

Emotions and Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning at University

Micò Beseghi

(Università degli Studi di Parma, Italia)

Abstract This article explores the role of emotions in foreign language learning at university level. Drawing on the recent literature regarding the affective dimension in language learning, it illustrates the ways in which students experience emotions in foreign language learning. Particular emphasis is given to the way in which students' emotions, both positive and negative, emerge and change during their learning process. The article presents a study conducted among university students learning English in a co-directed and autonomy-inspired environment. Following a qualitative approach, students' emotional expression was investigated, by means of individual advising sessions and group sessions, as well as in written form. The relationship between emotion, motivation and self-awareness in a semi-autonomous learning context was explored in order to consider the impact of the affective dimension on students' progress and achievement.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 What Is an Emotion? – 2.1 Emotions and Learning. – 2.2 Learner Autonomy and Motivation. – 3 Method. – 3.1 Understanding Students' Emotions: the Role of the Language Counsellor. – 3.2 Categorising Emotions: a Taxonomy. – 3.3 Managing Emotions. – 4 The Study. – 5 Results and Discussion. – 5.1 First Advising Session. – 5.2 The Evolution of Emotions. – 6 Conclusions.

Keywords Emotions. Learner autonomy. Language advising. Motivation.



If we want to help people learn, we must expect to
encounter emotion, and we must take it seriously.
(Zull 2002, 52)

1 Introduction

The present study is an investigation of the role of emotions in autonomous language learning processes in order to offer an insight into the emotional dimension of language learning and to suggest ways to guide students in the regulation of their emotions. In the last few decades, much research has focused on autonomous learning (among others, Benson 2001; Dickinson 1987; Holec 1981; Little 1991 and 2007; Littlewood 1996 and 1999; Oxford 2003). However, less attention has been paid to the specific relationship between autonomous learning and emotions in academic settings

DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2018/02/003

Submitted: 2017-09-11 | Accepted: 2018-08-28

© 2018 |   Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution alone

(Bown, White 2010; Dörnyei, Ushioda 2009; Tassinari, Ciekanski 2013). In this article, learning-related emotions are first considered from a psychological, neurological and educational perspective and then the affective dimensions involved in autonomous language learning are illustrated with reference to the data collected. More specifically, the article presents the findings of a research study carried out with university students at the Language Centre of the University of Parma, within the context of an autonomy-inspired language-learning environment.

In order to help students prepare for their English exam,¹ the Language Centre introduced a co-directed and autonomy-inspired learning programme (Holec 2009), which gives learners the opportunity to follow personalised learning paths according to their specific needs (Beseghi, Bertolotti 2012 and 2016). The fundamental guiding principles of this programme are based on the idea that students can learn better if they are in control of and responsible for their own learning process (Benson 2011; Little 2007; Murray 2009 and 2011). Indeed, the co-directed programme, as the name itself suggests, does not include teacher-based language lessons, but offers learning strategies and activities, which are provided in mini-lessons delivered by a teacher or language advisor both in class and online (on the university e-learning platform). Furthermore, regular one-to-one meetings with the language counsellors, small group workshops and mock tests throughout the learning programme contribute to making students more aware of their own personal progress and their individual needs (Beseghi, Bertolotti 2016). Indeed, the co-directed programme, which is not compulsory but voluntary, is complementary or alternative to classroom teaching, and aims to cater for situations where learning needs are too diverse to be satisfied by traditional methods. The students usually make the first contact with the teacher or language counsellor, especially when they feel discouraged and demotivated. This is why teachers and counsellors need to take their students' emotional sphere into consideration when they start working with them.

2 What Is an Emotion?

Interest in the role of emotions in academic settings, especially in how emotions shape student engagement and learning, has grown substantially in the last decades (Calvo, D'Mello 2011; Méndez López, Pena Aguilar 2013; Pekrun, Linnenbrink-Garcia 2012 and 2014; Pekrun 2006; Schutz, Pekrun 2007). For a long time research in the Western world has "concentrated on

1 All the students enrolled at the University of Parma must take an English exam (CEFR level B1 for Bachelor's degrees and B2 for Master's degree). The test, introduced by the Language Centre in 2005, has a standardised format assessing three receptive abilities: Use of English, Reading Comprehension, Listening Comprehension.

understanding the rational, cognitive functions of our mind, while misusing or denying whatever falls within the realm of the emotions or the non-rational” (Arnold, Brown 1999, 3). In the field of second language acquisition, two scholars have systematically investigated the role of emotions in foreign language learning: Jane Arnold (1999), whose studies belong to the *cognitive theory of emotions*, and the neurolinguist John Schumann (2004), who has explored what happens in the brain when we learn a language. This recent growing interest in emotions is also found in other disciplines such as economics, neuroscience, anthropology and the humanities. However, as far as educational psychology is concerned, research on emotions is still rather limited (Pekrun, Linnenbrink-Garcia 2014, 1). In Italy, the role of emotions in language learning and teaching has been increasingly investigated in the last years (for review, cf. Balboni 2013).

