Speech is silver and silence is golden?

An investigating study regarding a group of Swedish eighth-grade students’ perceived foreign language speaking anxiety.

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Abstract
This investigating and comparative study aimed to demonstrate the perceived foreign language speaking anxiety among a specific group of eight-grade compulsory school students, attending an International English school in the south of Sweden. The study also aimed to explore the potential relationship between the students’ perceived foreign language speaking anxiety and the students’ gender. The specific group of students completed a survey, in which the questions were constructed with significant part-whole correlations with the total scale, aiming to assess one's individual perception of language anxiety. The first part of the result indicated low to medium-low levels of foreign language speaking anxiety among the group. However, the result also suggested that some classroom situations generated higher levels of anxiety than others, like unprepared speaking activities and situations. The second part of the result indicated that there is a distinct difference between the female students and male students regarding their perceived foreign language speaking anxiety. The results revealed that the female students indicated a medium-low to medium level of foreign language speaking anxiety, while the male students indicated a low to medium-low level. The result also indicates that the male students and female students experience different levels of foreign language speaking anxiety, depending on the specific classroom-situation. The results from this study are of great importance for further research, as well as for actions and developing methods to decrease levels of foreign language speaking anxiety among students learning a second or foreign language.

Key words: foreign language speaking anxiety, perceived anxiety, anxiety level
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1. Introduction

“We teach language best when we use it for what it was designed for: communication”
(Krashen 1982:19).

Some of the reasons to learn English as a foreign language are according to Harmer (1991), school curricula, need of advancement in professional life, living in a target community permanently or temporarily, and interest in different cultures. While learners are generally expected to become proficient in several areas of the target language, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and language skills, the learning of English as a foreign language is closely and directly related to the awareness of certain individual differences, such as the beliefs, attitudes, aptitudes, motivations and affective states of learners (Gardner, 1985). Of these variables, the affective state known as language anxiety can seriously impede achievement in a foreign language, according to Gardner (1985). In recent years, researchers have found that foreign language anxiety can impede the acquisition of communicative competence (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Foreign language anxiety is described by MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) as “a feeling of apprehension, self-consciousness, tension, and worry, which mainly originates from exposure to specific stimuli in association with one or more of the receptive and/or productive skills in second/foreign language learning” (284).

During Autumn 2019, several language teachers at an International English compulsory school, located in the south of Sweden, noticed that a majority of the students in year eight and nine were not communicating as expected in their second or foreign language classes. This unwillingness to communicate was concluded to not originate from students´ lack of knowledge, since the students have been taught by both Swedish and English-speaking teachers during their time at the school. The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) emphasizes the importance of Swedish students having communicative competence in English, and “the ability to use the English language for interaction in different social and cultural contexts, to acquire new perspectives of the surrounding world” (Skolverket, 2011). To achieve this goal, it is important, as well as an advantage, that students are first able to use the English language unhindered. Unfortunately, many of students at the International English School do not seem to speak English unhindered, despite there being several variables to indicate the opposite.
It is, therefore, of great importance to examine these specific Swedish compulsory school students’ levels of anxiety when having to speak in English in order to assess and interpret the probability of them suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety. Moreover, it is not only important to investigate whether it is male or female students that suffer on a greater level from foreign language speaking anxiety, but also the reasons for this. It would be especially interesting to investigate what types of situations that could trigger high levels of foreign language speaking anxiety among the participating female and male students, also if the triggering situations could differ in regard to gender.

The first aim of this study is to investigate whether foreign language speaking anxiety exists among this specific group of eighth-grade compulsory school students, attending an International English School in the south of Sweden. The focus is to assess and interpret if the students, who participated in this study, answered in accordance with one suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety or not. The second aim of this study is to investigate and demonstrate the potential relationship between the levels of foreign language speaking anxiety and the gender of the participants, by investigating if the female and male students’ answers demonstrate different levels of speaking anxiety or if the answers and investigation are inconclusive.

Based on this purpose of the study, the following questions were formulated:

*With regards to the participants’ perceived foreign language speaking anxiety, what can be ascertained from the result of the quantitative survey?*

*Are there any differences in the level of perceived foreign language speaking anxiety between the female participants and the male participants? And if yes, what are they?*

2. **Literature Review**

The concept of communicative language learning, and a vital goal in English language teaching, is enabling learners to interact successfully with members of other societies. Key components to succeed, according to Hedge (2000), are having *linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and fluency*. These key components are vital in providing a basis for language acquisition, since it gives students
practice in communicating and negotiating meanings in establishing positive rapport (Hedge, 2000). It is also important for students to develop the ability to maintain a conversation with appropriate turntaking as well as allow an establishment on how well they can understand and make themselves understood (Hedge, 2000). Hedge (2000) also suggests that affective factors, such as personality characteristics, attitudes and emotional responses, can influence the language learning process.

