

## LINGUISTIC ANXIETY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Last decades have witnessed the growing interest towards multiple problems of language education. In the lime light there is the issue of language anxiety as a form of the psychological barrier in the foreign language learning. The tasks of the research were: to diagnose the degree of linguistic anxiety among students with different levels of English proficiency; to identify the correlation of data depending on micro- and macrosocial parameters; to formulate the possible ways of overcoming language stressors. The objects of the study for the research were undergraduate and graduate students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of the Kazan Federal University. Methodology included quantitative data obtained via a measurement system - the Foreign Language Classroom Scale test and an additional questionnaire with macro- and microsocial data. The validity of the survey was determined by the internal consistency of the entire measuring instrument (questionnaire) assessed by the Cronbach's alpha. Among the subtypes of linguistic anxiety analyzed were the fear of interpersonal communication, negative assessment from others, fear of tests and psychological barriers in the classroom educational process. The findings evidenced that all students face psychological barriers in the educational process, regardless of the year of study. However, the strongest stressor for undergraduate respondents becomes a test, while for senior students' interpersonal communication causes anxiety above all. Based on the results of the study, the forms of educational activity as ways to overcome language anxiety were outlined wherein teacher's psychological competence led.

**Keywords:** foreign language anxiety, linguistic anxiety, language learning, stressors.

### INTRODUCTION

Last decades have witnessed the growing interest towards multiple problems of language education. In the lime light there is the issue of language anxiety as a form of the psychological barrier in the foreign language learning. We claim that the educational process implies not only gaining knowledge by students, it also empowers them to grow and improve their ability in mastering a foreign language. The final result largely depends on the psychological readiness of students to overcome the prevailing stereotypes and lack of confidence. The psychological problems (anxiety, self-doubt, fear of making mistakes, etc.) students are beset with in the language classroom may lead to the loss of interest to the subject and negative attitude towards the process altogether.

Anxiety in general is an unstable emotional state, the feeling of unease, worry and its intensity can vary. This phenomenon has been the area of research over the past three decades. The anxiety connected with the study of different disciplines was examined by S. Beilbock, G. Ramirez, S. Belbeys and others [10].

The authors adhere to the definition of E. Horwitz, who was one of the first in foreign psycholinguistics to draw attention to the phenomenon of language anxiety, according to which language anxiety is “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” [7, p.128]. By accumulating empirical data, the main components of this phenomenon were identified, namely: tension in the process of interpersonal communication, anxiety in test situations and fear of a negative assessment from others. Linguistic anxiety is one of the forms of the psychological barrier and a serious obstacle in foreign language learning.

The scientists consider that the ability to overcome psychological impediments in interpersonal communication in the native language helps to dispose of anxiety in a similar situation and in the target language. Test fear comes from the fear of failing tests and exams. The students with high level language proficiency set themselves a pretty high bar before the test of knowledge, and any mistake is considered by them as a failure. A negative assessment of speech in a foreign language can be expressed by a teacher and students in class, and in socially oriented situations, for example, during interviews, speaking at international conferences, business meetings. Linguistic anxiety can be expressed in the speaker’s behavior, in his silence, shyness, fear and even panic [7, p. 126].

Foreign scientists developed a system for measuring language anxiety in the form of a test - Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), consisting of 33 points on a 5-point Likert scale (Attachment 1). This test became the starting point of surveys in the study of language anxiety in various situations and contexts. For example, a multivariate model of language anxiety and negative assessment in the Japanese language class and in communication with native Japanese speakers [1]; the study of language anxiety in Chinese students and the correlation with their achievements in the study of English [12]; the relationship between teacher and classmate support and language anxiety [8]; reduction of language anxiety outside the classroom [9]; the relationship between anxiety and motivation in English lessons [14]; levels of language anxiety in correlation with sociolinguistic variables [5], etc.

The Russian Psycholinguistics has had similar studies. Barvenko O.G. identified four groups of psychological obstacles in learning a foreign language by adults: macrosocial, microsocial, subjective and the ones connected with the psychological characteristics of foreign language learning process. The latter include barriers to fossilization, interference, communication techniques, assimilation and application of knowledge in a foreign language, communication barriers [3, p. 12]. Chaplina E.I. investigated emotional, cognitive and communication barriers which are expressed in student’s constraint front of the teacher, embarrassment to speak with mistakes in front of a group, fear of causing laughter or disapproval, constraint in a situation of conversation paired with a well-versed interlocutor, inability to apply knowledge in a situation of real communication [4, p. 8]. Psychological barriers in listening while learning a foreign language [1], psychological characteristics of learning a foreign language by students of

technical universities [2], motivation in learning a foreign language [6], etc. are also studied.