It is not easy to give a precise definition of what an emotion is. According to Frenzel and Stephens (2013, 5), “emotions are multidimensional constructs comprising affective, psychological, cognitive, expressive, and motivational components”:

- The *affective* component is the core of an emotion; it means that emotions are felt and that they are not mere thoughts or cognitive mental states: “there is no emotion without the affective experience, and without emotion there is no affective experience” (5).
- The *physiological* component refers to the fact that “bodily processes are set in motion when we experience an emotion” (5). These processes take place in the peripheral nervous system (the body) as well as in the central nervous system (the brain), where emotions have specific central arousal patterns in areas such as the amygdala and the cerebral cortex.
- The *cognitive* component is related to the arousal of distinct thoughts. For example, when experiencing fear, people may have thoughts about failure, or, when experiencing satisfaction, they may have thoughts about the positive consequences of the situation.
- The *expressive* component of emotions refers to all the facial expressions and body movements, gestures or postures that are shown when experiencing an emotion and make emotions recognisable to others.
- The *motivational* component refers to the fact that emotions can trigger behaviour.

Frenzel and Stephens underline that, when observing students in academic settings, it is important to distinguish between *state* emotions - which are momentary conditions, aroused in specific situations - and *trait* emotions - which refer to persistent characteristics of the student in question (2013, 7).

Balboni (2013, 11) defines emotions as “risposte adattive [...] della mente alle pressioni esterne”. According to the *cognitive theory* or *ap-*

praisal theory, the evaluation (*appraisal*) of a situation produces an emotional response or reaction (*arousal*). On this regard, it is useful to bear in mind Damasio's distinction between *emotions* – “changes in body state in response to a positive or negative situation” and *feelings* – “the perceptions of these changes” (Damasio 1994, in Balboni 2013, 13).

2.1 Emotions and Learning

For a long time, in the field of educational psychology, as well as in other fields, emotion and cognition were considered as incompatible realities that would never meet. From the 1990s onwards, different scholars have tried to demonstrate the opposite. LeDoux (1996) and Zull (2002 and 2004) explain that emotion and cognition are partners in the mind: “Emotion and thought are physically entangled. This brings our body into the story because we feel our emotions in our body, and the way we feel always influences our brain” (Zull 2004, 70). Moreover, emotions tend to overpower cognition rather than the opposite: “our emotions influence our thinking more than our thinking influences our emotions” (Zull 2002, 74). Therefore, the affective side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side. On the contrary, when both are used together, the learning process can be constructed on a stronger foundation. If teachers are aware of the cerebral structures that produce emotions and how they work, they may find new ways to motivate their students (Zull 2002).

Damasio (1994; 1995; 1996) illustrates the idea of the mixture of feeling and thinking, and demonstrates that emotions are a part of reason to such an extent that the absence of emotion compromises our rational capacity. Indeed, Zull (2004, 70) explains that this emotion connection may have important implications for students' motivation: “As part of the teacher's art, we must find ways to make learning intrinsically rewarding. Learning should feel good, and the student should become aware of those feelings”.

Zull argues that there is a connection between learning and pleasure. The parts of the brain that contribute to feelings of pleasure, joy, satisfaction, fulfilment, or happiness are located beneath the front cortex, which is “the place where goal-oriented activity is controlled and ideas about actions are generated” (Zull 2002, 61). The connection between the basal structures and pleasure highlights the distinction between passive and active learning: “any learning that involves some sense of progress and control by the learner might be expected to engage the basal structures. This would be learning that is pleasurable” (61).

If we acknowledge the connection between emotion and cognition, we should view learning as a global and dynamic process integrating positive and negative emotions that are felt both consciously and unconsciously. Through emotionally engaging situations, learning is not only more ap-

peeling but also more effective. In the construction of a learning environment, the emotional sphere must therefore be regarded as an essential component, as there is no learning without emotion.

2.2 Learner Autonomy and Motivation

The concept of autonomy is of great relevance in the learning process: providing students with the right amount of autonomy helps them gain the capability to control a situation, which in turn promotes the experience of positive emotions. As stated by Balboni (2013, 18), the pleasure of autonomy is a fundamental emotion, which is possible when the students are in control of their own learning.

