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An Investigation of the Relation between Neuroticism and English Language Listening Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine whether overall Neuroticism, as a factor of the Big Five, or Neuroticism facets had stronger significant correlations and predictions of English language listening Anxiety (ELLA). The participants (n=328) came from non-English majors and were recruited from Mohammed V University in Morocco. Data were gathered through two instruments: the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) (Costa & McCrae, 1992a), and Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) (Kim, 2000). The findings reported that two facets (Anxiety and Depression) showed stronger significant correlations with ELLA than overall Neuroticism. Moreover, stepwise multiple regression analyses (stepwise MRA) indicated that three facets (Anxiety, Depression, and Anger) showed a stronger significant prediction of ELLA than overall Neuroticism. Thus, teachers of English language can rely more on Neuroticism facets than on overall Neuroticism as the former give a broader and more accurate prediction of students who may experience ELLA.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Big Five Personality Factors

The Big Five Personality Factors (BFPF) are a comprehensive and widely replicated trait taxonomy (Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 2003). This personality taxonomy has dominated the field of personality psychology since the 1980s. The labels given to those five traits still vary but are often described as Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each trait is composed of six facets. For example, the facets of Agreeableness are Trust, Morality, Altruism, Cooperation, Modesty, and Sympathy. Moreover, this model of personality was labeled the Big Five (Goldberg, 1981) not to indicate their intrinsic greatness but to imply that each factor is largely broad. Hence, the Big Five does not suggest that personality differences can be classified into only five traits. Rather, personality is represented at the deepest level of abstraction by these five traits, and that each trait includes so many distinct and specific personality characteristics (John & Srivastava, 1999).

The existence of the BFPF has been proved by factor analytic methods where researchers used data from both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs (Costa & McCrae, 1980). Furthermore, much research has confirmed the validity of the Big Five (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006), which was supported by behavioral genetics (Yamagata et al., 2006), universality across cultures (Allik, 2005), and neuroscience (DeYoung et al., 2010). A large number of scholars and researchers contributed to the development of the Big Five including Allport (1937), Cattell (1943), Costa and McCrae (1992a), Eysenck (1960), Goldberg (1982), Norman (1963), and Tupes and Christal (1992). The BFPF showed to be a solid model as the same fivew personality traits appeared in studies of both self- and peer-ratings (McCrae & Costa, 1987), studies on children and adults (Digman, 1997), and several languages and cultures (Allik, 2005). It is also worth mentioning that the BFPF are independent of race, age, sex, culture, and time (Costa & McCrae, 1992a; Samuel, Simms, Clark, Livesley, & Widiger, 2010).

Neuroticism

Neuroticism has a widely agreed-upon definition and it is referred to as "individual differences in the tendency to experience distress, and in the cognitive and behavioral styles that follow from this tendency" (McCrae & John, 1992). It is also known as Emotional Instability by Goldberg (1993) and Negative Emotionality by Clark and Watson (2008).

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This personality factor is composed of six facets, namely Anxiety, Anger, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Immoderation, and Vulnerability (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals who score high on Neuroticism tend to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, nervous tension, depression, anger, immoderation, and guilt. This can be related to irrational thinking, inability to cope, and somatic complaints. Those who score low on Neuroticism are calm, pleasant, relaxed, confident, and even-tempered (McCrae & John, 1992). Individuals with high Neuroticism were found to speak less decisively and fluently (Alpert, Pouget, & Silva, 2001). They also express themselves with low confidence (McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). Neuroticism is also of pivotal significance to clinical psychology and psychiatry, saturating many personality disorders and psychopathology measures (Lahey, 2009).

Neuroticism was also associated with a high level of foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Dewaele, 2013). An important relation was also indicated between this factor and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) in the second, the third, and the fourth languages of two groups of language learners (Dewaele, 2013). This indicates that "more emotionally stable participants suffer less from FLCA, whereas high-Neuroticism participants report significantly higher levels of FLCA" (Dewaele, 2013). Notwithstanding, the relation between Neuroticism and FLA is not that clear as was reported by MacIntyre and Charos (1996) who concluded that there was no relation between Neuroticism and FLA.

Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Foreign Language Listening Anxiety (FLLA) has been given the least attention in comparison to foreign language speaking, writing, and reading anxieties. This was because listening was dealt with as a passive language skill that may be developed and mastered through classroom interaction, along with the belief that it is hard for language teachers to recognize learners who feel uncomfortable with listening activities and tasks, which is not the case with other language skills (Vogely, 1999; Bekleyen, 2009). However, researchers have recently started to focus on FLLA as a major problem just like other language skills (Kimura, 2008).

