

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety - A Classroom Perspective

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Abstract: This paper reports on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), a topic that has long been a focus of second language researchers. This is an important affective factor that influences the process and the outcome of foreign language learning. The first part of the paper deals with the most important FLA definitions. A detailed analysis of the FLA research conducted at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić, University of Montenegro, is offered in the second part of the paper. Participants of the study included students who are learning two foreign languages at the Department of English Language and Literature. The research was carried out on a sample of 190 university students studying French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish as a second foreign language in a regular university setting. The participants completed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale questionnaire (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz (1983). The primary goal of this research was to determine the level of FLA reported by the students. The obtained results indicate that the anxiety from the second foreign language (Spanish, Italian, French and German) appears among the first year students, and, generally speaking, it increases in intensity with the acquisition of greater foreign language knowledge during the two years of studies. The results indicate that there is foreign language anxiety, and that it is still present with the increase of the years of studying, except among the first and third year Russian language students at the English Language and Literature Department.

Key words: Anxiety, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Anxiety Scale

1. Introduction

In almost all European countries, learning at least one foreign language is compulsory. Today students learn two or sometimes even three foreign languages simultaneously as compulsory subjects of a curriculum. The knowledge of a second foreign language has become the imperative in the modern world. But, to achieve this goal, sometimes, can be very hard and almost impossible. In recent years there has been extensive research into aspects of differences in learning the second language. Some dimensions of learner differences are generally acknowledged such as age, aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, anxiety, attitude and learning strategies. In this paper we attempt to review and discuss one of them: *anxiety*. Anxiety is one of the psychological phenomena. Anxiety was defined by Freud as "something felt," an emotional state that included feelings of apprehension, tension, nervousness, and worry accompanied by physiological arousal. FLA recognized as an affective factor in foreign language learning and normally discussed alongside other individual learner differences (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993), is still considered to be a relatively new and developing area within foreign language research. Many students find foreign language learning in classroom situations stressful. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is considered to be a situational anxiety experienced in the well-defined situation of the foreign language classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). As such, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1991) view FLCA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (in Horwitz & Young, 1991: 31). According to Horwitz (1986), there are three main factors in the foreign language classroom anxiety experience: *communication apprehension* or fear about real or anticipated communication with other people, *test anxiety* or fear of failing in test situations and *fear of negative evaluation*.

2. Research in the Field of Foreign Language Anxiety

Although the results of scholarly research are sometimes contradictory, it is useful to know what the research in the field of language anxiety has shown. These findings are important from both the theoretical and practical aspect. On one hand, they can contribute significantly to the understanding of the foreign language learning process, and, on the other hand, they can help students understand why they feel the fear, become aware of the fact that other students feel it as well, and find suitable strategies to fight it.

The variety of the research results indicates that it is a rather complex phenomenon, and its influence on the success in foreign language learning is neither insignificant nor straightforward. Numerous studies show that there is a significant

tendency towards the development of apprehension in the process of learning a foreign language (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989). Campbell and Ortiz (Campbell and Ortiz in Horwitz and Young, 1991) also believe that more than half of the students of foreign languages feel different degrees of anxiety of learning a foreign language.

The results of most studies show a negative correlation between anxiety and success in learning. This means that the higher the apprehension, the less successful the learning. Young (Young in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002:13) established that respondents who felt higher apprehension achieved poorer results in oral exam. The study that was carried out by Trylong (Trylong in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002: 13) showed that the respondents with higher apprehension were less successful on their oral exams, written tests, and had lower final marks in foreign language. Gardner et al. (1987) established a negative correlation between the apprehension that the respondents felt in French class and the listening test, reading comprehension, active vocabulary use, and even the self-assessment of their knowledge of French.

Interestingly, some studies have shown how language anxiety is connected with only some aspects of language knowledge and skills. Thus, Swain and Burnaby (Swain and Burnaby, 1976: 115-128) indicated a significant negative correlation with only one aspect of language competence in French language among children, but not with other examined aspects. Gardner et al. (1987) established that there is a significant connection between anxiety and active use of vocabulary, but not between anxiety and the quality of language use. Ely (Ely, 1986: 437-446) indicates with his results that students who feel great uneasiness during their language class are not willing to take risks, but he did not establish the correlation between anxiety and the level of class participation.

A group of scholars obtained contradictory results: a statistically significant negative correlation between anxiety and success in one language or in one group of respondents, and an opposite statistically significant positive correlation between language anxiety and success in other language or in another group of respondents. It is difficult to determine reliably the connection between language anxiety and success in foreign language learning.