According to Tassinari (2012, 28), learner autonomy is “a complex construct, a construct of constructs”, a *meta-capacity* made up of different components: *cognitive* and *metacognitive* (knowledge, awareness, beliefs), *affective* and *motivational* (feelings, emotions, motivation), *action-oriented* (skills, behaviours, decisions) and *social* (interaction/negotiation with peers, advisors, teachers). A fundamental element of autonomy is the learners’ awareness of their affective and motivational dimension. Indeed, learner autonomy and emotions are closely associated with another theoretical construct: motivation. Dörnyei (2001, 1) defines motivation as “an abstract, hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do”. This concept is “related to one of the most basic aspects of the human mind, and most teachers and researchers would agree that it has a very important role in determining success or failure in any learning situation” (2). Balboni (2006, in Bier 2013, 429) describes motivation as “the energy that activates the brain and the mind”, thus highlighting the connection between emotion and cognition. According to his model, the motivational context of a language learning situation is determined by three elements: *pleasure*, *need* and *duty* (Balboni 2006, 2011, 2013). He claims that pleasure is the most powerful factor precisely because it is the result of emotions. Together with Balboni’s motivational model, other four well-known motivational approaches have been taken into consideration in the present study in order to interpret students’ emotions: *self-efficacy* theory (Bandura 1997), *attribution* theory (Weiner 1992), *achievement motivation* theory (Atkinson, Raynor 1974), and *self-determination* theory (Deci, Ryan 1985). According to Bandura (1997), *self-efficacy* refers to the belief that people can make a difference via their actions. If students believe they can obtain the desired effects through their own actions, they are more motivated to undertake activities or to persist in the face of difficulty. *Attribution theory* assumes that past actions, and how people interpret past successes and failures, determine current and future behaviour (Weiner 1992). For instance, if students repeatedly fail

the English exam, they may attribute this failure to their capacities and they might not want to take the exam again because they think that the cause of failure is something they cannot change. Instead, if students attribute the reason for failing the exam to their own poor effort, then they will be more likely to take it again. According to *achievement motivation theory*, motivation can be influenced both positively and negatively by expectancies of success, incentive values, need for achievement and fear of failure (Atkinson, Raynor 1974). In *self-determination theory*, Deci and Ryan (1985) distinguish between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The most basic distinction is between *intrinsic* motivation and *extrinsic* motivation: intrinsic motivation involves behaviour performed for its own sake, while extrinsic motivation concerns behaviour as a means to an end (Dörnyei 2001). According to Ryan and Deci (2000, 70), intrinsic motivation, “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn”, can be enhanced in the presence of three conditions: competence, relatedness and autonomy (70). Learners need to feel competent, to be cared about by others (teachers and peers), to understand that they have choices and that they can determine what they do. Students’ intrinsic motivation is therefore closely connected with their emotional experiences and the social context.

Following Balboni’s model of motivation, the co-directed learning programme encourages learners to find a balance between need, duty and pleasure. Students decide to join the learning programme out of their need to learn English in order to pass their exam, which is part of their duty as university students. The pleasure of learning, as this article shows, becomes possible when students are able to process their emotions and develop their own autonomous learning path.

3 Method

3.1 Understanding Students’ Emotions: the Role of the Language Counsellor

A co-directed learning programme encourages students to develop the conscious feeling of self-awareness and to manage their emotions while they become more autonomous, under the guidance and help (co-direction) of language teachers and/or advisors.

The growing importance given to autonomous learning has led to the shift from a teacher-led to a more learner-centred approach and to the development of a new professional role, the language counsellor or advisor, who promotes, encourages and supports learner autonomy (Mozzon-McPherson 2007). The language counsellor may be a distinct figure from

the teacher, or the teacher may acquire new skills and functions for supporting students (Mozzon-McPherson 2003). Whatever the case, the role of an advisor is to help learners become more responsible for the decisions regarding their learning, from determining their goals to evaluating their own learning process and outcome. Within the co-directed learning programme, the language counsellor has the fundamental role of assisting students in reaching their primary goal, that is, to learn English, while offering guidance in the processing of emotions.

Bown and White (2010, 434) defined three steps in the processing of emotions in language learning:

- a. the perception stage, in which students understand their emotional states;
- b. the reflection stage, in which learners reflect on their emotions,
- c. the self-regulation stage, in which learners manage their emotions and correct their self-beliefs.

Ciekanski (2007, 125) defines language advising as “a professional as well as an interpersonal relationship that concerns learning in its cognitive and subjective, as well as personal dimensions”. Tassinari and Ciekanski (2013, 264), following on from the work of Carette and Castillo (2004), mention three main areas in which language advisors can support learning and foster learner autonomy:

- a. listening to students’ perceptions and beliefs about language learning and themselves as learners;
- b. offering theoretical and methodological information about language learning and learning strategies;
- c. offering psychological support.

This last area is not only fundamental but also challenging, especially when students are not fully aware of their difficulties. That is why the language advisor aims to guide learners from the perception to the self-regulation phase, providing them with a deeper understanding of the affective aspects of the learning process.

3.2 Categorising Emotions: a Taxonomy

Different models have been proposed by different scholars to categorise emotions. In this study, the analysis of the students’ emotions is based on Pekrun et al.’s (2002) taxonomy of academic emotions, also known as level-two emotions, *id est*, “emotions that are directly linked to academic learning, classroom instruction, and achievement (e.g., enjoyment of learning, pride of success, or test-related anxiety”, Pekrun et al. 2002, 92). In Pekrun et al.’s categorisation, “meta-emotions” refer to the feelings about one’s

emotions, for instance, when a student feels angry about his/her anxiety (93). Making students aware of their meta-emotions or feelings may assist them in dealing with negative emotions as well as promoting positive ones.

