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Foreign language classroom anxiety

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Learners show significant individual differences in terms of their outcomes of foreign language (FL) learning, as many factors come into play in the FL learning process, including situational, affective, and cognitive factors. Therefore, to optimize FL teaching and learning, it is important to understand these FL learning-related factors, such as how do they affect FL learning? how important are they? What is the profile of their changes over time? With an attempt to contribute to our understanding of second language acquisition as a research field, the studies included in this dissertation examine a series of issues in relation to FL anxiety.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. This chapter reviews research into FL anxiety, both theoretical and empirical. It consists of six sections. Section 1 is a discussion of the constructs of anxiety and FL anxiety in particular. Sections 2-4 report empirical studies related to three essential issues in the field of FL anxiety: the relationship between FL anxiety and FL learning, the sources of FL anxiety, and the stability of FL anxiety. Section 5 summarizes the review and highlights the weaknesses of prior empirical studies. The last section outlines the current thesis with a focus on introducing Chapters 2-5.

1.1. Anxiety and FL anxiety

1.1.1. Anxiety

Anxiety as a psychological construct is characterized by "subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry, and by activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1983, p. 1). Scovel (1978) defined anxiety as "a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object and an emotional state generated through the arousal of the limbic system, the primitive, subcortical 'chasis' of the cerebrum" (p. 134), and proposed that anxiety could be measured through behavioral tests, self-reports of internal feelings and reactions, and physiological tests. Among these measurement types, self-reports are most commonly employed, as can be seen in the many empirical studies that exist in this field.

Sarason (1978) conceived of anxiety as “a type of cognitive response marked by self-doubts, feelings of inadequacy, and self-blame” (p. 195) and further pointed out that the extent to which and in what situation a person is anxious is idiosyncratic. Anxiety may arise from current stressors, self-deprecatory anticipations of being incapable to accomplish the task at hand, or a cross-situational preoccupation, i.e., "a history of experiences" (Sarason, 1978, p. 197).

Psychologists have traditionally differentiated three types of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is "a more permanent predisposition to be anxious" (Scovel, 1978, p. 137). State anxiety is a momentary apprehensive reaction to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus, for instance a pop quiz (Spielberger, 1983). Trait and state anxiety are closely related. Individuals with high levels of trait anxiety are more likely to experience a stronger form of state anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Situation-specific anxiety is triggered by a particular type of situation or event, such as public speaking (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994a).

Anxiety is a prevailing psychological reaction which occurs across multiple situations, like employment interviews and tests, but also when learning a FL. Teachers may hear their students' complaints from time to time, along the lines of *I am afraid that I will make a lot of mistakes in front of native speakers, so it is better to keep silent. I am incompetent in learning a foreign language by nature. I am totally blank when I am asked to answer questions in my English class.* When anxiety is discussed in the FL learning context, we unavoidably meet with a type of situation-specific anxiety, namely FL anxiety.

1.1.2. FL Anxiety

On the basis of observations of FL learners in instructed settings, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) proposed the construct of FL anxiety and defined it 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" (p. 128). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994b) referred to FL anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 284).

FL anxiety has been shown to be clearly distinct from personality anxieties, as evident from the findings in Horwitz (1986): the scores of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) showed no strong correlation with that of three personality anxiety scales, including the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970), the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969), and the Test Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1978). Furthermore, FL anxiety has gradually been established as a multi-faceted construct, as it does not only pertain to general FL anxiety, but also to skill-based anxieties. The FLCAS has been recognized as a measure of general FL anxiety (Aida, 1994; Pae, 2013; Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003). In addition to this widely used scale, in order to assess skill-based anxieties, researchers have developed a series of FL listening/speaking/reading/writing/anxiety scales (Cheng, 2004; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Pae, 2013; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Correlational studies have shown that the scores of specific anxiety scales and the FLCAS were associated to a medium or high degree, with correlation coefficients falling in the range of .48 to .77 (Cheng, 2004; Cheng et al., 1999; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Gkonou, 2011; Pae, 2013; Saito et al., 1999), indicating that general FL anxiety is associated with, but still distinguishable from skill-based anxieties. The divergence and convergence taxonomy was also revealed between anxieties for the four basic skills (Pae, 2013).

