"I command thee thou shalt speak": Practical strategies and activities for counteracting foreign language anxiety in the classroom

Riccardo Amorati
University of Melbourne, Australia

Beatrice Venturin
University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Until high levels of proficiency have been reached, language learners do not have full control over what they say in the target language (TL), how they say it and what image of themselves they project. Hence, learning and using an additional language (L2) might pose a threat to one's self-image. As a result, a reflection on how students' participation can be encouraged by minimising foreign language anxiety (FLA) in the L2 classroom is warranted. After providing a focused overview of scholarship on FLA and its impact on L2 learning, we consider the advantages of an approach whereby students reflect on the affective factors that impinge on the L2 learning process while also improving their L2 proficiency. We then show how this can be achieved in practice by presenting two possible activities, paving the way for future implementations in the classroom.

Finché non vengono raggiunti livelli elevati di competenza, gli apprendenti di una lingua non hanno il pieno controllo di ciò che dicono nella lingua target (TL), di come lo dicono e di quale immagine di sé stessi trasmettono. Per questo motivo, l'apprendimento e l'utilizzo di una lingua seconda/straniera (L2) può rappresentare una minaccia per l'immagine di sé. Questo fenomeno rende necessaria una riflessione sulle strategie che possono essere messe in atto per facilitare la partecipazione degli studenti e per ridurre al minimo l'ansia linguistica (FLA) nella classe L2. Dopo aver fornito una panoramica della ricerca su FLA e sul suo impatto sull'apprendimento della L2, consideriamo i vantaggi di un approccio che fa riflettere gli studenti sui fattori affettivi che influiscono sul processo di apprendimento della L2 mentre migliorano le loro competenze linguistiche. Mostriamo poi come questo possa essere realizzato nella pratica didattica presentando due possibili attività che possono essere implementate in classe.

Riccardo Amorati, Beatrice Venturin – *"I command thee thou shalt speak": Practical strategies and activities for counteracting foreign language anxiety in the classroom*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/12350

40

1. Introduction

Engaging students in classroom discussions is often viewed as a challenging task for teachers at the tertiary level (e.g., Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2009). This is particularly true in language classes, where students are asked to communicate in another language, and where avoiding embarrassment is more difficult. There is evidence that silence can be perceived as a survival technique for some language students (Bao, 2015), a strategy put in place to disguise the true level of their own language abilities to their teacher and peers. Many teachers may interpret students' silences as a disinterest in classroom activities, lack of concentration and unwillingness to participate, rather than a manifestation of foreign language anxiety (FLA, see Bao, 2015). Hence, they may be likely to force them to contribute to class discussions, following the biblical imperative "I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jeremiah 1:7). For many students in language classes, however, silence is linked to FLA, a widely researched area in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The term refers to the feeling of apprehension, tension and even fear in situations in which students are asked to use the L2 (Dewaele, 2007; MacIntyre, 2017). The construct describes "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128).

Despite the considerable amount of literature on FLA (e.g., Gkonou, Daubney, & Dewaele, 2017), most research is theoretical in nature and mainly interested in delineating the factors that influence this phenomenon and its impact on students' success in language learning. Although studies often end with implications for practice (e.g., Horwitz, 2017), various scholars have noted that in-depth discussions of practical classroom activities for the management of quiet and silent students are still scarce (e.g., Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Phillips, 1999; Young, 1999). While in other areas, such as L2 motivation, pedagogical implications are often explored in depth and are sometimes the primary focus of academic articles (e.g., Amorati, 2020), there is a scarcity of research on FLA connecting theory to practice (see, however, Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). This can be explained by the fact that research on FLA has often been directed more to researchers rather than language practitioners. Rose (2019, p. 895) notes that the paucity of teaching-related scholarship contributes to the distancing between teachers and researchers. In recognition of this bias, this article aims to provide a more practice-oriented review of the literature on the topic and to offer practical solutions that can be immediately applied by teachers in their daily practice in the classroom. In doing so, we propose a pedagogical culture that is more sensitive to the affective factors that influence language learning and to students' psychological investment in the L2 learning process.

The article is structured as follows. First, we offer a general overview of past and recent research on FLA, focusing in particular on its causes and consequences. Second, we discuss what teachers can do in the classroom to reduce students' anxious states: from modifying instructional practices and classroom procedures, to promoting activities where students can reflect on their language learning experiences and face their anxiety triggers while also developing their L2 skills. In so doing, this article aims to pave the way for new lines of research into suitable activities that can be implemented by language practitioners to help students deal with and overcome their language anxiety.