Since anxiety, as mentioned in the most studies, affects the process of language acquisition adversely, it is necessary to identify the students who actually experience psychological discomfort in foreign language classes.

The aim of this research is to define the degree of linguistic anxiety among students of economic profile with different levels of English proficiency.

The objects of the research were the 1st, 2nd and 5th year-students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of the Kazan Federal University. We set the following tasks: to diagnose the degree of linguistic anxiety of students; to identify the correlation of data depending on micro- and macro- social parameters, such as gender, year of study, multilingual communication environment (if the native language is not Russian), urban or rural school of study in the pre-university period, as well as the level of the English language proficiency; to develop recommendations for overcoming language anxiety among students.

### **Research method**

The data for assessing FLA was gathered using structured research instruments as the FLCAS (33-item, self-report questionnaire that uses Likert scale to assess issues related to communication apprehension, Test Anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation). The additional questionnaire with micro- and macro-level data (year of study, gender, language proficiency, types of secondary schools, citizenship) was also used there (Attachment 2).

The subspecies of linguistic anxiety were pointed: 8 questions (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, 32) were connected with barriers in interpersonal communication, 9 questions (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33) - with a Negative Assessment, 5 questions (2, 8, 10, 19, 21) - with Test Anxiety and 11 questions (4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 26, 29, 30) - with psychological problems experienced in terms of students in the classroom.

Students of the Institute of Management, Economics and Finance of KFU were divided into three groups: first-, second-year undergraduate students and first-year students of the master's program (hereinafter referred to as the fifth-year students), who had a two-year break in learning English, or their level of language proficiency was fixed at the elementary level. It is due to the fact that students learn English for two years at the bachelor's level (first and second courses) and one year during master's degree (fifth year of study).

### **Data collection, processing and analysis**

In this study we made a statistical analysis of the survey results. The basic descriptive statistics of both the general sample and the corresponding subsamples with the individual characteristics of students (gender, course of study) was used. The results of the statistical analysis are presented below in two tables.

The Reliability of Survey Information is determined by the internal consistency of the research instrument (questionnaire), using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient  $\alpha$ . The value of  $\alpha = 0.71$ , which corresponds to an acceptable ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ) internal consistency of the instrument.

## Results and discussion

The Number of Respondents were 103:

28 (39.9%) first-year students;

42 (40.8%) second-year students;

23 (22.3%) fifth-year students.

The number of female students prevailed: 75.7% (N female = 78) and 24.3% (N male = 25). The question about their native language established bi-multilingual competence of the respondents. The results showed that the majority of the respondents was monolinguals (Lingmono = 45.63%), but the number of bilinguals is also adequate (Lingbi = 42.72%). Whereas our region is bilingual (Russian and Tatar are declared as two state languages of the Republic of Tatarstan), and there is also a small number of multilingual students (Lingmulti = 11.65%) international students. English proficiency level was determined on the basis of Placement and Assessment test.

The results of descriptive analysis showed that female students experience more psychological stress than male students learning English at a university.

**Table 1**

Number of respondents	Sex	Sample Average	Sample SCR
78	female	2.81	1.19
25	male	2.76	1.19

When comparing students in courses of study: students of the 1st year course experience psycholinguistic barriers more often than students of the 5th year one. First year students from neighboring countries experience more serious discomfort during English lessons, as indicated by the data demonstrated by Table 2. In our opinion, this is due to the polylingualism (bi-, trilingualism) of students from post-Soviet countries, which is accompanied by various forms of linguistic interference.

**Table 2**

Number of respondents	Course	Sample Average	Sample SCR
38	1	2.87	1.22
30 (from Russia)	2	2.77	1.12
12 (near abroad)	1	2.91	1.14
23	5	2.71	1.26

As for the directions of language anxiety, we placed the data in Table 3.

