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Abstract

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Introducing positive psychology to SLA

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Abstract

Positive psychology is a rapidly expanding subfield in psychology that has important implications for the field of second language acquisition (SLA). This paper introduces positive psychology to the study of language by describing its key tenets. The potential contributions of positive psychology are contextualized with reference to prior work, including the humanistic movement in language teaching, models of motivation, the concept of an affective filter, studies of the good language learner, and the concepts related to the self. There are reasons for both encouragement and caution as studies inspired by positive psychology are undertaken. Papers in this special issue of *SSLLT* cover a range of quantitative and qualitative methods with implications for theory, research, and teaching practice. The special issue serves as a springboard for future research in SLA under the umbrella of positive psychology.

Keywords: positive psychology, motivation, the good language learner, humanistic education, positive emotion

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1. What is positive psychology?

Positive psychology (PP) is the empirical study of how people thrive and flourish; it is the study of the ordinary human strengths and virtues that make life good (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011; Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). From its inception, PP has been designed to address three topic areas: the workings of positive internal experiences such as emotions, positive individual characteristics such as traits associated with living well, and institutions that enable people to flourish. The goal of PP, expressed simply, is to help people lead better lives. To do so, rather than taking a palliative approach to reducing pain or coping with distressing experience, PP seeks to develop tools to build positive emotions, greater engagement, and an appreciation of meaning in life and its activities (Seligman, 2006). There are several books written by PP researchers for a general audience, including Seligman's (2002) *Authentic Happiness* and *Flourish* (2011). These books strive to mobilize the empirical research into practical actions that have empirical research support. When comparing these two works by Seligman, we see the transition toward a more complex concept of well-being. Seligman (2011) uses the acronym PERMA to reflect the multiple dimensions of the good life, including a focus on positive emotion (P), engagement with activities that use one's character strengths (E), developing positive interpersonal relationships (R), finding meaning by serving a cause beyond oneself (M), and recognizing areas of accomplishment and achievement (A).

As a defined scholarly area, PP has been said to have a short history and a long past (Peterson, 2006); it represents a form of "rebirth" for humanistic psychology (Funder, 2010), but with a stronger emphasis on empirical research. The narrative of the founding of modern PP is most often traced to 1998, when then-president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman, focussed on "prevention" as the working theme for the annual convention (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7). Positive psychology became the focus of his year at the helm of the organization (Seligman, 1999). A short time later, the millennial issue of *American Psychologist* featured 16 papers introducing the newly christened field of positive ssychology to a wide audience. In their seminal article, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) each tell a personal story that led them to focus on the positive side of being human, stories that we will include here as an illustration of the shift in perspective that PP represents.

For Csikszentmihalyi, best known for his work on creativity and flow, the study of human psychology took hold during the Second World War:

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> As a child, I witnessed the dissolution of the smug world in which I had been comfortably ensconced: I noticed with surprise how many of the adults I had known as successful and self-confident became helpless and dispirited once the war removed their social supports. Without jobs, money or status they were reduced to empty shells. Yet there were a few who kept their integrity and purpose despite the surrounding chaos. Their serenity was a beacon that kept others from losing hope. And these were not the men and women one would have expected to emerge unscathed: they were not necessarily the most respected, better educated, or more skilled individuals. This experience set me thinking: What sources of strength were these people drawing on? (p. 6)

Seligman, who was previously best known for studies of learned helplessness and clinical depression, tells a story of an everyday experience infused with deep meaning, as so many everyday experiences can be. He describes a moment of understanding, where he could make a choice to live a more positive life:

> The moment took place in my garden while I was weeding with my five-year old daughter, Nikki. I have to confess that even though I write books about children, I'm really not all that good with children. I am goal-oriented and time-urgent and when I'm weeding in the garden, I'm actually trying to get the weeding done. Nikki, however, was throwing weeds into the air, singing, and dancing around. I yelled at her. She walked away came back and said,
> "Daddy, I want to talk to you."
> "Yes, Nikki?"
> "Daddy, do you remember before my fifth birthday? From the time I was three to the time I was five, I was a whiner. I whined every day. When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch."
> This was for me an epiphany, nothing less. (pp. 5-6)

