting contextual factors in the coding process also reflects Ushioda's (2009) person-in-context approach to motivation, according to which motivation emerges from "relations between real persons (...) and the unfolding cultural context of activity" (p. 215). The categories that the codes were included in were emotions, motivation, and WTC. Each code contained a key word or phrase linked to the concepts explored (for example, 'enjoyment' or 'vision for the future') and words or phrases which connected the concepts to the context (for instance, 'pair work and group work in the classroom'). The following are examples of codes in the dataset: "Enjoyment - Talking to classmates", "Enjoyment - Pair work and group work in the classroom", "Anxiety - Speaking in the classroom", "Vision for the future - Doing a master's in English", "Vision for the future - Working as a nurse",

"Out-of-class use of English - Workplace", "Out-of-class use of English - Parents' meeting at daughter's nursery." To check the accuracy of the interpretation of the collected data, member checking was included; the participating students, as well as their ESOL teacher, were sent a summary of the findings by email and confirmed the interpretation accuracy. As it has been pointed out, through member checking, the researcher can use participant feedback in revising the results if the participants feel that their experience has been conveyed inaccurately (McKim, 2023). The data was organised into five themes: the enjoyment of studying grammar in the ESOL learning experience, enjoyment and anxiety of interacting with other students during the ESOL class, mental images of desired English-related selves in the future, the use of English with classmates in the ESOL classroom, and the use of English in the learning experience outside the ESOL classroom.

RESULTS

The Enjoyment of Studying Grammar in the ESOL Learning Experience

Yasumi liked learning grammar in the classroom because she felt that such activities were helping her to use it more accurately outside the classroom, in her everyday life. Yasumi reported: "I should correct my grammar after learning (...) these activities" (Interview 2). The lesson observations revealed that she gave correct answers whenever the teacher nominated her. Yasumi's enjoyment of grammar was also reflected in her interview comment that, in the post-lesson student feedback after every class, she tried to use the new grammar and vocabulary in her comments. Moreover, Yasumi liked the fact that her teacher uploaded the slides on Moodle after the lessons because she could take notes based on the slides (the teacher was using PowerPoint to teach such lessons).

Miguel also enjoyed grammar and reported that he was very good at these kinds of exercises. During one of the lessons observed, he was actively engaged in pair work focused on the future continuous, where the students were using this tense to discuss the question 'How will we be living in 20 years' time?'. Miguel's enjoyment of grammar was also revealed by Jill: "He

does really like doing grammar. And that's because he is good at it." He enjoyed grammar-focused group work in the classroom since he reportedly felt that, when he explained grammar to others, he reinforced his own knowledge. Moreover, when his explanation was wrong and his team members pointed it out, that constituted an opportunity for him to think more deeply about grammar: "that self-thinking is very good process for learning." (Interview 2)

Miguel also enjoyed the independent study of grammar, on topics of his own choice. Every week, he emailed his teacher questions on grammar-related aspects which confused him, and he wrote down her answers when she replied:

Because I did a list of the confusing words or grammar and... and she was answering me. So I... I made like a book where I copy the question and her answers. So when I review again, my grammar's review, I know 'OK'. Because normally when I stop to study in three weeks later I say 'Oh, what you say...'. So at least I have something written. And I can check: 'Ok, yes, the things I was thinking, yes, it's correct.' (Interview 2)

His enjoyment of studying grammar on his own was also emphasised by his teacher:

He... he emails me at least twice a week with lots of questions about every bit of grammar you can ever imagine to think about. With just: 'Can you give me the answers to these questions?' (...) Not related to what we've been doing in the lessons. Just his own learning.

Miguel's enjoyment of grammar was also linked to his perception of himself as a logical learner, who liked learning through rules. This was also implied by his teacher, who stated that Miguel was interested in how grammar forms. His enjoyment of receiving explanation and clarification from the teacher was also 'observed' during a lesson, when Miguel had stood up and had gone to his teacher to ask a question. When this episode was discussed in the interviews, Miguel clarified that he had done a piece of writing, and the teacher had given him feedback. He had not understood why one of the connectors he had used was inaccurate, and he had decided to ask Jill for additional explanation in class.