It is believed that there are two essential reasons for different results in scholarly research. "Firstly, foreign language learning [...] is a very complex process which is influenced by a number of variables (attitudes, motivation, talent, intelligence, learning strategies, etc.), and it is, hence, difficult to determine the importance of a single variable: it is possible that anxiety affects learning only in the case of weak learning abilities. Secondly, researchers measure language anxiety in different ways, as there still is not a generally accepted instrument for measuring this phenomenon." (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2000: 14).

Researchers believe that language anxiety is an acquired emotional reaction, and that at the beginning a student experiences a form of apprehension that is connected with a certain situation during the learning process. When these feeling begin to repeat, the student gradually starts to identify the apprehension with the foreign language learning. The intensity of foreign language anxiety can become rather strong as time passes, and can, thus, have a crucial influence on learning.

Horwitz (Horwitz 1983) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by linking the foreign language classroom anxiety with the apprehension of communication, testing and social evaluation. She believes that communication apprehension is a reaction on real or expected act of speaking, which sometimes we feel in our mother tongue communication. Furthermore, she points out that the apprehension of social evaluation appears due to the social nature of language use: communication in a foreign language is, also, self-representation, but in a language for which we are only partially competent. Test anxiety is a consequence of the academic nature of the formal context of second-language learning. The author thinks that language anxiety is a combination of beliefs, feelings, self-experience, and behaving which appear during foreign language learning in a formal environment and which are specific for the foreign language learning process. The scale or instrument which was developed by Horwitz is used for measuring foreign language classroom anxiety (*FLCAS-Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale*). Because of its high quality and reliability, it has been used for numerous world languages and cultures, and it has found its application, i.e. it has been used in this research, as well.

3. Research in Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

3.1. Research Goals

The goal of this research is to determine the foreign language anxiety level in students experience in different foreign languages, the presence of a low, medium or high apprehension among them, and if there is a connection between language anxiety and the number of years they have been studying the second foreign language.

3.2. Instrument

For this research, we used an already existing instrument, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was developed by Horwitz. The scale consists of a general part and 33 claims which test apprehension from: communication, assessment and negative social classroom evaluation, and the degree of agreeing with the claims. The claims under these numbers: 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 and 32 are recoded. The absolute results span is 33 - 165 points, and a bigger scale result indicates a higher level of foreign language anxiety. A Likert-type rating scale was used with the span 1– 5 (1 - strongly disagreeing with the statement, 2 – mostly disagreeing with the statement, 4 – mostly agreeing with the statement, 5 – completely agreeing with the statement, and 3 – neutral/indecisive attitude towards the statement). The analysis of the obtained data gives an insight into the level of foreign language anxiety in a formal surrounding: low, medium or high. The obtained data was quantitatively analyzed.

3.3. Sample Group

The research was carried out at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić, at the English Language and Literature Department among the students of the first (N 110), and third (N 80) year of undergraduate studies. The research involved the overall number of 190 participants who study German, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish as a second foreign language. At all philological study programs at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić, the second foreign language is studied for six semesters, with the class load of four classes per week. Students choose the second foreign language that they prefer to study at their undergraduate studies.

3.4. Research Procedure

A questionnaire was carried out during foreign language classes without the students being previously informed about the research. It was applied anonymously in order to get as honest answers to the questions as possible.

4. Research Results and Discussion

After the analysis of the questionnaire, the results showed that the first year students at the English Language and Literature Department have a low language anxiety level. It is worth noting that a low apprehension is mostly present for the language that students learn for the first time, i.e. for the language which they hadn't learned in secondary and primary school. Furthermore, when Russian, which they had studied previously, is concerned, the apprehension is very low. With this, it should be noted that 16 or 88.89% of students, who had previously been studying this language from 5 to 10 years, chose to attend the course of Russian as a second foreign language at the English Language and Literature Department, while 2 (11.11%) of students did not write the number of years they had been studying the language.

Since Gardner et al. (1977) established that with the increase of language competence increases the number of positive experiences in the use of foreign language and decreases language anxiety, we compared the obtained results from the first year students with the results obtained from the third year students and came to the conclusion that at this department with the increase of language knowledge, language anxiety does not decrease. Gardner (1979) claims that with the increase of language knowledge, decreases language anxiety. This research does not confirm his theory, since the obtained results are quite the opposite. Namely, after two years of learning and attending second language classes, as a compulsory course at the undergraduate studies, second foreign language anxiety increased with all the mentioned languages, except Russian.

The research showed that 51.81% of participants decided in their first year to enroll on the second language course which they had not studied in secondary and primary school. All students did not fill in the information in the questionnaire regarding the number of years they had been studying the second foreign language, and with this 11.11% are the students of Russian language, 16.67% of Italian, and 10.52% of German.