Foreign language learning is a field that is closely related to human psychology and studies have been conducted to find relationships between language learning and affective variables (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994 and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). The common point of these studies is that they all reveal the influence of affective factors on the language learning process. The affective variables, which are associated with the emotions and feelings of human beings, involve certain personality traits or qualities, such as self-esteem, empathy and intervention (Brown, 1994). Research on the relationship between foreign language learning and effective variables generally focuses on several personality factors such as motivation, as well as anxiety. In the process of language learning, these factors may have positive or negative effects, and among them, anxiety is an important facet of the affective domain.

Lightbown & Spada (2012) state that several personality characteristics have been proposed to affect language learning and emphasize that learner anxiety has been extensively investigated. Researchers have examined learner anxiety in language classrooms where the students learn a language other than their mother tongue and find anxiety to be dynamic and dependent on particular situations and circumstances (Lightbown & Spada, 2012). This permits distinctions to be made between for example, feeling anxious when giving an oral presentation in front of the whole class but not when interacting with peers in group work. Whatever the context, anxiety can interfere with the learning process, according to Lightbown and Spada (2012).

MacIntyre (1995) argues that because nervous students focus on both the task at hand and their reactions to it, they might not learn as quickly as relaxed students. MacIntyre (2002) investigated learner anxiety and how some students might suffer more from it than others. Furthermore, Macintyre & Gardner (1991) have looked in more detail at anxiety in the classroom and found that the greatest anxiety seems to relate to negative experiences in speaking activities. This implies that teachers have both the power and responsibility to
counter and development of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2004). In collaboration, Donovan & MacIntyre (2005) found interest in learners’ willingness to communicate and suggest that patterns of communication are different in men and women. A learner’s willingness to communicate has also been related to anxiety (Lightbown & Spada, 2012). Willingness to communicate may change with the number of people present, the topic of conversation, the formality of the circumstances, and even with whether the learner feels tired or energetic at a given moment (Lightbown & Spada, 2012). MacIntyre et al (2003) argue that learners who willingly communicate in a wide range of conversational interactions are able to do so because of their communicative competence. The authors also found two variables by which communicative competence is shaped: how relaxed the learner is in their second or foreign language and how competent the learner feels about their second or foreign language abilities (MacIntyre et al, 2003).

Horwitz, E (2010) published an overview of the historical development of research on foreign language acquisition anxiety and she argues that the article by Scovel (1978), as cited in Horwitz, E (2010) marks a turning point in the study of language learning and anxiety. This is due to Scovel’s claims that the inconsistent results from earlier foreign language acquisition studies are the consequence of an inconsistency when referring to anxiety (Horwitz, E 2010). Scovel’s arguments, according to Horwitz, E (2010) contribute to a shift in the demands for careful and specific definitions of the type of anxiety examined. From this point, the differentiation of types of anxiety connected to foreign language and the examination of the effects of them are in focus. Krashen (1981)’s Affective Filter hypothesis is the view of there being a number of affective variables play a facilitative, but non-casual, role in second and foreign language acquisition. The Affective Filter hypothesis identifies general anxiety as an affective variable that hinders the ability to achieve maximum language acquisition (Krashen 1981). Researchers have, since 1980, been more inclined to try to identify specific types of anxiety and their causes. Language anxiety has considered to be an important affective variable in foreign language learning process. Krashen (1985) asserts that, as a part of the learner’s affective filter, anxiety might interfere with the process of learning and acquiring a language. He states that “when the acquirer is unmotivated, lacking in self-confidence, or anxious, she or he may not be able to employ fully the comprehensible input that is necessary for acquisition” (Krashen 1985:44).
In the literature, however, the investigated relationship between anxiety and language learning has found that the focus is usually on the negative correlations between language anxiety and students’ performance in speaking. Gardner (1985) is credited for being a pioneer in studying affective variables in connection to the specific second or foreign language acquisition environment and he describes this relationship as “a construct of anxiety which is not general but instead is specific to the language acquisition context” (Gardner 1985:34). Gardner (1985)’s findings paved the way for Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), and their introduction of a new term in the research field: foreign language anxiety. This research team argue that foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety and they discuss the possibility that different levels of this anxiety may have various negative effects on the students’ ego and self-esteem in second language learning. Horwitz (2010) concludes that “foreign language anxiety research should play closer attention to social variables” (Horwitz 2010:166). In conclusion, there is consistent recognition of the fact that anxiety is an existing and influential factor in foreign language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) revealed that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill and it is the greatest source of anxiety in language classrooms. Other than anxiety, another factor that is crucial in language learning process is motivation. In general, and in all kinds of learning, motivation is among the fundamental factors which a learner should maintain throughout the learning process. In contrast, anxiety can interfere with the learning process, whatever the context (MacIntyre 1995).