Proponents of PP have pointed out that, in general, psychology can tend towards the negative when it is focussed on abnormalities, disorders, and mental illness (Seligman, 2006). If there is a single document that best captures the practice of modern psychology, it is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (the DSM-5 published by the American Psychiatric Association, 2013); a thick compendium that details mental disorders, their frequency, contributing and exacerbating factors, associated disorders, and so on. PP does not aim to replace the DSM or to alter the topics of clinical psychology. Rather, PP aims to contribute another perspective to psychology by studying what we can do to increase strengths and attributes such as resiliency, happiness, optimism and the like in the general population. If PP has something akin to the DSM, it would be the VIA inventory of strengths survey (formerly called *values in action* survey), a worldwide, internet-based, ongoing study of character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The 24 character strengths in the VIA

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survey are organized into six categories representing virtues that are found in all cultures. Table 1 provides a brief description of each of the six overarching virtues and the specific character strengths categorized within each.

Second language acquisition (SLA) rarely deals with these topics at present; however, their relevance in the field is immediately apparent when one considers the practical, human, and social dimension of language learning. Many language educators are aware of the importance of improving individual learners' experiences of language learning by helping them to develop and maintain their motivation, perseverance, and resiliency, as well as positive emotions necessary for the long-term undertaking of learning a foreign language. In addition, teachers also widely recognise the vital role played by positive classroom dynamics amongst learners and teachers, especially in settings in which communication and personally meaningful interactions are foregrounded. For these reasons, we feel that studying the role of strengths, such as those listed in Table 1, along with the institutions, such as classrooms, schools, and language policies, that explicitly enable the expression and development of strengths would represent a valuable addition to current perspectives on language learning processes and contexts.

Table 1 Six virtues and 24 character strengths in the VIA inventory of strengths (adapted from Ruch, Weber, Park, & Peterson, 2014)

Wisdom and knowledge: Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
(1) Creativity: thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
(2) Curiosity: taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
(3) Open-mindedness: thinking things through and examining them from all sides
(4) Love of learning: mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
(5) Perspective: being able to provide wise counsel to others
Courage: Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
(6) Bravery: not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
(7) Perseverance: finishing what one starts
(8) Honesty: speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
(9) Zest: approaching life with excitement and energy
Humanity: Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others
(10) Love: valuing close relations with others
(11) Kindness: doing favors and good deeds for others
(12) Social intelligence: being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
Justice: Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
(13) Teamwork: working well as member of a group or team
(14) Fairness: treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
(15) Leadership: organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

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Temperance: Strengths that protect against excess
(16) Forgiveness: forgiving those who have done wrong
(17) Modesty: letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
(18) Prudence: being careful about one's choices; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
(19) Self-regulation: regulating what one feels and does

Transcendence: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
(20) Appreciation of beauty and excellence [short: beauty]: noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
(21) Gratitude: being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
(22) Hope: expecting the best and working to achieve it
(23) Humor: liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people
(24) Religiousness: having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

2. PP roots in humanistic psychology

The short narrative of the history of PP might begin in 1998, but the long past traces back to foundational philosophies in the East and in the West that questioned the meaning of living well (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). Topics of love, virtue, character strength, and related subjects have occupied the thoughts of great philosophers, poets and teachers for centuries. The recent history of psychology, and indeed education, features significant contributions from the humanist tradition found in the influential work of Maslow and others (e.g., see Maslow, 1979).

Maslow's (1968, 1970) approach to studying human nature shares common ground with Csikszentmihalyi in emphasizing the study of characteristics of respected and admired persons. This is the *good specimen* approach where one focuses on the best examples of lives well lived (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Maslow, 1969). Psychology has more often taken an illness-oriented approach, most famously embodied in the work of Sigmund Freud. Whereas Freud studied neurotic maladies to inform a ground-breaking theory of the mind, Maslow compiled case studies of admired colleagues and mentors, from which he wrote his influential descriptions of self-actualizing people (Maslow, 1968, 1970). Yet, Maslow's particular approach to humanistic psychology was both eclectic and inclusive: "I am Freudian and I am behavioristic and I am humanistic" (Maslow, 1969, p. 724). His personal experience included years of being psychoanalyzed himself, and his original research was in the behaviourist tradition, studying monkeys as Harry Harlow's first doctoral graduate (Hoffman, 1992). Although Maslow himself embraced empiricism and sought to ground his thinking in research data, humanistic psychology generally did not engage with a strongly empirical approach, which ultimately led to extensive criticism of work emerging from this branch of psychology. It is

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a credit to Maslow himself that he was able to resolve the apparent dichotomy between empiricism and humanism and embrace multiple epistemological perspectives (Waterman, 2013).