Enjoyment and Anxiety of Interacting With Other Students During the ESOL Class

When talking about what she had liked in the classroom that term, Yasumi mentioned group work, such as activities in the form of games focused on pronunciation. Her enjoyment of interactive classroom activities was confirmed by Jill:

Although she's quiet and reticent, I think she does quite like pair work and group work, actually (...) I think she partly comes to give a bit of a... some communicative activity. You know, she's a mum, she's got her child and... I just think this is a bit for her.

Yasumi's liking of interactive activities was also reflected in her comments that her ideal English lesson would also include role-play tasks, which she believed would prepare her for real-life situations. In Yasumi's own words: "Because... to communicate with classmates is casual. But for example go to hospital or... somewhere officially place we have to speak more formal answer" (Interview 1).

As for Miguel, talking to his classmates was one of the aspects of the course that he particularly enjoyed. He believed that interacting with people of various nationalities was a valuable experience:

Because I think... for your personal experience is really nice to have contact with different kind of people. Even for different kind of nationalities, ages. Kind of things everyone do. Because everyone does different things. And... and feel we are together in the classroom, just everyone try to... to learn English. Is interesting. (Interview 1)

Jill's comments also suggested that he enjoyed communicating with other students in his ESOL class: she described him as "very engaging and engaged with other students" and added: "He likes talking and speaking." His enjoyment of speaking to his classmates was also reflected in the lesson observations; for instance, during a speaking activity done in small groups on the topic of the environment, Miguel contributed ideas to the discussion and laughed while working in his group.

In addition to enjoyment, Yasumi also experienced anxiety when interacting with classmates. She explained that she felt nervous in the English class when her interlocutors did not understand what she was trying to express because her English was inaccurate. To illustrate this, she gave the example of a grammar activity which had been part of a lesson on practicing conditional and future time clauses. The task required the completion of sentences such as ‘Don’t allow strangers into our house unless...’ and sharing these sentences with a partner. Yasumi stated: “But I couldn’t... I didn’t understand “unless” (...) So I made a sentence ‘You lock the door’” (Interview 1). As she pointed out, her partner had not understood what she had said. Yasumi added that she became aware of the mistake she had made when the teacher wrote an answer (a possible way of completing the sentence) on the board.

Jill also mentioned that speaking in pair or group work made Yasumi feel anxious:

I think she is nervous perhaps in pair work, group work, but she does her best to contribute. So I think her natural inclination is not to do that. But... she... she knows it’s the way to improve, so she does it. But I expect that does make her nervous.

As far as Miguel was concerned, he had had high levels of speaking anxiety in the past. Although his nervousness was still present when using English in class, it had reportedly diminished:

In the past even in class I was very aware ‘Oh, I cannot speak very good English’ even I was in the class to try to improve my English. Was a problem. And... no. Now, just I... When I compare with my classmates, I feel that I don’t have the same speaking level, so... (...) When I have to speak I’m a little aware about that, no [not] very afraid. (...) But always when I have to speak I think ‘Oh, I don’t speak very good. For my level.’ (Interview 1)

His perception that he did not speak well enough for his proficiency level may have been linked to the fact that he felt that, although he was very good at grammar exercises, he did not use his grammar knowledge when speaking. Miguel added: “If I have to write I know my English is better than if I have to... Maybe is because my mind is not quick for speaking. Even I do some really basic mistakes” (Interview 2).

Another possible explanation was the setting of very high standards. Jill reported: “I think he sets the standard really high for himself. Really high. I mean, he asks some very intricate questions, you know, about grammar, that you have to think about.” An additional reason why he perceived his speaking skills as not being good enough may have been that he could feel his Spanish accent when he spoke English. Miguel expressed his desire for a Phonetics course to be included as part of his ESOL classes to help him improve his accent. He reported that sometimes people did not understand him because of his accent.

