

# The perceived importance of intercultural communication and emotions in the language classroom

KATALIN PINIEL AND ÁGNES ALBERT  
EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY  
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

---

*IAIE 2021*

THIS STUDY WAS SUPPORTED BY NKFI GRANT (129149).

# Who we are ...

Ágnes Albert

Katalin Piniel

Affiliation: Eötvös Loránd University,  
Budapest, Hungary



Members of a research team headed by prof. Kata Csizér: <http://nyelvtanulas.elte.hu/>

Focus: Individual differences and emotions in foreign language learning: a multi-perspective approach

# Intercultural contact

---

Role of **intercultural communication** and **intercultural contact** in the language learning process

- it is a key determinant of communication using the foreign language (see studies on Willingness To Communicate, e.g., MacIntyre, 2007).
- it induces language learning motivation and ultimately contributes to successful language learning (Kormos, Csizér, & Iwaniec, 2013).

**Perceived importance of intercultural contact** is oftentimes intertwined with a number of contextual and individual characteristics, including language learners' emotions (Dewaele, 2015)

# Emotions

---

Emotions: "multifaceted responses to events that we see as challenges or opportunities in our inner or outer world, events that are important to our goals" (Keltner, Oatley, & Jenkins, 2014, p. 27)

A qualitative study based on Pekrun (2014) describing English majors emotional experiences (Piniel & Albert, 2018): enjoyment and anxiety emerged as most defining BUT there are other emotions that have emerged and seem to play a role in the FL classroom (including boredom, apathy, confusion, shame, hope, curiosity, pride)

# Context

---

Hungary: monolingual country, with a population of around 10 million people, 99.4% with Hungarian as L1

Capital city: Budapest with almost 2 million people

Compulsory foreign language learning:

- First FL: grade 4 (around age 10), five possible FLs (English being the most frequent);
- Second FL: Grade 7/9: anything the school can offer

EU statistics: Hungarians generally score low in FL knowledge compared to other countries

Change from face to face to online learning due to the worldwide pandemic in March 2020 in all institutions of public education

# Research questions

---

- What characterizes Hungarian secondary school learners' intercultural awareness (conceptualized in our study as the perceptions learners hold about the importance of language use in intercultural contexts) and learners' emotions associated with language learning?
- What characterizes the relationship of these constructs?
- Did the relationship of these constructs change after the sudden lockdown of schools?

# Methods

---

- Longitudinal, quantitative study
- Data was collected at two points in time during the 2019-2020 academic year: once before the lockdown of schools and once after.
- Participants: N=187 secondary school learners
- Instrument: standardized questionnaire measuring learners' positive as well as negative emotions (altogether nine different emotions) and their perceptions about intercultural communication using five-point Likert-scale items.
- Data collection: Time1: paper and pencil; Time2: online
- Data analysis: descriptive statistics, correlations, converting the correlation coefficient into a z-score using Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation

# Results

Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Contact	187	1.00	5.00	4.0719	.76299
Contact_2	187	1.00	5.00	4.0524	.79787
Anxiety	187	1.00	4.80	2.6409	.78113
Anxiety_2	187	1.00	4.80	2.6663	.81932
Boredom	187	1.00	4.80	2.1505	.75097
Boredom_2	187	1.00	4.40	2.1369	.76149
Apathy	187	1.00	4.75	2.0940	.86828
Apathy_2	187	1.00	4.50	2.1096	.87721
Confusion	187	1.00	4.20	2.5679	.71895
Confusion_2	187	1.00	5.00	2.5326	.77457
Shame	187	1.00	5.00	2.7218	.96527
Shame_2	187	1.00	5.00	2.8118	1.05181
Enjoyment	187	1.80	5.00	3.8682	.65049
Enjoyment_2	187	1.80	5.00	3.8021	.72882
Hope	187	2.33	5.00	4.3036	.55658
Hope_2	187	1.83	5.00	4.2308	.62388
Curiosity	187	1.50	5.00	3.3485	.72456
Curiosity_2	187	1.17	5.00	3.3529	.78549
Pride	187	1.20	5.00	3.6997	.96119
Pride_2	187	1.00	5.00	3.6246	.95469



# Results: Time1

---

	Contact	Anxiety	Boredom	Apathy	Confusion	Shame	Enjoyment	Hope	Curiosity	Pride
Contact	1									
Anxiety		1								
Boredom			1							
Apathy		.262**	.494**	1						
Confusion		.602**		.207**	1					
Shame		.632**		.226**	.363**	1				
Enjoyment	.384**	-.328**	-.597**	-.428**	-.297**		1			
Hope	.210**	-.502**		-.353**	-.530**	-.365**	.484**	1		
Curiosity	.239**		-.689**	-.422**			.728**	.260**	1	
Pride	.327**	-.420**	-.203**	-.304**	-.415**	-.313**	.539**	.673**	.335**	1

# Results: Time2

	Contact_2	Anxiety_2	Boredom_2	Apathy_2	Confusion_2	Shame_2	Enjoyment_2	Hope_2	Curiosity_2	Pride_2
Contact_2	1									
Anxiety_2		1								
Boredom_2		.148*	1							
Apathy_2		.227**	.654**	1						
Confusion_2		.699**		.197**	1					
Shame_2		.712**		.157*	.488**	1				
Enjoyment_2	.358**	-.263**	-.661**	-.553**	-.231**		1			
Hope_2	.401**	-.351**	-.189**	-.314**	-.393**	-.248**	.538**	1		
Curiosity_2	.305**	-.144*	-.745**	-.569**			.785**	.366**	1	
Pride_2	.397**	-.420**	-.216**	-.344**	-.450**	-.337**	.598**	.684**	.379**	1

# Results: Changes between Time1 and Time2

---

Change in correlations:

- Contact-Pride ns
- Contact-Enjoyment ns
- Contact-Curiosity ns
- Contact-Hope  $z = -2.02$   $p = 0.0434$

# Conclusion

---

- Strong associations between learners' **positive emotions** and the **perceived importance of intercultural communication**;
- No significant correlations with any of the negative emotions.
- The link became significantly stronger in the case of one positive emotion in particular: **hope**.
- The perceived importance of intercultural communication tends to be associated with higher levels of self-reported positive emotions; thus, it might contribute to language learning success. Interestingly, negative emotions seem to be irrelevant in this respect.

# Pedagogical implications

---

- Since we examined **correlations** between our variables, it is difficult to decide whether experiencing more positive emotions led to more intercultural contact, or having more intercultural contact led to experiencing more positive emotions.
- Both would be plausible since
  - Learners might want to have more contact with speakers they associate positive feelings with.
  - Being in contact with speakers of a language might lead to experiencing more positive feeling about them and their language as they are perceived as less "foreign/unfamiliar".
- Thus, teachers should both **promote** positive feelings in connection with the target language, the culture, the speakers and the language classes and offer possibilities for learners for establishing intercultural contact.
- In the online environment, **hope** seemed to emerge as an important emotion particularly linked to the **perceived importance of intercultural contact**; thus, language teachers should place special emphasis on it in language classes, nurturing learners' hopes of future language learning success.

Thank you for your  
attention!

---

QUESTIONS ARE WELCOME!