2. Overview of the literature

2.1 Causes and consequences of FLA

FLA has been defined as a sense of worry, negative self-perceptions, beliefs and emotional reaction experienced by L2 learners, exacerbated by classroom situations where learners are required to express themselves in the L2 (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Maclntyre, 1999). It is considered the primary obstacle experienced by learners in the L2 classroom (Alrabai, 2014), hence it is the most widely investigated emotion in the field of SLA (MacIntyre, 2017). FLA has been recognised to have academic, cognitive and social effects (see Gkonou et al., 2017 for a recent overview). On the academic level, it impacts achievement, self-perceived language competence and often pushes learners to 'overstudy'. Cognitive effects have been identified at all stages. At the input stage, FLA represents an obstacle for the processing of information: it influences the speed and accuracy of learning, and impacts on the short-term memory required to learn vocabulary and grammar rules, among others. At the output stage, it affects the retrieval of information from long-term memory, the fluency of speech and the complexity of sentences. On the social level, FLA affects students' willingness to communicate: anxious students tend to opt for risk-avoiding behaviours, such as speaking less or being silent, and are more self-conscious and apprehensive, even when speaking in their first language (L1) in an L2 environment (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986). The literature on FLA has identified various causes of language anxiety. Among these, we report the most significant factors associated with FLA in Figure 1. As can be seen, these causes are often interconnected in the role they play on students' anxiety.
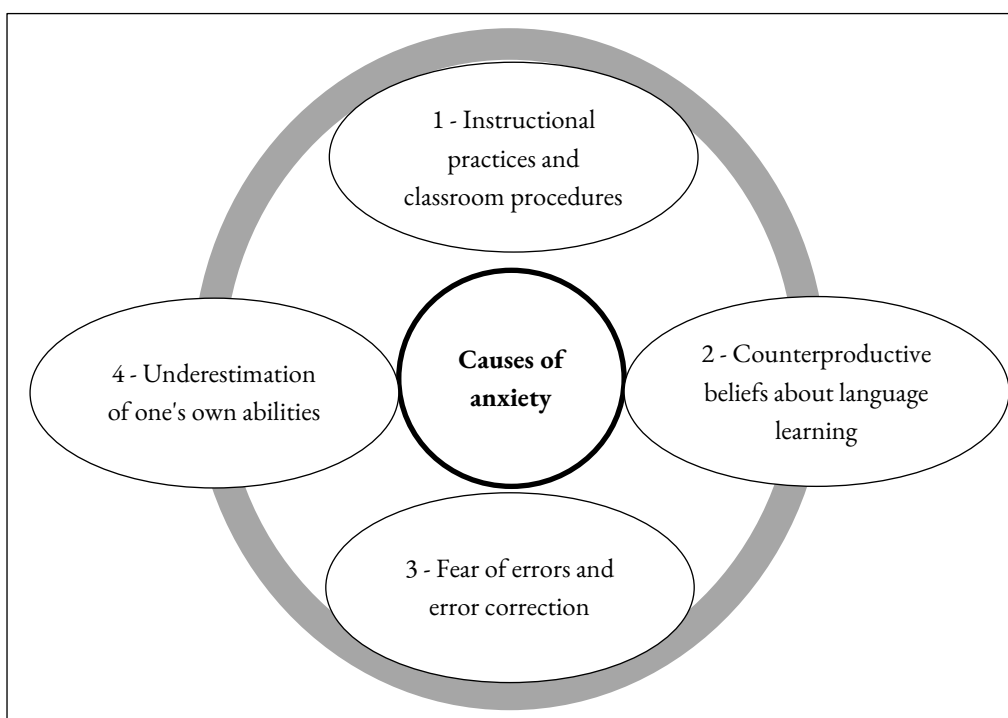

Figure 1: Main factors associated with FLA

Instructional practices and classroom procedures (factor 1) are often perceived as anxiety producing (Young, 1991). In particular, FLA is linked to teacher-centred environments where power differentials, namely the perceived differences in status between teachers and students, are constantly remarked (Dewaele, Magdalena & Saito, 2019; Dewaele, Witney, Saito & Dewaele, 2018; Littlewood, 1981). It is also associated with activities that create an atmosphere of competition, such as timed learning games (De Andrés & Arnold, 2009). Negative competitiveness and negative comparisons with other learners affect students' self-concept and sense of belonging to the group (Rubio-Alcalá, 2014), thus contributing to feelings of anxiety and unpleasant learning experiences (Bailey, 1983). Activities and assessment tasks that require unrehearsed speaking have also been associated with uneasiness (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015; Horwitz et al., 1986, see also Kim, 2009; Price, 1991).

Anxious students may also have *counterproductive beliefs about language learning (factor 2)*,), which lead them to negative self-evaluations. Students may think, for example, that their level of proficiency is not high enough to enable them to speak and may hold unrealistic expectations of achieving native-like pronunciation and/or proficiency. These beliefs have the potential to create a vicious circle, where learners afflict themselves for not reaching these overly ambitious standards, hence convincing themselves that they are not good enough to speak in front of the class. There is clear evidence that students link their learning process to their sense of self (e.g., Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017). When they try to communicate in another language, they do not have full control of their language skills. The inability to authentically communicate who they are in the target language is often associated with FLA (e.g., Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 2; see also Cohen & Norst, 1989; Horwitz, 2017). This leads students to develop what Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017, p. 55) call "anxious self": an anxious persona that is perceived as distinct and independent from their own self and which appears to be out of their control. Students are sometimes unaware of the complexities involved in language learning and may formulate unrealistic goals. Students' negative self-comparisons with others (perhaps with native speakers), competitive (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) and perfectionist (Dewaele, 2017) nature may also result in anxiety. In addition, students may make associations with previous negative language learning experiences and expect them to occur again (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Rubio-Alcalá, 2014).