Sources of Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Wheeless and Scott (1976) conducted a significant study where they identified sources of second language listening anxiety. They concluded that there were three factors which were responsible for this issue. The first factor was called situation-specific worry of facing new information, the second one was fear of information processing, and the third one was the use of interpretive schemes as a way to respond to information. This implies that language learners with inappropriate schemata to strategically process information usually experience anxiety in many situations. This study mentioned also that listening text type may be a challenge for learners by giving various forms of interpretive schemes that have to be proceeded by them to achieve message comprehension. Hence, having inappropriate schemata may result in different degrees of anxiety while listening to different text forms.

Other sources of FLLA were found among students learning Spanish at an American university (Vogely, 1998). Specifically, 51% of the sources were due to characteristics of listening comprehension input (nature of the speech, level of difficulty, lack of clarity, lack of visual support, and lack of repetition), and they were considered the main listening anxiety-provoking factors compared to process-related, instructional, and personal factors which were respectively represented by 30%, 6%, and 13%. Particularly, the learners in this study referred to that speech which was fast, spontaneous, and delivered in a poor accent. They also indicated that unknown words, difficult syntax, and unfamiliar topics contributed to the difficulty in language listening. To reduce FLLA, the students suggested some solutions such as making input comprehensible, focusing on strategies needed, providing regular feedback, and experiencing small success.

Based on self-reports of both language teachers and learners, Sharif and Ferdous (2012) came up with other FLLA sources which were mainly associated with teachers, learners, materials, and process. Other sources such as listening text authenticity, incomprehensibility, fear of failure to interpret the message properly due to difficulty, task unfamiliarity, and fear of embarrassing outcomes were found by other studies (Samaneh & Noordin, 2013; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Young, 1992).

Some researchers suggested some ways to reduce listening test anxiety. For instance, introducing students to listening strategies as well as more practice may reduce FLLA (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Another study proposed relaxation and visualization as a solution to this issue (Arnold, 2000). This study found that students who practiced visualization made fewer mistakes in a listening post-test compared to those who did not.

Research Hypotheses

Based on those studies that reported stronger findings of the Big Five personality facets than factors when it comes to correlation and prediction of various variables (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Paunonen et al., 2003), the following two hypotheses were developed:

1. It is expected that one or more Neuroticism facets will have stronger significant correlations with ELLA than overall Neuroticism.
2. It is expected that one or more Neuroticism facets will have stronger significant prediction than overall Neuroticism.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study recruited 328 (54% women and 46% men) Moroccan non-English major university students, aged between 17 and 26 years (m=22.4 years, sd=2.1). They all belonged

to Mohammed V University. A total of 172 (52.44%) of the participants came from social science majors, and 156 (47.56%) came from non-social science majors.

Instruments

NEO-PI-R: this study adopted only the 48 items related to the Neuroticism factor and its six facets (Anxiety, Anger, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Immoderation, and Vulnerability) in the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992a). Neuroticism was calculated by adding the 48 items, whereas facets were calculated by adding the eight items belonging to each one of them. The items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Very Inaccurate* (1) to *Very Accurate* (5).

Given that the participants in this study were not native speakers of English, the NEO-PI-R was delivered to them in the Arabic language. The scale was first translated into Arabic by the researcher and then was back-translated into English by an English-Arabic translator. Then, the final version was developed for the Moroccan sample and indicated a good internal consistency (Cronbach's α=.83) in this study.

FLLAS: this scale was invented by Kim (2000) to measure FLLA. This scale is composed of 33 items that follow a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The total score is calculated by summing all the items. This indicates that higher scores refer to a higher level of FLLA. As the participants of this study were not native English speakers, the Arabic version of FLLAS was adopted (Baba khouya, 2018). The Arabic version also revealed a very high internal consistency (Cronbach's α=.94) in this study.

Procedure

To increase the validity and reliability of the participants' answers, clear explanations and instructions of the objective of the study and how to fill out the scales were given before the administration of the instruments. The participants were also informed that the scales' items are not based on correct or wrong answers and that their confidentiality would be secure and safe. Furthermore, the researcher clarified questions that seemed unclear to the participants.

Data analysis

This study employed two statistical methods to confirm or disconfirm the two research hypotheses. First, hypothesis 1 was examined through correlation analyses. It was conducted to investigate if there were significant correlations between overall Neuroticism and its six facets with ELLA. Second, taking into consideration that correlations cannot identify which independent variables were most strongly related to a unique variance in ELLA, stepwise MRA were followed to examine hypothesis 2. This method uses an automatic procedure to identify significant predictor variables. Clearly, F-tests or t-tests are the most important pre-defined criteria that add or delete predictor variables in each step of this regression. Hence, NEO-PI-R was entered as an independent variable, whereas FLLAS was entered as a dependent variable in the stepwise MRA.

