

### **Effects of Attributions and Task Values on Foreign Language Use Anxiety**

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#### **Abstract**

Using the expectancy-value theory of anxiety and attribution theory, learners' perceptions about controllability and task values regarding language learning were examined in order to explore how they affected foreign language use anxiety. Survey data results from 226 international teaching assistants revealed that first, learners who believed effort was the most important factor determining communication competence and outcomes on the TOEFL experienced a high level of foreign language use anxiety. Second, task values (i.e., interest, importance, utility) of language learning and foreign language use anxiety were related but, not in a straightforward fashion. As the perceived levels of importance of language learning increased levels of foreign language use anxiety also heightened. However, interest and utility were negatively related to foreign language use anxiety. The implications of these findings for increasing our understanding of perceptions, motivation, anxiety, as well as practical issues are discussed.

#### **Introduction**

Studies in foreign language anxiety have grown over the last two decades in the field of second/foreign language acquisition. Yet, relatively little research has focused on perceptions as they relate to foreign language anxiety. Information regarding learner perceptions of ability, expectations regarding successful second language acquisition, previous learning experiences, and the importance of learning and perceptions of control, among others, represent an important aspect. Knowledge about these factors may lead to a clearer understanding of anxiety, in general, and perceptions, in particular.

These issues are embraced in the models of the expectancy-value theory of anxiety (Pekrun, 1992) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1986). Pekrun's model suggests that anxiety is created by the combination of learners' high expectations about the outcome of uncontrolled events and high values placed on the outcome of these events. In a similar vein, attribution theory states that when learners believe that they have control over the outcome of an event, they are more motivated to continue efforts at learning than when they do not.

These theoretical perspectives suggest two major questions to be addressed in this study. The first question explores the relationship between the value placed on an outcome and the level of foreign language use anxiety. Expectancy-value theory suggests that foreign language use anxiety should increase as the value of the outcome goes up. In other words, the prospect of failing at a task that learners regard as important is more likely to create anxiety than failure at a relatively unimportant task.

Second, learners' perceptions about their ability to control the outcomes are also central to understanding motivation and anxiety. Attribution theory suggests that individuals are more likely to persist in an activity if they believe their efforts can meaningfully affect the outcome in the desired direction.

Both of these questions represent a step forward in the understanding of motivation and anxiety. The relation, if any, between values and foreign language anxiety has not yet been established through empirical study. Answers to this question will provide an important insight into the mechanism of

second language acquisition. Similarly, how learners view the effectiveness of their efforts in acquiring a second language will shed light on how the perceptions related to effort affect motivation. Taken together, these questions will help to provide an algorithm for the study of anxiety and achievement in second language acquisition. Using the perspectives of the expectancy-value theory of anxiety and attribution theory, it is possible to begin a systematic examination of the above questions.

Although Weiner (1986) and Pekrun (1992) have different empirical foci, there is a relationship between the two research strands. Both deal with learner perceptions of the situation rather than "actual realities". Unless a learner believes the outcome is under his/her own control (Weiner), there is no particular belief that individual action will produce required results (Pekrun). Therefore, we can expect that anxiety should be relatively low when learners perceive an internal locus of control.

If learners believe they have control over a situation, then they are more likely to take actions. Practically, this means that if learners believe their actions will result in successful second language learning, then they will study more, practice more, and presumably, learn more. On the other hand, students who do not believe they can control outcomes will be less likely to pursue actions. These students will, presumably, study less, practice less, and learn less. These students may experience anxiety but, it is not the anxiety, per se, that causes the failure in learning. It is the perceptions/beliefs related to the inability to take effective actions that determine both the likelihood of anxiety and the failure to take action.

The purpose of this study, then, is to use information about individuals' perceptions of the importance of learning a foreign language and beliefs about the ability to affect the desired outcome to determine their relationship to the anxiety these learners feel. This study attempts to frame these variables within two well established social psychological traditions in the hopes of developing a clearer understanding of factors related to motivation as well as anxiety.

### **Expectancy-Value Theory of Anxiety**

Expectancy-value theory has often been used to explain human behavior. Its basic assumption is that people determine their behavior depending on the perceived likelihood that a behavior will lead to a desired goal and on the value of that goal for the individual. A greater the motivational tendency to engage in a given behavior exists when there is a greater belief that the goal will be obtained and a higher the value of that goal (Weiner, 1986, 1991a, 1991b).

Pekrun (1984, 1985, 1988, 1992) has taken this theory a step further and used expectancy-value theory to develop an algorithm of anxiety. He suggests that anxiety is basically a product of the expectancies of negative future outcomes and the subjective value of these outcomes. Hence, anxiety occurs when learners expect negative events and when they highly value the outcome of those events. This function is a combination of total expectancy and total valence.

Total *expectancies* are composed of three components: (1) a belief that a negative situation will occur (situation-outcome expectancies); (2) a belief that preventative actions can be taken (action-control expectancies); and (3) a belief that such action will be effective (action-outcome expectancies). Total *valences*, on the other hand, are comprised of two components: (1) subjective evaluations (intrinsic valences of outcomes) and (2) others' evaluations about self (extrinsic valences of outcomes). Total *expectancy* is assumed to be high when the situation-outcome expectations are high but the action-control expectations and/or action-outcome expectations are low. Total *valence* is high when the combination of the appraisal of the intrinsic and extrinsic valences of outcomes is high. In this model, anxiety is believed to be higher when both expectancy and valence are high, but only if negative situation-outcome expectancies result in negative valences of the outcome. Negative expectancies and valences may be regarded as primary determinants of anxiety (by mediating relations between anxiety and achievement and the influence of social factors on anxiety).