Students may *also worry about making errors (factor 3),* especially when asked to speak in front of the class without any preparation (Mak, 2011). Students, in fact, are often worried about being judged by others and can be apprehensive about being corrected in the classroom in front of their peers. This can create a vicious circle: as errors are made, learners become more anxious, and the more errors they make, the less willing they are to participate, as they try to protect their social image (Alrabaj, 2014). Perfectionist students are generally more anxious learners (Dewaele, 2017; Flett, Hewitt, Su, Flett, 2016; Fujio, 2010; Stöber & Joormann, 2001), as «they spend their energy avoiding mistakes rather than focusing on learning» (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 563).

Anxious students may also *underestimate their own abilities (factor 4)* and tend to focus on the negatives rather than positives. They may, for instance, believe that their performance is riddled with more errors than they actually produce and decide not to speak for fear of being ridiculed by others (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, 1988; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999;

Philipps, 1992). Students' negative self-evaluations can lead them to invest less energy in the learning process, and to ultimately withdraw from language programs (MacIntyre et al., 1997).

2.2 Teachers' role in counteracting FLA

As noted previously, despite the plethora of studies on FLA, scholarly literature has mainly contributed to a theoretical understanding of the construct, with scholars providing language practitioners with limited practical suggestions to reduce its impact. As Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) observe, there is not a single solution that can eliminate FLA. However, there are a series of strategies that can be put in place to alleviate tensions. Horwitz (2017, p. 42; see also Horwitz, 2013, p. 12) suggests, among other things, that teachers should be mindful of students' fears of errors (see factor 3) and correct them gently, acknowledge students' discomfort in using the L2, give students opportunities to talk about their experiences, and help them develop more realistic expectations about language learning (see factor 1, factor 2). In addition, she argues that humour and games should be used in the language classroom and that small-group rather than whole class activities should be preferred (factor 1, see also Ewald, 2007; Young, 1991). An additional viable way to reduce FLA can be through the promotion of positive (rather than negative) emotions in the classroom (factor 1, e.g., MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Oxford, 2016).

2.2.1 Awareness-raising activities for anxious students

Awareness-raising activities aimed at challenging FLA can be put in place directly or indirectly (Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). In the former case, teachers should organise targeted events to help students cope with high anxiety and low self-esteem (see factor 4), for instance by means of workshops. In the second case, teachers could implement «activities and other methodological procedures in which students learn the language and are likely to have a personal growth at the same time» (p. 208).

As FLA is a situation-specific construct, teachers should examine their own practice to create an anxiety-reducing atmosphere in the classroom and to understand which activities and situations are more anxiety-inducing for students (see factor 1). In line with the suggestions offered by scholars in this area (Horwitz, 2017; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 3), teachers could include more small-group activities in the curriculum and be more sensitive towards error correction during class activities (see factor 3). As for learner-related causes (i.e., students' unrealistic beliefs about language learning, better understanding of their own anxieties), following Rubio-Alcalá (2017), teachers could propose activities that pursue a twofold objective: linguistic – i.e., reinforcing language structures - and psychological - the students speculate on their language-anxiety triggers and think about how they can overcome these negative, debilitating emotions while engaging in group activities. In other words, teachers should implement a teaching approach that includes a focus on linguistic forms within the context of broader communicative activities aimed at teaching content as well. This approach is in keeping with the principles of the communicative method (e.g., Spada, 2007) and also reflects the tenets of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an educational pedagogy that builds on the integration of language and content (Villabona & Cenoz, 2021).

3. Integrating affective factors into classroom activities: some practical examples

In this section, we aim to present two activities that can be easily implemented in the classroom. In doing so, we aim to contribute, to some extent, to showing that scholars working on FLA should be mindful about the possible stakeholders of their research, i.e., teachers, and should explain in detail – and not vaguely – the pedagogical implications of their work for their daily practice.

Following Hadfield and Dörnyei's (2013) mode of presentation, we provide key details on the two activities and offer some further comments on each, particularly with regards to the information that we expect to elicit from students. The activities presented here can be adapted for any language. In the procedure and comments sections we describe what teachers can do in the classroom, drawing upon Balboni's (2012) conceptualization of the key features of a didactic unit. According to this scholar, learning activities should include the steps summarized in the table below (Table 1).

Motivation	The initial phase serves to develop motivation to make learning meaningful. Students make assumptions and predictions about the learning content. Brainstorming activities are presented in the classroom, students activate prior knowledge of the content.
Globality	The material is presented. Through exercises and group discussion, students select information and confirm the assumptions formulated in the "motivation" phase. Skimming and scanning activities are presented.
Analysis	Students group the words in the text by semantic fields or form word networks (e.g., they create spider diagrams). They identify the linguistic/communicative forms studied under analysis and rearrange them in grids. New grammar rules are discovered inductively.
Synthesis and reflection	This practice phase consists in the application, fixation and re-use of the grammar rules, vocabulary, content, and/or textual features under investigation. The learning activity ends with a final summary and reflection on the new content presented.

Table 1: Balboni's (2012) steps for learning activities

Balboni (2012) also includes a final "assessment" phase, which we do not elaborate on substantially in the discussion of our activities, as the types of assessment tasks depend on the overall aims of the course in which the activities are integrated.