Mental Images of Desired English-Related Selves in the Future

Yasumi saw herself working as a nurse in the UK in the future: “Professionally... I hope I can be a nurse. UK nurse” (Interview 1). Her teacher had also referred to Yasumi’s desire to work as a nurse in the UK when she talked about Yasumi’s motivation to learn English:

So her motivation for learning is: she is a nurse and she wants to try and get... go back to college, but she has to have IELTS 6.5 or something. So she is desperate to try and get her IELTS so that she can... get... do her conversion course or whatever, so...

Despite this vision of herself as a nurse in Britain, Yasumi mentioned some barriers in her learning: time management and concentration. She reported that she tried her best to study, but she was also a mother and a housewife, and managing her study time was therefore quite difficult. Although she made time for her homework, she wanted to have more time for independent study. When she reported that concentration was also an issue and was asked why she felt that she could not concentrate enough on her studies, she stated: “Always thinking about: What should I make for dinner? or what time should we leave tomorrow? Thinking many things” (Interview 1).

The obstacles of lack of time and concentration also appeared to be linked to moving house. Yasumi stated that this life event had hindered her motivation to study on her own at home that term. As she pointed out, “moving the house... ahm... you have to think about

lots of things, not only moving the stuff’ (Interview 2). As that was a stressful experience for Yasumi, at the weekend she met her friends, who were also Japanese, to relax.

Miguel envisioned doing a master’s in English in Cybersecurity in the future. While in the first interview he stated that he had decided to do a master’s online at a British university, in the second interview he reported that he wanted to apply for a master’s in Finland, taught fully in English. Miguel stated that, to be accepted, he needed an excellent IELTS score:

(...) you know for the process English for them is very important. So they rank. If you got in IELTS 6 and another person 7 [unintelligible speech]. (...) Even if I got 7, that is good, but someone got 8, they prefer 8 over me. Just for the English. So I... that is very important in English. (Interview 2)

Moreover, he was aware that writing a dissertation in English was difficult and that he thus needed to continue to work on improving his language skills. His teacher thought that his vision of himself doing a master’s in English in his field motivated Miguel the most: “he would do a master’s, he would do artificial intelligence and software, which is his thing, in English.”

Miguel imagined himself still working in the United Kingdom after the completion of his master’s. He reportedly felt that the UK was his home and added: “(...) when I go to my country of course I enjoy, but when I return and I land here I feel ‘OK, I arrive at home’” (Interview 1). This vision of continuing to do his job in Britain was also reflected in Jill’s comments: “I think he misses Colombia, but I don’t think... I think he knows there’s more opportunities for him here.”

Despite the presence of this self-image of studying on a master’s programme in English, Miguel felt that there were certain obstacles in his learning; for instance, being very busy at work during certain periods of time prevented him from fully engaging with the course. Another barrier had been feeling poorly, which had prevented him from attending some of his classes; nevertheless, he had managed to catch up with his lessons at home. During such difficult times, Miguel motivated himself by telling himself not to give up, to continue to attend and to complete his course.

The use of English With Classmates in the ESOL Classroom

Yasumi was rather quiet when observed during the lessons and was mostly a listener in pair work. She did not contribute much to pair work and seemed to prefer to listen to her partner’s contributions. One of the grammar activities observed focused on the second conditional. It was a speaking task which asked the learners to discuss the question ‘What would you do if you won the lottery?’ with a partner. Yasumi did not say much and did not seem very willing to communicate with her partner. When it was pointed out that she was usually quiet in pair work, she stated that she wanted to communicate, but first she mentally constructed the sentence in English: “I want to talk but... still making sentence in my brain first” (Interview 2). The fact that she was mentally translating what she wanted to say from Japanese into English had also been mentioned before: “I need time to... speak. ‘Cause I think I’m translating in my brain. English and Japanese. I think Japanese idea and translate English” (Interview 1). Yasumi felt that she did not have enough time to make contributions in interactive tasks because of this mental translation process and thus stayed silent.