Apart from a distinction between general FL anxiety and skill-based anxieties, researchers have also distinguished between anxieties for different stages of FL learning, i.e.,

input, processing, and output anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994b) developed three 6-item scales to measure these respective anxieties. In Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (2000), the three scales correlated at an r value of .63 (input-processing), .57 (input-output), and .69 (processing-output), mirroring MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994b) findings, and providing further evidence for the relative independence of input, processing, and output anxiety.

In sum, formulating the concept of FL anxiety is important, as it helps to understand the nature of anxiety specific to FL learning and enables a distinction between this type of anxiety, and personality anxiety as well as other academic anxieties. Self-report instruments allow a retrospect of past learning experiences under a less threatening condition than other measures. Moreover, self-report measures can be conveniently administered to a large group (Scovel, 1978). In brief, the development of anxiety scales has greatly benefited empirical studies.

1.2. FL Anxiety and FL Learning

Studies looking at the relationship between FL anxiety and FL learning can be categorized along two dimensions. Those in Category 1 relate FL anxiety to FL achievement (course grades) or proficiency (e.g., standardized tests, self-reports). Horwitz (1986) reported that the FLCAS scores were moderately correlated with final grades for two beginning Spanish and French classes: $r(33)=-.49$ and $r(30)=-.54$, $p<.005$. Aida (1994) explored the underlying structure of the FLCAS in a sample of 96 students of Japanese at the University of Texas and examined the relationship between students' anxiety levels and their Japanese course grades. Anxiety was found to be negatively associated with final scores in Japanese. Saito and Samimy (1996), looking at the same context, further attested that the negative correlation strength between general FL anxiety and final grades increased from beginning, to intermediate, to advanced proficiency levels. Multiple regression analyses showed that

anxiety was the only predictor of final grades for both intermediate and advanced-level students. Reflecting on the non-significant regression finding for the beginning level, Saito and Samimy (1996) noted that “[it] is possible that many of them [beginning learners] have not had sufficient experiences (positive or negative) in foreign languages for anxiety to play a significant role in their performance” (p. 245). Other studies also reporting a negative link between general FL anxiety and FL achievement/proficiency include Cheng et al. (1999), Liu and Jackson (2008), Hewitt and Stephenson (2012), to name but a few.

Studies in Category 1 also address the relationship between more specific skill-based FL anxiety and academic outcomes. Cheng et al. (1999) found that writing anxiety, measured by the adapted Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (Daly & Miller, 1975), showed a weak negative link with writing course grades. Zhang (2013) reported a study with two tests over a 3.5-month interval, which investigated the impact of listening anxiety on listening scores measured by the IELTS listening test. Structural equation modeling analyses revealed a significant negative effect of listening anxiety on listening test scores. Using Chinese as a FL students at an American university, Zhao, Guo, and Dynia (2013) found a medium negative link between English reading anxiety and English reading scores (a combination of reading scores from three chapter tests and one final exam) for the elementary Level I and the intermediate level participants, but not for the elementary Level II participants. As shown, a negative relationship between FL anxiety and FL learning outcomes has generally been reported in previous studies. Correlation is not causation, and the findings highlight the possible interplay between FL anxiety and FL achievement/proficiency, but do not indicate a direct causal relationship.