3.1 Activity 1

Title	Online resource: "Speaking a foreign language: challenges and suggestions to succeed"
Duration	Around 5 classes (5 hours)
Level	Elementary and intermediate levels
Communicative functions	Giving suggestions (elementary and intermediate levels), describing emotions (intermediate levels), describing past experiences (intermediate levels)
Psychological aims	Factor 2: Challenge counterproductive beliefs about language learning (Cohen & Norst, 1989; Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017) Factor 3: Eliminate fear of errors and errors correction (Gregersen, 2003) Factor 4: Foster realistic and positive views on students' abilities (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013; Horwitz,

	2017)
Skills	Writing, speaking
Possible language areas	Imperative, modal verbs in the present indicative, verbs expressing emotions in the present indicative and adjectives of emotions (elementary levels), modal verbs in the present conditional, hypothetical sentences, imperative with pronouns (intermediate levels)

Table 2: Activity 1

3.1.1 Procedure and comments

3.1.1.1 Day 1

In the initial "motivation" phase students are shown some pictures that sensitise them about the importance of emotions in language learning. The goal of the teacher is to make students aware of the relevance of the issue to language learners, so as to justify pedagogically the group activity that will be proposed in the second part of the activity:

1. Describe the pictures. What do they tell us about the experience of learning and speaking a foreign language?
2. Can you relate to the experiences presented in the pictures? What causes difficulties in speaking in your opinion?

Figure 2: Illustration by Ginnie Hsu. Retrieved from: https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/reduce-foreign-language-anxiety/
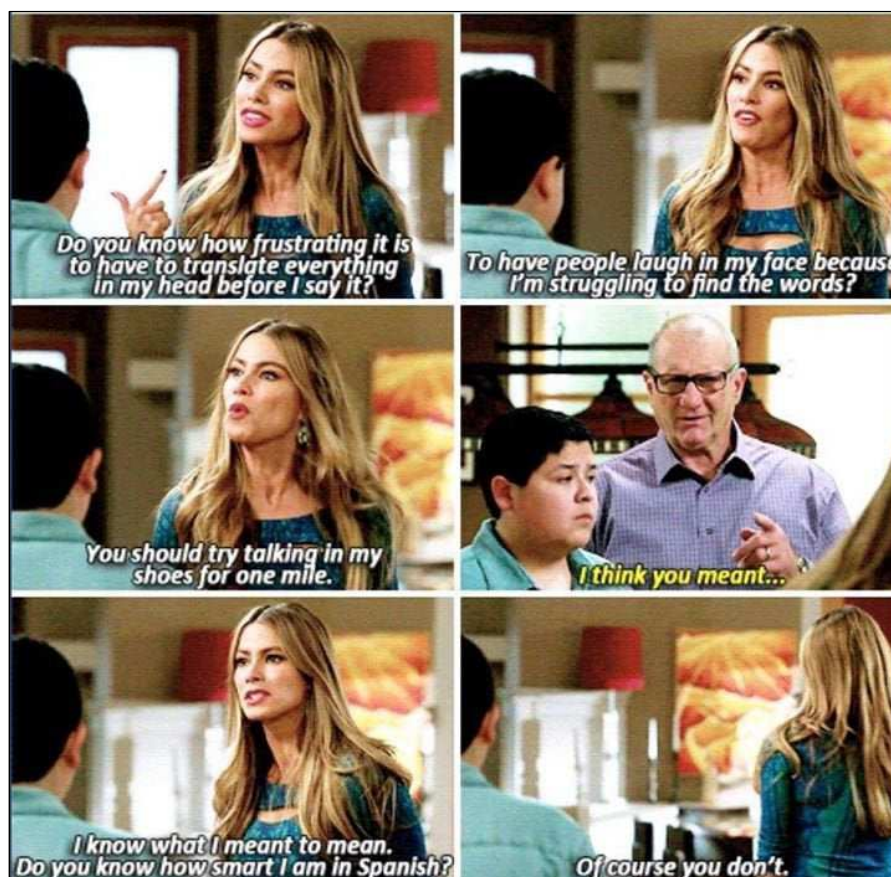
Figure 3: Gloria from the sitcom *Modern Family* on her struggles as a second language speaker. Image retrieved from the internet (https://latinatvlover.wordpress.com/2018/04/05/do-you-know-how-smart-i-sound-in-spanish/)

After the students have commented the pictures in pairs or small groups, the class discusses the topic in plenum and the teacher creates a spider diagram with key words. Students are then explained that they will watch a documentary on YouTube called "Second Language Anxiety" (Jarrell, Lee & Ta, 2016[i]). They are asked to discuss in small groups what they think the video will be about:

1. What is "language anxiety" in your opinion? Can you guess?
2. What causes it? What do you think its effects are? Think about the previous discussion.

The teacher than shows the documentary, which discusses how FLA manifests and how it affects the learner. It includes interviews with different L2 learners and presents an interesting account of their individual experiences, which are likely to resonate with the experiences of other language students. Students can confirm the hypotheses previously formulated on the content of the video. In the "globality" phase, students are presented with questions related to the content of the video, e.g. "What is student X most anxious of when learning their second language?", "What anecdote do they recount?", "How does student X feel about using the language outside the classroom? Why?", etc. Students could also be asked more complex questions relating to their overall understanding of underlying themes, such as "Can you identify any common features in the experiences of the learners?".