Indeed, studies have shown that one of the causes of foreign language anxiety comes from negative expectations that learners have carried over from previous negative learning experiences. Adult learners experience anxiety because of the negative expectations about the outcomes of their learning

(cf. Campbell and Ortiz, 1991; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Price, 1991; Samimy and Rardin 1994). However, as Young (1994) notes, expectations are related to anxiety only if they are accompanied by actual negative consequences.

Although these studies did not explicitly use expectancy-value theory as their theoretical frame, they indeed support the argument that negative expectations affect higher levels of anxiety. Anxiety occurs when learners face a negative situation with a belief that they cannot alter the situation and when they do not believe that they will be able to prevent negative situations.

Gardner and his colleagues have extensively examined the role of values in language learning (Clément, Gardner, and Symthe, 1977; Desrochers and Gardner, 1981; Gardner and Lysynchuk, 1990; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991; Gardner and Smythe, 1981; Glikman, Gardner, and Smythe, 1982; Tremblay, Goldberg, and Gardner, 1995). They identified two types of motivation orientation: integrative and instrumental. An integrative orientation refers to the enjoyment of learning or an interest in the target language culture as the reasons to study. The instrumental orientation, however, indicates learners pursue a language for utilitarian reasons including advancing in school or career.

Motivational intensity, according to Gardner (1985b), plays a more important role than motivational orientations. Researchers (Gardner, 2001; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991) have developed the idea of “integrative motivation” and suggest that such a motivation includes not just reasons for learning a language but also attitudes toward the target language community and learning situations. This notion of motivation encompasses a more multifaceted approach including both valences and attitudes (Lim, 2003).

Eccles and her colleagues (1983) have developed a comprehensive model of task values in terms of four components: intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value, and cost. Intrinsic value refers to the degree of personal interest or enjoyment obtained from performing the activity. Attainment value refers to the personal importance of doing well on the task. Utility value is determined by how well a task serves the individuals’ future goals while cost is defined by the cognitive and emotional effort involved with a task.

These components are similar to the construct of motivation suggested by other researchers (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1981). Intrinsic value captures a construct similar to intrinsic motivation. This value relates to the pure satisfaction derived from the task. Attainment and utility values are tantamount to the construct of extrinsic motivation in the sense that both values represent external reasons for engaging in a task.

Research has shown that values affect emotions (Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Legget, 1988; Elliot, 1997; Matsumoto and Sanders, 1988; Nicholls, 1983). Extrinsic motivation tends to result in negative emotions such as anxiety and shame, particularly in failure situations. Conversely, intrinsic motivation tends to yield more positive emotions leading to an increase in effort on the part of the learners. This cycle of positive perceptions and increased effort lead to positive emotions for learners (Lim, 2003).

Taken together, the research suggests that individuals’ perceptions of the consequences and the evaluation of those consequences are crucial in determining the value of the task. Presumably, individuals who feel others’ views will not have negative effects on them or who do not care about those views, will experience little, if any, anxiety. It seems reasonable to conclude that high values regarding outcome are related to the level of foreign language anxiety.

### **Attribution Theory**

Rotter (1954) formulated an expectancy-value theory of behavior from the perspective of social learning. He claims that “the unit of investigation for the study of personality is the interaction of the individual and his meaningful environment” (p.85). Individuals’ perceptions are not just an individual characteristic but also the product of social interaction. Expectations that individuals have will reflect their previous learning experiences.

As a determinant of the expectancy of success, Rotter (1966) coined the term “locus of control.” This term deals with whether a potential reinforcer can be attained through one’s own actions or follows from luck or other uncontrollable external factors. Perceived locus of control influences the individual’s specific goal expectancy in any given situation (Weiner, 1992).

The findings of Rotter and his colleagues (cf. Rotter, 1975; Rotter, Chance, and Phares, 1972; Rotter and Hochreich, 1975; Rotter, Seeman, and Liverant, 1962) generally suggest that when individuals possess a sense of internal control, they increase the perceived probability of future successes after a successful outcome and decrease it after a failure. How much effort individuals put forth depends on their previous experiences which have shaped their perceptions of future success. On the other hand, if individuals believe outcomes are beyond their control, expectancies about future outcomes appear to be relatively unaffected by previous experience.

In a similar vein, attribution theory has focused on the expectancy of success and failure (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965; Kelly, 1967; Weiner, 1985, 1986). The basic tenant is that learners try to understand the causes of their success and failures and choose their subsequent behaviors according to their perceptions of the earlier causes.

According to Weiner (1986), attributions of cause may be related to locus, stability, or controllability. Locus refers to the notion of whether the individual has control or not (i.e., internal versus external); stability to the amount of fluctuation over time; and controllability to the degree of control the individual actually possesses. Attributions of failure to stable and uncontrollable factors (e.g., low ability) are less likely to result in continued effort. On the other hand, attributions of failure to a lack of effort (controllable factors) are likely to lead to greater sustained efforts over time.

