Effects of Language Anxiety on Three Proficiency-Level Courses of Spanish as a Foreign Language

Mónica Marcos-Llinás
University of Missouri—Columbia

Maria Juan Garau
Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, Spain

Abstract: *This article investigates the effects of language anxiety on course achievement in three foreign language proficiency levels of Spanish, namely, beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Participants completed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) and a background questionnaire. Results showed that language anxiety actually differed across proficiency levels. In the present study, advanced learners showed higher levels of anxiety than beginning and intermediate learners. In addition, there was an interrelation between language anxiety and course achievement. However, students with high levels of anxiety did not necessarily exhibit lower course achievement in comparison to students with low levels of language anxiety, as concluded in previous studies. Furthermore, there was a medium level of language anxiety among most participants, with no significant effect on course achievement.*

Key words: *affective variables, course achievement, foreign language, language anxiety, language level*

Language: *Spanish*

Introduction

Research in Foreign Language Anxiety

Over the last 30 years, research has supported the important role that affect plays in language learning. For a long time, cognition and affect were regarded as two opposing terms. Today, the cognitive and the affective domain complement one another (Dewaele, 2005). One of the most recently investigated affective factors is language anxiety. A study by Horwitz (1986) became the starting point for the term "foreign language anxiety," or "language anxiety." In the language classroom, there are learners who suffer from negative language anxiety (that is to say, anxiety im-

Mónica Marcos-Llinás (PhD, Universitat de les Illes Balears) is Teaching Assistant Professor of Spanish at University of Missouri—Columbia, Columbia, Missouri.

Maria Juan Garau (PhD, Universitat de Barcelona) is Assistant Professor of English at Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

pedes language learning), while others do not. For some researchers and educators, language anxiety is a minor problem. For others, however, it is a major problem. Given the different views on language anxiety, some studies have concluded that high anxiety usually has a negative effect on the language acquisition process (e.g., Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Gregersen, 2003; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991). Recently, though, different studies show that some level of anxiety is not as detrimental as originally thought (see Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). Another recent study (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006) on the relationship between language anxiety, reading, and listening self-efficacy beliefs (i.e., one's personal beliefs in one's capabilities) suggests that the latter are closely related to language anxiety since students with stronger self-efficacy showed lower levels of language anxiety and better language proficiency compared to lower self-efficacy students. Still, more research needs to be undertaken to have a better grasp of how this affective variable can influence foreign language acquisition.

In fact, very few studies have been carried out regarding differences in anxiety levels and proficiency levels (Ewald, 2007; Gardner, Smythe, & Brunet, 1977; Kitano, 2001; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007; Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar, & Plageman, 1997). In their study, Gardner et al. (1977) concluded that anxiety decreased when experience and proficiency increased. In their investigation of French learners, beginners showed higher anxiety than more advanced learners. Contrarily, two recent qualitative studies have concluded that students in upper-level courses experience high anxiety, which may or may not impede the learning process (Ewald, 2007; Kitano, 2001). In her investigation of college students of Spanish in upper-level undergraduate courses, Ewald (2007) suggested that advanced learners also experienced anxiety even though most of them liked

their advanced courses and were pursuing a major or minor in Spanish. In a previous study, Kitano (2001) found that advanced students of Japanese experienced higher anxiety than elementary- or intermediate-level students. In several studies, Sparks and Ganschow (1995; Sparks et al., 1997; Ganschow & Sparks, 1996) have found that language anxiety seems to be related to native language skills and foreign language aptitude. In a recent study, Sparks and Ganschow (2007) found that foreign language high school learners with higher levels of language anxiety exhibited first language (L1) skills differences as early as the second grade when compared to those with lower levels of anxiety. Due to the contradictory results on proficiency levels and language anxiety and the scarcity of studies examining different proficiency levels at once, the present study tries to add new evidence by examining this variable across three Spanish-level courses.

Definition of Anxiety

Anxiety is a complex construct (MacIntyre, 1999; Young, 1999) that deals with learners' psychology in terms of their feelings (frustration, fear, insecurity, or apprehension), self-esteem, and self-confidence (Clément, 1980, 1987; Sellers, 1998). There are two approaches to defining language anxiety: (1) language anxiety is a transfer of other forms of anxiety (Scovel, 1978; Young, 1991), and (2) language anxiety is a unique type of anxiety that causes worry and negative emotional reactions (P. Bailey, Daley, & Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1999). In the second approach, language anxiety differs from the kind of anxiety that relates to public speaking, test taking, or communication apprehension. MacIntyre and Gardner defined language anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language (L2) contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (1994, p. 284). Horwitz et al. argued that language anxiety is also a feeling of worry "associated with an

arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (1986, p. 125). More recently, Horwitz (2000) defined language anxiety as a cause of poor language achievement. In contrast, Sparks and Ganschow (1991, 1995) defined language anxiety as a consequence of difficulties in the L1 coding challenging the hypotheses of language anxiety researchers on the relationship between language anxiety and achievement (see also Sparks & Ganschow, 1993, 2007). According to these authors, anxiety must be looked at in relation to L1 skills. Thus, if a student has poor L1 skills, that is to say, if the student has difficulties with language "codes"—i.e., phonological/orthographic, syntactic, and semantic features—the student may be prone to suffer high anxiety in a second language (L2)/foreign language context. Another contrasting view is expressed by Spielmann and Radnofsky, who also challenged the current research paradigm on language anxiety and defined it as "an unstable phenomenon that may be generated by any situation or event and may be perceived differently by each individual experiencing it" (2001, p. 259).

In both approaches, language anxiety is a state (i.e., a moment-to-moment experience of anxiety) rather than a trait (i.e., a permanent predisposition to become nervous in a wide range of situations that relates to an individual's personality) (Goldberg, 1993; Scovel, 1978; Spielberger, 1983). In the literature review, both state and trait anxiety have been seen to have negative effects. To L2/foreign language acquisition, state anxiety is very relevant because it limits anxiety to situation-specific constructs. According to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) definition of anxiety, in the present study anxiety is regarded as a situation-specific construct (i.e., a moment-to-moment experience) that plays a significant role in the foreign language classroom. Results in recent studies on anxiety, nevertheless, do not seem to agree on the role anxiety plays in the learning process. Today, the notion of language anxiety should be reconceptualized as something more individualistic,

closely related to individual differences (DeKeyser, 2005), needs, and personal language experiences, and to the concept of self-efficacy as suggested by Mills et al. (2006). Furthermore, new studies should consider L1 as well as foreign language skills to examine their relationship with language anxiety as suggested by Sparks and Ganschow (2007).

Types of Language Anxiety

Alpert and Haber (1960) distinguish two types of anxiety: facilitative and debilitative (see also K. Bailey, 1983; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978). As Young explains, "[f]acilitating anxiety is an increase in drive level which results in improved performance" (1986, p. 440). An example of facilitative anxiety might be students who accept risk as part of their language acquisition process; thus, anxiety motivates the students to learn more about the foreign language (Chastain, 1975; Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Gregersen, 2003; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). Debilitative anxiety, on the other hand, impedes language learning. Learners who suffer from debilitative anxiety may have feelings of fear or insecurity and even suffer from poor performance and withdrawal from the foreign language class (Gardner, 1985; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986).

Effects of Language Anxiety on Academic Achievement

One of the major concerns among researchers and educators is that anxiety may have a negative effect on academic achievement (MacIntyre, 1999; Young, 1991). The research literature reveals that there are five types of factors related to language anxiety: behavioral, cognitive, psycholinguistic, physical, and sociolinguistic. Behavioral factors refer to patterns of behaviors, such as students coming to class unprepared, or not attending class (Daley, Onwuegbuzie, & Phillip, 1999; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002;

Spielmann & Radnosfky, 2001). Cognitive factors refer to language aptitude, cognitive ability, and study habits such as overstudying. Closely related to this is Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), included in his Monitor Model. This hypothesis, based on research on L1 acquisition, regards emotions as a key element in L2/foreign language acquisition, acting as a filter that either allows or impedes language achievement at the input stage of the learning process. To Tobias (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991b), emotions not only affect the input stage but also the processing and the output stages. Psycholinguistic factors refer to low performance, forgetting words, or simply refusing to speak. Another factor related to language anxiety is physical symptoms such as tapping, sweaty hands, exaggerated laughing, or nodding (Oxford & Ehrman, 1993; Young, 1999). Finally, sociolinguistic factors can affect both the learner and the instructor in terms of classroom interaction, or cultural issues such as speaking two L1s or sharing two cultures, which is also related to language anxiety (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

Furthermore, language anxiety can have an effect on learners at different levels: the academic (Gardner, Smythe, & Lalonde, 1984), the affective (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a), the social (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Young, 1999), and the personality-related levels (Cheng, 2002; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). Often, foreign language courses are the most anxiety-provoking classes to the extent that language learning can cause traumatic reactions in some individuals, such as attrition or changing majors (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1989). Similar to what might happen in other anxiety-provoking classes, some language learners can also feel a mental block (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). Horwitz and Young (1991) estimated that half the students taking language courses experience debilitating anxiety, although other scholars claim that anxiety can also be facilitating (Gregersen, 2003; Guiora, Brannon, & Bull, 1972; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

A number of studies have documented that language anxiety can predict foreign language achievement only when language variables are not included as predictor variables (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1989; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a, 1991b). Researchers have found a moderate negative relationship between anxiety and language achievement scores indicating that high–anxious students either expect or receive lower grades than their less anxious counterparts (Gardner, Smythe, & Lalonde, 1984; Price, 1991; Trylong, 1987). One common factor among these studies is that they take for granted that low–anxious learners will learn better, although, in the past, a study by Bachman (1976) on affective factors and adult L2 learners suggested that there was no association between language anxiety and achievement. In a more recent study on anxiety among true- and false-beginner learners of Spanish and French, Frantzen and Magnan (2005) concluded that true beginners showed higher anxiety levels and received lower final grades than false beginners.

