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INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON FRENCH-SPEAKING ORAL PROFICIENCY AMONG SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

Language anxiety differs from general anxiety and is understood as a kind of anxiety due to, or caused by, learning or using another language. The research objective was to evaluate the influence of language anxiety on performing French-speaking oral proficiency among Secondary Education students. To this end, 519 year 1 to 4 students of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education who studied French as a second foreign language or as a bilingual form were included from six Secondary Education Institutes. The results showed statistically significant correlations between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency in all academic, where these correlations were higher for females and for the optional teaching form. The language anxiety variable alone explained 46.7% of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable. We conclude that language anxiety influences performance in languages, which suggests the need to consider new research works into this matter in order to improve the teaching practice and teaching students to become competent in languages.

Keywords: French-speaking, language anxiety.

1. Introduction

Language anxiety is understood as a type of anxiety due to, or caused by, learning or using another language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). These put forward the hypothesis that learning a foreign language implies positive or negative emotional factors that can affect both the learning process and performance in the foreign language in question (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). According to this hypothesis, they developed a theory that demonstrated the magnitude of the influence that this factor had on academic foreign language learning. This language anxiety construct is closely related with communicative tasks and continues to be the reason why many European citizens do not master foreign languages (Delicado, 2010; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015). Language anxiety has currently become one of the main obsta-cles for learning languages and is a disease of the 20th and 21st centuries for foreign lan-guage teachers and for researchers in this field (Bárkányi & Melchor-Couto, 2017; Madonsela, 2015; Mejía, 2014). Previous studies have established that language anxiety consists in a negative emotion appearing, which is defined as anxiogenic. When talking in or handling a foreign language, the subjects who suffer this situation associate the languages classroom with a detrimental setting which, in turn, implies that subjects will suffer language anxiety when dealing with a language once this association has been made (Lee, 2016; Uştuk & Aydın, 2018). In other words, subjects experience the use of a foreign language as if it were a "metacognitive" task that denies them the communication capacity in their mother tongue and makes them express themselves with an instrument that they do not master (Tóth, 2008). According to several studies, foreign language students or bilingual schoolchildren aged 13-19 years are quite inclined to suffer anxiety because using a foreign language, e.g. its content and as a language resource to transmit knowledge, is quite a usual practice (Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015). This makes more sense when we consider that it is well-known that students who start learning the language early –in nursery or primary education- suffer less language anxiety than those who start learning the language late -secondary or high school- (Ó Muircheartaigh & Hickey, 2008).

2. Objective

The objective of the present study is to evaluate the influence of language anxiety on Secondary Education students' speaking oral proficiency in the French language.

3. Methodology and design

The present research followed a selective, or ex post facto methodology (a complex prospective design), to study the language anxiety variable in the study sample's ordinary surroundings, and to then study a possible relation with the other variables.

3.1. Participants

The sample comprised 519 participants, who were students of years 1 to 4 Spanish Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO, Spanish acronym). There were 51.3% females and 48.7% males. 25% (51.7% females and 48.3% males) of participants are in first grade, 25% (52.1% females and 47.9% males) in second year, 24.7% (46,90% females and 53,10% males) in third year and 25.2% (49,7% females and

50,3% males) in final year of high school. The researchers wanted a proportionate number of participants for each school year,

3.2. Instruments and Procedure

Spanish version of The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The present study employed the Spanish version by Pérez and Martínez (2001). In this version, items were adapted to the Spanish education system, which explains why some modifications were justified and validated by their authors. The Spanish version of the FLCAS is considered a reliable and valid instrument with an internal consistency of.89 and test-retest correlation of .90 within an 8-week interval. The present study obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of α=.88. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC), devised by Spielberger (1973) and collaborators (Spielberger, Edwards, Lushene, Montouri, & Platzek, 1998). This test allows levels of anxiety to be evaluated in children and adolescents aged 8-15 years who are at school and is composed of two scales: State Anxiety and Trait Anxiety. The present study obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of α=.904. AdHoc Questionnaire. In order to control other variables in this research (practicing a language elsewhere; i.e., not in an academic setting at school; having previously mastered French; or being native French.). Speaking Oral Proficiency Questionnaire. Measuring the speaking oral proficiency criterion variable corresponds to the participants' annual mean in the French-speaking oral proficiency, on a scale from 0 to 10.