3.1.1.2 Day 2-4

In the second part of the activity students are explained that their goal is to create an online resource for language students aiming to raise awareness about the language learning process, some obstacles that language learners encounter and strategies to overcome them. Students are provided with an online space (e.g., a Padlet wall[ii]) and a series of prompts, as well as some initial examples for each prompt provided by the teacher. Some examples of prompts and models are provided in Table 3.

Prompt 1: When I speak a language, I feel... (TL structure: verbs of emotions and adjectives expressing emotions)

For example:

- Positive emotions: e.g., happy, intelligent, clever, etc.
- Negative emotions: e.g., frustrated, worried, etc.

Prompt 2: Focus on the positives, not on the negatives...

Mention a positive and a negative in each sentence.

For example:

- Surely your teacher understands that you are nervous, so don't worry about making a mistake!
- Learning a language is an impressive skill! It's normal to make mistakes!

Prompt 3: Some "rules" for language learners (TL structure: imperative)

For example:

- Create an atmosphere of solidarity in class, always offer help and advice to your classmates, and don't be afraid to ask for help from them and from your teacher.
- Embrace risk! Learn from your own and others' mistakes!
- Don't be afraid of your teachers' feedback. Remember that they know very well what it means to learn a foreign language.

Prompt 4: Suggestions for language learners (TL structure: conditional)

For example:

- You should try to speak in class, even though you are not completely sure about the grammatical form of your sentence.

Prompt 5: What I must/can do to improve (TL structure: modal verbs)

For example:

- You can try new fun ways to improve your language; for example, you can do a language exchange with a student who is studying your native language.

Prompt 6: Things I would like suggestions on (add to the list and offer suggestions to your classmates)

For example:

- What should I do to feel less worried about talking in class? → You should think that no one is there to judge! Everyone makes mistakes – including native speakers! – and practice makes perfect!

Prompt 7: Errors are normal: Funny errors made in the L2

For example:

- "Please shout the door" – Shouting at a door may not make it shut...

Table 3: Examples of prompts and models

As can be seen, most prompts also target language structures (see Linguistic aims). Teachers can present prompts containing grammar topics that have already been studied in class in order to consolidate them in the context of a communicative activity with a practical objective and a specific audience (other L2 learners). If presented in this way, the activity would not include the "analysis" phase identified by Balboni (2012) but would rather be part of the "synthesis" phase, since its main linguistic aim would be to practise structures already presented previously. However, it is also possible to present new linguistic forms in the prompts and ask students to analyse them inductively. For example, students could be asked to underline the new grammar form presented in the linguistic input contained in the prompts and could then be encouraged to formulate a rule inductively and apply it (analysis and synthesis phases). While we recommend that the activity on the Padlet is conducted over three classes, the duration is variable and dependent on the number of prompts that teachers decide to propose. At the start of each class, students are divided into small groups (3-4) and are asked to work on a prompt for a set period of time. Each group then rotates and works on a different prompt by adding additional points to the ones already listed and by providing suggestions for the points already given, in case the prompt requires them to do so. The teacher acts as a facilitator and moves around groups to provide assistance and support, as well as to encourage critical reflection on the topics discussed. At the end of the group work, teachers are likely to be presented with students' most common anxieties and their own ideas about how to overcome them.

3.1.1.3 Day 5

The activity is concluded by a final class discussion on the most common themes emerged (synthesis and reflection phase). The resource can be regularly updated by the whole class and can be shown to other year levels to raise awareness of the intricacies of the language learning process. Students could also be asked to submit a final reflective journal where they critically discuss what they have learnt in the activity and how it can be applied to their own experience as language learners. The journal should include both new vocabulary learnt and specific language structures, so as to maintain a focus on the language as well. This could be part of the assessment.

3.2 Activity 2

Title	Emails to the *Readers' Club*
Duration	Intermediate level and possibly advanced
Level	Around 6 classes (6 hours)
Communicative functions	Describing hopes, possibilities, opinions, expectations
Psychological aims	Factor 1: Creating a positive learning environment, reducing power differentials with teachers (Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Littlewood, 1981), competition (De Andrés & Arnold, 2009) and negative comparisons with peers, encouraging students' self-concept and sense of belonging to the group (Rubio-Alcalá, 2001, 2014); Factor 2: Minimising negative attitudes and negative expectations (Philipps, 1992); Factor 4: Boosting students' realistic views on their own abilities (MacIntyre et al., 1997; Onwuegbuzie et

Riccardo Amorati, Beatrice Venturin – *"I command thee thou shalt speak": Practical strategies and activities for counteracting foreign language anxiety in the classroom*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/12350

	al., 1999).
Skills	Reading, writing, speaking
Possible language areas	Present and past conditional (intermediate level), hypothetical sentences - If clauses (intermediate/advanced level), subjunctive forms for languages that have this mood (intermediate/advanced levels)

Table 4: Activity 2

3.2.1 Procedure and comments

3.2.1.1 Day 1

During the "motivation" phase, students are shown the trailer of the film *Inside Out* (available on YouTube[iii]), a computer-animated film that tells the story of a young girl and on how the five basic emotions in her mind – joy, fear, sadness, disgust, anger – control her actions. The teacher's goal is to have students reflect on the emotions that impact on language learning. After watching the trailer students are encouraged to discuss what happens in it and to describe how the mind is represented. They are then shown the picture displayed in Figure 4 and are asked to discuss the following questions in small groups (3-4 students):

1. Imagine that your mind includes the same emotions presented in the film and shown in the figure below. Which of them do you feel when learning or speaking a language? Elaborate on your answer giving examples of scenarios where you feel different emotions.
2. Would you add any other emotions that better describe your experience or the experience of people you know of other than the five represented here? Give practical examples.