3. On the trail of positive psychology in SLA

As with the field of psychology, PP in SLA could perhaps be viewed as having a short history and a long past. Lake (2013) was one of the first to explicitly adapt and apply PP concepts in his study of Japanese learners' positive self, positive L2 self, self-efficacy, and intended effort. Lake successfully demonstrated that PP-inspired measures correlate with effort, self-efficacy, and TOEIC Bridge scores. There are several additional, established concepts familiar to those studying SLA that could also be brought under a PP umbrella. Although there are a number of lines of inquiry that we could consider, let us focus on five especially salient ones: the humanistic movement in language teaching, models of motivation that draw upon a range of affective factors, the concept of an affective filter, studies of the good language learner, and the more recent literature on concepts related to the self and its development.

The humanistic movement in language teaching was at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. Characteristically, humanistic approaches took a holistic view of the learner, combining cognition and affect; the underlying assumption, as expressed by Roberts (as cited in Stevick, 1990), being that "the affective aspects of language learning are as important as the cognitive aspects, [and therefore] the learner should be treated in some sense as a 'whole person'" (p. 26). Today few would dispute such core principles and their importance for understanding language learner psychology and behaviours. However, humanism became closely associated with alternative forms of language teaching such as Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, and Total Physical Response (Asher, 1969; Gattegno, 1963; Lozanov, 1979). As with humanistic psychology, these instructional methods came under considerable criticism for their lack of scientific support and validity; however, the humanistic tradition as a guiding approach and epistemology has had a considerable, lasting influence in SLA.

Indeed, integrating affect and cognition remains a key tenet of many contemporary SLA models. In particular, work by R. C. Gardner and his colleagues has played an important role in drawing attention to socio-affective factors and the importance of positive attitudes toward the language, its speakers and related cultures (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985, 2010). In the socio-educational model, Gardner (2010) holds that positive attitudes towards the learning situation (teacher and course) facilitate language learning. The social milieu in which the learning takes place is a key source of

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both positive and negative attitudes, as learners internalize elements of the context in which they live. Clément's (1980, 1986) socio-contextual model places even more emphasis on the learning context, the power relationships among language groups, and tensions between language acquisition and language loss, especially for members of a minority group learning the language of a majority group. In addition, Clément proposes a secondary motivational process within the individual, *self-confidence*, which is defined by low anxiety and perceptions of high linguistic competence. Both Gardner's and Clément's models foreground the role of social and cultural contexts, highlighting that an individual's psychology does not exist in a vacuum; an individual learner is always embedded in multiple contexts.

A third perspective of note is offered by Krashen (1985), who also drew attention to the role of emotions with what he termed the *affective filter*. Krashen argued that a high degree of negative emotion raises a filter that reduces the amount of comprehensible input reaching the learner. Conversely, in the presence of positive emotions, the affective filter is lower and the learner is open to being exposed to more comprehensible input.

A fourth noteworthy approach, studies of the "good language learners" (GLLs; Naiman, 1978, Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Stevick, 1989), provides recognizable parallels to the holistic approach of Maslow's studies of self-actualizing persons. Essentially, GLL studies sought to understand the lessons that can be learned from "good" or "expert" learners or teachers (Griffiths, 2008). The related set of studies of "expertise" (see, e.g., Farrell, 2013; Johnson, 2005; Tsui, 2003) also examined positive examples of learners and/or teachers, typically focussing on the integrated use of competences and skills. An important feature of many GLL studies has been the tendency to look at the processes by which "good" language learners acquire a foreign language and not just merely describe the learner and their language output. Such a process-oriented approach to understanding the learner resonates with more recent developments in complexity perspectives.