RESULTS

Basic Findings

All the participants except six (n=328) completed the two instruments of this study. Table 1 introduces basic results for all the study variables, namely overall Neuroticism, facets, and ELLA. As for overall Neuroticism, the means appeared to meet with those presented by the American NEO-PI-R manual (Costa & McCrae, 1992a) for adults. The internal consistency of the Cronbach's alpha of this personality factor was.87. Furthermore, most of the facets showed satisfactory coefficients except for Immoderation which demonstrated a coefficient of.59. As for ELLA, the table depicts a score that is above average along with a strong coefficient of.91.

Correlations of Neuroticism and its Facets with ELLA

Focusing first on the correlations of overall Neuroticism and its facets with ELLA, it is stated that all the correlations are positive and that there is no single negative correlation (Table 2). This means that both overall Neuroticism and its facets have a positive impact on ELLA. In addition to these broad relations between these study variables, other results are noteworthy. As factors, overall Neuroticism displayed a significant positive correlation (r=.67, p<.05) with ELLA, this indicates that individuals with a higher score on overall Neuroticism experience more ELLA. Turning to the facets, the results show that 5 out of 6 facets reported significant correlations with ELLA. Clearly, 5 Neuroticism facets (Anxiety, Anger, Depression, Self-consciousness, and Vulnerability) were significantly correlated with ELLA. The Neuroticism

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Neuroticism and its facets	*m*	*sd*	α
Neuroticism	103.7	21.1	0.87
Anxiety	18.4	4.4	0.76
Anger	13.9	3.4	0.69
Depression	15.8	5.3	0.81
Self-consciousness	14.,1	5.4	0.66
Immoderation	11.2	3.5	0.59
Vulnerability	17.5	3.7	0.77
ELLA	58.4	8.6	0.91

Table 2. Correlations of Neuroticism and its facets with ELLA

Neuroticism and its facets	*r*
Neuroticism	**0.67**
Anxiety	**0.82**
Anger	**0.45**
Depression	**0.75**
Self-consciousness	**0.26**
Immoderation	0.11
Vulnerability	**0.55**

Coefficient in **boldface** are significant at p<.05

facets displayed significant positive correlations and ranged from. 26 to.82. Interestingly, Anxiety depicted the highest significant correlation with ELLA. Unexpectedly, Immoderation showed no significant correlation with ELLA.

Neuroticism and its Facets as predictors of ELLA

Although correlation analyses are informative and helpful, they are unable to determine which independent variables (overall Neuroticism or its facets) are more related to a higher variance in ELLA. Therefore, stepwise MRA were conducted to examine whether overall Neuroticism and its six facets may predict ELLA. Then, it was investigated whether facets reported stronger significant prediction than overall Neuroticism. This was through involving only variables that had significant contributions to the increase of prediction (ΔR^2).

When overall Neuroticism entered into the regression equation, it showed a significant association with ELLA by explaining 41.1% of the variance (ΔR^2=.411, ΔF(1,327)=29.00, p=.000). This means that overall Neuroticism significantly predicted ELLA. Furthermore, it was reported that overall Neuroticism (β=.35, t=3.39, p=.000) received significant betas (Table 3). Simply put, the model shows that with every increase of one standard deviation in overall Neuroticism, ELLA increases by. 35 standard deviations.

Turning to the facets and at Step 3 of the analysis, Anxiety, Depression, and Anger entered into the regression equation and were found to be the only Neuroticism facets that had significant associations with ELLA by accounting for 45.8% of the variance. Separately, Table 3 shows that Anxiety (ΔR^2=.251, ΔF(1,327)=27.22, p=.000), Depression (ΔR^2=.115, ΔF(1,327)=24.55, p=.000), and Anger (ΔR^2=.092, ΔF(1,327)=22.27, p=.000) significantly positively predicted ELLA. These results show also that the three steps reported significant F change statistics. That is to say, when Anxiety was entered at Step 1, it significantly explained 25.1% of the variance in ELLA, and when Depression was entered at Step 2, it significantly added 11.5%, then at Step 3 Anger contributed 9.2% to the explained variance. This clearly shows that Anxiety has the highest prediction compared to the other facets.

It was also reported that Anxiety (β=.19, t=4.15, p=.000), Depression (β=.13, t=3.78, p=.000), and Anger (β=.08, t=3.12, p=.000) received significant betas at Step 3 (Table 3). In other words, the model shows that with every increase of one standard deviation in Anxiety, Depression, and Anger, ELLA increases by.19.,13, and.08 standard deviations respectively. Based on these results, Anxiety had more impact in the model and, therefore, was the strongest significant predictor of ELLA compared to the other Neuroticism facets. This result was consistent with the correlational analyses where the same personality trait was found to have the strongest correlation with ELLA. More importantly, it is reported that the facets had a stronger prediction than overall Neuroticism. To be noted, Self-consciousness, Immoderation, and Vulnerability facets did not enter into the equation at Step 3 of the analysis, which means that no one of them significantly explained any variance in ELLA.