Figure 4: Five basic emotions from the movie Inside Out (taken from
https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/328410997828717355/)

Riccardo Amorati, Beatrice Venturin – *"I command thee thou shalt speak": Practical strategies and activities for counteracting foreign language anxiety in the classroom*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/12350

50

At the end of the group discussion, students are invited to write short sentences in the TL on an online space (e.g., a Padlet wall) where they describe how they feel in the language classroom. Teachers can ask students to follow these models:

- When doing speaking activities in the classroom I often/usually/always feel/get...
- When doing group work in the classroom I often/usually/always/sometimes feel/get...

Teachers can include scenarios in the classroom that they believe to be more anxiety inducing, so as to receive direct feedback from students about how they feel. The activity also aims to have students revise emotion-related vocabulary, particularly adjectives and verbs of emotions, which will be used in the following stages of the activity. To conclude this part, the teacher can solicit a classroom discussion in plenum, where students are asked to identify the most common emotions that were mentioned in the previous phase and to give suggestions on how to overcome the negative feelings and capitalise on the positive ones.

3.2.1.2 Day 2-3

During the second phase of the activity, students are told that they will work on the advice column of an online magazine specialised in language learning, contributing both as "readers" and as "language experts". As readers, they will turn to the column and write a letter to the experts to ask for advice on their language learning experience, and how to deal with and overcome their fears and anxiety in the classroom. As experts, they will act as language specialists and will be asked to write a letter in response to the readers' questions and provide suggestions on how to approach the language learning process effectively and confidently. Students are supported in building the expertise required for their role as experts. First, in the "globality" and "analysis" phases of the activity (Balboni, 2012), students are shown examples of letters to the Reader's Club and expert opinions prepared by their teachers. Table 5 displays an example of a model letter and answer that could be presented.

Letter from a reader

Dear Club,

I am a third-year university student of Italian. I need some advice on how to participate more actively in class and on how to improve my language proficiency. I think that speaking in front of the whole class is very stressful. When I speak, I have the impression that everyone is judging me, so I freeze. I believe my classmates have done more progress than me in Italian, and I'm ashamed of speaking.

The positive side is that I think our teachers are very patient and understanding, although they expect a lot from us. They told us about their experience when they were learning languages. I didn't imagine that they also had the same problems we are having now with Italian when they studied English!

What should I do to overcome my fears and speak freely in class?

Expert's answer

Dear student,

I understand your worries very well, I think they are common to lots of language students. I also think that reflecting on them is the first step to overcome them. When I studied at university, I had the same anxieties, especially when I had to speak in front of the whole class. I thought we were supposed to speak only when we could express everything perfectly, that it was more important to

---

express ourselves perfectly than pass on the message and that having an accent was something to be ashamed of. I didn't realise how useful it was to learn from our own and our classmates' mistakes. I also realised how common it is to underestimate our level and focus on our errors and flaws rather than our progress.

Today, though, I see the bright side of mistakes and I think a student should focus on the progress made, rather than on what there is yet to learn. I also think it is very important to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and that classmates should encourage each other.

Table 5: Example of a letter for the Reader's Club and an expert opinion

These texts are presented as part of reading comprehension activities and are followed by questions in the TL on the content of the letters (globality phase). A few examples of questions to propose may be:

- What are the reader's main concerns described in the letter?
- How does the reader see the teacher?
- How does the teacher show sympathy towards the student's experience?
- What is the language expert's first suggestion?
- What kind of experience does the language expert share?
- What are the main aspects the language expert suggests focusing on?
- What is the language expert's view on the classroom experience?

Students are also encouraged to observe and analyse the language structures used in the texts (analysis phase), for example present and past conditional, present and past subjunctive (see Language areas), as they are invited to use them later in their own production phase.

3.2.1.3 Day 4-6

Subsequently, students move on to the synthesis and reflection phase, where, in pairs, they take the role of both "readers" and "experts" in turn. First, they write emails to each other about problems or difficulties encountered in their L2 experiences. Then they exchange these emails and provide suggestions to each other in writing. In their answer as experts, students are invited to provide practical examples that build upon what they have learnt in the previous phase of the activity, and are also encouraged to refer to personal experiences, if relevant. The same activity can be repeated with different pairs and implemented across more lessons. Throughout the activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator, moving from one pair to another and providing support and assistance. At the end of the synthesis and reflection phase, students are invited to share their questions and answers with the class on a Padlet, and are given the option to anonymise their responses if they wish. To conclude, a final classroom discussion is proposed to reflect on the activity, the main problems identified by the students and the key strategies to overcome them.