Most recently, a fifth line of relevant research has developed that emphasizes the self as a central concept. With respect to motivation, Dörnyei's (2005) L2 self system model proposes that people are motivated to deal with perceived discrepancies between their current sense of self and their future selves, one to move closer to their vision of an ideal self and another to prevent developing negative aspects of the self, such as a sense of failure or disappointing important others. This approach stresses the importance of having positive future goals, a requisite level of optimism that one is able to change and potentially achieve these future self-states, as well as the strategic knowledge necessary in order to achieve future goals. Related studies investigating the self in its various forms

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also highlight the role of positive self-beliefs, a sense of competence, a growth mindset and accompanying optimism about the potential for positive change in one's abilities (e.g., Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Mercer & Williams, 2014).

4. Criticism of prior work

As can be seen, even from this brief and by necessity selective overview, it is apparent that there is already a substantial base work consistent with PP with which SLA researchers can build connections. However, it should not be surprising to find that the approaches described above also have their critics. The early humanistic teaching techniques received considerable criticism for their lack of scientific support and validity, and the whole movement was criticised for supposedly attending unduly to the emotional sphere with too little focus on the linguistic, cognitive dimensions of language learning (e.g., Gadd, 1998). The models stemming from the work by Gardner and Clément have been considered to be less applicable to locations beyond the Canadian context in which they were developed, and some have questioned the applicability of the models in the case of English as a lingua franca where the language group is diffuse, global, and difficult to specify. The affective filter hypothesis also has been criticized for being imprecise in describing the origins of the filter and for being difficult to measure. The GLL studies have been faulted for being overly-prescriptive and ignoring the lessons to be learned from unsuccessful learners as a way to balance the perspective (e.g., Rees-Miller, 1993). Self-related concepts have been criticized for the seemingly endless array of self-related concepts that have been invented, leading to confusion about vague and inconsistent use of terminology (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994; MacIntyre, MacKinnon, & Clément, 2009).

PP has itself also generated a number of critiques (Brown, Sokal, & Friedman, 2013; Coyne & Tennen, 2010; Friedman & Robbins, 2012; Held, 2004; Waterman, 2013). The journal *Psychological Inquiry* devoted an entire 98-page issue to debating the merits of PP. The target article by Lazarus (2003), still listed as one of the journal's five most downloaded papers, took aim at a number of issues common to all of psychology, and PP in particular. In one of the last works of his life, Lazarus cited problems with (a) the over-use of cross-sectional research designs, (b) a tendency to treat emotion too simplistically as either positive or negative, (c) inadequate attention to both differences among individuals within a group as well as the overlap between groups when discussing statistically significant group differences, and (d) poor quality measurement of emotions. Lazarus ended his criticism by urging proponents of PP to avoid oversimplification of research results that can seem like little more than slogans. In the popular press, Ehrenreich (2010) also takes issue with PP

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in her book entitled *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America.*[1] She identifies a tendency in the United States to promote exclusively positive thinking and purge negative thoughts. At the individual level, she offers the example of excessive promotion of positive thinking that can lead to victim self-blaming among cancer patients, as one example relevant to Ehrenriech's own life. At the national level, she identified a refusal by corporations to accurately assess risk that partially contributed to a sharp economic downturn in 2008.

There is no doubt that the future development of the PP approach within SLA can learn from these and other criticisms. In future studies, SLA research might be at an advantage over the discipline of psychology, having travelled much further down the road of recognising the genuine value in research that allows a variety and mixture of epistemological and methodological stances. SLA research has developed an openness to different understandings of empirical studies such as those employing systematic, rigorous qualitative research. As a field, SLA has the ability to see language phenomena from more than a single perspective (MacIntyre, Noels, & Moore, 2010). Openness to using a full range of research tools, and acceptance of a diversity of methods, will prove invaluable when opening up new areas of research into aspects of PP that have not yet been explored in SLA. Examples of topics waiting to be studied include flourishing, eudemonia, hope, gratitude, wellbeing, and hardiness in respect to language learning. Other examples of the rich conceptual vein to be explored might include adaptations of the character strengths listed in Table 1 above.