Motivation is multi-faceted and complex. The recognition of the importance of causal attributions has been recognized in some studies in language acquisition (cf. Dörnyei, 1990; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Williams and Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden, and Al-Baharna, 2001). However, no direct research has been conducted to examine causal attributions in relation to foreign language anxiety. Nevertheless, much data support the evidence that locus of control affects anxiety. In clinical studies, results have shown that a lower sense of control was correlated with increased anxiety (Castaneda, McCandless, and Palmermo, 1956; Finch and Nelson, 1974; McCauley, Mitchell, Burke, and Moss, 1988; cited in Barlow, Chorpita, and Turovsky, 1996; Nunn, 1988). The general results suggest that the more people feel they are victims of events outside their control, the more anxious they become.

Merging the frameworks of expectancy-value theory (Pekrun, 1992) and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985, 1986), it is possible to see that both emphasize the individual’s perceptions. Beliefs about what causes events (attributions) and the subjective importance of these events (perceptions) to individuals operate together to create a sense of control or lack of control, which then determines both the level of anxiety a person may feel as well as the persistence of his/her efforts in future situations. Neither alone is sufficient to give us a complete picture of how motivation and anxiety operate. By using these two frameworks and looking at motivation and anxiety through this lens, we may be better able to understand this complicated relationship in second language acquisition.

## **Hypotheses**

Based on the above discussion, two hypotheses were tested in this study. First, it is hypothesized that high task value is related to a high level of foreign language use anxiety. Those who have high values about outcomes will experience a higher level of foreign language use anxiety than those who have lower values. Second, it is hypothesized that foreign language learners' perceptions of the outcome are related to their level of foreign language use anxiety. Those who attribute their outcomes externally have a higher level of anxiety than those who attribute their consequences of the events internally controllable variables.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

A sample was recruited from the participants of the workshop for the International Teaching Assistants or Assistant Instructors (hereafter referred to as ITAs) at a large southwestern university in August, 2001. A total of 226 out of 365 attendees participated voluntarily in the study. They fell between the ages of 21 and 38. Of the respondents, 154 were male and 70 were female. The participants came from 32 different countries: 99 from India, 31 from Republic of Korea, 19 from People's Republic of China, 12 from Mexico, and 63 from a variety of other countries. One hundred seventy two of the participants had assistantships for the coming semester.

### **Instruments**

This study used a written survey incorporating four scales to assess the value of learning English for respondents, foreign language use anxiety, and their attributions regarding language learning. These four scales can be found in Appendices A, B, C, and D. A description of each instrument and how the instrument operationalized these variables is given below.

### **Task Values**

To measure task values, a seven item Likert-scale based on the research of Eccles and Wigfield (1995) and Feather (1988) was used. This "Task Values" scale (Appendix A) measures the perceived importance of learning English for the respondent. Items were summed to get a total score for the task values. (Item 2 was inverted when added to the total). Higher values indicated greater levels of importance attached to the task of learning English.

### **Foreign Language Use Anxiety**

To measure foreign language use anxiety, a seven-point Likert-scale was created by modifying Gardner's (1985a) "French Use Anxiety" Scale. The resultant "English Use Anxiety" scale uses Gardner's eight items but replaced the word "French" with "English" (Appendix B). An additional two items were included specifically to measure feelings of concern about using English in the classroom as an ITA. Scores were summed to give a single value describing respondent anxiety. Higher scores indicate greater levels of foreign language use anxiety.

### **Perceived Locus of Control and Attribution**

Two instruments were used to measure attributions for the causes of outcome success and failure. First, Rotter's (1966) "Internal-External Locus of Control Scale" (I-E scale) was used. This instrument measures a generalized expectancy and is commonly used for cross-cultural personality tests in psychology (Rotter, 1966, 1990). Rotter's (1966) I-E scale was shortened to a 15-item dichotomous forced-choice instrument<sup>4</sup>(Appendix C). External locus of control items measure the belief that the result of the action is due to luck, chance, fate, or is under the control of powerful others. Internal locus of control items measure whether the person perceives that the outcome is contingent upon his/her own behavior or relatively permanent characteristics (Rotter, 1966). In Appendix C, the underline preceding the external choice in every item is italicized for reference. An individual who scored 51% or more of the choices as internal was assigned to the "internal locus of control" category and those who had less than 50% were determined to have an "external locus of control."

A second instrument was included in order to measure the individuals' beliefs about language learning in specific situations. Weiner's (1986, 2000) dimensions of attribution were utilized (i.e., effort, ability, task difficulty, luck) in the questions created for the present study. Three items measure individual perceptions of the cause attributed to English language learning (Appendix D). Based on Weiner's attribution theory (1986, 2000), these perceptions were examined with the respect to internal and external factors: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Three major language learning tasks were focused on: communicative competence, grades, and TOEFL scores. Each question had a blank section so that participants could write other opinions.

Respondents reported a percentage value based on the amount they believed each item accounted

for successful task completion. The percentages for each item were totaled accordingly in each category (i.e., ability, effort, task difficulty, luck) for the three different learning tasks. Then, the scores for each category were added and divided by three to represent total scores of effort, ability, task difficulty, and luck.