4. Conclusions

This paper has presented an overview of strategies to reduce learners' anxieties in the classroom. Previous scholars (e.g., Rubio-Alcalá, 2017) have recommended that activities in the classroom should be structured in such a way so as to both teach the language and pursue psychological aims, such as challenge FLA and pro-

mote positive emotions. Our article offers practical suggestions regarding how this can be achieved in practice through the implementation of two activities that can be adapted to learners of various levels and of different languages. The activities presented engage three of the main language skills - writing, reading and speaking - and follow the model of the didactic unit proposed by Balboni (2012), with students progressing from an initial motivation phase to a final synthesis and reflection on the material presented. In the current form, our activities are clearly broad in scope and objectives. In future research, we aim to present anxiety-reducing activities catered to specific languages (e.g., Amorati, forthcoming, for Italian L2) and to empirically test their impact on students' well-being and emotional investment in L2 learning. In light of the paucity of practice-oriented research on FLA, more scholarly attention should be devoted to teachers' perspectives on anxiety and to the development of easy-to-implement strategies to reduce its effects in the classroom.

---

[i] Jarrell, G., Lee, K., & Ta, H. (2016). Documentary: Second Language Anxiety. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCZNL4uwpg

[ii] Padlet is a web app that enables learners and teachers to include images, links, videos and documents on an online "wall" that can be made public or private. It is particularly effective for collaborative group activities and to create online repositories of material.

[iii] Trailer of the film Inside Out - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seMwpP0yeu4

References

Alrabai, F. (2014). A Model of Foreign Language Anxiety in the Saudi EFL Context. *English Language Teaching, 7*(7), 82-101.

Amorati, R. (forthcoming). Utilizzare risorse grammaticali dell'italiano per ridurre l'ansia linguistica: riflessioni e proposte operative. *ItalianoLinguaDue.*

Amorati, R. (2020). Drawing upon disciplinary knowledge to foster long-term motivation: implementing future L2 Selves in the Australian tertiary L2 classroom. In J. Fornasiero, S.M.A Reed, R. Amery, E. Bouvet, K. Enomoto, H.L. Xu (Eds.) *Intersections in language planning and policy. Establishing connections in languages and cultures*. (pp. 335-351). Berlin: Springer.

Bailey, K. M. (1983). Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learning: Looking *at* and *through* the diary studies. In H.W. Seliger & M.H. Long (Eds.), *Classroom-Oriented Research in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 67-103). Rowley: Newbury House.

Balboni, P.E. (2012). *Fare educazione linguistica*. Turin: UTET.

Bao, D. (2015). *Understanding silence and reticence*. New York, NJ: Bloomsbury Academic.

Cohen, Y., & Norst, M. J. (1989). Fear, dependence and loss of self-esteem: Affective barriers in second language learning among adults. *RELC Journal, 20*(2), 61-77.

De Andrés, V., & Arnold, J. (2009). *Seeds of confidence: Self-esteem activities for the EFL classroom*. Innsbruck, AU: Helbling.

Dewaele, J.M. (2007). The effect of multilingualism, sociobiographical, and situational factors on communicative anxiety and foreign language anxiety of mature language learners. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 11*(4), 391-409.

Dewaele, J.M. (2017). Psychological dimensions and foreign language anxiety. In S. Loewen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Instructed Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 433-450). London, UK: Routledge

Dewaele, J. M., & Al-Saraj, T. M. (2015). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety of Arab learners of English: The effect of personality, linguistic and sociobiographical variables. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 5*(2), 205-228.

Dewaele, J. M., Magdalena, A. F., & Saito, K. (2019). The effect of perception of teacher characteristics on Spanish EFL Learners' Anxiety and Enjoyment. *The Modern Language Journal, 103*(2), 412-427.

Dewaele, J.-M., Witney, J., Saito, K., & Dewaele, L. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(6), 676–697.

Ewald, J. D. (2007). Foreign Language Learning Anxiety in Upper-Level Classes: Involving Students as Researchers. *Foreign Language Annals, 40*, 122-142.

Flett, G. L., Hewitt, P. L., Su, C., & Flett, K. D. (2016). Perfectionism in language learners: Review, conceptualization, and recommendations for teachers and school psychologists. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 31*(2), 75-101.

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., & Marshall, S. (2009). *A Handbook for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

Fujio, M. (2010). How to incorporate qualitative analysis into experimental research: Why Japanese students studying in the UK did not improve their fluency. In A. Botinis (Ed.), International Speech Communication Association: Proceedings of the third ISCA Tutorial and Workshop on Experimental Linguistics (pp. 49-52). Athens, GR: University of Athens.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London, UK: Edward Arnold.

Gardner, R.C., & MacIntyre, P.D. (1993). On the measurement of affective variables in second language learning. *Language Learning, 43*(2), 157-194.

Gknou, C., Daubney, M., & Dewaele, J.M. (2017). *New Insights into Language Anxiety. Theory, Research and Educational Implications.* New York, NJ: Multilingual Matters.

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language Learning and Perfectionism: Anxious and Non-Anxious Language Learners' Reactions to Their Own Oral Performance. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(4), 562-570.

Gregersen, T., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). *Capitalizing on individual differences: From premise to practice*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Hadfield, J., & Dörnyei, Z. (2013). *Motivating Learning*. London, UK: Routledge.

Horwitz, E. K. (1988). The Beliefs about Language Learning of Beginning University Foreign Language Students. *The Modern Language Journal, 72*(3), 283-294.