Furthermore, researchers have found foreign language anxiety to be one of the best predictors of foreign language achievement (Aida, 1994; Gardner, 1985; Kim, 1998; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 2000b; Rodríguez, 1995; Saito & Samimy, 1996). A study by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) showed anxiety to be the best single correlate of achievement. Early studies also assumed that anxiety could influence language learning, although their results did not support this assumption (Chastain, 1975; Scovel, 1978). Since the 1990s, studies have revealed significant negative correlations between students' academic performance and anxiety measures. Studies have tried to determine the conditions under which anxiety has an effect, although more research is needed regarding language anxiety and levels of proficiency.

Sources of Language Anxiety

Research has tried to establish the sources of language anxiety. According to Horwitz

et al. (1986), testing, communication apprehension, and peer evaluation are the three main sources of anxiety. However, other factors, e.g., stage fright, the fear of being laughed at, the learner's personality, the instructor's teaching styles (Oxford, 1999; Price, 1991; Tse, 2000), the learner's learning styles (Reid, 1995), the learning context itself (Phillips, 1999), the L1 skills (Sparks & Ganschow, 1995) and the whole process of learning a foreign language can also cause language anxiety.

Studies show that language anxiety can affect language skill development in different areas: communication apprehension (Daly & McCroskey, 1994; Mejías, Applbaum, Applbaum, & Trotter, 1991), reading comprehension (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 1998; Young & Oxford, 1993), oral proficiency (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Young, 1992), communicative skills (Phillips, 1999), writing skills (Cheng et al., 1999; Daly, 1991; Leki, 1995, 1999), and listening skills (Vogely, 1999).

The effect of anxiety on learning an L2/foreign language is complex and still under study (P. Bailey et al., 1999; Cheng et al., 1999; Horwitz, 2000; MacIntyre, 1999; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 2000a, 2000b; Oxford, 1999). A review of the literature suggests that teaching/learning methodologies need to reduce the levels of anxiety and tension among high–anxious learners to diminish the pervasive cognitive, academic, social, and personal negative effects on L2/foreign language learning contexts (Horwitz, 2001; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Young, 1999). On the other hand, researchers also point out that some degree of anxiety seems to motivate learning an L2/foreign language.

Purpose of the Study

The focus of this study was first to examine possible differences regarding language anxiety across three proficiency levels of Spanish as a foreign language. Second, the study sought to investigate the relationship between language anxiety and course achievement. Thus, language level (i.e., placement level based on participants' scores on the placement test and the number of years they had studied Spanish as a foreign language in high school) and language anxiety (i.e., participants' scores on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale [FLCAS]) were the two independent variables in the present study. Due to the lack of many studies dealing with this affective variable across language levels and the mixed results of recent studies on language anxiety and its negative or positive influence on foreign language acquisition, this investigation sought to take a step further.

Research Questions

This study addressed three research questions:

1. Are there differences in levels of foreign language anxiety among students enrolled in different levels of Spanish (i.e., elementary, intermediate, and advanced)?
2. Are there differences in final foreign language course grades among students with different levels of foreign language anxiety?
3. How strongly is foreign language anxiety related to foreign language course achievement as measured by final course grades?

Method

Participants

Participants (first-, second-, and third-year learners of Spanish) were 134 college students from a variety of degree programs enrolled in 11 courses of Spanish as a foreign language during the winter and spring terms at a midwestern American university. Out of the 201 students who originally participated in the study, 67 had to be eliminated because they either failed to complete at least one instrument or they stopped attending classes (despite the fact that this specific subgroup might have proved important in the data analysis since it may have included some

high-anxiety learners). Students participated voluntarily and were asked to sign an informed consent form. All names and results were kept confidential.

Even though the Spanish community is quite big in the United States, Spanish is not an L2 in the whole nation and is primarily a foreign language in the state of Ohio (where this study was conducted). In fact, the Hispanic population during the data collection period was 2%, according to the 2004 U.S. census. And 14.1% ($N = 19$) of the participants stated having Hispanic origins, as some member in their family or extended family was from a Spanish-speaking country.