DISCUSSION

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first that examined the relationship between Neuroticism (including its six facets) and ELLA. Paunonen et al. (2003) mentioned that there are two advantages behind adopting the Big Five facets rather than factors in research. First, predictive accuracy becomes higher when associating the Big Five with different variables. Second, understanding of the nomological network regarding the relation between personality and other constructs improves.

Starting with the first hypothesis, it was expected that one or more facets will have a stronger correlation with ELLA than overall Neuroticism. This hypothesis was confirmed as Anxiety and Depression displayed stronger correlation with ELLA than overall Neuroticism. This implies that among the Neuroticism facets, those two facets showed the strongest ability to correlate with ELLA, meaning that they both represent the core of Neuroticism. That is to say, these two facets usually indicate high scores when they are related to negative life outcome (John, Caspi, Robins, Moffitt, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1994; Robins, John, & Caspi, 1994). However, three Neuroticism facets did not show a stronger significant correlation with ELLA than Neuroticism, namely Anger, Self-consciousness, and Vulnerability (Table 2).

Table 3. Stepwise MRA for predicting ELLA from Neuroticism and its Facets

Sample	F	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	t
Regression Model for Neuroticism					
Neuroticism		0.411	29.00***	0.35***	3.39
Regression Model for Facets					
Step 1					
Anxiety		0.251	27.22***	0.19***	4.15
Step 2					
Anxiety					
Depression	26.65***	0.115	24.55***	0.13***	3.78
Step 3					
Anxiety					
Depression					
Anger	23.54***	0.092	22.77***	0.08***	3.12

ΔF=F change, ΔR^2=R^2 change. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

One of the most surprising findings of this study is the absence of a significant correlation between Immoderation and ELLA. This indicates an important question "why was Immoderation not associated with ELLA?" The answer to this question may be based on the way Immoderation is defined according to the BFPF. That is to say, Immoderation is measured by asking questions that highlight the extent to which individuals behave in certain ways without considering consequences. However, this study shows that facets express larger correlation with ELLA than overall Neuroticism. Moreover, the design of this study does not imply any inferences regarding the causal relationship of Neuroticism and its facets with ELLA.

The second hypothesis of this study expected that facets will have stronger prediction than overall Neuroticism. This hypothesis was also supported as the results indicated that Anxiety, Depression, and Anger together had stronger significant ΔR^2 than overall Neuroticism. Moreover, Anxiety was the strongest predictor of ELLA among the six facets followed by Depression and then Anger. However, three other facets did not significantly predict ELLA, namely Self-consciousness, Immoderation, and Vulnerability. Accordingly, these results are congruent with Paunonen et al. (2003) who stated that the Big Five facets are stronger than the Big Five factors when it comes to predicting external variables. It is also worth mentioning that both Neuroticism and its facets had positive direction with ELLA both in their correlations and regressions. This was highly expected as they all include components that refer to negative feelings, behaviors, and experiences.

Nevertheless, the findings reported an essential inconsistency, namely the number of facets that showed significant correlations and predictions of ELLA. Simply put, only one facet (Immoderation) was not significantly correlated with ELLA, whereas three facets (Self-consciousness, Immoderation, and Vulnerability) did not significantly predict ELLA. Although the correlational analyses supported the relation of the five facets with ELLA, the regression analyses supported only three facets. The explanation that may be given to this inconsistency is the existence of suppressor effect. Overall, ELLA was better explained by facets than by overall Neuroticism. Importantly, this conclusion practically implies that facets would be more accurate than overall Neuroticism in predicting students who may suffer from ELLA.

Numerous limitations have to be indicated in this study. As an example, although the participants belonged to various university majors, they were recruited from only one Moroccan university. This implies that the generalization of the results is restricted and cannot go beyond the sample. In other words, participants who belong to other universities and with different demographic backgrounds may give different findings. Another limitation is that the participants' answers were wholly self-reported. That is to say, the results entirely depend on the extent to which the participants are accurate and honest toward the scales. A critical question for future studies is to investigate whether these kind of relations of Neuroticism and its facets with ELLA are replicable with both self- and collateral reports. Other future studies should examine if these results can translate to students from various universities and with different demographic backgrounds.

Despite those limitations, this study provides significant contributions to the understating of the relationship of Neuroticism and its facets with ELLA. As an illustration, 328 participants were recruited for this study, which resulted in a variety of responses that could reflect a large number of students' personalities. Another example is the recruitment of university students, which provided more accurate responses compared to participants from lower grades. Furthermore, controlling variables such as gender, age, and years of English learning gave more strength to this study. Overall, this study provides broad evidence for the importance of using the Big Five facets and not only the Big Five factors in predicting other variables as the facets usually explain stronger variance in the dependent variables.

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