**Table 3**

Course	Aspects of Language Anxiety	Selective Average	Selective SCR
1	Fear of interpersonal communication	2.85	1.11
	Negative assessment of surrounding	2.83	1.13
	Fear of tests	2.99	1.24
	Psychological problems in the learning process (at the lesson)	2.87	1.34
2	Fear of interpersonal communication	2.79	1.02
	Negative assessment of surrounding	2.54	1.02
	Fear of tests	3	1.18
	Psychological problems in the learning process (at the lesson)	2.84	1.2
1 (neighbouring countries)	Fear of interpersonal communication	3.11	1.14
	Negative assessment of surrounding	3.04	1.19
	Fear of tests	3.32	1.02
	Psychological problems in the learning process (at the lesson)	2.91	1.14
5	Fear of interpersonal communication	2.86	1.15
	Negative assessment of surrounding	2.6	1.22
	Fear of tests	2.74	1.24
	Psychological problems in the learning process (at the lesson)	2.84	1.37
2 (neighbouring countries)	Fear of interpersonal communication	3.11	1.14
	Negative assessment of surrounding	3.04	1.19
	Fear of tests	3.32	1.02
	Psychological problems in the learning process (at the lesson)	2.91	1.14

Thus, first- and second-year students have the most problems caused by fear of tests, while senior students are more concerned about the problems of communicating in a foreign language. It should be noted that among students from neighboring countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), according to all the selected parameters, the level of anxiety is significantly higher than among Russian-speaking classmates. This is again associated with a high level of linguistic interference. Non-Russian-speaking students find themselves in a lockdown situation when they don't understand the translation into

Russian, they suffer from lack of knowledge, skills and abilities, and this is ultimately reflected in the manifestation of psychological stressors.

On individual issues, the situation is as follows: for the first-year students, 10 statements have values above 3.00; for the second-year students - 8 statements; for students of the fifth year - 11 statements, and the sample of these questions almost coincides. According to our research, junior students highlighted Question 29 of the questionnaire (I am afraid that the teacher will correct each of my mistakes); and the fifth-year students Question 9 (I begin to panic if I have to speak without preparation).

To overcome linguistic anxiety among university students, it is necessary to increase an interest in the subject, to motivate them to study a foreign language. This can be done by combining traditional methods and ways of teaching with multimedia to enhance students' independent work. Presentations on various topics are a good example of this. Particularly interesting presentations are demonstrated by students from neighbouring countries, in which they can present their motherland in different aspects.

Extracurricular activities like video or song contests dedicated to the English-speaking holidays (Christmas, Halloween, etc.) help overcome language anxiety and the fear of interpersonal communication. Preparation and presentation of posters, leaflets on vital topics (e.g. Eco-friendly initiatives, Higher education institutions) have a positive effect on the general psychological climate in the groups. Students become more open, stiffness and fear of classmates disappear, the negative assessment of others is levelled.

## CONCLUSION

Psycholinguistic problems can accompany the process of learning any language. As can be seen from our research, students of an economic university experience language anxiety to one degree or another, especially this is expressed in the 1st year of study when performing test tasks and among bilingual students from neighboring countries. The task of the teacher is to reduce the degree of this tension. The tools for removing LA can be a favorable psychological climate in classroom classes, accompanied by the goodwill of the teacher (the psychological competence of the teacher himself); a multi-level approach to language learning (from elementary to advanced); a well-developed teaching experience in combination of all types of learning (reading, listening, writing, communication) with game forms, which significantly removes fear and panic among students; the use of modern new multimedia capabilities (internet resources) that strengthen the independent work of students; students' participation in non-auditory language competitions and holidays, contributing to the removal of tension among classmates and mobilizing internal creative abilities of students themselves. All these tools help strengthen students' self-confidence, reduce the threshold of language anxiety and thereby contribute to increasing the level of foreign-language and communicative competence and skills.

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## APPENDIX

### Attachment 1

FLCAS items:

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be asked to speak in English class.
4. I am afraid when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English class.
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.
6. In English classes, I think of things that are unrelated to the lesson.
7. I think that my classmates' English is better than mine.
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my class.

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English class.
12. In English class, I am so nervous that I forget what I know.
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.
14. I will not be nervous when speaking with native English speakers
15. I get depressed when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.
17. I often feel like not going to my English class.
18. I feel confident when I speak in English class.
19. I am afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake I make.
20. I feel my heart pounding when I am going to be asked to speak in English.
21. The more I prepare for an English test, the more confused I get.
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.
23. I always feel that my classmates speak better English than I.
24. I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students
25. English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.
26. I feel tense and have more pressure in English class than in other classes.
27. I get nervous when I speak in my English class.
28. Before English class, I feel confident and relaxed.
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.
31. I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me when I speak English.
32. I feel easy when native English speakers are with me.
33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance [7, 129-130].

## Attachment 2

Respondent's personal data questionnaire:

1. Level of English
2. Male/female
3. Native language
4. Type of school that he or she finished
5. Citizenship (Russian, nearby or a foreign citizen)
6. Course of study.