## Results

### *Relationships between Task Values and Foreign Language Use Anxiety*

The first research question concerns the relationship between the values assigned to foreign language learning (task values) and foreign language use anxiety (FLUA). Specifically, this research posed the following hypothesis:

[1] There is a positive relationship between task values and foreign language use anxiety.

Table 1 shows that there is a statistically significant but negative relationship between Task Values and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA) with a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.212$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). The data show that as task values increase, foreign language use anxiety goes down. In other words, participants who place a high value on English language learning tend to have a lower level of foreign language use anxiety, contrary to predictions.

Table 1. Correlation Results: Task Values and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA)

		Task Values	FLUA
Task Values	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.212**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.001
	N	217	198**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (1-tailed).

This result runs counter to much previous research. One possible explanation lies in the way in which the independent variable was operationalized. Task values were divided into two components: intrinsic value and extrinsic value. Intrinsic value refers to the “pure” interest of the individual with no particular pressure for rewards beyond the self. On the other hand, extrinsic value refers to a motivation grounded in externally mediated rewards. Extrinsic value can be composed of both importance and utility. In the task value scale, three items asked about importance (Appendix A, items 3 to 5) and two questions related to utility (Appendix A, items 6 to 7). Table 2 reports the relationship between foreign language use anxiety (FLUA) and the three different dimensions of task values. UTILITY represents the utility dimension of extrinsic value, IMPORTANCE is the importance dimension of extrinsic value, and INTEREST represents intrinsic value.

Table 2. Zero Order Partial

	FLUA	IMPORTANCE	INTEREST	UTILITY
FLUA	1.0000 ( 0) P= .	.1025 ( 196) P= .151	-.2872 ( 196) P= .000	-.2863 ( 196) P= .000
IMPORTANCE		1.0000 ( 0) P= .	.0645 ( 196) P= .366	.1481 ( 196) P= .037
INTREREST			1.0000 ( 0) P= .	.2597 ( 196) P= .000
UNTILITY				1.0000 ( 0) P= .

(Coefficient / (D.F.) / 2-tailed Significance)

An examination of the data (Table 2) shows interest and utility to be negatively correlated with foreign language use anxiety while no relationship exists between importance and foreign language use

anxiety. However, the table also shows that the independent variables are related to each other. Further, the relationships are not all in the same direction. This means that it is possible that the zero order effects are artificially attenuated. In order to better examine the relationship between task values and foreign language use anxiety, a partial correlation analysis between the dependent variable, FLUA, and the independent variables, UTILITY, IMPORTANCE, and INTEREST, was conducted.

The results of the partial correlation analysis are given in Table 3. Here the data show that FLUA is significantly correlated to all types of task values. The  $r$  value for FLUA and INTEREST is  $-0.237$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). This is consistent with the results for the original correlation which included all dimensions of task values. The  $r$  value for FLUA and IMPORTANCE is  $0.1636$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests a positive relationship between the variables as was originally suggested in the hypothesis. The  $r$  value between FLUA and UTILITY is  $-0.2505$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). Again, the relationship exists but, opposite the direction predicted.

Table 3. Partial Correlation Coefficients

Controlling for..	UTILITY	UTILITY	IMPORTANCE
	INTEREST	IMPORTANCE	UTILITY
FLUA	-.2371 ( 194) P= .001	.1636 ( 194) P= .022	-.2505 ( 194) P= .000

(Coefficient / (D.F.) / 2-tailed Significance)

Taken together, the results of these analyses show that task values are related to foreign language use anxiety. However, the relationship is not as clear as originally predicted. First, a positive relationship exists between FLUA and IMPORTANCE (an extrinsic dimension of task values). If ITAs viewed learning English as important for their career or if they perceived that others believed it to be important, respondents were more likely to have high levels of anxiety about using English. However, though significant, it accounts for only 2.7% of the variation in FLUA. On the other hand, FLUA is significantly, albeit negatively, related to UTILITY (an extrinsic dimension) and INTEREST. This means that as the perceived usefulness of English increased, language use anxiety got lower. Similarly, the more interest they had in learning English, the less anxious they were about using it. These effects are about equally strong. INTREREST accounts for approximately 5.6% and UTILITY 6.3% of the variation in FLUA. Together the three variables account for approximately 15% of the variation. Possible reasons for this will be discussed later.

### **Effects of Attributions and Foreign Language Use Anxiety**

The second major research question examined the effect of perceptions about language learning on foreign language use anxiety. It was hypothesized that the perceptions that learners had about the cause of their success or failure in foreign language learning were related to their levels of foreign language use anxiety. More specifically, learners who attributed their achievement in English learning to uncontrollable variables were predicted to have a higher level of foreign language use anxiety than those who attributed achievement to controllable variables.

Learners' perceptions about English language learning were measured using two scales: Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (I-E scale) and a scale developed specifically for this study based on the work of Weiner (1986, 2000). Rotter's I-E scale was used to measure the general tendency of locus of control in general life events. The Weiner-based scale measures learners' specific attribution types in English language learning. Specifically, this scale measures how learners attribute their success in language learning to internal and external factors including effort, ability, luck, and task difficulty. Effort is regarded as a controllable factor where all other factors are seen as uncontrollable. Analysis of the relationship between FLUA and perceptions are presented below.