Studies have also probed the effects of FL anxiety on subtle FL learning aspects, rather than just relating FL anxiety to FL achievement/proficiency (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b). These studies form the second category. Steinberg and Horwitz (1986) were

interested in the difference between anxious and non-anxious students' degree of subjectivity in their personal output when orally describing pictures. It was found that anxious students provided significantly less interpretive content than their more relaxed counterparts. Though Steinberg and Horwitz's study (1986) dealt with experimentally induced anxiety, its findings still shed light on the possible reactions of anxious learners when performing speaking tasks in the classroom. As anxious students tend to be unwilling to vent their personal opinions, for instance out of apprehension of others' evaluation, it is very likely that their oral output is usually short, which in turn impedes the development of their speaking ability. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994b) examined the relationships between anxiety and performance at the input, processing, and output stages of FL learning. Anxiety at each stage was assessed, using a 6-item scale. Nine tasks were used to measure performance at the three stages (e.g., a Digit Span test for the input stage; a Paired Associates Learning task for the processing stage). Overall, a significant negative correlation was found between stage-specific anxiety and the task at hand.

Furthermore, Sellers (2000) investigated the anxiety-reading relationship on the basis of data from 89 American university students of Spanish (53 students in a third-semester Spanish course and 36 students in an advanced oral expression course). All participants completed a FL reading anxiety scale and the FLCAS, read an article in Spanish, and then filled out Sarason's (1978) Cognitive Interference Questionnaire. After that, they completed two reading comprehension assessments, one of which was a free recall protocol in English, the participants' L1. Results showed that high-reading anxiety students recalled significantly fewer central messages, whereas those scoring highly on the FLCAS recalled less content of mid-level importance. Irrespective of anxiety type, highly anxious individuals experienced more cognitive interference than their less anxious peers. Rassaei's study (2015) aimed to uncover the effect of FL anxiety on learners' perceptions of oral corrective feedback. Results

indicated that low-anxiety students perceived significantly more recasts and metalinguistic feedback, in contrast to high-anxiety ones. The reason may be that highly anxious students experience more cognitive distraction and fail to devote sufficient attention to the task of identifying the corrective feedback provided by the interlocutors.

To sum up, previous findings have supported the view that FL anxiety interferes with FL learning (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Woodrow, 2006). Yet, this viewpoint is by no means without dispute. Illustrating the Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH), Sparks, Ganschow, and their associates (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995; Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 2000; Sparks, Ganschow, & Pohlman, 1989) have continuously argued that phonological, syntactic, and/or semantic coding deficits in native language learning account for poor FL learning outcomes. The impact of phonological coding deficits is most pervasive and important. FL anxiety is then seen as a mere consequence of FL learning difficulties. Responding to the LCDH, MacIntyre (1995) described how language anxiety as a social anxiety cognitively interferes with learning tasks. Such interference is best elaborated in Eysenck's (1979) statement that "highly anxious subjects are effectively in a dual-task or divided attention situation, in contrast to non-anxious subjects who primarily process task-relevant information" (p. 364). The LCDH is incomplete, as it "[assigns] mere epiphenomenal status to affective variables in general and language anxiety in particular" (MacIntyre, 1995, p. 90). Horwitz (2000) remarks that many anxious students indeed do not have L1 cognitive disabilities. In other words, anxiety can be independent of processing deficits. In effect, "the potential of anxiety to interfere with learning and performance is one of the most accepted phenomena in psychology and education" (Horwitz, 2000, p. 256). Therefore, FL anxiety is best treated as a contributing factor of deficient FL learning.

1.3. Sources of FL Anxiety

From a review of the language anxiety literature, Young (1991) proposed six FL anxiety sources: 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing. Others have been identified as well, among which demographic variables, such as age and years of FL learning, or specific teaching methods are included. In what follows, we focus on five frequently invoked factors: personality, learner beliefs about FL learning, classroom activities, classroom environment, and teaching methods.

1.3.1. Personality

Personality refers to a person's traits that "account for consistent patterns of response to situations" (Pervin, 1980, p. 6). Researchers have related FL anxiety to various personality traits. Quantitative studies have consistently attested a negative correlation between self-esteem and FL anxiety (Liu & Zhang, 2008; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999; Zare & Riasati, 2012). The consistent findings very much endorse the belief held by Krashen, Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin that low self-esteem is one source feeding into anxiety (Young, 1992). In contrast, research into the relationship between another factor (competitiveness) and anxiety yielded rather contradictory results. Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) reported a non-significant relationship between the FLCAS scores and competitiveness, as assessed by the Competitive Subscale of the Social Interdependence Scale (Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1979). However, in Tóth (2007), the relationship was a significantly positive one.