The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 55, although the majority of the students were in their early 20s. The mean score for age was 19.94 ($SD = 4.34$). In terms of gender, 70.1% ($N = 94$) of the participants were female and 29.9% ($N = 40$) were male.

Based on the university's language system and the learners' results on their placement test, learners were divided into three main language levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Out of the total number (N) of participants, 36.6% ($N = 49$) were elementary students, 32.1% ($N = 43$) were intermediate, and 31.3% ($N = 42$) were advanced students. Freshmen formed the biggest group of students among the three levels, followed by sophomores, juniors, and seniors. There were only two graduate participants in the study. In general terms, participants were mostly full-time undergraduates.

Regarding age of first instruction, the majority of the participants (67.1%, $N = 90$) were between 13 and 17 years old when they first began to learn Spanish. The next largest group (18.6%, $N = 25$) was students who were 12 or younger when they first learned Spanish, followed by those (12.6%, $N = 17$) who were between 18 and 25. Only 2 were past age 25 when they first began studying Spanish.

As mentioned, 11 classes participated in the study. According to the university's language system and its placement test administered to the students upon their arrival at the university, students were divided into three proficiency levels. In this institution, the placement test consisted of a 20-minute computerized test with multiple-choice questions on vocabulary and grammar. Based on the students' scores, all participants in the study had been placed into the three course levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. In this institution, each language level consisted of three-level courses offered throughout the academic year. There were seven teachers (native and nonnative Spanish-speakers) involved with the study who followed a similar language program as well as assessment methodology.

Instruments

The instruments provided were the FLCAS and the background questionnaire. The researchers also administered an informed consent form to the participants. Furthermore, instructors helped collect participants' final course grades (and their grade components) at the end of the quarter.

As previously mentioned, this study used the FLCAS because Spanish was a foreign language for most students. Furthermore, the FLCAS had already been used in previous studies on foreign language anxiety, proving to be a valid and reliable measure of language anxiety. This instrument was designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and consists of 33 statements that assess communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in the foreign language classroom. Each item on the scale is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In the present study, Spanish was the foreign language, and the researchers made changes to the wording of the instrument wherever necessary (e.g., "foreign language" to "Spanish"). In this study, the FLCAS had a reliability index of .94 Cronbach's alpha coefficient. See Appendix A for the FLCAS.

The background questionnaire (pilot-tested in a previous study, Marcos-Llinás, 2002) included some background questions

on the participants' age, sex, family origins, academic major, year in college, native language, reasons for taking Spanish, and others more specifically related to their language experience learning Spanish and possibly other foreign languages, e.g., the number of years of formal Spanish instruction, age of first instruction, number of years since a previous Spanish course, number of visits to a Spanish-speaking country, etc. See Appendix B for the background questionnaire.

To measure course achievement, the final course grade was collected at the end of each term to examine possible significant correlations between language anxiety and academic achievement. All instructors followed a grading scale of 0–100. Because final grades have a very complex nature (i.e., many factors can influence course grades, e.g., different instructors' grading systems and their rigor as well as different students' factors, e.g., class attendance, interest, study time, and effort), it was important to consider grade components (tests, quizzes, final exams, compositions, oral presentations, homework, and class participation) when analyzing the data. Final course grades, in fact, have been used in previous studies as global measures of language proficiency (Aida, 1994; K. Bailey, 1983; Banya & Cheng, 1997; Chastain, 1975; Horwitz & Young, 1991); thus, the researchers adopted this measure in the present study.

Procedure

To collect the data, the aforementioned instruments were administered to the stu-

dents twice during a term to determine how stable language anxiety was over time (i.e., to examine whether there was any change in anxiety levels when comparing scores at the beginning and in the middle of the term) and to examine the reliability of the instrument used. The first part of data collection took place during the first week of winter and spring term; the second part of data collection occurred during the fifth week. The researchers compared results in the pre- and posttest to analyze significant differences between the two data collection times. Participants had about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires during class time. For the statistical analysis of the data, the program SPSS was used. As shown in Table 1, the significant correlation reveals that the participants' level of language anxiety was stable from week 1 to week 5, as it did not change much. For this reason, the researchers used results from week 5 for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

As mentioned, the researchers used the FLCAS. Based on Cronbach's alpha (.94), the FLCAS scores were highly reliable in this study. This scale consists of 33 items on foreign language anxiety. The possible range of scores is 33 to 165. When statements were negatively worded, responses were reversed and recoded, so that, at any time, a high score represented high anxiety. A total of 24 items are worded in the anxious direction, while 9 are worded in the non-anxious direction. In the present study, the actual range of scores was 47 to 155.