2.1 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) acknowledge the uniqueness of foreign language anxiety and introduce the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as an instrument to measure anxiety levels as evidenced by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviors. The FLCAS consists of 33 statements with significant part-whole correlations with the total scale, aiming to assess one's individual perception of language anxiety. Each item on the FLCAS is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Total scores of the scale range from 33 to 165 with lower scores indicate higher levels of anxiety. 24 of the items are positively worded, and nine of the items are negatively worded, see appendix 1.
Horwitz et al.’s theory of foreign language anxiety has been widely accepted with subsequent research acknowledging the uniqueness of foreign language anxiety and providing evidence that the FLCAS is a reliable tool. Since then, “the concept of anxiety in second language acquisition has achieved the status of a precise technical notion” (Young, 1994, p.3) with more consistent research findings of the negative effects of language anxiety on achievement and performance (e.g. Horwitz, 1991; MacIntyre, 1988; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

2.2 Gender-based language

A major topic in sociolinguistics is the connection between linguistic features - the structures, vocabularies, and ways of using particular languages and the social roles and identities of the men and women who speak these languages. Gender has proven to be a prominent factor in language learning processes according to researchers (Batters, 1986, Clark & Trafford, 1995, Powell, 1986). The gender-based language groundbreakers and researchers have paved the way for future research and literature, however, in this essay the pioneers and their work are of importance for understanding the way women and men speak differently, and theories to why that is.

Eckert (1998) discussed how certain usages exclude women and create the mentality that men are the default and the norm, while women are the exception. ‘The English language has been literally man-made and [...] is still primarily under male control’ and that males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought, and reality” (Eckert, 1998: 87-88).

Studies on gender-based language, such as Holmes (1995) indicate that men tend to dominate public talking time, while women more often work hard to get them to talk in the privacy of their homes. Holmes (1995) also asserts that women tend to use questions and phrases such as “you know” to encourage others to talk, while men tend to use such devices to qualify the certainty or validity of the information they are asserting. Men's reasons for talking often focus on the content of the talk or its outcome, rather than on how it affects the feelings of others. It is women who rather emphasize this aspect of talk. Women compliment others more often than men do, and they apologize more than men do (Holmes, 1995).

Men and women’s speech are not the same in private and public spheres, and different roles in interactions can also lead to different ways of speaking. The focus on dominance in the study of language and gender arose as an approach which became known as the difference, or
two cultures, approach. Its basic idea was popularized by the psychologist John Grey in his bestselling book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: the Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex* (1992) and by the linguist Deborah Tannen in her book *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990). These works are based on the assumption that men and women speak differently. Their claim is that men learn to talk like men, and women learn to talk like women because society subjects them to different life experiences. The main claim is that men and women have different conversational goals and thus, although they may say the same things, they actually mean different things.

Tannen (1990) likens speech between men and women to cross-cultural communication and also claims that men seek to establish hierarchy and status through talk, whereas women look to create solidarity and connection. One consequence of such differences is that men have often devalued women’s speech and Tannen (1990)’s difference approach in no way denies the existence of male dominance in speech between men and women. In their interactional patterns in conversation, men and women seem often to exhibit the power relationship that exists in society, with men dominant and women subservient (Tannen, 1990).

Maltz and Borker (1982) propose that men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures. They have learned to do different things with language, particularly in conversation, and when the two genders try to communicate with each other, the result may be miscommunication. Hence, gender may play a significant role on how male and female students experience and suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety.

### 2.3 Previous studies using FLCAS

Three previous studies, in which the *foreign language classroom anxiety scale*, FLCAS, has been used as a survey-method, have been read and evaluated. The three studies all examine foreign language speaking anxiety and other variables, such as corrective feedback, student performance, multiple intelligence and student's achievement.