Researchers have related FL anxiety to three personality components evaluated by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985), i.e., extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. In Dewaele (2013), the participants comprised two groups of

multilingual university students (86 from London and 62 from Mallorca). It was found that neuroticism was significantly and positively correlated with anxiety in the L2 and L3 for the London group, but with anxiety in the L2 to L4 for the Mallorca group. Yet, psychoticism and extraversion were only negatively associated with anxiety in the L3 for the Mallorca group and did not relate to anxiety in the L2 to L4 in the London group data. Dewaele's (2013) findings regarding the relationships between neuroticism and extraversion, as well as anxiety, were furthermore in line with those described in Liu and Zhang (2008), who reported that neuroticism and extraversion were positively and negatively associated with FL anxiety, respectively. However, the two studies differed in the psychoticism-anxiety relationship, which was negative in Dewaele (2013), but positive in Liu and Zhang (2008).

Furthermore, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) investigated the relationship between FL anxiety and perfectionism. To this end, they tested eight university students of English in Chile, four of whom were highly anxious (scoring 92 to 101 out of 165 on the FLCAS) and four of whom were more relaxed (scoring 34 to 41 on the same scale). The eight students were video recorded when engaging in a 5-minute one-on-one conversation with the first author of the study on five simple topics, for instance *How do you celebrate Independence Day/normally spend your weekends?* and *Where do you go and what do you do on vacation?*. The students then reviewed and commented on their videos. Comments pointing to high personal performance standards, fear of evaluation, and error-consciousness were treated as indexes of perfectionism. Anxious students were found to show more of these perfectionist tendencies than the relaxed ones, highlighting perfectionism as a potential source of FL anxiety.

1.3.2. Learner Beliefs about FL Learning

Beliefs refer to “the associations or linkages that people establish between an object (e.g.,

English) and various attributes (e.g., difficult, an important language, should be learned by everyone” (Tanaka, 2004, p. 7). Learner beliefs about FL learning may reflect the public mindset or originate from prior experiences in learning either a native language or another FL (Horwitz, 1988; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). Using the 34-item Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), Horwitz (1988) investigated and compared the beliefs of 98 students of Spanish, 80 students of German, and 63 students of French, who were learning these FLs at the University of Texas. Results showed that an overwhelming percentage of participants in each group agreed with the item, “*Some languages are easier to learn than others*”. And yet, within each group, responses pertaining to the difficulty of the FL being learned varied greatly. Some learners rated their FL to be difficult, whereas others considered the FL they were studying to be relatively easy. In addition, a large number of students felt that they could become fluent within a maximum of two years. Other learner beliefs also investigated by Horwitz (1988) are concerned with FL aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. In general, studies have revealed a link between learner beliefs and anxiety levels.

Truitt (1995) found that two factors of the adapted BALLI were negatively correlated with FL anxiety, including *self-efficacy/confidence in speaking* and *beliefs about the ease of learning English*. In the ensuing stepwise regression analysis that was conducted, the two factors were found to significantly predict anxiety, with *confidence in speaking* displaying a stronger predictive power. In Wang (2005), 175 Chinese EFL students (79 first-year and 96 second-year undergraduates) were recruited. The students completed a Chinese version of the FLCAS and the BALLI. Factor analyses identified five BALLI factors, two of which were significantly related to anxiety: $r(173) = .54, p < .01$ for *language learning difficulty*; $r(173) = -.26, p < .01$ for *foreign language aptitude*. Furthermore, the two factors were found to predict FL anxiety, with *language learning difficulty* being the better predictor. However, using the

same instruments, Lan's (2010) study involving 212 junior high school students of English in Taiwan, revealed inconsistent results with those reported by Wang (2005): FL anxiety was not linked to *foreign language aptitude*, but did negatively correlate with *language learning difficulty*.