When observed in class, Miguel was engaged in speaking activities. One such activity consisted of cards with questions in the second conditional that the students asked each other in pairs. Miguel was smiling during the activity and seemed to enjoy answering the questions and listening to his partner. During one of the interviews, he reported that he enjoyed teamwork in his English class. He talked about an interactive classroom task he had found particularly useful that term, namely an activity which involved working in teams to match phrasal verbs with their meanings and use the verbs in sentences:

So that help me a lot because phrasal verbs sometimes you read the meaning but when you see the sentences is... I don’t know, is confusing. So with several examples because... I don’t know. Every team have to write five sentences, so you have at the end twenty for the same phrasal verbs, five. So I found very useful that exercise. And is in a team. (Interview 2)

In the second interview Miguel stated that he had liked the fact that he had felt more confident and comfortable about in-class speaking that term. He reported that during his first class he was embarrassed when speaking because he was worried about what other students might think of him.

The use of English in the Learning Experience Outside the ESOL Classroom

Yasumi stated that she used the new vocabulary she was learning in her ESOL course with her husband and her mother-in-law once a week. The day before the first interview, Yasumi had attended a parents' meeting over morning coffee at her daughter's nursery. She confessed that she had been quiet throughout: "They're talking very, very fast and... no chance to... talk." When asked how she had felt, she replied: "I give up." However, in the second interview, Yasumi mentioned a consultation with her daughter's teacher at the nursery, where she felt that the communication had been successful. In Yasumi's own words: "We have... consultation about my daughter. So she explain how is she in the school. (...) And I explain to the teacher how is she doing in the house, or outside of the school. She understand and I understand." She stated that she had felt relieved because one and a half years before she had asked her mother-in-law to come to the consultation with her: "I thought it's important to communicate perfectly to the teacher, but now I can relax to talk to the teacher."

As for Miguel, in the first interview he reported that his perceived inability to express himself at the same level that he could understand others made him feel somewhat isolated at the workplace. All of Miguel's colleagues were British. Although he had tried to interact with his colleagues during breaks, he felt that he could not truly connect with them because of his perceived struggle to convey his ideas clearly:

(...). ... they [work colleagues] are really friendly, but for example we are going... we are going for a break to drink coffee. (...). At work. I did in the beginning with them. But I was in the table, on the table with them, they were speaking, but I don't find like the point how I can integrate with them because when I start to speak maybe they don't understand. (...). So in the end I stopped going to have a coffee

with them because I have the feeling 'Oh, I'm in the wrong place.' (...). I was not participating, no anything. (Interview 1)

Miguel reported that he was "a little afraid" when using English at work because he felt that it was at a "different level" than when using the language in his English class or in situations such as being at the airport. He felt that his speaking skills were not good enough, and that made him feel insecure when talking to his co-workers. Miguel's perception that his speaking was not good enough when interacting with colleagues was also reflected in his comment that he mentally repeated many times what he wanted to say in meetings held at his workplace.

DISCUSSION

The positive emotion of enjoyment was linked to various elements in the learners' environment such as grammar and interactive class work. Yasumi's enjoyment of grammar activities was related to the perceived benefits of grammar accuracy outside the classroom. Yasumi particularly enjoyed group games on pronunciation. Pair work made her feel anxious when she was not able to convey her ideas clearly and her partner was thus unable to understand her. This is in line with Dewaele et al.'s (2018) study, which uncovered a link between anxiety and relative standing among peers. It also converges with King and Smith's (2017) findings regarding social anxiety in Japanese learners of English. As for Miguel, enjoyment of grammar was linked to his perception of himself as a logical learner, his high level of competence, relevant discussions with classmates, and the opportunity to ask his teacher questions on unclear or complex aspects he was studying independently. Miguel's case confirms the results of the study by Wang et al. (2024) regarding the link between enjoyment and independent learning. Not only does self-study of grammar provide empirical support for Botes et al.'s (2021) second factor of the foreign language enjoyment scale – personal or private enjoyment of language learning – but it also highlights the role of the teacher-student relationship in shaping motivation, pointed out by Moskowitz et al. (2022). Miguel enjoyed speaking to his classmates as it gave him a sense of belonging to a community - that of