A particularly intriguing area of overlap between language learning/teaching and PP is in the emphasis on a participant-active approach. The late Christopher Peterson (2006) admonished readers of his *Primer in Positive Psychology* that PP "is not a spectator sport" (p. 25). Likewise, the communicative approach to language learning also emphasizes the need to talk in order to learn and autonomy-inspired approaches emphasize the self-directed actions and agency of the learners (see Chaffee, Noels, & McEwan, this volume). A vital component in self-directed learning is an awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses. Using the tools of PP (such as the VIA inventory) or adaptations of those tools could be valuable in helping learners to become aware of their personal strengths and to develop strategies for building on and employing these strengths in new ways to assist their own language learning. Teachers too may benefit from an increased focus on their own strengths as educators as well as on the positive dimensions of their educational settings. For exam-

[1] The book was published in the UK under an even more provocative title, *Smile or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America and the World* (2010, Granta).

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ple, rather than taking a problem-focused action research approach to classroom issues, teachers could opt for an appreciative inquiry approach beginning with the positive aspects and strengths of their classroom lives and practices, working to build on these through cooperation in new ways in order to improve teaching and learning (see, e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

5. Revisiting familiar concepts from a PP viewpoint

It would seem that we are now well equipped as a scholarly community to realise the potential offered by PP to better understand what enables individual learners, groups of learners, and teachers to flourish. We can address the critiques of the past, whilst no doubt making our own mistakes in the present, as we connect with existing frameworks and extend ideas in new directions. In order to illustrate how a fresh perspective can be brought to bear on existing constructs, let us briefly explore the role of emotions in language learning, revisit the idea of the GLL, and consider the concept of expertise.

5.1. Positive and negative emotion

One of the most important findings in the PP literature thus far has been Fredrickson's (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) clarification of the difference between positive and negative emotion (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), that is, emotions that are generally experienced by individuals as pleasant versus unpleasant. Emotion research has been successful in identifying a relatively small number of basic, universal emotions that are closely tied to physiological responding and basic survival (emotions such as fear, disgust, anger, and so on). Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001, 2003) examines the nature and function of positive emotion. Fredrickson concludes that positive and negative emotions are not dichotomous or opposite ends of the same continuum (as was implied by Krashen's concept of the affective filter); they are better conceptualized as two dimensions of experience. At the core, the function of positive emotion is qualitatively different from negative emotion. Whereas negative emotion tends to narrow a person's field of attention and predisposes specific action tendencies, positive emotion creates tendencies toward play and exploration, yielding a broadened field of attention and building resources for future action.

The implications of positive-broadening emotions for SLA can be profound. Differentiating positive and negative emotions leads to a more nuanced understanding of how they affect L2 learning and communication. The most widely studied emotion in SLA has been anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, this

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volume). Prior research has presented a conventional, one-dimensional view of positive and negative emotion using a see-saw metaphor (positive goes up, negative goes down). A two-dimensional view of emotion can accommodate the see-saw view of emotion, but also opens up the possibility of examining ambivalence (MacIntyre, 2007) which is the co-occurrence of negative with positive emotion (see Table 2). Ambivalence is a common experience in SLA; for example, when a person is feeling both confident *and* anxious before giving a classroom presentation or approaching a native speaker. Further, a two-dimensional view allows for understanding amotivation, apathy or the absence of emotion in the situation as the lack of arousal of both positive and negative emotions in a particular context.

Table 2 A two-dimensional view of emotion

	Low positive	Highly positive
Low negative	Lack of emotional arousal	Pleasant emotional tenor
Highly negative	Unpleasant emotional tenor	Ambivalent feelings

5.2. Expertise and GLL reloaded

The developments in positive psychology and those in SLA also offer a new take on both the GLL and the concept of expertise. In a recent study, one of the present authors (Mercer, 2011) was surprised to discover the relatively negative beliefs held by one of the expert learners who had attained an exceptionally high level of proficiency. Although this learner was clearly highly successful in terms of achievement within her context, she appeared to lack confidence in certain domains and hold more fixed mindset beliefs. Reflecting on such findings in light of PP suggests that taking a process-oriented view of learners and their experiences and, more importantly, considering their well-being during this process might be a valuable way of examining "good" language learners, rather than focusing primarily on their states and outcomes.