Most recently, Zhang (2014) tested 151 first-year L1 Chinese English majors. These students' anxiety was assessed, using the FLCAS, and their beliefs about English learning were elicited by an adapted version of Tanaka's (2004) 27-item questionnaire tapping learners' language learning beliefs. Results showed that two belief factors, i.e., *self-efficacy about English learning* and *beliefs about formal and structured learning*, negatively and positively predicted learners' anxiety levels, respectively.

1.3.3. Classroom Activities

Classroom activities have the potential to trigger FL anxiety, but those related to speaking seem most troublesome (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele, 2011). Young (1990) noted that her two groups of 135 and 109 students of Spanish enrolled at university and high school respectively felt particularly uncomfortable when speaking in front of the class. Kim (1998) compared the anxiety levels of 59 Korean university students in English conversation and reading classes. The results suggested that students in a communicative context experienced significantly higher anxiety levels. The reasons include that speaking a FL "entails the radical operation of learning and manipulating a new grammar, syntax, and vocabulary and, at the extreme limits of proficiency, modifying one of the basic modes of identification by the self and others, the way we sound" (Guiora, 1972, p. 144).

1.3.4. Classroom Environment

Classroom environment or classroom climate, has been referred to as "the 'objective'

perception of the social and emotional features of a class, the average or shared perception of class members” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 29). It is a multi-dimensional concept (Trickett & Moos, 2002). Several qualitative studies have addressed the relationships between various classroom dimensions and learners’ anxiety levels.

Grandcolas and Soulé-Susbielles (1986) described a project involving Italian students of French. The students’ diaries were collected. Discourse analysis revealed the importance of student cohesiveness in the classroom for calming down the learners’ tenseness and fear, as evidenced by the utterance, "The group's cohesion was essential and certainly favoured the 'risks' I was taking when speaking a new sentence. I would have been less bold in a hostile group" (p. 300).

Cohen and Norst’s (1989) diary study of nine students learning a FL (unspecified by the authors) to fulfill the requirements for a Master’s degree disclosed teacher support and competition as determinants of anxiety levels. Particularly notable is that several places in the diaries pointed to teachers’ influences on learners’ anxious reactions in the classroom, which led Cohen and Norst (1989) to note that “a critical factor, if not *the* factor, [to reduce learners’ fear or anxiety], is the warmth, friendliness, empathy and personal commitment of the teacher to the students as people rather than as pupils” (p. 75). For Young’s (1990) 135 university and 109 high school participants, three instructor characteristics were found to most likely reduce the students’ speaking anxiety in Spanish: friendly, good sense of humor, and patient.

The effects of different dimensions of classroom climate on FL anxiety have also been examined directly in quantitative studies involving college students. Palacios (1998) administered the FLCAS and the Classroom Environment Scale (Trickett & Moos, 1973) to 227 Spanish I and 218 Spanish IV university students. Simple correlation analyses uncovered a significant link between FL anxiety and classroom environment aspects at Spanish I level: a negative relationship vis-à-vis student-to-student connection (-.24), student involvement

(-.18), and teacher support (-.26), but a positive correlation with competition (.25) and task orientation (.22). At Spanish IV level, the same patterns were found, except that student-to-student connection and competition were not related to FL anxiety anymore. Subsequent regression analyses for Spanish I and IV confirmed the relationship between anxiety and some aspects of classroom climate, but the details of these aspects are left unspecified. Huang, Eslami, and Hu (2010) furthermore found that academic/personal support provided by teacher was significantly negatively related to the FLCAS factor of fear of failing the class, but positively to a factor labeled “comfort with English learning”, which was also positively associated with academic/personal support provided by peers.