### **Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control and Foreign Language Use Anxiety**

The specific hypothesis for this research question is

[2] Foreign language use anxiety (FLUA) scores will be higher for individuals with scores of “2” (external/uncontrollable) than for individuals with scores of “1” (internal/controllable).

In order to test this hypothesis, a *t*-test procedure was used. Table 4 shows the results of the *t*-test. There is a significant difference between the groups ( $t = 2.073$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed test). Therefore, English language learners who had an external locus of control had higher foreign language use anxiety than learners with internal locus of control.

Table 4. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
FLUA	Equal variances assumed	.415	.520	2.073	196	.039	3.6203	1.7465

### Weiner's Attribution Framework and Foreign Language Use Anxiety

To test the hypothesis that learners who attribute their success at foreign language learning to internal variables will have less anxiety than those who attribute to external variables, a *t*-test was used. As shown in Table 5, a statistically significant difference exists between the two groups ( $t = 2.004$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Those who attributed their success internally had higher levels of foreign language use anxiety than those who attributed externally. This result is different from the one seen using Rotter's scale. Therefore, it was necessary to examine whether these two constructs (i.e., Rotter's Internal-External Locus and Weiner's attribution) were measuring the same dimensions.

Table 5. *t*-Test Results: External Variables and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
FLUA	Equal variances assumed	.020	.887	2.004	179	.047	3.7962

### Rotter's and Weiner's Measures of Internal-External Locus

In order to examine whether or not Rotter's and Weiner's scales are measuring the same construct, a correlation was computed. Because the variables were categorically coded, a chi-square test was used. The chi-square value of 0.617 ( $p = 0.432$ , Table 6) indicates no statistical significance suggesting that the two measures of locus of control are not related each other. Therefore, each is likely tapping different dimensions of the construct.

Table 6. Chi-Square Test Results: Relating to Internal Locus of Controls

	<i>Value</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</i>
Pearson Chi-Square	.617	1	.432
N of Valid Cases	181		

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 15.80.

Although Weiner's framework was theoretically developed based on Rotter's single internal-external locus of control dimension, it went beyond the original formulation by including three different dimensions: locus, stability, and control (Stipek, 2002). Weiner (1986, 2000) argued that simply examining attribution focusing on one dimension (i.e., locus) of attributions may not give a clear picture of what learners actually believe the causes of success in language learning to be. In order to

gain a clearer picture of the role of attributions on foreign language use anxiety, the dimension of controllability is included in subsequent analyses.

### Controllability and Foreign Language Use Anxiety in Different Foreign Language Learning Tasks

According to Weiner's framework, internal locus is composed of two factors (i.e., ability, effort). Only effort is considered "controllable" whereas other factors (i.e., ability, task difficulty, and luck) are "uncontrollable" whether they are internal (i.e., ability) or external (i.e., task difficulty, luck). Therefore, taking a look at the effort factor in the different foreign language learning tasks might provide a picture of how learners' controllability is related to foreign language use anxiety.

With respect to communicating in English, Table 7 shows that a statistically significant difference exists between the groups ( $t = -2.171, p < 0.05$ , two-tailed test). This means that people who attributed success at communicating in English to effort had higher levels of foreign language use anxiety. In other words, if people felt they had more control over the outcome, they were more likely to have high levels of foreign language use anxiety.

Table 7. *t*-Test Results: Effort in Communication and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
FLUA	Equal variances assumed	2.338	.128	-2.171	188	.031	-4.6240

Table 8 shows that those who believe that success in TOEFL depends on effort have higher levels of foreign language use anxiety than those who do not attribute success to effort ( $t = -2.179, p < 0.05$ ). This is consistent with the findings in communication competency: perceptions of increased control yield greater foreign language use anxiety.

Table 8. *t*-Test Results: Effort in TOEFL and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
FLUA	Equal variances assumed	.013	.909	-2.179	191	.031	-4.7673

Interestingly, individuals who believe that grades in English classes are primarily due to effort do not have higher levels of foreign language use anxiety than those who do not as shown in Table 9. Foreign language use anxiety does not appear to be related to attributions of controllability for grades.

Table 9. *t*-Test Results: Effort in Grades and Foreign Language Use Anxiety (FLUA)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
FLUA	Equal variances assumed	.002	.964	-.267	186	.790	-.6505

These three tables reveal that the situations about which attributions of cause are being made are important. Related to communicating in English and performing on TOEFL tests, higher levels of foreign language use anxiety are experienced by those who believe they have the most control. Individuals who believe they are not in control of those things do not, in fact, experience high levels of foreign language use anxiety.

These results are contrary to what attribution theory would predict. Greater control should lead to reduced anxiety. However, this was not the case. Rotter's scale, on the other hand, did show results in the predicted direction. A further discussion and analysis for these findings will follow in the next session.

## **Discussions and Conclusions**

The purpose of the study was to examine how foreign language anxiety is related to attributional perceptions and task values. Rotter's perceived locus of control in the paradigm of expectancy-value theory and Weiner's attribution theory were introduced to measure the nature of perceptions and attributions regarding the success or failure of an outcome: in this case, second language acquisition. The concept of valences developed by Eccles and Wigfield was used to determine participants' values related to foreign language learning.