To make this research more practical, these steps were followed: the participation of five research institutes was formalized. Then a list was made that indicated the selected research population and authorization from parents/guardians was requested, and the different corresponding measuring instruments were administered. The various measuring tests applied to participants were corrected and scored. Data were processed and analyzed with the SPSS 23.0 Statistics Software for Windows. The obtained statistical results were interpreted by considering a theoretical review.

4. Results

First of all, the correlations between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency were generally examined. A statistically significant negative linear correlation (r=-.685**) was found between variables French-speaking oral proficiency and language anxiety. There was a negative linear relation between these variables, which indicates that the greater lan-guage anxiety is, the poorer French-speaking oral proficiency becomes. The correlations be-tween language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency were examined in the differ-ent academic years studied (years 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Spanish Compulsory Secondary Educa-tion). The results were: year 1 (r=-.695**); year 2 (r=-.607**); year 3 (r=-.661**); year 4 (r=-.768**). We stress that all the correlations were inverse or negative. Thus the greater language anxiety was, the poorer French-speaking oral proficiency became. The statistics values, which were all over r=-0.6, enabled us to deduce that the relation between these two variables was quite close in all the academic years that the present research work studied. Therefore, we state that language anxiety is a determining variable and influences French-speaking oral proficiency among schoolchildren studying Compulsory Secondary Education. Secondly, the correlations between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency were examined in the different forms of learning French; i.e., optional second

foreign language and bilingual. Statistically significant correlations were found between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency in both these forms: Optional (r=-.679**) and Bilingual (r=-.669**). Although this difference was smaller, we found a higher negative correlation for the students who studied French as an optional second foreign language than for those who formed part of a bilingual French programme. Statistically significant negative linear correlations were found between variables language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency for both females(r=-.766**) and males (r=-.659**).This would indicate that the Language Anxiety variable has a greater influence on the French-speaking oral proficiency variable for females than for males. In order to better understand the language anxiety construct, the correlations between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency were evaluated according to age. We found statistically significant medium-high negative linear correlations (p=<0.001) between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency for all ages for the statistical processing; from 12 to 16 years. The highest correlation was observed for the age of 15 withr=-0.782**, followed by 12 years withr=-0.721**, 14 years withr=-.638**, 16 years with r=-.623**, and finally by13 years withr=-.608**. The language variable anxiety correlated significantly with the French-speaking oral proficiency variable in the different age groups (12-16 years old). Statistically significant medium-high negative linear correlations (p=<0.001) were observed among variables French classes not given in institutes, language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency, regardless of students going to French classes not given in institutes or not. The highest correlation corresponded to the participants who went to French classes not given in institutes, with r=-0.751**, as opposed to those who did not, with r=-0.670**. The greatest influence was found for the participants who went to French-classes not given in institutes. Finally, in order to go examine the study objective more pro-foundly, which consisted in studying and evaluating language anxiety on French-speaking oral proficiency for the various forms of teaching French(optional/bilingual), a decision was made to do a linear regression statistical analysis for predictive purposes with these variables: language anxiety, trait anxiety, state anxiety, French classes not given in institutes, the form of teaching, gender, age, academic year, mastering French before and being a native French student to predict the French-speaking oral proficiency variable. This was done to show which was more influential on the dependent variable. The model (Table 1) was made up of language anxiety, gender and French classes not given in institutes, trait anxiety and native French student. The other variables, trait anxiety percentiles, direct state anxiety scores, state anxiety percentiles, mastering French before, form of teaching academic year and age were excluded from the model. The model confirmed that a significant linear relation between these variables and language anxiety really had an effect on French-speaking oral proficiency (F=115,413***).