5.3. Goals of language learning

For us, as with many language educators, one of the goals is to foster the positivity of our learners' educational experiences, and supporting them as individuals in reaching their personal highest levels of achievement and success (Fredrickson, 2001). Whilst learners' ultimate levels of achievement and proficiency will be a focus of SLA research, perhaps a vital additional perspective would be to focus on the processes and timescales in which learners can be seen to be happy and experience flourishing in language learning. Griffiths (2008, pp. 1-2) asks key questions

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in her collection on the GLL such as, what is it that makes a good language learner? And why are some learners more successful than others? Viewed through a PP lens, these questions might take a slightly different focus concentrating not on levels of proficiency, language competence and achievement, but instead considering the processes, rather than the product of learning. The following are example questions that capture processes over different timescales:

1. Over the long term (measured in years), why are some learners happier, more resilient, and enjoy language learning more than others?
2. In what ways/how do learners appear to develop a sense of flourishing whilst engaging in language learning (activities) during a specific course (measured in days and months)?
3. What features of short-term, immediate experience are associated with the ebb and flow of engagement in the learning situation, such as a classroom, during the minutes that teacher and students spend together? Can we better understand what leads to greater engagement for some learners and not others (measured in seconds and minutes)?
4. How do learners' immediate experiences interact with their medium-to-long-term emotional trajectories whilst learning a foreign language (measured on multiple timescales)?

As research progresses with a process-oriented approach, positive experiences can be understood in more nuanced terms as we consider not only moment-to-moment experiences but also how ongoing experiences fit within the language and self-development process. Kahneman and Riis (2005) draw a valuable distinction between these two processes that they link to the conceptualization of self. First, the *experiencing self*, with a timeframe of approximately 3 seconds, is our ongoing window of conscious experience; the experiencing self is active and fleeting. Second, the *remembering self* has a long history in memory. The remembering self knits together the narrative that captures the meaning of events in our life, and is open to reinterpretation. Kahneman's (2011) studies of the experience of happiness draw the distinction between the experiencing and remembering selves, helping to clarify ways in which immediate negative events can ultimately be interpreted within a positive narrative or vice versa. Thus, the multiple processes involved in learning a foreign language might produce a complex answer to a deceptively simple question such as "what makes learners happy?" when we consider these different perspectives on experiences.

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6. Four encouraging trends for the future of PP research in SLA

If PP is to be taken up in SLA, it needs to develop along strong empirical lines. In considering the potential for PP-inspired research to have an impact on SLA, we see four trends that support emerging research in this area.

First, the social turn in SLA means that the field is taking seriously the idea that contexts in which language learning occurs are diverse, nuanced, and they matter. The three pillars of PP include positive emotions, positive character traits and positive institutions. Conducting studies of enabling institutions, so far, has been the weakest link for PP (Waterman, 2013). However, in SLA research, greater care is now being taken to describe the contexts in which learning occurs, especially at the classroom level. Perhaps the next step is to focus a little more on the institutions (broadly defined formal and informal organizational structures) that enable success and promote positive language learning environments. Institutions are embedded in the broader cultural milieu that will shape the ways in which the aims of PP are pursued and various possible configurations of its pillars (see Leu, Wang, & Koo, 2011; Sheldon, 2009).

A second trend that bodes well for developing interest in PP is the idea of complex dynamic systems, which has become a "hot" topic in SLA (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, & Henry, 2015). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) have argued that L2 development involves complex, dynamic, emergent, open, self-organizing and adaptive systems. Systems thinking adopts inherently holistic perspectives and examines dynamism across different contexts and timescales. Models of the learning and communication process are incomplete without explicit consideration of positive emotions, individual strengths, and the various institutions and contexts of learning, such as governments, public/private schools, community groups, and networks in which learning occurs. In addition, Lazarus (2003) questioned whether one can consider any emotion positive or negative. In a functional sense, all emotions are adaptive (e.g., fear serves a protective function). Quickly moving between positive and negative affective states, and explicitly considering ambivalent states (MacIntyre, 2007), is one of the strengths that dynamic models have over prior approaches to individual differences research (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015).