Two major hypotheses were tested. First, a positive relationship was predicted between task values and foreign language use anxiety. This hypothesis was based on Pekrun's expectancy-value theory that a negative event expectation combined with a high valence can lead to anxiety. Specifically, this study hypothesized that the higher the task values, the higher the anxiety. Second, it hypothesized that learners who had a lower sense of control over the achievement of a foreign language would have a higher level of anxiety than those who had a higher sense of control. The rationale for this hypothesis was based on attribution theory which states that learners lose a sense of control when they attribute a failure to external causes and, therefore, increase the level of anxiety in learning tasks.

### ***Task Values and Foreign Language Use Anxiety***

Regarding the relationship between the value of learning a foreign language and foreign language use anxiety, the data did not support the original hypothesis of a positive relationship between task values and foreign language use anxiety. In fact, a significant, albeit negative, correlation was found. As the value of learning a foreign language increases, foreign language use anxiety appears to go down. In order to examine further the effects of task values on foreign language use anxiety, a second order partial correlation analysis was used. Task values consisted of "interest," "importance," and "utility" in learning a foreign language. The results showed that "interest" (i.e., pure interest in foreign language learning) is negatively correlated to foreign language use anxiety. The more learners were intrinsically interested in learning a foreign language, the less they experienced foreign language use anxiety. "Importance" was positively related to foreign language use anxiety. The more importance learners attached to learning a foreign language, the higher the level of anxiety experienced. However, interestingly, "utility" appears to be negatively related to foreign language use anxiety. The more utility learners felt a foreign language would have in their future, the less foreign language use anxiety they had.

It is clear that the subcomponents related to task values do not function in the same way. "Importance" functions in the expected fashion. That is, there is a positive relation between "importance" and foreign language use anxiety. However, both "utility" and "interest" showed a negative correlation with foreign language use anxiety. Thus, "utility" and "interest" appear to function in opposition to theoretical expectations.

In this study, task value was measured using all three components. In the general literature, task value is often conceived as being either "intrinsic" or "extrinsic." The current formulation does not make such a distinction. A careful look reveals that the initial apparent failure to support the hypothesis may not be as serious as first thought. In fact, "importance" functions as it is supposed to. If we consider the intrinsic – extrinsic continuum, "interest" functions as expected. "Utility" appears to be the exception. As utility goes up, anxiety goes down in contrast to theoretical formulations.

Rethinking the current conceptualization, it might be that "utility" was seen by these students as a more futuristic, unreal, and imaginary issue and thus was seen as being of less immediate importance. The more immediate the threat (or perceived negative outcome) is, the more anxiety is produced. As

immediacy diminishes, perceptions of threat similarly diminish so that even though individuals perceive potential negative consequences, this does not yield increased anxiety due to the fact that these consequences are in the future.

These results suggest that future studies using task value and its subcomponents must be careful to do one of two things: make sure that the operationalizations of “utility” and “importance” occur or refer to a similar time referent or provide a separate analysis for each component. Since these appear to be somewhat distinct dimensions, greater care in the definition and operationalization of task values is required.

Nevertheless, the results of this study imply that international teaching assistants who perceived English to be crucial to successful teaching at this university, experienced elevated feelings of foreign language use anxiety. They were not so worried about the role of English in future jobs, perhaps because they paid it less importance or attention.

### ***Attributions and Foreign Language Use Anxiety***

The study hypothesized that as perceptions of internal control go up; feelings of foreign language use anxiety go down. The learners’ perceptions of internal control were measured by two scales: Rotter’s internal – external locus of control scale to measure perceptions of general life events and the scale developed specifically to measure attributional perceptions in foreign language learning based on Weiner’s theoretical paradigm. The results showed that as learners perceived a greater level of internal locus of control in general life events, they experienced less anxiety. That is, the original hypothesis was supported in this case. However, in the foreign language learning situation, learners who perceived high levels of internal controllability experienced higher levels of foreign language use anxiety. That is, the original hypothesis was not supported in the foreign language learning situation. In fact, the opposite relationship was found.

In detail, when the perceptions of controllability were measured in terms of the foreign language learning environment, the data revealed that learners who attributed their success internally (i.e., ability and effort) had higher levels of foreign language use anxiety than those who attributed externally (i.e., task difficulty and luck). Especially, when effort was singled out as the only internally controllable factor, learners who made higher attributions to effort had higher levels of foreign language use anxiety in such language learning tasks as communicating in English and taking the TOEFL. That is, when learners felt they had more control over the success of foreign language learning, they were more likely to have high levels of foreign language use anxiety. This tendency did not hold regarding grades in English courses.

One of the explanations might be related to the uniqueness of foreign language anxiety. Researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley, 2000) have claimed that foreign language anxiety is unique compared to other anxieties in the sense that language learning situations seem to differ from other subject learning situations. The data appear to support the position that attributions learners have differ in foreign language learning situations from those in other general life events. Then why might this case occur in foreign language learning?

One reason might be related to the possible conflict between learning a foreign language in class and using it in real life. The goal of attaining a good grade could be somewhat easily achievable when learners put in enough effort to cover materials that they have learned in class thoroughly for the test. However, outside the class, learners might realize that being proficient in a language does not mean just having a good score. They have to be able to use the language holistically; they cannot simply use grammar, vocabulary, and/or reading individually, but all aspects of the language must be applied simultaneously. This characteristic of language learning might challenge learners’ perceptions that effort in class does not necessarily pay off in real life communication and thereby, elevates the levels of foreign language use anxiety.