In their qualitative studies, Pekrun et al. (2002, 94) observed that students experience a rich and diverse emotional life. The scholars distinguished between positive and negative emotions, and between task- and self-related and social emotions. Task- and self-related can be further divided into prospective, process-related and retrospective (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. The domain of academic emotions (Pekrun et al. 2002, 92)

	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
Task- / Self-Related	Hope, anticipatory happiness	Anxiety, hopelessness
Prospective	Enjoyment	Boredom
Process-Related	Joy of success, satisfaction, pride,	Sadness, disappointment, shame,
Retrospective	relief	guilt
	Gratitude	Anger
Social	Empathy	Envy
	Admiration	Contempt
	Sympathy	Antipathy

The present study explores the *emotional diversity* characterising university students' affective life, without limiting the range of emotions considered. Negative emotions tend to be more evidently displayed and to be studied more frequently in literature: anxiety – in particular, test anxiety – is one of the most widely researched emotions, having been addressed in more than a thousand studies (Pekrun et al. 2010). However, positive emotions are experienced as often as negative ones (Pekrun et al. 2002). Since the co-directed learning programme is mainly targeted at students who find it hard to prepare for the English exam or have failed it repeatedly, it is interesting to see which emotions play a role in the learning process, exploring how the language advisor can promote the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

3.3 Managing Emotions

Negative emotions interfere with learning when students become frustrated to the point of feeling helpless or incompetent. In fact, some students may have difficulty in learning because their minds are cluttered with pessimistic thoughts and negative memories. Advisors can help students understand that emotions can be managed, regulated and controlled. They can help students reduce their anxieties and the impact that negative

emotions have on motivational energy. When students become upset by an event such as a failed test, they often react in a way that further impedes learning. This tendency can be inverted if students learn how to regulate or manage their emotions. First of all, they need to learn to acknowledge and express their feelings. Secondly, they need to be able to manage negative emotions and come up with successful strategies. Learning how to cope with emotions and feelings constitutes a sort of “emotional intelligence” (Goleman 1995) that can help students to succeed. According to Goleman, the main components of emotional intelligence are:

- *self-awareness*: the ability to recognise one’s own feelings. We can support students in developing this self-confidence by helping them understand how they are feeling;
- *self-regulation*: the ability to manage one’s own emotions. We cannot eliminate anxiety or frustration but we can help students learn to manage their feelings;
- *self-motivation*: the ability to generate feelings of enthusiasm, confidence and persistence, especially in the face of obstacles;
- *empathy*: the ability to recognise emotions in others. We can encourage students to empathise with another student who is facing a difficult time.

It is the language advisor’s role to foster learners’ emotional intelligence, in a learning environment that should be aimed at:

- reducing *inhibition*, because making mistakes is part of language learning (Arnold, Brown 1999, 9);
- enhancing *self-esteem*, because it is fundamental for successful cognitive and affective activity (12);
- promoting *motivation*, especially the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, where the learning experience is its own reward (14).

4 The Study

By way of a qualitative study, students’ academic emotions were investigated in order to see how they changed during the learning process, and specifically, how they evolved throughout the period of the co-directed learning programme, whose duration is usually of one semester. A group of fifty students from different university departments who were attending the co-directed learning programme was selected for the study. Participation was voluntary and students agreed to share their learning experience. However, they were not informed about the purpose of the study, in order not to influence their emotional response.

As Pekrun et al. (2002, 103) suggest, “Starting with qualitative, exploratory analysis can help in appreciating the complexity of real-life affective

experience, and thus lay the groundwork for constructing measures and undertaking quantitative studies". The first phase of the present investigation concerned the observation of how students express emotions – consciously and unconsciously, directly and indirectly. Following Tassinari and Ciekanski's model of analysis (2013), language advising sessions were chosen as the main tool to explore the students' affective experiences. Their verbal expressions of emotions were analysed by taking into consideration direct reference to emotions and the use of affective and evaluative words (Tassinari, Ciekanski 2013). During the interaction with the counsellors, learners were allowed to use their first language so as to avoid limitations in their narrative.

The data obtained from the advising sessions were first analysed and then integrated with students' responses to a questionnaire that was specifically designed to trigger awareness of the emotional dimension of learning. Throughout the different stages of interaction with students, the qualitative analysis focused on the language of emotions, not only at a verbal level, but also at a non-verbal one, that is, paralinguistic features (e.g. facial expressions, laughter, tears, etc.).

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 First Advising Session

The investigation of emotions started with the first advising session, which usually takes place at the beginning of each semester. Once the students express their interest in the learning programme, they take part in a preliminary advising or learner awareness session, a pedagogical dialogue in which students are asked to describe their previous and current experience of language learning. The first advising session is therefore focused on students' personal stories and experiences. Through their narrative, their consciousness emerges or, to quote Damasio's book title (2010), "self comes to mind".