TABLE 1

Stability Analysis of Language Anxiety

Paired-Sample Correlations		N	Correlation	Significance
Language anxiety	Week 1 & 5	134	.797**	< .001

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = number of participants

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics for Language Anxiety Levels

| Anxiety Groups	N	Possible Range Minimum- Maximum	Mean	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation
Low anxiety	20	47–83	72.80	14.9	10.84
Medium anxiety	91	85–126	105.90	67.9	11.58
High anxiety	23	130–155	141.13	17.2	8.02

N = number of participants

The mean language anxiety score for the 134 participants was 106.36 ($SD = 22.71$). Once the researchers added the totals for each participant, they divided the participants into three groups according to their level of anxiety: high anxiety, medium anxiety, and low anxiety (see Table 2). Researchers judged participants whose z-scores (i.e., the number of standard deviations above or below the mean for each individual score) were one or more standard deviations above the mean on the scale as high anxiety, and those whose z-scores were one or more standard deviations below the mean as low anxiety (Sellers, 1998). Researchers judged the participants whose scores were in between as medium-anxiety students. Twenty (14.9%) participants in the study scored between 47 and 83, with a mean score of 72.80 ($SD = 10.84$). Researchers considered these students to be low-anxiety students. Ninety-one participants (67.9%) scored between 85 and 126, with a mean score of 105.90 ($SD = 11.58$), and researchers considered them to be medium-anxiety students. Finally, researchers considered 23 participants (17.2%) who scored between 130 and 155, with a mean score of 141.13 ($SD = 8.02$), as high-anxiety students. The distribution of scores (grouped at 10-point intervals) as presented on the histogram below (see Figure 1) shows that, overall, the largest number of students was in the medium-anxiety range, something to be expected using z-scores on a normally distributed sample.

Results

With regard to Research Question 1, which examines possible differences in levels of foreign language anxiety (i.e., participants' scores on the FLCAS) across language levels (i.e., placement test), the ANOVA results showed significant differences across language levels: $F(3,56) = 3.54$, $p < .031$ (see Table 3). Beginners' mean score was 100.53 ($SD = 22.85$), intermediates' was 106.47 ($SD = 20.98$), and advanced learners' was 113.05 ($SD = 22.92$). Thus, advanced learners (who also scored higher levels of foreign language achievement on the placement test) scored the highest in the language anxiety scale. A posthoc Scheffe test showed significant differences, $p < .031$, between beginning and advanced learners. This suggests that the higher the language level, the higher the levels of anxiety.

A Pearson bivariate correlation confirmed this analysis, resulting in a significant negative correlation between anxiety and language level, $r = -.227$, $p < .008$. This also indicates that the higher the language level, the higher the language anxiety.

FIGURE 1

Histogram of FLCAS Grouped Scores
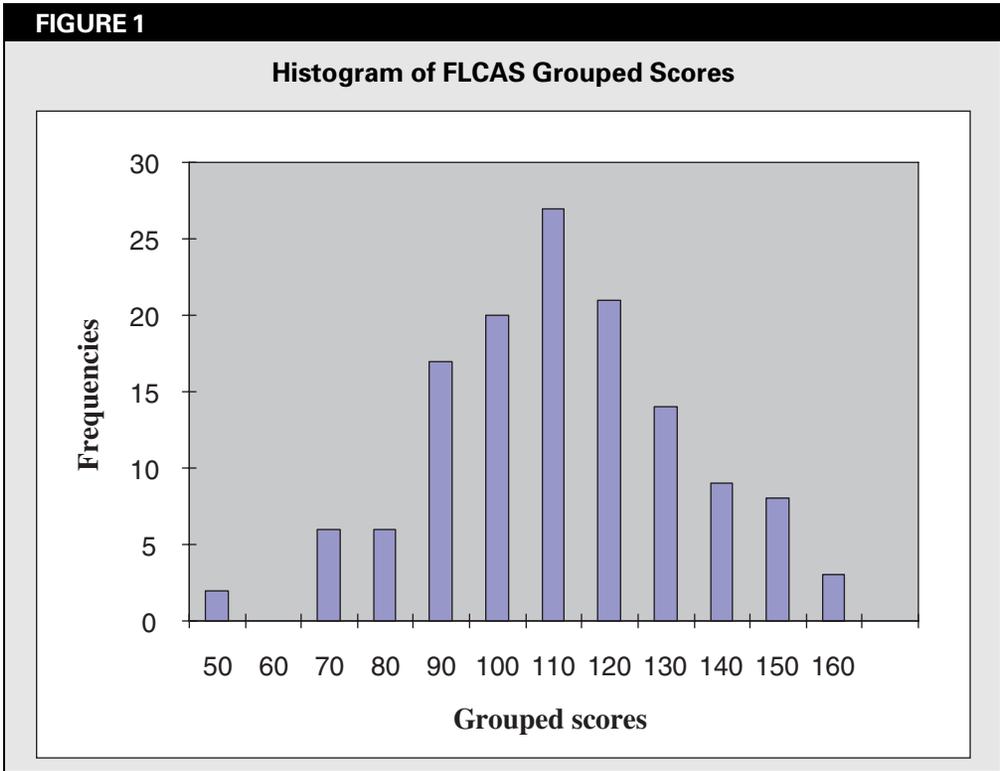
Overall, advanced learners revealed higher anxiety than the other two language levels.