Table 01. Predictive model of French-speaking oral proficiency

Model	Non-normalised coefficients		Normalised coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Language anxiety	-0.042	0.002	**-0.638**	-17.120	**0.000**
Gender	0.835	0.123	**0.230**	6.733	**0.000**
French classes not given in institutes	-0.773	0.223	**-0.108**	-3.467	**0.001**
Trait Anxiety	-0.053	0.020	**-0.106**	-2.650	**0.008**
Native French student	-1.639	0.632	**-0.080**	-2.593	**0.010**

According to Table 2, statistically processing the determination coefficient indicated how the first model with the language anxiety variable predicted the French-speaking oral proficiency dependent variable, which explained 46.7% of its variance (corrected R^2=0.467). Moreover, the value for the change in R^2, which indicated factorial weight, was higher for all the models with a value of 0.468. Therefore, the language anxiety variable had a significant factorial weight for the French-speaking oral proficiency variable. The R^2 value was 0.468, so there was very little difference between R^2 and corrected R^2, which indicated that the level at which the sample effect and independent variables was fitted was lower. The typical error, the square root of unexplained variance, was 1.3265. This percentage of explained variance was coherent with both the beta value (β=-0.685), t (t=-21,131) and level of significance (p<0.05). The p-value associated with the T-statistic was below 0.05 and enabled the predictive character of the language anxiety variable to be ratified on French-speaking oral proficiency.

Table 02. Multiple Linear Regression

Model	R	R2	Adjusted R2	T-statistic estimation	Change in R squared	Change in F	Sig. Change in F
1	0.684[a]	0.468	**0.467**	1.3265	0.468	446.543	0.000
2	0.714[b]	0.510	**0.508**	1.2743	0.042	43.347	0.000
3	0.722[c]	0.521	**0.519**	1.2610	0.011	11.768	0.001
4	0.727[d]	0.528	**0.524**	1.2534	0.007	7.110	0.008
5	0.731[e]	0.534	**0.530**	1.2464	0.006	6.723	0.010

Predictors in the model: 1: Language anxiety; 2: gender; 3: classes not given in institutes; 4: trait anxiety; 5: native French student.

The model was composed of variables language anxiety, gender, classes not given in institutes, trait anxiety and native French student, which explained 53.4% of the variance of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable (corrected R^2=0.534). The value in the change in R^2 was 0.006 (Table2). The beta and t values were β=-0.638 and t=-17.120 for language anxiety, β=0.230 and t=6,773 for gender, β=-0.108 and t=-3.467 for variable classes not given in institutes, β=-0.106 and =-2.650 for trait anxiety, and β=-.080 and t=-2.593 the native French student for variable. As the p-value associated with the T-statistic was below 0.05, it was possible to revalidate the predictive nature of the variables of the French-speaking oral proficiency model. Moreover, in order to go more deeply into the study objective, which consisted in studying and evaluating the influence of language anxiety on French-speaking oral proficiency in the different modes of teaching French(optional/bilingual), a decision was made to do a multiple linear regression statistical analysis between variables language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency according to the form of teaching, i.e., optional and bilingual (Table 3), to attempt to establish a predictive model of this performance according to the form that the French language is taught in. A linear relation was found between variables language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency for both bilingual (F=209,251; p<0.05) and optional forms of teaching a second foreign language (F=216,816; p<0.05). For the bilingual mode (Table 4), the language anxiety variable explained 44.5% of the variance of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable (adjusted R2= 0.445), while the language anxiety variable explained 45.9% (adjusted R2= 0.459 for the optional form of teaching. The value of the change in R2 in the optional form of teaching was 0.462 and the beta was β=-0.679, while the change in R2was0.447 and the beta was

β=-0.669 in the bilingual form of teaching. The value of the change in R2 indicates that the language anxiety variable had more factorial weight in the performance variable in the optional form of teaching than in the bilingual one. Likewise, the beta value indicated a larger quantity of change, i.e., weight, in the optional form of teaching.