The most frequent situation that leads to a first advising session and consequently to the voluntary enrolment in the co-directed learning programme is when students experience negative emotions such as frustration and anxiety. The preliminary advising session is in fact dedicated to reflection, focusing on a series of core aspects, including language learning and competence, learning strategies and needs. For example, students who do not feel competent enough in the foreign language tend to postpone taking the exam until the end of their studies. This, however, contributes to increasing their anxiety because failing the English exam also means postponing their graduation. Reflection is encouraged at this stage because it is a useful way for the students to first identify their

emotions and then to set goals to move forward. The counsellor sets up a trusting relationship with the students by carefully listening to them, by being respectful and empathetic and by helping them to identify, express and understand their feelings (Mozzon-McPherson 2001). The advising session functions as a two-way process where counsellor and student influence one another: “both parties are in a learning and teaching role” (Mozzon-McPherson 2000, 121).

During the preliminary advising sessions, a number of different emotions were registered, with a striking preponderance of negative task- and self-related emotions, among which – surprisingly – anxiety is not the most frequent. Table 2 lists the emotions that emerged during the first advising session, in which 48 students out of 50 (96%) reported negative ones, both directly and indirectly.

Table 2. Emotions that emerged during the first advising sessions listed in order of frequency

Negative Emotions	
Task- / Self-Related	Frustration (91%)
	Disappointment (86%)
	Fear (84%)
	Worry (84%)
	Anxiety (83%)
	Stress (82%)
	Lack of self-esteem (82%)
	Self-doubt/insecurity (80%)
	Shame (78%)
	Uneasiness (76%)
	Discouragement (76%)
	Helplessness / Hopelessness (74%)
	Apprehension (70%)
	Tension (68%)
	Nervousness (58%)
Sadness (56%)	
Anger (48%)	
Despair (38%)	

What emerged from the first advising session is that students’ negative attitude is very often the consequence of previous negative experiences with language learning. From the perspective of attribution theory, many students reported poor foreign language learning at school, which negatively influenced their subsequent attitude to language learning in general and led to insecurity and lack of self-confidence as language learners. Moreover, the majority of students expressed their frustration because of a past failure, such as a failed exam, which may have occurred many times. This perception of inadequateness is also magnified by the fact that other students passed the exam the first time round without any difficulty. From

the perspective of achievement motivation theory, their anxiety is also enhanced by achievement pressure and fear of failure: some students explained that if they kept failing the test they would have to postpone their graduation and as a consequence spend more money on university tuition, ask their parents to help them economically, lose job opportunities, etc.

Frustration (91%), disappointment (86%), fear (84%) and worry (84%) were the most frequently reported emotions in the first advising sessions, followed by anxiety (83%). The main negative impact of these emotions was the loss of self-confidence and self-esteem (82%), leading to insecurity (80%), shame (78%), uneasiness (76%) and discouragement (76%). A range of different emotions and meta-emotions emerged when students explained their failure to overcome major obstacles in language learning: some students experienced sadness (56%) and even despair (38% of them cried), while others were nervous (58%) and even angry with themselves (48%). In a significant number of cases (74%), the judgment of their capabilities and their perception of themselves as language learners appeared to be seriously damaged to the point where they convinced themselves that they were incapable of foreign language learning.

In the first advising session, the language counsellor needs to be a good listener, without appearing to judge students and without asking too many questions. The aim of the first meeting is to make learners feel at ease, to build a relationship based on trust, and to help them set reachable goals.

5.2 The Evolution of Emotions

The first advising sessions are typically carried out in one-to-one meetings, to allow students to express their emotions, feelings and thoughts without any restriction or fear of being judged by their peers. After the first meeting, the students start following their learning path, which consists of mini-lessons and a series of study sessions in the language laboratory under the guidance of language advisors as well as study sessions carried out autonomously by the students at home. Furthermore, the co-directed learning programme promotes the social dimension of learning, by including subsequent group meetings and social interaction. Indeed, peer interaction is a fundamental factor in developing self-confidence and self-awareness: during successive advising sessions, a significant number of students (90%) reported that coming into contact with other learners experiencing similar difficulties was beneficial. In point of fact, while high school students are used to experiencing learning in small classrooms of twenty/twenty-five learners, university students typically experience a more individual kind of learning, due to larger classes. Because of this lack of group cohesion, they may feel isolated and ashamed to ask for help, especially when they think they are not making any progress. For this reason,

the co-directed learning programme aims to provide integrated support of language advisors and peers. Certainly, emotions occur not only within individuals, but also within entire groups; such emotional experiences are known as “collective emotions” (Goetz et al. 2003). In this perspective, emotions are seen as contagious and can be transmitted through social interaction. Individual and collective emotions coexist, influence and interact with one another also in academic contexts.