With regard to Research Question 2, which examines the relationship between foreign language anxiety and foreign language course achievement, results revealed that low–anxious students showed lower grades (mean = 83.97, SD = 10.23) when compared to mid-anxious students (mean = 84.48, SD = 10.94) and high–anxious students (mean = 87.63, SD = 11.70). When looking at language level and course achievement, results of the ANOVA evidence significant differences across the three Spanish levels ($p < .031$). This indicates that the higher the language level, the higher the course grade. Thus, advanced students obtained higher final grades (mean = 90.45, SD = 3.24) than beginners (mean = 82.22, SD = 13.85) considering that the mean for the final grade was 84.95 (SD = 10.96) for all participants.

Regarding Research Question 3, which investigates how strongly related foreign

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics for Each Language Level

Language Anxiety	N	Mean	Mean (%)	Standard Deviation
Beginners	49	100.53	36.6	22.85
Intermediate	43	106.47	32.1	20.98
Advanced	42	113.05	31.3	22.92

N = number of participants

language anxiety is to course achievement, a Pearson bivariate correlation run with FLCAS score and final grade found a significant correlation between these two variables, $r = .175$, $p < .043$. This indicates that, in the present study, anxiety is related to course achievement. However, when examining the three groups of students according to their anxiety levels and their final grades, results of the ANOVA did not show significant differences in achievement among high-, medium-, and low-anxiety students despite the fact that high-anxiety learners scored lower grades according to their mean score 83.97 ($SD = 10.23$) than low-anxiety students, whose mean score was 87.63 ($SD = 11.70$). Finally, in order to examine whether grade components are related to language anxiety or not, the researchers broke down final grades into their various components (i.e., tests, final exam, compositions, oral presentations, homework, and class participation). When the researchers ran the statistics, opposite to what was expected, results showed no significant correlations.

Discussion

This study examines possible differences of language anxiety across language levels and possible relationships between language anxiety and course achievement. Thus, language level and language anxiety are the two independent variables. In regard to the first research question, which examines differences in levels of foreign language anxiety across language levels, significant differences were found between beginners and advanced learners in terms of language anxiety, with the latter scoring higher on the anxiety scale. In this study, the higher the language proficiency level, the higher the anxiety levels. This result confirms the study by Kitano (2001), which found significant differences in terms of anxiety among beginners and advanced college learners of Japanese. It also confirms Ewald's (2007) study on language anxiety in upper-level classes, which found that ad-

vanced students experienced anxiety. One explanation may be the fact that students in lower language levels regard the Spanish class as a mere requirement to graduate. Advanced learners, on the other hand, take Spanish as their major or minor. For them, learning Spanish is clearly more than a requirement they need to fulfill. These learners, in addition, reported being interested in learning about Spanish culture so as to interact and possibly work with native Spanish speakers. Consequently, advanced students tend to feel more pressure to do well. Furthermore, they are usually more concerned about their relationships with their classmates and instructors as well as about their own expectations. Thus, course achievement differs according to the goals of the learners, as each language group has different purposes to study Spanish. Moreover, whether students have studied another foreign language or not may be worth considering in relation to this question, as suggested by Magnan, Frantzen, and Worth (2004), as results may differ between students with further language experience and students with none. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that this result could have been different if, in the data analysis, the subgroup of dropout students could have also been considered.

Regarding Research Question 2, which examines possible differences in final foreign language course grades among students with different levels of foreign language anxiety, results showed significant differences, indicating that even though advanced learners showed high anxiety, these learners did not necessarily obtain lower final grades than beginners. In this study, students with higher levels of foreign language achievement on the placement test also achieved higher grades in the advanced foreign language courses despite the fact that they had higher foreign language anxiety on the FLCAS. Thus, high anxiety does not necessarily result in poor course achievement. Some level of anxiety may be beneficial and may actually facilitate the study of a foreign language. This finding should be high-

lighted, as it challenges the long-held tenet in anxiety research that foreign language anxiety interferes with foreign language proficiency and achievement. Thus, the present study, at a minimum, undermines the hypothesis that language anxiety is associated with foreign language learning difficulties. Future investigations should examine this issue carefully to contrast this result. Moreover, future investigations should analyze whether language anxiety facilitates foreign language learning and leads to higher levels of foreign language achievement, or language anxiety undermines foreign language proficiency and leads to lower levels of foreign language achievement.