Zhang & Rahimi (2014) studied the differences in high-anxiety and low-anxiety learners’ beliefs about corrective feedback, when they are made aware of the purpose, significance, and types of corrective feedback, such as formal or informal feedback on various tasks. The differences were sought with regard to the necessity, frequency, timing of corrective
feedback, types of errors, types of corrective feedback and choice of corrections. 116 Iranian EFL learners participated in the study. A student’s score on FLCAS determined if that student was assigned to the low-anxiety group or the high-anxiety group. The data showed that the observed differences between the two groups were not significant. The result indicated that both groups, regardless of their anxiety level, had similar beliefs about corrective feedback.

Zhongshe & Meihua (2011) explored foreign language anxiety and strategy use in relation to their interactive effect on the students’ performance in English. The participants were 934 Chinese undergraduates and they completed a 71-item survey based on FLCAS. Complicated statistical analyses, correlation analyses, regression analyses and structural equaling model were run on the data. The result showed that nearly one third of the students experienced anxiety in English class and that the participants mainly reported a medium use of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategy is based on the need to achieve a particular goal and metacognitive strategy is used to ensure that the cognitive goal has been reached. The result also showed that foreign language classroom anxiety, cognitive strategy use, and metacognitive strategy use were all significantly correlated and that all the measured variables produced a significant effect on the students’ performance in English.

Hui-ju & Ting-han (2013) explored language anxiety in young Chinese EFL learners and how it relates to two other major learners’ variables: multiple intelligences and learner attitudes. The instrument used to assess learner foreign language anxiety was adapted from FLCAS. The 216 participants were students in the fifth and sixth grade and the findings indicate that the subjects experienced a fair amount of language anxiety. The results illustrate two major components of foreign language anxiety: general worry over performance and little confidence in speaking ability. Further, language anxiety was found to be significantly and negatively related to all variables studied. In order of decreasing association, these variables included: perceived English ability, learning attitude, years of taking extracurricular English lessons, length of studying the language and multiple intelligence, which is a theory describing the different ways students learn and acquire information. Out of the three major learner variables, language anxiety appeared to have a much stronger link to learner attitudes than to multiple intelligence.
2.4 Previous studies on foreign language speaking anxiety and gender

In addition to the three studies on foreign language anxiety, using the foreign language classroom anxiety scale, FLCAS, as a method of gathering information, three other studies on foreign language anxiety and its potential relationship with gender have been read and studied. The three studies all investigate the potential influence of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety.

Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz (2010) examined anxiety in English undergraduate classes at the University of Sargodha, Pakistan, with regard to the type of situations that provoke anxiety during different stages if the learning process and the relationship of anxiety with learners’ achievements. The questionnaire used in the study is an abbreviated form of FLCAS and the participants of the study include 149 EFL students. The students’ GPA (grade point average) in English class is used to find its relationship with language anxiety. The results show that female students are less anxious about learning English as a foreign language than male students.

Stawiarska (2014) investigated the influence of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety on a group of second year university students at Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland. Her research revealed no gender differences in the level of anxiety measured with FLCAS. No statistically significant interaction was observed between gender and perceived difficulty of speaking skills, between gender and self-assessment of one's speaking skills, between gender self-efficacy level, between gender and general speaking anxiety and between gender and the level of speaking-in-class anxiety. Some gender differences in the apprehension level were observed in the case of speaking activities and patterns of interaction. Females were found to be more anxious while speaking in front of the class, in small groups and during presentations and role-plays. However, in the majority of Stawiarska´s (2014) investigation, gender differences did not reach the level of significance.

Debreli & Demirkan (2016) investigated the levels of EFL students’ speaking anxiety and the circumstances that make them anxious as well as if there is any relationship between anxiety and students’ language proficiency level and gender. Data was gathered from 196 Turkish and Turkish Cypriot EFL students through FLCAS and through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the students generally had low levels of speaking anxiety, although
students with a higher level of language proficiency had a higher level of anxiety compared with that for students with a lower level of language proficiency. No statistically meaningful difference was observed with regard to students´ gender and anxiety levels.

In conclusion, the three studies in which foreign language speaking anxiety and its potential relationship with gender, found no profound data or indications to gender differences regarding foreign language speaking anxiety.

3. Methodology and Materials

Within the chosen field of research, several studies and surveys have been created and conducted on foreign language speaking anxiety, as presented in literature review. This essay will be based on this previous research and the result will be analyzed and compared to the results of these previous studies. However, previous studies have looked at both monolingual and multilingual groups of students and language learners, while as this essay focuses on a specific monolingual group and their situation-based context. Therefore, the potential conclusions that will be presented in the results can only be applied to this specific group and context.