In the event that learners attribute the cause of a failure to their effort, learners might experience such feelings as frustration or disappointment. In a similar future situation, when a failure occurs again,

they might doubt their effort and get nervous that their effort is not sufficient to accomplish the task. Learners might come to believe that failure is their fault because their effort did not work. Therefore, they would heighten their tension and levels of anxiety. This pattern is not totally in opposition to the paradigm of attribution theory.

Indeed, caution has to be taken with assigning effort as the cause of success or failure of a task. Although effort should lead to positive outcomes in the educational settings, a “double-edged sword” effect can occur in school achievement (Covington and Omelich, 1979). While students can experience accomplishment and pride in completing a task by expending effort, they can easily feel incapable if they have to expend extraordinary effort to be successful. Thereby, these learners would also experience distress (Covington and Omelich, 1979). This pattern might have happened to the participants in the present study. Further work needs to examine the effects of effort in the language learning context and its effect on foreign language anxiety.

### ***Implications***

Similar to previous studies on motivation, the present study shows that intrinsic values in language learning decrease foreign language anxiety. Thus, learners may have better opportunities to devote complete attention and energy to learning. Extrinsic values, on the other hand, generally increase anxiety. However, the present results also indicate that extrinsic values may play a more complex role in increasing anxiety. The “utility” factor in extrinsic values seems to take the role of decreasing anxiety in language learning while the “importance” factor increases foreign language anxiety. While further empirical studies need to be explored to build a firm theoretical framework, it is worth noting that the present results indicate that immediacy takes an important part in creating foreign language anxiety. That is, a threat of negative consequences does not seem to raise anxiety levels unless it is relatively proximate or immediate.

The use of attribution theory results in interesting theoretical implications in the studies of foreign language anxiety. The present results show that attributions influence anxiety in a way that is not usually predicted in previous studies. If learners believe that foreign language learning can be controlled internally, levels of anxiety increase. On the other hand, if learners believe they can control life related events, anxiety decreases. This result implies that causal attributions may affect anxiety in a different way in language learning than in more general life situations. For instance, Lim (2003) suggests, in a theoretical model, that self-efficacy plays a mediating role between attribution and anxiety. Learners may have a high sense of controllability in language learning but if their self-efficacy is low for some reason, they experience high levels of anxiety. Although more empirical studies are necessary to examine these complex interrelationships, it is worth exploring such possible mediating variables to get a clearer picture of relationships between attribution and foreign language anxiety in second/foreign language acquisition.

The results of the present study also provide some practical implications for dealing with foreign language use anxiety. The role of task values and attributions suggests several insights for educators.

This study clearly shows that interest in learning a foreign language, particularly intrinsic interest, can reduce foreign language use anxiety. Teachers should, therefore, try to create innovative, practical, and fun activities that will generate and maintain interest. Teachers might also wish to devise strategies to make the activities themselves inherently interesting while deemphasizing the utility of language acquisition and use.

Effort clearly plays a role in foreign language anxiety. In this study, anxiety was higher among students who perceived effort as the primary causes of their achievement (or lack thereof). While language teachers want to create a sense of individual responsibility for learning, they want to be cautious of the double-edged nature of such a strategy. Overemphasis on effort may result in a backlash creating a feeling of heightened anxiety because it may lead to increased internal attribution. As seen from the data, internal attributions can increase anxiety.

### ***Recommendations for Further Research***

The data from this study show promise in helping to understand the role of attributions in motivation. The study should be replicated using other populations in an effort to increase the reliability and validity of the findings. Future studies need to include a greater diversity of participants. Language learners at varying levels of proficiency, various stages of learning and with various ages might need to be included to try to determine more precisely how the model used in this study works.

Using a previously untested model developed by Lim (2003), it might be possible to explore the role of attributions in motivation. Care should be taken to address some of the measurement problems noted here, but linking attribution with expectancy-value theory directly in a motivational model related to foreign language anxiety could be a step toward integrating these research traditions.

Further, studies examining the effects of culture on foreign language use anxiety are recommended. Perceptions do not stand alone. Researchers need to consider the effects of culture to understand the whole picture of anxiety not just as an individual variable. Therefore, we need studies examining such variables as task values and attributions with the link to culture.

Finally, the study suggests that attribution theory has something to offer the field of second/foreign language acquisition. Future studies need to try to make greater use of the theoretical models presented in this study. In combination with the empirical studies, this could result in a better and more complete understanding of foreign language anxiety.

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## Appendix A. Task Values

This questionnaire examines your attitudes and opinions about learning English. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers will remain anonymous. This questionnaire will probably take about 15-20 minutes. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

<p>The following questions are designed to examine how you feel about learning English. Please indicate your opinion by <u>circling the number</u> of the degree that best indicates your choice.</p>						
<p>Ex) How interested are you in movies?</p>						
<p>Not Interested</p>			<p>Moderately Interested</p>			<p>Very Interested</p>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. In general, I found studying English to be  

Very Boring			Neutral			Very Interesting
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Compared to my other school subjects, English was  

Much more Interesting			About the same			Much more Boring
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. How important do you think English is for the occupational career you propose to follow?  