Quantitative studies have also been done with secondary school students. Abu-Rabia (2004) investigated teachers’ roles in anxiety in English on the basis of 67 Grade 7 Israeli pupils aged 12-13, using the FLCAS and an additional 10-item Likert scale to assess teachers’ attitudes towards learners. Perceived teacher support was shown to negatively predict learners’ FL anxiety levels. Thus, understanding and supportive teachers may prevent students from experiencing a higher level of anxiety. Piechurska-kuciel (2011) further found that a group of students who perceived a low level of teacher support showed a significantly higher level of anxiety than an otherwise comparable high-support group.

1.3.5. Teaching Methods

The use of specific teaching methods tends to be associated with both negative and positive learner feelings. Some learners may feel uncomfortable with a given method, which may be favored by others. Hence, different teaching methods can have advantages and disadvantages when it comes to reducing anxiety effects.

The Community Language Learning (CLL) method was devised by Curran and his associates with a view to reducing students' anxiety levels by introducing psychological

counseling techniques into language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The roles of the teacher and learners in this context are analogous to the *counselor* and his/her *clients*. The CLL method has no pre-set language syllabus, which typically governs more traditional teaching methods. Learners make choices about their own learning process. Ariza (2002) reported her success in helping four monolingual English-speaking Puerto Rican boys overcome their anxiety in Spanish through the use of the CLL method. Samimy and Rardin (1994) analyzed 100 journals of university FL students and found that the most frequently mentioned affective variable was either lack or reduction of anxiety during the CLL experiences, entirely opposite to the fact that the students mostly reported anxiety before the CLL experiences. The shift of learners' attitudes might be attributed to the secure relationship between the teacher and learners, as well as group support, achieved by using the CLL (Samimy & Rardin, 1994). Nonetheless, some students expressed discomfort in relation to this teaching method, as evidenced by the comment: *I feel that the card games produced in me some anxiety. I wanted to succeed in matching at least some words and felt obliged to do a fairly good 'performance'...* (Samimy & Rardin, 1994, p. 387).

Another teaching method that has been related to learners' positive and negative feelings is the Natural Approach, which emphasizes "exposure, or *input*, rather than practice; optimizing emotional preparedness for learning; a prolonged period of attention to what the language learners hear before they try to produce language; and a willingness to use written and other materials as a source of comprehensible input" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 129). In Koch and Terrell (1991), 40%, 34%, and 26% of 92 university students of Spanish (mostly native speakers of English), who perceived themselves to be calm and self-confident, reported an increase, a decrease, or no difference in anxiety level after the Natural Approach experiences, respectively.

1.4. The Stability of FL Anxiety

The issue of FL anxiety stability can be approached from two perspectives: stability over time and stability across target languages. As for stability over time, not many studies exist, reflective of the lack of studies over time in the field of FL anxiety. In one early study, Gardner, Smythe, and Clément (1979) found that anxiety in French significantly decreased after six weeks for Canadian students and after five weeks for American students. It should be noted that Gardner et al.'s (1979) students attended an intensive language program and were placed into beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes on the basis of a French screening test. They received instructions that were in line with their initial French proficiency. Hence, the results cannot be generalized to more regular classrooms where the input is less intensive. In Liu, Liu, and Su (2010), 934 first-year Chinese students from three universities reported significant decreases in the scores of the full adapted FLCAS and of two factors: low self-confidence in speaking English and general English classroom performance anxiety, over a period of one semester. Interestingly, female students showed significant decreases in the scores of the full anxiety scale and the two factors, but males' anxiety levels significantly decreased only for the factor of low self-confidence in speaking English. The results of paired-samples *t*-tests for two of the three universities replicated the findings for males and females. Significance levels were not attested for the third university. It should be noted that anxiety levels do not always naturally decrease as a function of time. Samimy and Tabuse (1992), for instance, reported a significant increase in the level of Japanese class discomfort among 39 university students from the spring to the autumn quarter. Furthermore, in a recent study, Jee (2014) reported a significant increase in the scores of the full FLCAS and one of the FLCAS factors, i.e., communication apprehension, from the first to the second semester among 12 Korean FL students. The skewed picture may be related to different learning contexts, participants, sample size, or the FLs under investigation.