English language learners – and was perceived as an interesting personal experience. He liked discussing grammar with his peers not only because it helped him consolidate his knowledge through the explanation provided but also because, when his explanation was inaccurate and that was pointed out by classmates, the experience contributed to a more in-depth understanding of grammar. This empirically supports the third factor in the foreign language enjoyment scale: social enjoyment. It also converges with Ducker (2022), who found that having a reason to engage (desire to communicate), which included communication goals such as desires to develop personal relationships, to share topical information or to personally challenge themselves, shaped the relationship between WTC and learner talk.

Miguel's perception that his speaking skills were lower than his peers' made him experience a certain level of anxiety. Such perception appeared to be related to his self-reported inability to apply grammar to communicative situations, to the setting of high standards and to his L1 accent. While de Saint Léger and Storch (2009) found that grammatical knowledge and pronunciation/accent were some of the perceived strengths in their participants' oral proficiency, Miguel did not perceive grammatical knowledge and accent as speaking-related strengths. Both foreign language enjoyment and anxiety were generated by in-class communicative interaction with peers, showing that "anxiety co-exists with positive emotions to varying degrees" (Gregersen, 2020, p. 67). Although Yasumi reportedly enjoyed interactive activities in class, she was quiet when observed during such tasks. Her lack of active participation in such classroom activities due to the perception of lacking time to mentally translate her ideas into English converges with de Saint Léger and Storch's (2009) finding that participation in speaking activities can be hampered by the high level of cognitive processing needed when thinking 'on the spot', in real time. Yasumi's silent behaviour during such tasks is also in line with Maher and King (2020), who found silence to be linked to cognitive processing and fear of negative evaluation by classmates.

Yasumi and Miguel had visions of future selves – the ideal L2 self – which were essentially linked to the use of English: being a nurse in the United Kingdom and completing a postgraduate programme of study in English. The results of these case studies have confirmed Dörnyei's

(2009) assertion that, when learning an L2, the learners' wish to bridge the gap between their current and ideal selves gives the ideal L2 self motivating power. In Miguel's case, his ideal L2 self may have also been linked to his positive self-talk, which had motivational force during difficult times. Both participants seemed determined to succeed in developing their language learning skills in order to materialise their ideal L2 selves. The findings have thus shown that determination to succeed is a source of motivation in language learning, which is in line with Méndez López and Fabela Cárdenas's (2014) results. Moreover, both cases reflect the findings of Magid's (2011) and Islam et al.'s (2013) studies according to which the Ideal L2 Self is a powerful predictor of effort in the language learning experience. Yasumi's case does not appear to align with Sidaway's (2021) results regarding the power of the ought-to L2 self in motivating female ESOL learners; it was the ideal L2 self which seemed to powerfully shape this student's motivation to learn English. The two components of what Dörnyei (2009) calls the L2 learning experience which seemed to motivate Miguel the most were the teacher's impact, particularly in terms of feedback and support provided in the independent study of grammar, and the peer group in his ESOL class. However, in Yasumi's case, the L2 learning experience did not appear to play an especially important role in her motivation despite her reported enjoyment of certain aspects of the ESOL course.

Although Yasumi enjoyed grammar and interactive class work, her enjoyment was not reflected in her classroom participation in pair work even when the focus was on speaking activities aimed at consolidating or reviewing grammar. Anxiety related to her partner's possible lack of understanding of her message may have thus been more intense than the enjoyment experienced. As for her use of English outside the classroom, Yasumi did not seem willing to communicate in certain everyday life situations despite the fact that using English played a vital role in her vision of her ideal L2 self (being a nurse). A possible reason for this may be that she felt more comfortable in a communicative context in which there was one interlocutor (her daughter's teacher) than in a situation in which she was surrounded by several people (other parents), who were talking at a fast pace. Another reason why the consultation with her daughter's teacher constituted

effective real-world communication may be Yasumi and the teacher's mutual goal of successfully communicating with each other. It appeared to be a communicative situation in which both parties were equally invested in negotiating meaning.