Throughout the course of their learning, students can request further meetings with the advisors in order to clarify doubts and to discuss their progress. During these meetings evidence of positive emotions was recorded, both task/self-related and social, such as hope, enjoyment, satisfaction, pride and relief (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Positive emotions emerging during follow-up advising sessions

Positive Emotions	
Task- / Self-Related	Hope (88%) Satisfaction (80%) Relief (76%) Enjoyment (74%) Surprise (59%) Self-confidence / Self-awareness (55%) Pride (54%) Joy (52%) Enthusiasm (48%)
Social	Gratitude (92%) Empathy (70%) Admiration (60%)

Hope was reported as the most common positive emotion (88%) that emerged during follow-up sessions, together with satisfaction (80%) and relief (76%). This might be explained by the fact that during the co-directed programme students are given the opportunity to take a mock test. The mock test is a fundamental stage in the development and management of emotions: it is delivered several times throughout the programme, with the same types of tasks and same external conditions as the exam, such as the time limit and the prohibited use of a dictionary. Test anxiety is not decisive in this context, since students’ test results are simply indicative of their possible progress. When the students show some improvement in their performance in the mock test, more positive task-related emotions come to the surface, such as pride (54%), joy (52%), enthusiasm (48%) and even surprise (59%). The mock test can thus influence motivation positively, generating the expectancy of success, in accordance with achievement motivation theory. At this stage, students become more self-confident and aware of the fact that they can actually improve (self-efficacy theory). This

is a crucial moment, and the counsellors can encourage them to benefit from positive emotions, turning harmful into helpful anxiety. As pointed out by Frenzel and Stephens (2013, 30) positive task-oriented emotions promote intrinsic motivation and persistence in the face of challenges and obstacles (self-determination theory). When learners experience positive outcome-related emotions in achievement situations, they feel encouraged to persevere in achieving their goal, thus acting according to extrinsic motivation.

A positive emotion closely connected to intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, also emerged in the students' discourse (74%). When they began to realise that language learning was not an impossible mission for them, but simply a challenge that they could face and overcome, they started to enjoy the learning process, showing more enthusiasm and satisfaction, which led to increased self-confidence and self-awareness (55%). The emergence of positive emotions becomes of great relevance when students work autonomously: the feelings of enjoyment and enthusiasm lead them to explore the language in new ways that go beyond learning for its own sake (e.g. watching films and TV series in the original language, reading articles or books, etc.) and ultimately lead to the pleasure of learning.

In addition, it was possible to observe the development of positive social emotions such as gratitude (92%), empathy (70%) and admiration (60%), experienced towards both counsellors and peers. At this stage, it is the role of the counsellor to help the students focus on positive emotions and capitalise on them, for example, by showing appreciation for their improvement, praising them for their efforts and pushing them to move forward.

At the end of the co-directed learning programme, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire (in their L1) concerning their learning experience. By integrating the analysis of the advising sessions with their responses and comments, their emotional reactions and the evolution of their emotions during the learning process were further explored. The students' comments clearly show the shift from negative to positive emotions: a significant number of students refer to initial fear (87%), discouragement (85%) and insecurity (84%), which later turned into more positive emotions and feelings such as awareness (85%), confidence (75%) and determination (70%). By way of example, a selection of students' responses are reported below.² The words in italics (Author's emphasis) highlight the affective and evaluative language used by the students:

- Initially I was *afraid* that I wouldn't make it, and that everything would be useless. Then, little by little, I gained more *confidence* until I felt *calm* and *prepared* for the exam.

² The comments were written originally in Italian and were later translated into English for the purpose of this article.

- At the beginning I was *insecure* about my language competence and this prevented me from learning. By doing the various activities of the programme I acquired more *awareness* and *confidence*, which made me feel more *positive*.
- At first I was *discouraged* and *insecure*, but as I kept training I gained more and more *confidence*.
- I have always loved English but I was convinced it was not for me. Now I have gained more *familiarity* with the language and I have *overcome my language learning block*.
- My attitude towards the foreign language has changed dramatically: at first, learning English seemed an *insurmountable obstacle* to me, now I believe I can continue to improve my language skills. Yes I can!!
- Perceiving my language improvement was *motivating* and *satisfying*. Now I feel more *autonomous* when I learn.
- I found myself in a situation of absolute *tranquillity*: I felt *safe* and I could concentrate better on my learning.
- I now have more *willpower* and *determination* to study, increased learning abilities, *increased self-esteem* thanks to group study and collaboration.
- I could overcome my difficulties thanks to the *relationship* with other students and the *psychological support* offered by the teachers.

These remarks indicate how emotion, motivation and (meta-)cognition are interrelated, especially in a co-directed and autonomous learning context. Thanks to the one-to-one meetings, peer interaction, progress checking and (self-)reflection, learners were able to regulate their emotions and transform self-determined extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation, becoming more self-conscious in the process. The shift from negative to positive emotions is possible if teachers/counsellors first listen to and then understand their students' affective dimension, acting not only as facilitators in the autonomous language learning process but also as coaches in the students' management of their emotional sphere.

6 Conclusions

The data obtained in this study have demonstrated how crucially important it is for language counsellors and teachers to focus on affective aspects in their students' learning process and to take them in careful consideration in order to support their learning progress. Despite the qualitative nature of the study and the small sample size, the findings presented in this article indicate that emotions play a pivotal role in the learning process, especially in a co-directed and autonomy-inspired context, where learners have the opportunity to be assisted by language

counsellors in the processing of emotions, from the perception to the self-regulation stage. Furthermore, a co-directed environment that encourages students to reflect on their emotions allows them to develop autonomy and self-awareness, to change their perceptions of themselves as learners and to experience the pleasure of learning.