In addition, most advanced students in this investigation reported having traveled to a Spanish-speaking country before. The fact that they had already been in an authentic Spanish-speaking context, interacting with native speakers and going through this experience themselves, may explain this high achievement despite their high anxiety level. The reason why students suffer from anxiety is not quite clear. Often, the fear of making mistakes or of being laughed at, pursuing high expectations, showing low self-esteem, or failing the language class are common feelings in foreign language classrooms that can explain high levels of anxiety.

As mentioned, the largest number of students showed a medium anxiety level of 67.9% ($N = 91$), considering that their average anxiety score was 105.90. One explanation might be that some anxious learners, in this study, may handle anxiety-provoking situations better if they have high self-esteem, as suggested by Andrés (1999). Although self-esteem was not measured here, Andrés' study shows that the higher the learners' self-esteem, the more positive the anxiety level. Still, this medium level of anxiety did not seem to be as debilitative as expected, as it did not hinder course achievement. This finding confirms several studies (Brown, 2000; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Guiora et al., 1972; Marcos-Llinás, 2002; Spielmann & Radnofsky,

2001; Young, 1992) that claim that some degree of language anxiety can be facilitative and helpful for language learning because it motivates students to learn the foreign language and to perform better overall. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) concluded that some level of tension was positive for learners to study the foreign language. In another study, Ehrman and Oxford (1995) concluded that a medium level of anxiety did not have an effect on the final grade.

Regarding Research Question 3, on the relationship between language anxiety and course achievement, the researchers found a significant correlation between these two variables. This finding implies that despite the fact that advanced learners show higher levels of anxiety, this does not seem to negatively affect their course achievement. One explanation may be that these learners have more positive attitudes toward or higher motivation for learning the foreign language, although these variables have not been examined here. In addition, many of these students have probably had longer exposure than the beginning- and intermediate-level students to the study of Spanish, which can positively influence their language achievement. In addition, in the present study, language anxiety may not be as debilitative as concluded in previous studies (MacIntyre, 1999; Tsui, 1996). In fact, in a study by Tsui (1996), findings showed that high-anxiety students were generally poor students (i.e., students with lower knowledge and lower use of the foreign language). Language anxiety was also found to have negative effects on academic achievement and performance in studies by Horwitz et al. (1986), Gardner (1985), Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991b, 1994). In a recent study with 54 high school learners of a foreign language, Sparks and Ganschow (2007) concluded that low–anxious students showed the highest scores on L1 skills and foreign language grades. However, high–anxious students showed lower L1 skills and course grades.

Another explanation why no significant differences were found between anxiety levels and course achievement is that, possibly, other factors such as learners' motivation, personality traits, individual differences, L1/L2 skills, study habits, self-efficacy, self-expectations, and self-confidence (not examined here) could have influenced students' achievement rather than language anxiety.

Limitations

Some considerations need to be made for future research. First, due to the complex nature of language anxiety and affective variables in general, one should interpret the findings with caution. As pointed out in the literature review, the measurement of personal and affective factors often results in open and complex interpretations of the findings. In future investigations, the assessment of language anxiety should probably involve the use of personal diaries for participants so as to obtain some qualitative information to contrast with the scores on the different scales.

Second, one should interpret the results with caution due to the problematic nature of using course grades as a measure of achievement. Course grades are fraught with problems, including the subjective nature of the grading process.

Third, recent work on the notion of language anxiety defines this variable from a more individualistic point of view. Experts say that research on language anxiety should focus on causes, individual differences, and remedies, and not so much on measuring the symptoms of language anxiety and its effects on language learning (DeKeyser, 2005). One should consider this reconceptualization when designing new investigations.

Fourth, based on results of previous research that are not congenial to the authors' anxiety hypothesis, a replication of the study could probably control for the participants' level of L1 skills—since they have been found to be a confounding variable in research on affective variables—so as to better understand the observed anxiety levels and their effect on course achievement.

Fifth, a future replication of the study should examine both nondropout and dropout participants to better analyze and understand the results. Previous research shows that dropout participants (i.e., respondent mortality) may limit the interpretation of results in any study. Thus, one should view results in the present study with caution.

Sixth, even though the language classroom is a very appropriate context to observe and analyze how language learners learn, the foreign language classroom itself is a somewhat artificial context that may constrain the learner's linguistic, sociocultural, and communicative competence. Observations of participants in a natural context could possibly show different results in terms of language anxiety. Furthermore, replication of this study is necessary to see if the reported findings would be consistent with other populations (i.e., heritage speakers/learners with a Hispanic background, different target languages, different L1 learners, different cultures, or different learning contexts) as well as with other affective variables.