A third reason that PP topics might be especially relevant to SLA is the methodological diversity already present in the field. As noted previously, core epistemological advances have been made toward reconciling the humanistic and PP traditions that sometimes seem impossible in psychology (Waterman, 2013). However, SLA research has been receptive to a variety of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research for several years now, with studies routinely collecting data from multiple types of sources. The strength of large-

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scale quantitative surveys lies in assessing the reliability and generalizability of the findings, but the weakness is that general trends in large datasets might not apply to any single individual within those data sets. On the other hand, the strength of individual-level qualitative data is that a rich description of the relevant factors for an individual can be proffered, with the weakness that reliability and generalizability typically cannot be assessed. The strength of each method is the weakness of the other (Creswell, 2003). It is highly desirable to maintain the empirical base for PP in SLA, and the diversity of rigorous research approaches already available is encouraging.

A fourth, related sign that SLA is ready for PP is what might be called an "individual turn" (MacIntyre, 2014). The dense data that is required to study in detail the processes of language learning often must be collected and interpreted at the individual level (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007). Research that uses group averages and correlations among variables has been a mainstay of SLA theory development over the years (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). More recently, alongside the existing large-sample methods, there has been a burgeoning interest in documenting the complexity of individual cases; it is for this reason we have opened this paper with the personal stories of Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman. Individual level research can describe in some detail the processes that lead to happiness, the protective force of learned optimism, or describe the most enjoyable facets of learning for a specific person, with nomothetic studies identifying how commonly occurring these events might be. An example of a dense, individual-level, mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to SLA research can be found in MacIntyre and Serroul's (2015) idiodynamic study that integrates motivation with perceived competence, anxiety and willingness to communicate as part of an ongoing, dynamic process. Perhaps we are at an optimal time for a wide ranging research program devoted to study the role of PP in SLA from both the individual and group perspectives. With greater methodological diversity in the SLA field, perhaps we can avoid some of the issues that led to criticism outlined above.

7. A preview of the special issue

We hope that this brief introduction to PP will help to orient readers of the special issue of *SSLLT* to the other papers in this volume, and demonstrate that applications of PP in SLA are both possible and desirable. Within this issue, readers will find a collection of innovative research papers inspired by PP themes. The papers in this volume demonstrate a range of diverse methods, large-scale and small-scale, quantitative and qualitative, research-oriented and teaching-oriented. Gabryś-Barker examines the positive interpretations of failure experiences, showing how one might maintain enthusiasm from one situation to another. Murphey examines the

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role of music in the process of well-being, or to use the future-oriented term, "well-becoming." Falout examines how the physical layout of instructional space within an institutional setting can foster positive emotion and facilitate learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre discuss the links between positive and negative emotion in a large-scale survey, using enjoyment and anxiety as their areas of focus. Chaffee, Noels and McEwan examine the motivational side of learner resiliency when faced with controlling versus autonomy-supportive teachers. Gregersen, MacIntyre, Hein, Talbot and Claman take three PP activities that have received empirical support in the literature and document how both learners and pre-service teachers use facets of emotional intelligence to understand their reactions to the PP activities. Oxford and Cuellar examine learner narratives to reveal hot cognition, emotion, flow, and other themes among their experiences. Finally, Oxford's provocative book on language and peace is reviewed by Ryan, who discusses why he liked the work in spite of some initial misgivings. All-in-all, the articles in this special issue contribute to the literature on PP in SLA in both pedagogically and theoretically-oriented ways using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods.

8. Conclusion

We conclude by claiming that positive psychology is *not* frivolous pop psychology; it is a rapidly expanding field of knowledge with rigorous methods and a promising future. There is an abundance of specific concepts and general themes to be explored. In speculating on the future of PP, Peterson (2006) said that ". . . the endeavour will swim or sink in accordance with the science it produces over the next decade" (p. 305). In the SLA field, we envision future theory development and pedagogical applications that will establish the relevance of PP for language learning. The recent history of PP shows that, when collected under one umbrella, the study of ordinary human strengths and virtues tells a compelling story. Advancing a PP perspective in SLA helps to ensure that the literature covers the full range of positive and negative experience with languages, communication, and the learning processes. The introduction of PP opens up a broad, rich collection of underresearched themes. The SLA field is perhaps in a particularly strong position to engage with PP to generate innovative thinking and research. We hope that this special issue will be a springboard to further studies of the themes that have been addressed, with conceptual and methodological rigour, and to new interventions in language learning institutions including, but not limited to, classrooms, schools, and curricula.

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