It is possible that the reason for the low apprehension among the first year students is their insufficient familiarity with the fact whether that language is difficult or not, their rash decision and desire to learn and acquire a larger number of foreign languages, or the attraction of a challenge. However, when language anxiety appears with a relatively low intensity, as is the case with the first year students, it can have a motivational effect as it encourages them to put an effort into it, to face the unknown, to face a new task, in other words, to struggle. Bailey (Bailey, 1983) emphasizes this motivating effect of the low intensity of apprehension. Likewise, Gardner (Gardner in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2000) claims that the positive effect of language anxiety, or low apprehension, can be attributed to the influence of motivation.

After two years of studying a second foreign language, there is still a higher degree of apprehension among the students, except for those studying Russian. It is hard to say whether it is the case that with the increase of years of studying a foreign language, students gradually become demotivated for learning, more aware of the difficulties and requirements involved in learning a foreign language, if they do not have enough time to dedicate to learn a foreign language, and if these are the only reasons why a low apprehension was not maintained, or decreased, but, on the contrary slightly increased among all the participants, except Russian language students. We did not expect this result, since we believed that with the increase of foreign language knowledge, language anxiety decreases. The result which was obtained from the answers of the first and third year Russian language students indicates that there is no second language anxiety among them. It would be good to research if the reasons for this were a good previous knowledge, a good teacher, a quality and adequate study program and textbook which was used, classroom environment or something else. The obtained results would help us understand how to decrease the classroom anxiety with the increase of the years of studying the language. We must not neglect the results which indicate the absence of apprehension, as an affective factor, in the Russian language classroom at the English Language Department. We believe that it would be useful to carry out a new research to find out the impact of apprehension on second foreign language learning, which would contribute to the awareness of the (non-)existence of second foreign language apprehension, and would point out to a solution to this problem.

In her research, Horwitz links foreign language classroom anxiety to the communication apprehension, testing apprehension and social evaluation apprehension. We were, also, interested to know the intensity of these fears in the classroom. We examined the intensity of apprehension by these categories separately, and contrasted the obtained results between the first and third year of studies.

a) Classroom Communication Apprehension

Communicologists point out that communication apprehension appears because of reticence, shyness, lack of willingness to communicate, and it is connected with academic success, traits of personality, choice of profession, self-respect, nonverbal behavior, and peer perception (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002: 23-25). A person having problems with communicating in general will have difficulties with speaking in the classroom environment, as well. Since classroom communication, especially during foreign language classes, is out of student's control, and his participation in activities and communication is followed and evaluated, he will have difficulties in speaking and understanding.

The highest low communication apprehension intensity was found among the students of the Russian as a second foreign language, or, rather, it could be said that it does not exist, since 88.89% of participants answered that they have a low apprehension. We can take this result as a model and wish for the percentage of an apprehension as low as this one to be found in the classrooms of other foreign languages, as well. Since our goal was pointing out to the presence or absence of classroom communication apprehension, we will not compare it with other foreign languages that were covered with this research, but only point out to its presence or absence with desire to indicate to what extent its presence may obstruct the second foreign language acquisition. The low type of apprehension of 44.4% is found in the case of Spanish as the second foreign language, for which 92.5% of respondents answered that they had not studied it before. French had not been studied by 47.6% in previous schooling, and yet a low apprehension in classroom communication is felt by 40.9%. The highest level of medium apprehension and stronger intensity is found among the Italian language students. The medium apprehension is present with twice as high an intensity than the other two types, and with this the high apprehension intensity (medium + high type) is found three times more than the low one. Possible reason for this is that 30% of students did not study this language before the enrollment in the first year of studies.

It is well-known that children have a very positive opinion about their foreign language learning abilities, but with growing up that self-evaluation becomes more realistic and, often, less positive, as is the case with the third year students when their classroom communication apprehension is concerned. Now we have a different image, i.e. classroom communication apprehension increased and low intensity apprehension is of the lowest intensity.

We, once again, find the low apprehension among the Russian language students (92.85%), but, among the students of all the other languages, the high classroom communication apprehension dominates. It is interesting that after two years of studying a language, language anxiety increased significantly and this among the languages where we have the highest percentage of students who study them for the first time in the first year of studies. Thus, it should not be neglected the result obtained from the Spanish language participants where the high fear is found among 14.81% of respondents, and even 60.90% in the third year. It is a similar case with the French language where high apprehension in the first year appears among 22.72% of participants, and in the third year 53.40%. Likewise, when German is concerned, the high apprehension intensity is 36.84% in the first year, and 75% among the participants from the third year of studies.

It is obvious that students with high apprehension are afraid to communicate in foreign language in classroom. Oxford (Oxford, 1990) indicates that apprehension reinforces inhibitions among students, decreases their readiness to take risks, and, with that, the desire to communicate in a foreign language. Krashen (Krashen, 1981) indicates that forceful participation in communication can increase communication apprehension among students, cause their withdrawal and decrease the motivation for learning. All of this can lead to bad results in foreign language learning.