As pointed out by Tassinari and Ciekanski (2013) language advising certainly provides a privileged opportunity to study the emotional responses of the students to the language learning experience. Within the dialogic relationship between counsellors and learners, it is possible to investigate the affective dimensions of learning and to help learners to cope with their emotions. The figure of the language counsellor turns out to be of great significance. As underlined by Mozzon-Mc Pherson (2007), advisors contribute to the development of new types of teachers, who (re) define their role in response to the learners' changing needs, and new types of language learners, who are more autonomous, in control of their learning and are aware of their emotional dimension. The role played by language counsellors is thus crucial and requires continuous research and professional training, so that reflection on the affective aspects of learning can become an integral part not only of the practice of language advising but also of language learning and teaching at university.

The findings of this study highlight the fact that students experience a wide variety of academic emotions, thus confirming the results of previous studies (Goetz et al. 2003; Pekrun et al. 2002; Pekrun et al. 2010), and that the pleasure of learning is obtained when students learn to understand, process and control their emotions. Further qualitative as well as quantitative studies are certainly needed to explore the impact of emotions in academic settings. Moreover, the affective dimension of counsellors and teachers also needs to be systematically investigated, as research in this field is still scarce (Balboni 2013, Bier 2014). If it is true that there is no learning without emotion, it is also true that there is no teaching without emotion.

References

- Arnold, Jane (ed.) (1999). *Affect in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arnold, Jane; Brown, Douglas (1999). "A Map of the Terrain". Arnold 1999, 1-27.
- Atkinson, John W.; Raynor, Joel O. (eds.) (1974). *Motivation and Achievement*. Washington: Winston.
- Beseghi, Micol; Bertolotti, Greta (2012). "Designing Tailor-made Academic Paths for University Language Students". *Language Learning in Higher Education – Journal of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education*, 3(2), 319-37.
- Beseghi, Micol; Bertolotti, Greta (2016). "Fostering Autonomy in University Language Students: a Self-study Programme". Schwienhorst, Klaus (ed.), *Learner Autonomy in Second Language Pedagogy and Research – Challenges and Issues*. IATEFL Learner Autonomy SIG, 62-75.
- Balboni, Paolo E. (2006). *Italiano Lingua Materna: Fondamenti di didattica*. Torino: UTET Università.
- Balboni, Paolo E. (2011). *Conoscenza, verità, etica nell'educazione linguistica*. Perugia: Guerra.
- Balboni, Paolo E. (2013). "Il ruolo delle emozioni di studente e insegnante nel processo di apprendimento e insegnamento linguistico". *EL.LE, Educazione linguistica-Language Education*, 2(1), 7-30. DOI 10.14277/2280-6792/1063.
- Bandura, Albert (1997). *Self-Efficacy: the Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman and Company.
- Benson, Phil (2001). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. London: Pearson.
- Benson, Phil (2011). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. 2nd ed. London: Pearson.
- Bier, Ada (2013). "The Motivation of Adolescent Pupils to Learn English as a Foreign Language". *EL.LE, Educazione linguistica-Language Education*, 2(2), 429-59. DOI 10.14277/2280-6792/62p.
- Bier, Ada (2014). "The Motivation of Second/Foreign Language Teachers". *EL.LE, Educazione linguistica-Language Education*, 3(3), 505-22. DOI 10.14277/2280-6792/119p.
- Bown, Jennifer; White, Cynthia (2010). "Affect in a Self-Regulatory Framework for Language Learning". *System*, 38(3), 432-44.
- Calvo, Rafael A.; D'Mello, Sidney K. (eds.) (2011). *New Perspectives on Affect and Learning Technologies*. New York: Springer.
- Carette, Emmanuelle; Castillo, Désirée (2004). "Devenir conseiller: Quels changements pour l'enseignant". *Mélanges CRAPEL*, 27, 71-97.

- Ciekanski, Maud (2007). "Fostering Learner Autonomy: Power and Reciprocity in the Relationship Between Language Learner and Language Learning Adviser". *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 37(1), 111-27.
- Damasio, Antonio R. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Putnam.
- Damasio, Antonio R. (1995). "Toward a Neurobiology of Emotion and Feeling: Operational Concepts and Hypotheses". *Neuroscience*, 1, 19-25.
- Damasio, Antonio R. (1996). "The Somatic Marker Hypothesis and the Possible Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex". *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 351(1346), 1413-20.
- Damasio, Antonio R. (2010). *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Deci, Edward L.; Ryan, Richard M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Dickinson, Leslie (1987). *Self-Instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Zoltán (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Zoltán; Ushioda, Ema (eds.) (2009). *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Frenzel, A.C.; Stephens, E.J. (2013). "Emotions". Hall, Goetz 2013, 1-56.
- Goetz, Thomas; Zirngibl, Anne; Pekrun, Reinhard; Hall, Nathan (2003). "Emotions, Learning and Achievement from an Educational-Psychological Perspective". Mayring, Philipp; Rhoeneck, Christoph V. (eds.), *Learning Emotions. The Influence of Affective Factors on Classroom Learning*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 9-28.
- Goleman, Daniel (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Hall, Nathan C.; Goetz, Thomas (2013). *Emotion, Motivation, and Self-Regulation: A Handbook for Teachers*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Holec, Henri (1981). *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press Pergamon.
- Holec, Henri (2009). "Autonomy in Language Learning: a Single Pedagogical Paradigm or Two?". Kjisik, Felicity et al. (eds.), *Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy: Learning Environments, Learning Communities and Identities*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 21-47.
- LeDoux, Joseph E. (1996). *The Emotional Brain*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Little, David (1991). *Learner Autonomy. 1: Definitions, Issues and Problems*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Little, David (2007). "Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited". *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 14-29.