Research into the stability of anxiety across FLs started just a decade ago. Saito et al.'s (1999) study is said to be the first to address this topic (Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003). In their study, 383 American students of French, Japanese, or Russian filled out the FLCAS and a FL reading anxiety scale. Results showed that the learner groups for the three FLs significantly differed from each other in reading anxiety. However, no significant differences between the groups were attested for general FL anxiety. It needs to be noted that Saito et al.'s participants at different grades were learning either French, Japanese, or Russian. In addition, FL courses were required for some students, but were elective for others. Sparks et al. (2000) believe that Saito et al.'s (1999) study design does not allow a conclusive answer to the issue of the stability of anxiety across FLs, especially because of its heterogeneous groups of learners. The changes of anxiety across FLs should ideally be studied using students learning the same multiple FLs (Dewaele, 2013).

Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) compared 110 Venezuelan students' anxiety in English and French classes. These students, with various proficiencies in the two languages, came from two universities. Their anxiety levels in English and French were not found to significantly differ. Kim (2009) criticized Rodríguez and Abreu's (2003) study for ignoring contextual factors that contributed to learners' anxiety and subsequently compared 59 Korean college students' anxiety in English reading and conversation courses. It was found that learners experienced significantly higher anxiety levels in the conversation course. Rodríguez (2010) responded to Kim's criticism by clarifying that Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) did take contextual factors into account, as the 110 participants were recruited from two schools and were studying two FLs, and furthermore identified deficiencies in Kim (2009). For example, Kim's claim that her study paid attention to cross-cultural differences in FL instruction conflicted with the fact that her subjects were taking two English courses at the same college. Moreover, Kim did not report relevant information in the Results section, like homogeneity

of regression slopes and effect sizes. In brief, research into anxiety stability across FLs is not without dispute.

Studies of anxiety stability across FLs have not merely targeted university students. Piniel (2006) examined anxiety in 61 ninth-year secondary school students at a grammar school in Hungary. These students were learning two FLs for three hours per week within a classroom setting. Both the first and the second FLs for the students were not necessarily identical. The first FLs were those which had been learnt in primary schools, including English and German. The second FLs had been learnt after secondary school enrollment, and included French, German, Italian, and English. It was found that anxiety in learning the first and the second FLs as assessed by the FLCAS significantly differed.

More studies were conducted by Dewaele and his colleagues (Dewaele, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2013; Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008). The 2002 and 2007a studies examined pupils in the last year of secondary school, who were either mostly (2002 study) or all (2007a study) native speakers of Dutch. These studies revealed significantly higher levels of communicative anxiety in French than in English. In a follow-up study (Dewaele, 2007b), the university-level participants were 35 bilinguals, 33 trilinguals, and 38 quadrilinguals. The languages known by the students were marked L1 to L4 (diverse languages in L1 to L4) on the basis of the order of acquisition. Communicative anxiety in the L1, L2, L3, and L4 was measured in three situations, i.e., speaking with friends, with strangers, and in public. Paired-samples *t*-tests showed that anxiety gradually and significantly increased from L1 to L4 in the three situations (with the exception of non-significant differences between anxiety in the L3 and L4 when speaking with friends and strangers). Dewaele, Petrides, and Furnham's (2008) study replicated and extended the 2007b findings. In the 2008 study, multilingual adults' anxiety levels for speaking in the language learnt later significantly increased when talking to friends, colleagues, and strangers, on the phone and in public. An

explanation for the gradually higher anxiety levels is that the participants may be more proficient in the languages learnt earlier, as noted by Dewaele (2007b). In the earlier mentioned study by Dewaele (2013), the FLCAS was administered to 86 and 62 university students from London and Mallorca, respectively, who were also multilingual. Simple correlation analyses showed that the L2, L3, and L4 FLCAS scores were highly related for both the London and Mallorca groups, which led to Dewaele's (2013) conclusion that FL anxiety levels are relatively stable across the FLs known by the learners/users.