Horwitz (2013). *Becoming a language teacher: A practical guide to second language learning and teaching*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Horwitz, E. K. (2017). On the misreading of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and the need to balance anxiety research and the experiences of anxious language learners. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 31-47). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132.

Jarrell, G., Lee, K., & Ta, H. (2016). *Documentary: Second language anxiety.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCZNL4uwpg

Kim, S. Y. (2009). Questioning the stability of foreign language classroom anxiety and motivation across different classroom contexts. *Foreign Language Annals, 42*(1), 138-157.

Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction.* New York, NJ: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, P. D. (1999). Language anxiety: A review of research for language teachers. In D.J Young (Ed.), *Affect in Foreign Language and Second Language Learning: A Practical Guide to Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Atmosphere* (pp. 24-45). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

MacIntyre, P. D. (2017). An Overview of Language Anxiety Research and Trends in its Development. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 11-30). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

MacIntyre, P.D. & Gardner, R.C. (1991), Language Anxiety: Its Relationship to Other Anxieties and to Processing in Native and Second Languages, *Language Learning, 41*, 513-534.

MacIntyre, P.D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*(2), 193-213.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Mercer, S. (2014). Introducing Positive Psychology to SLA. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 153-172.

MacIntyre, P.D., Noels, K.A., & Clément, R. (1997). Biases in self-ratings of second language proficiency: the role of language anxiety. *Language Learning, 47*(2), 256-287.

Mak, B. (2011). An exploration of speaking-in-class anxiety with Chinese ESL learners. *System, 39*(2), 202-214.

Onwuegbuzie, A., Bailey, P., & Daley, C. E. (1999). Factors associated with foreign language anxiety. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 20,* 217-239.

Riccardo Amorati, Beatrice Venturin – *"I command thee thou shalt speak": Practical strategies and activities for counteracting foreign language anxiety in the classroom*

DOI: https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/12350

Oxford, R. L. (2016). Toward a psychology of well-being for language learners: The "Emphatics" vision. In P. D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in SLA* (pp. 10–87). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Philipps, E.M. (1992), The Effects of Language Anxiety on Students' Oral Test Performance and Attitudes. *The Modern Language Journal, 76*, 14-26.

Phillips, E. (1999). Decreasing language anxiety: Practical techniques for oral activities. In D. J. Young (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning. A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere* (pp. 124–143). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Price, M. L. (1991). The Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interview with Highly Anxious Students. In E. K. Horwitz, & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language Anxiety: From Theory and Research to Classroom Implications* (pp. 101-108). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rose, H. (2019). Dismantling the ivory tower in TESOL: A renewed call for teaching-informed research. *Tesol Quarterly*, 53(3), 895 – 905.

Rubio-Alcalá, F. (2014). Self-esteem and self-concept in foreign language learning. In S. Mercer & M. Williams (Eds.), *Multiple Perspectives on the Self in SLA* (pp. 41-58). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Rubio-Alcalá, F. D. (2017). The Links Between Self-Esteem and Language Anxiety and Implications for the Classroom. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 198-216). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Şimşek, E., & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Anxiety and L2 self-images: The 'anxious self'. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications* (pp. 51-69). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Spada, N. (2007). Communicative Language Teaching. In: Cummins J., Davison C. (eds) International Handbook of English Language Teaching. *Springer International Handbooks of Education*. Boston, MA: Springer.

Steinberg, F.S. & Horwitz, E. K. (1986). The effect of induced anxiety on the denotative and interpretive content of second language speech. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(1), 131-136.

Stöber, J., & Joormann, J. (2001). Worry, procrastination, and perfectionism: Differentiating amount of worry, pathological worry, anxiety, and depression. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 25*(1), 49-60.

Villabona, N. & Cenoz, J. (2021) The integration of content and language in CLIL: a challenge for content-driven and language-driven teachers, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*.

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest?. *The Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 426-439.

Young, D. J. (1999). *Affect in Foreign Language and Second Language Learning: A Practical Guide to Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Atmosphere*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Sources of figures and videos

Extract from Modern Family (n.d) https://latinatvlover.wordpress.com/2018/04/05/do-you-know-how-smart-i-sound-in-spanish/

Five basic emotions from the movie *Inside Out*: https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/328410997828717355/

Hsu, G. (n.d.), https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/reduce-foreign-language-anxiety/

Jarrell, G., Lee, K., & Ta, H. (2016). Documentary: Second Language Anxiety. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCZNL4uwpg

Trailer of the film *Inside Out* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seMwpP0yeu4

Riccardo Amorati is a teaching associate and research assistant at the University of Melbourne (Australia). Following university studies at the University of Bologna (Italy), he completed a Ph.D in Applied Linguistics at the University of Melbourne (Australia). His research interests are in three main areas: (1) affective factors influencing L2 learning experiences; (2) novel approaches to L2 learning and teaching, with a particular focus on Italian L2; (3) student recruitment and retention in language studies.
Contact: riccardo.amorati@unimelb.edu.au

Beatrice Venturin has recently completed her PhD in Applied Linguistics at the University of Melbourne (Australia), where she is also a teaching associate. Her main research interests include bilingualism and multilingualism, heritage languages and speakers, language attrition and maintenance, emotions, identity, L2 learning and teaching. She is particularly interested in affective factors impinging upon multilinguals' language use and choices.
Contact: beatrice.venturin@unimelb.edu.au