- Littlewood, William (1996). "Autonomy: an Anatomy and a Framework". *System*, 24(4), 247-35.
- Littlewood, William (1999). "Defining and Developing Autonomy in East Asian Contexts". *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71-94.
- Méndez López, Mariza G.; Pea Aguilar, Argelia P. (2013). "Emotions as Learning Enhancers of Foreign Language Learning Motivation". *Profile*, 15(1), 109-24.
- Mozzon-McPherson, Maria (2000). "An Analysis of the Skills and Functions of Language Learning Advisers". *Links & Letters*, 7, 111-26.
- Mozzon-McPherson, Maria (2003). "Language Learning Advising and Advisers: Establishing the Profile of an Emerging Profession". *Actes de la IX Trobada de Centres d'Autoaprenentatge*. Generalitat de Catalunya, 179-196. Col·lecció COM/Materials didàctics 9. URL <http://llengua.gencat.cat/permalink/50a3ea09-5386-11e4-8f3f-000c29cdf219> (2017-08-07).
- Mozzon-McPherson, Maria (2007). "Supporting Independent Learning Environments: an Analysis of Structures and Roles of Language Learning Advisors". Rubin, J. (ed.), "Counselling in Language Learning Settings", special issue, *System*, 35(1), 66-92.
- Murray, Garold (2009). "Self-Access Language Learning: Structure, Control, and Responsibility". Kjisik, Felicity et al. (eds.), *Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy: Learning Environments, Learning Communities and Identities*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 118-42.
- Murray, Garold (2011). "Metacognition and Imagination in Self-Access Language Learning". Gardner, D. (ed.), *Fostering Autonomy in Language Learning*. Gaziantep: Zirve University, 5-16.
- Oxford, Rebecca L. (2003). "Toward a More Systematic Model of L2 Learner Autonomy". Palfreyman, David; Smith, Richard C. (eds.), *Learner Autonomy Across Cultures*. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 75-91.
- Pekrun, Reinhard; Goetz, Thomas; Titz, Wolfram; Perry, Raymond (2002). "Academic Emotions in Students' Self-Regulated Learning and Achievement: a Program of Qualitative and Quantitative Research". *Educational Psychologist*, 37(2), 91-105.
- Pekrun, Reinhard (2006). "The Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions: Assumptions, Corollaries, and Implications for Educational Research and Practice". *Educational Psychology Review*, 18(4), 315-41.
- Pekrun, Reinhard; Goetz, Thomas; Daniels, Lia M.; Stupnisky, Robert H.; Perry, Raymond (2010). "Boredom in Achievement Settings: Exploring Control-Value Antecedents and Performance Outcomes of a Neglected Emotion". *Educational Psychologist*, 102(3), 531-49.
- Pekrun, Reinhard; Linnenbrink-Garcia, Lisa (2012). "Academic Emotions and Student Engagement". Christenson, Sandra L.; Reschly, Amy L.; Wylie, Cathy (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. New York: Springer.

- Pekrun, Reinhard; Linnenbrink-Garcia, Lisa (eds.) (2014). *International Handbook of Emotions in Education*. New York: Routledge, 259-82.
- Rosenberg, Erika L. (1998). "Levels of Analysis and the Organization of Affect". *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), 247-70.
- Ryan, Richard M.; Deci, Edward L. (2000). "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions". *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Schumann, John (2004). *The Neurobiology of Learning: Perspectives from Second Language Acquisition*. Los Angeles: Erlbaum.
- Schutz, Paul A.; Pekrun, Reinhard (eds.) (2007). *Emotion in Education*. San Diego: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Tassinari, Maria G. (2012). "Evaluating Learner Autonomy: a Dynamic Model with Descriptors". *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 3(1), 24-40.
- Tassinari, Maria G.; Ciekanski, Maud (2013). "Accessing the Self in Self-Access Learning: Emotions and Feelings in Language Advising". *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 4(4), 262-80.
- Weiner, Bernard (1992). *Human Motivation: Metaphors, Theories and Research*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Zull, James (2002). *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning*. Virginia: Stylus, Sterling.
- Zull, James (2004). "The Art of Changing the Brain". *Educational Leadership*, 62(1), 68-72.