

Preface

The study of language learner characteristics, or *individual differences* (IDs), has a long tradition in second language studies and nobody would question that factors such as language aptitude, motivation, or learning styles are important contributors to success in mastering a foreign language. Accordingly, the existing literature on individual difference variables is extensive. Curiously, however, there are very few book-length summaries of the topic—in fact, there is only one single-authored monograph on language learning IDs, Peter Skehan’s (1989) seminal title on *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning*. Since the publication of that book a great deal of research has been conducted in the field to explore the language learner, and an updated overview has been due for some time. In response to this need, the last five years have seen the publication of no fewer than four anthologies on learner issues (although not all from an ID perspective), edited by Breen (2001), Cook (2002), Cornwell and Robinson (2000), and Robinson (2002). These volumes are all of high quality, with chapters written by some of the best known experts in the field. So what justifies the writing of the current book? Let me mention three reasons:

- An authored book can offer certain useful features that anthologies, by definition, cannot: A unified voice and style, an integrated text, and a more even coverage of the domain without duplications or gaps.
- Anthologies are, by definition, selective: They focus on key issues and often ignore smaller but nevertheless important subareas that do not warrant a whole chapter. This is certainly true in our case, as none of the four works mentioned above address, for example, ‘learner beliefs,’ or ‘learning styles,’ let alone lesser known variables such as ‘creativity’. So far such topics have been discussed primarily in journal articles and, to a lesser extent, in thematic monographs targeting only the specific ID variable in question.
- In this book I would like to extend the traditional boundaries of individual differences and include some important learner variables—most notably various personality traits—that are not normally discussed in this context in the L2 literature.

Having said that, *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition* intends to be a standard ID book, following the tradition of L2 scholars—particularly that of Peter Skehan and Peter Robinson—working in the individual differences paradigm. I have learned a great deal from the work of the two Peters, for which I am grateful. The following friends and colleagues have given me valuable feedback on various parts of the manuscript: Andrew Cohen, Peter MacIntyre, Kim Noels, Rebecca Oxford, Peter Robinson, and Ema Ushioda; I really appreciate their helpful suggestions and comments and I hope they find that the final manuscript addresses many of the points raised. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Sue Gass, the series editor, and Cathleen Petree, my editor at Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Their initial encouragement and their ongoing support and friendship have been invaluable!

—Zoltán Dörnyei