As for Miguel, while the perception of his grammar and accent did not seem to hinder his WTC with classmates, it appeared to make him unwilling to communicate with colleagues at the workplace. Although his mental image of himself in the future involved using English for a master's degree, Miguel had stopped interacting with his colleagues during breaks. The anxiety triggered by his perception that his speaking skills did not allow him to make himself understood during such communicative interactions seemed to be linked to a lack of participation and the decision to no longer join his colleagues for coffee breaks. In the classroom context, enjoyment of talking to other language learners and the desire to materialise his vision of doing a master's in English prevailed over speaking anxiety and shaped WTC positively. However, in the work context, speaking anxiety seemed to dominate in interactions with others and hindered WTC despite the determination to turn his ideal L2 self into reality. This might have been due to the setting of higher standards in terms of speaking accuracy in a professional context, especially one in which all peers were native speakers of English. Miguel may have experienced not only competence-based anxiety, linked to how his co-workers may evaluate his speaking skills, but also what Stroud and Wee (2006) refer to as identity-based anxiety, related to how his colleagues may perceive him. The findings emerging from Yasumi and Miguel's data align with MacIntyre, Burns and Jessome's (2011) research, showing that L2 WTC can vary widely depending on the situation the learners are in.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the intricate interplay between enjoyment and anxiety, motivation, and WTC in two adults learning English in the ESOL context in the United Kingdom. It was found that enjoyment was experienced in relation to grammar learning and interactive classroom activities and that interacting with peers in class and with certain people out-of-class triggered anxiety. The presence of L2-related mental images appeared to motivate both participants in their learning experience. While one of the

participating students showed high WTC in the classroom context, he was rather unwilling to communicate or socialise at the workplace. As for the other participating learner, her WTC in class was hindered by time pressure in terms of her mentally translating her ideas. The interlocutors and the discussion pace seemed to play a crucial role in her WTC in out-of-class conversations. This study used two data collection methods. Future research should also include other means of collecting data, such as reflective journals, for further triangulation and to provide richer insight into clusters of psychological dimensions of the language learning experience. As the interviews in the present study were conducted in English rather than in the students' L1, this may have affected to a certain extent the participating learners' ability to describe their emotions. Thus, where possible, future studies should employ interviews in the participating learners' L1 to allow for a more nuanced verbal expression of emotions. The length of time over which the research project was carried out was an academic term. Research conducted over a longer period of time, such as a whole academic year, is likely to capture more fully the dynamism in learners' emotions, motivation and WTC. Furthermore, action research should be carried out for teachers to use the results of such interventions in order to "deliberately change, modify and improve practices" (Burns, 2005, p. 60) in the language classroom.

The study has shown that, by being approachable and responsive to learners' individuality and by supporting learners' autonomy, teachers can nurture students' engagement with them (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020) and can cultivate the positive emotion of foreign language enjoyment. Another way in which teachers can enhance their learners' enjoyment is by creating an in-class atmosphere where students can build meaningful connections with each other and have a sense of belonging; in turn, this can contribute to a boost in the learners' WTC in class. Since anxiety was experienced by both participants, the study has emphasised that teachers should work towards addressing students' anxiety-provoking beliefs and misconceptions and towards diminishing their fear of negative evaluation to reduce learners' foreign language anxiety and enhance their self-confidence (Alrabai, 2015). As mental images of future L2-related selves have the power to motivate learners, students should be provided with opportunities

to share and discuss their ideal L2 selves in class and to reflect on the steps they should take to materialise these selves for their motivation to be strengthened.

Authors' Contributions

Liana Pavelescu designed the study, collected, analysed and interpreted the data, and drafted and revised the article.

Declaration of GenAI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The author confirms that GenAI has not been used for data generation, data collection, data analysis or interpretation, to draft or write any part of the article, to generate research ideas or assist in research design, or for language editing.

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the educational institution where it was conducted. All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrollment and data collection in the study.

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