Not important At all			Moderately Important			Very Important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. How important do you think English is for doing your teaching assistant or assistant instructor's job?  

Not important At all			Moderately Important			Very Important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I am learning English because others (i.e., parents, peers) say it is important to speak English well.  

Absolutely not			Moderately			Absolutely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. How useful is learning English for what you want to do after you graduate and go to work?  

Not very Useful			Moderately Useful			Very Useful
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. After I graduate and get a job in my country, I don't anticipate having to use English for work.  

Strongly Agree			Neutral			Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Appendix B. English Language Use Anxiety**

You have answered a number of questions about how you feel about learning English. The following statements apply to how you feel about English use in daily life. Indicate how well these statements apply to you by **circling the number** that best describes your opinion.

	Ex)	I like Austin.		
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>			<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5
		Disagree		6
			Agree	7

1. I would feel comfortable speaking English in an informal gathering where native English speakers and people from my country were present.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
2. I would feel uncomfortable speaking English under any circumstances.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
3. I would feel confident and relaxed if I had to ask street directions in English.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
4. I am sure that I would get nervous if I had to speak English to a sales clerk.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
5. When making a telephone call, I would get flustered if it were necessary to speak English.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
6. I would feel calm and sure of myself if I had to order a meal in English in a U.S. restaurant.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
7. If I should ever meet an English speaking person, I would feel relaxed talking with him.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
8. Speaking English with my supervisor would bother me.  

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
  
9. I am concerned about having to speak English with undergraduate students in my class.  

	Strongly								Strongly
--	----------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	----------

Disagree		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. I feel confident that I will have no trouble explaining things in English to undergraduate students in class.

Strongly		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		Strongly
Disagree		3	4	5		Agree
1	2				6	7

### Appendix C. Locus of Control

The following items are to find out the way in which certain important events in our society affect different people. Each item consists of a pair of alternatives lettered (a) or (b). Please select the one statement of each pair (**and only one**) by **circling the letter** of the statement which you more strongly **believe** to be the case as far as you're concerned. Be sure to select the one you actually **believe** to be more true rather than the one you think you should chose or the one you would like to be true. This is a measure of personal belief: obviously **there are no right or wrong answers**.

Ex)  (a) I like apples.  
 (b) I like bananas.

1.  (a) Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.  
 (b) People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
2.  (a) In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.  
 (b) Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.
3.  (a) The ideas that teachers are unfair to students are nonsense.  
 (b) Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings.
4.  (a) Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.  
 (b) Capable people who fail to become learners have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
5.  (a) I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.  
 (b) Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
6.  (a) In the case of the well-prepared student there is rarely if ever such a thing as an unfair test.  
 (b) Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying is really useless.
7.  (a) Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.  
 (b) Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
8.  (a) When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.  
 (b) It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.
9.  (a) Who gets to be the boss often depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first.  
 (b) Getting people to do the right thing depends upon ability, luck has little or noting to do with it.
10.  (a) Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.  
 (b) There really is no such thing as "luck."
11.  (a) It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you.  
 (b) How many friends you have depends upon how nice a person you are.
12.  (a) Sometimes I can't understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give.  
 (b) There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get.
13.  (a) Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.

- (b) It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
14. (a) People are lonely because they don't try to be friendly.  
(b) There's not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you.
15. (a) What happens to me is my own doing.  
(b) Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.

#### Appendix D. Attribution

16. For each of the items below, please indicate the percentage you believe that it contributes to **your success of communicating in English?** Please make sure they total 100%.

The similarity of English to your native language	_____ %
How much you try to talk with native speakers	_____ %
Your natural aptitude for languages	_____ %
The number of hours a day you study	_____ %
How good your English teachers are	_____ %
Number of opportunities for you to encounter native speakers of English	_____ %
Doing extra homework	_____ %
Clarity of pronunciation of the person you are talking to	_____ %
Other. Please specify _____	_____ %
	100 %

17. For each of the items below, please indicate the percentage you believe that it contributes to **your TOEFL scores?** Please make sure they total 100%.

Which version of test you get	_____ %
Test conditions (i.e., good computers/speakers/physical conditions)	_____ %
Your natural aptitude for languages	_____ %
Taking a TOEFL class	_____ %
Your natural aptitude for taking tests	_____ %
The number of hours you studied	_____ %
Other. Please specify _____	_____ %
	100 %

18. For each of the items below, please indicate the percentage you believe that it contributes to **making a good grade in your English classes?** Please make sure they total 100%.

The number of hours a day you study	_____ %
Performance standards necessary to pass a class	_____ %
Your natural aptitude for languages	_____ %
Doing extra homework	_____ %
How good your teachers are	_____ %
Teachers' grading standards	_____ %
Other. Please specify _____	_____ %
	100 %

<sup>1</sup> The scale originally consisted of 29 items. Six filler items were eliminated (e.g., "There are certain people who are just no good," "There is some good in everybody"). Two items that were pointed out as weak items by Collins (1974) were removed (i.e., "No matter how hard you try some people just don't like you," "People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others"). Six more items related to political views of the world were removed from the study (e.g., "As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand, nor control," "By taking an active part in political and social affairs the people can control world events"). Those items may be debatable for various nationality groups and did not seem to provide much information for the purpose of the present study. Therefore, 15 items of the I-E scale were used.