We will try to establish to a certain degree in the continuation of this paper whether this classroom communication apprehension is caused by the already mentioned factors, the expected grading, or negative social evaluation.

b) Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is the consequence of the academic nature of the formal context of learning a foreign language. It is believed that language anxiety is a combination of beliefs, feelings, self-experience and behaving which appear during foreign language learning in a formal environment and which are specific for the foreign language learning process. Students are afraid of making mistakes during the communication, afraid that they might not understand well their interlocutors, afraid of the teachers' reaction while being aware that everything is going on under their watchful eye, and that they will evaluate their knowledge, i.e. grade them, based on that. Thus, by learning a foreign language we can feel the direct threat of a bad mark. (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

Ely (Ely, 1986) indicates with the obtained research results that students who feel great uneasiness in the foreign language class are not risk-takers, and it is well-known that without this willingness there is no quality learning, and, hence, there are no good grades.

Test anxiety research indicates that individuals with lower apprehension are more successful than those with a higher one (Holmes, 1972). We believe that this shows their desire to get a good mark and their concern for success or that this apprehension comes from the fear of failure. This result may be regarded as predictable since it is expected that the first year students desire to prove themselves, they are ambitious and wish good marks.

The results of the test anxiety research among the third year students indicate that there was a decrease in the intensity of the mentioned anxiety. It is possible that our research confirmed the hypothesis of Alpert and Haber (Alpert and Haber, 1960), that test anxiety may have a motivational effect on students. Apparently, our result indicates that high test anxiety which they had in the first year motivated and encouraged them to work harder and, hence, the anxiety decreased.

There is no high test anxiety among the first and third year students who study Russian as the second foreign language. We did not expect this result and believe that the apprehension that is, in a small degree, present among these students motivates them to work harder and this leads to the positive result of the absence of higher grading apprehension. This, unfortunately, is not a common result. Namely, high apprehension appears both among 50% of the first year French language students and 66.66% of the third year students, and 50% of the first year German language students, and 60% of the third year students. We can clearly see here that there is an increase in high level of apprehension with the increase of the years of studying these languages. It is interesting to note the results which show a decrease in high apprehension among 13.04% of the third year Spanish language students in relation to 55.55% of the first year students who experience it.

c) Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation apprehension appears because of the social nature of language use: the communication in a foreign language is at the same time self-representation, but in a language in which we are partially competent. Students are not only exposed to the teacher's assessment of their knowledge in a classroom, but also of other students as well, which can increase the apprehension.

Numerous studies in language anxiety showed that fear of being ridiculed, which is very strong, influences the verbal behavior and may cause avoidance of active participation during the lessons or even total withdrawal from or giving up studying altogether.

The research results obtained from the first year students show a low level of negative social evaluation apprehension. At the same time, there is a decrease in low and increase in medium and high apprehension among the third year students, with the exception of the Russian language students where in the first and third year there is only a low level of apprehension.

Obviously, the low negative social evaluation apprehension among the first year students increases as they become more familiar with the environment. This apprehension refers to the fear of the evaluation of others. Students are

concerned about how they will look in the eyes of others, about losing their "image", being ridiculed, about being corrected by other students when they make mistakes, etc. After studying the second foreign language for two years, they get to know their peers better, and, unfortunately, the intensity of medium and high level of apprehension increases, which was not expected with this research.

4. Conclusion

With this research, we tried to establish to which degree the anxiety from different foreign languages is present among the first and third year students at the English Language and Literature Department. The obtained results indicate that the anxiety from the second foreign language (Spanish, Italian, French and German) appears among the first year students, and, generally speaking, it increases in intensity with the acquisition of greater foreign language knowledge during the two years of studies, familiarization with the classroom environment and regular assessment. This does not confirm the theory that "with the increase of language competence increases the number of positive experiences in the use of foreign language and decreases language anxiety" (Gardner et al., 1977). However, we established that there is no foreign language anxiety among the first and third year Russian language students. We emphasize that, when Russian is concerned, 88.89% have been studying this language in the period from 5 to 10 years. We wonder if the years of studying and being exposed to the language in the environment of formal teaching were one of the reasons for the absence of the second foreign language anxiety among the students.

Communication apprehension appears at the beginning, but, after two years of studying it, decreases and becomes low. Among the Russian language students, 88.89% opted for the low type of communication apprehension. As for the test anxiety, it is more intense among the first year students, but it gradually decreases afterwards. The high type of test anxiety among the Russian language students is absent both in the first and third year. Fear of negative evaluation apprehension is of a low intensity among the first year students only to increase in time and become the so-called medium one. The results indicate that there is foreign language anxiety, and that it is still present with the increase of the years of studying, except among the first and third year Russian language students at the English Language and Literature Department.

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