1.5. Summary

This chapter has reviewed the constructs of anxiety and FL anxiety in particular, as well as empirical studies related to three important issues in the field of FL anxiety: the relationship between FL anxiety and FL learning, the sources of FL anxiety, and the stability of FL anxiety. The review tapped the multi-dimensionality of the construct of FL anxiety and the adverse effects of FL anxiety on FL learning. It also attested the complexity of anxiety-provoking factors, including both internal and external learner variables. Furthermore, previous studies documented that anxiety levels in learner groups showed different trends over time (e.g., a significantly increase or decrease) and a significant or non-significant difference across multiple FLs.

Some weaknesses in previous studies were also identified. For instance, data should be collected over time to further clarify the relationship between FL anxiety and FL proficiency. Likewise, studies are still needed that compare the effects of FL anxiety on FL learning with those of other factors, for example classroom climate dimensions, in order to establish the relative importance of the anxiety variable to learners' academic outcomes. In addition, more quantitative studies should be conducted on how factors such as competitiveness, a family's social status, and learner beliefs relate to FL anxiety. Such studies

can help to extend our understanding of the factors underlying FL anxiety. Furthermore, studies comparing the weighted contributions of different factors to FL anxiety should be continued and extended, for instance between aspects of learners' personality/classroom environment. FL anxiety is related to a myriad of affective, cognitive, sociobiographical, and situational variables, as well as their interactions. Hence, teachers are incapable of dealing with (i.e. considering) all anxiety-provoking factors in their lesson construction. It is more practical to focus on those factors which have already been shown to strongly relate to FL anxiety. Those prominent variables can be identified via comparative studies.

As far as the stability of FL anxiety over time is concerned, research is only at the initial stages. Not many studies have looked at the changes of FL anxiety across FLs either, with the majority of past work focusing on European FL learning contexts. No studies have -to our knowledge- compared Asian learners' anxiety in multiple FLs. Studies of anxiety stability over time, especially those involving multiple FLs, for which the participants have different duration of learning (e.g., students who have learned a given FL for a long time, while they have just started learning the other), can shed light on the stabilization of FL anxiety. Research into anxiety stability across target languages facilitates our understanding of FL anxiety in terms of its (in)dependence of target languages. Thus, in this PhD project, a series of studies is conducted, building on the findings of previous studies, but also on the niches they have left. The layout of the thesis is presented below, and the research questions for each study are formulated as well.

1.6. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by summarizing the findings and suggesting new lines of research in the area. Chapters 2-5 constitute four studies, which are presented in more detail below.

Factors associated with foreign language anxiety: A study of Chinese university learners of Japanese and English (Chapter 2). Chapter 2 reports a study that investigates and compares the effects of FL proficiency, the family's social status, and a learner's competitiveness and self-esteem on FL anxiety.

The anxiety-proficiency relationship and the stability of anxiety: The case of Chinese university learners of English and Japanese (Chapter 3). The study reported in Chapter 3 investigates the relationship between FL anxiety and FL proficiency within English and Japanese learning contexts, as well as the stability of anxiety in English and Japanese over time and the stability of anxiety across the two languages.

Situational and psychological correlates of foreign language anxiety: The case of Chinese university learners of Japanese and English (Chapter 4). The study reported in Chapter 4 compares the impact of two classroom environment dimensions (teacher support and student involvement) and two personality traits (trait anxiety and competitiveness) on FL anxiety. It also compares the weighted contributions of situational and psychological factors in relation to FL anxiety.

Affective and situational correlates of foreign language proficiency: A study of Chinese university learners of English and Japanese (Chapter 5). Chapter 5 reports a study that explores the effects of teacher support and student cohesiveness on FL learning outcomes and compares their effect with that of FL anxiety.