Conclusions

From these results, several pedagogical implications need to be considered. This study shows that some level of language anxiety may not be as negative and debilitative as traditionally believed. The fact that advanced learners exhibited high anxiety but did not necessarily show low course achievement seems to imply that some anxiety may be beneficial to keep learners' motivation high to learn and do well. As previously mentioned, this finding undermines the hypothesis that foreign language anxiety is related to foreign language learning problems. Nevertheless, whenever a learner suffers rather than enjoys the study of a foreign language, then, that would

imply that the student's level of anxiety is debilitative. To a great extent, whether foreign language students feel secure, liked, and valued will depend on the language instructor. Thus, levels of anxiety may vary depending on the instructor. It may be possible that most instructors in this study were generally successful in avoiding high anxiety levels by creating a positive classroom atmosphere. This would confirm what other studies have emphasized about the supportive role of the foreign language instructor (Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 2001; Palacios, 1998). In a study on the impact of classroom climate on students' level of foreign language anxiety, Palacios (1998) concluded that the foreign language classroom atmosphere could decrease students' anxiety levels. His study also concluded that the instructor's support to students had the strongest influence on students' feelings of anxiety.

Furthermore, the study also shows that high levels of anxiety do not necessarily result in poor course achievement. The fact that advanced learners showed high anxiety but high final grades may be a consequence of the dynamics of the advanced courses themselves. In language learning, it is important that instructors include every learner (no matter the student's language level) in the class community—also referred to as a "society" within the classroom by Aoki (1999) because it deals with social changes from the teacher's and the learners' side—and provide students with constant positive feedback and encouragement so as to lower language anxiety. According to a previously mentioned study on self-efficacy and anxiety, Mills et al. concluded that foreign language instructors should incorporate learning strategies that "foster self-efficacy, which could foster positive linguistic behavior from the very first days of instruction and reduce the subsequent need for techniques to reduce anxiety" (2006, p. 287). Closely related is the question of accepting error-making as part of the learning process so that language anxiety is not detrimental (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

As this study shows, feeling some tension is part of the complex process of learning a foreign language. Since this tension does not seem to be as detrimental as traditionally believed, it would be interesting to see if future foreign language anxiety researchers could prove whether foreign language anxiety facilitates or undermines foreign language learning and leads to success or failure.

To conclude, we cannot talk about the single best way to learn a foreign language, as each learner will react differently to the language learning environment using their language skills, language-learning experience, personality traits, affective factors, learning styles/strategies, and personal circumstances. Nevertheless, language instructors should guide learners on how to best find their own voice in the foreign language and how to best learn the foreign language and its culture through a common understanding of the important role emotions play in successful language achievement.

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Appendix A

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

1 Strongly Agree; 2 Agree; 3 Neither Agree/Disagree; 4 Disagree; 5 Strongly Disagree

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more Spanish classes. 1 2 3 4 5
6. During Spanish class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes. 1 2 3 4 5
12. In Spanish class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. 1 2 3 4 5
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I would not be nervous speaking Spanish with native speakers. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. 1 2 3 4 5
16. Even if I am well prepared for the Spanish class, I feel anxious about it. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I often feel like not going to my Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I feel confident when I speak in the Spanish class. 1 2 3 4 5

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in class.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The more I study for a Spanish test, the more confused I get.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for the Spanish class.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I always feel that the other students speak Spanish better than I do.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking Spanish in front of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting behind.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my Spanish class than in any other class.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I get nervous when I am speaking in my Spanish class.	1	2	3	4	5
28. When I'm on my way to Spanish class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules one has to learn to speak Spanish.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak Spanish.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of Spanish.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I get nervous when the instructor asks questions that I haven't prepared.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Background Questionnaire

Name_____Male___Female___

SPANISH CLASS___Age___

Freshman___Sophomore___Junior___Senior___Graduate___

Do you have any Spanish relatives in your family?   Yes___No___
    Parents___Siblings___Cousins___In-laws___

Do you talk to them in Spanish?   Yes___No___

Major_____

Do you commute to come to class?   Yes___No___

Are you a full-time or part-time student?_____

How long have you studied Spanish for?_____

When did you first start learning Spanish?

Elementary school___Highschool___College___Other___How old were you?___

Did you stop studying Spanish? Yes___No___

Why?_____

For how long?_____

How old were you when you took Spanish again?_____

Have you ever visited a Spanish speaking country? Yes___No___

Where did you go and for how long?_____

Did you practice your Spanish? Yes___No___Do you like learning Spanish? Yes___No___

Have you ever been abroad? Yes___No___

How many hours do you spend studying Spanish? Per day_____Per week_____

Why are you taking Spanish? General requirement____Major requirement___Interest in languages___Other____

How do you usually use Spanish? Through oral interactions___pleasure___
reading___writing___studying grammar books___Internet___watching TV___