Table 03. Explanatory variance of performance according to the bilingual vs. optional teaching form

Model	R	R^2	AdjustedR^2	Estimated T-statistic	Change in R^2	Changein F	Sig. Change in F
Bilingual	0.669b	0.447	**0.445**	1.3194	**0.447**	209.451	0.000
Optional	0.679c	0.462	**0.459**	1.3126	**0.462**	216.886	0.000

In both cases, we can state that variables language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency were linearly related, and that language anxiety explained high percentages of variance for the latter variable in both teaching modes. Nonetheless, we observed that the percentage of explained variance and factorial weight were higher in the optional form of teaching a foreign language than in the bilingual one. In short, statistically significant correlations were found between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency in all the academic years (1 to 4) and for all ages. These correlations were higher for females, as was the optional teaching form. The language anxiety variable alone explained 46.7% of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable (45.9% in the optional mode and 44.5% in the bilingual mode), while variables language anxiety, gender, French classes not given in institutes, trait anxiety and native French student explained 53.4% of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Language anxiety has been defined as one of the most influential factors on learning and acquiring the language competence in foreign languages since the 1980s, researchers in this field have recently shown an interest in the construct, who coincide about the huge influence that language anxiety has on the communication competence in foreign languages (Baran-Lucarz, 2014; Chow, Chui, Lai, & Kwok, 2015; Jee, 2014). The results in the present research work follow the same line as those of the ones. In the regression analysis, the language anxiety variable explained 46.7% of the French-speaking oral proficiency variable. Our study centred on oral proficiency. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), among others (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999), have stated that most inquiries made in the learning foreign languages field have focused on the main concern voiced when producing oral texts in a foreign language. Our study also found statistically significant correlations between language anxiety and the French-speaking oral proficiency, with r=-0.685**. When comparing the optional and bilingual groups, we observed that correlations were higher for the optional group(r=-0.679**) than for the bilingual one (r=-0.669). The option group obtained a mean of =92.26 in language anxiety, as opposed to one of =78.55 for the bilingual group. Several studies insist on there being a relation between language anxiety and students' marks in the language they are learning. The works of Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) have demonstrated statistically

significant negative correlations between language anxiety and participants' marks in a range of situations and in different academic years (Secondary Education, Higher Education and Primary Education). This means that language anxiety is the most determining factor for being successful and competent in learning a second foreign language for both written and reading tasks (Lee, 2016; Machida & Dalsky, 2014). Our research work compared the influence of language anxiety on French-speaking oral proficiency in both the optional/bilingual teaching forms. The results indicated that the correlation between language anxiety and French-speaking oral proficiency was higher in the optional form with r=-0.679** than in the bilingual one, with r=-0.669**. This finding is in line with recent studies (Thompson & Khawaja, 2015; Torres & Turner, 2015) which indicate that language anxiety levels continue for people who live in a country where the second language is a usual language to communicate in, but they are lower. This is because students who believe they are competent in the second foreign language experience significantly lower levels of anxiety when learning the language than those who perceive themselves as incompetent in communication actions and when bilingual programmes are used. However, cognitive processing, cognitive functions and learning, and specifically learning foreign languages, improve (Cortina, 2014; Fernández & Manrique, 2015). Our study found significant correlations in language anxiety and performance between males and females, just as previous research has done (Liu & Ni, 2015; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015). In our study age came over as a decisive factor in anxiety when learning and acquiring a new language. Some works have indicated that anxiety management programmes lower language anxiety levels and improve performance (Lin, Chao, & Huang, 2015). The weak points of this study include the need to conduct more thorough research into the effects of bilingualism on different aspects in people who are already bilingual (ex post facto), but also in people who are still not, by longitudinal studies to more accurately evaluate improvements in cognitive functions in general. It is also necessary to promote and increase studies into bilingual programmes in Spanish schools to evaluate their efficiency at younger ages, and also into learning foreign languages at school. In light of our results, the importance of language anxiety for performance in general, and also for French-speaking oral proficiency, comes over quite clearly. The latest research in this field provides us with valuable information to state that language anxiety significantly influences performance in languages. Hence it is necessary to continue investigating in this area in order to improve the teaching praxis and to teach students to become competent in languages.

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