3.1 Method

The methodology for this study is primarily quantitative, consisting of an online survey, to identify and investigate any valid correlations between levels of foreign language speaking anxiety and gender. The data is examined and analyzed with the purpose of detecting any probability patterns, which could support different inferences. The findings were graphically prepared for presentation as multi-variable tables and graphs. Due to the difference in analytic methods in previous similar research, the study is unable to provide data that hold any significance in comparison with other studies that share similarities, due to contexts. The results in this study can only provide a basis for implied correlations due to context and the specific participant group and context.

The survey used in this investigating essay is constructed and based on Horwitz et al´s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and consists of 20 statements (see appendix 2). 87 participants took part in this quantitative survey, where the statements are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Out
of the 20 statements in the survey, 15 use a negative tone in regard to speaking in English, such as: “In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I already know”. Out of the 20 statements, 5 take a positive tone in regard to speaking English, ex. “I am usually at ease during tests in English Class”. The statements in the survey are based on situations which previous researchers have found to cause foreign language speaking anxiety, such as communication apprehension situations, test situations and negative evaluation situations. This study also seeks to discover and demonstrate the potential relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and the sociolinguistic variable gender. The male and female answers to the quantitative survey statements will be compared, with the aim to investigate if female students indicate to suffer more from foreign language speaking anxiety than males, if male students indicate to suffer more from foreign language anxiety than females, or if the investigation is inconclusive.

3.2 Materials

The quantitative online survey is computer-based. The survey, based on FLCAS, was made on Google Forms, and was answered by the participants via computer. The result was automatically saved via Google Forms and was then reviewed and analyzed by computer as well as on printed paper. The result was then transcribed and put into computer-based diagrams to visualize the result and in text to explain the graphs and the results.

3.3 Participants

The 87 participants in this study and survey are all eighth-grade students at the same International English compulsory school in the south of Sweden. This school uses Swedish and English when teaching, since the teachers are from both Sweden and English-speaking countries. The students are therefore able and encouraged to communicate in both Swedish and English. However, the issue regarding these students has been their low levels of speaking during language classes. This survey was made to investigate if foreign language speaking anxiety could be a hindering variable for the students when speaking in English. Among the 87 participants, 46 students have identified themselves as males, 38 students have identified themselves as females and three students have chosen not to give their gender in the survey. The students were informed that their answers in the survey were anonymous and that they were free to participate without identifying their gender. Since 3 students chose not
4. Results and Discussion

First, the results of the survey regarding the students’ perceived foreign language speaking anxiety are presented and discussed. Second, the results from the female and male students’ answers in the survey regarding their perceived foreign language speaking anxiety will be presented, compared and discussed.

4.1 The perceived foreign language speaking anxiety

The first part of the result shows that the answer 5 (strongly disagree) is the most chosen answer overall, 12 out of the 20 statements. These 12 statements all allude to a negative experience when speaking English. This indicates that a majority of the students do not perceive themselves as suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety in the situations that these 12 statements describe. The other answer alternatives, 1 (strongly agree), 2 (somewhat agree), 3 (neutral) and 4 (somewhat disagree), all have a majority of the students’ answers in two statements each. The two times in which answer 1 (strongly agree) is used, the statements allude to a positive experience when speaking English and is therefore the perceived answer by one not suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety. In 14 out of 20 statements, a majority of the students’ answers indicate a low level of foreign language speaking anxiety.

However, during the investigation of the data regarding students’ perceived foreign language anxiety, some results are distinguished. In 3 out of the 15 statements, which use a negative tone in regard to speaking English, the expected answer is not met. Also, in 3 of the 5 statements, which use a positive tone in regard to speaking English, the expected answer is not met. In total, 6 statements do not follow the pattern of low foreign language speaking anxiety, and have therefore been analyzed in greater depth.

4.1.1 Statement 1

In statement 1: “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English class”, 9 students answered that they strongly agree, 12 students answer that they somewhat agree, 22
students answer that they are neutral to the statement, 27 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 17 students answer that they strongly disagree with the statement. The perceived answer to this statement, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 5 (strongly disagree). However, the majority of the students chose 4 (sort of agree) or 3 (neutral). This indicates that a large number of the participants do not feel sure of themselves when speaking in English class.

### 4.1.2 Statement 2

In statement 2: “I don’t worry about making mistakes in English class”, 14 students answer that they strongly agree, 21 students answer that they somewhat agree, 25 students answer that they are neutral to the statement, 20 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 7 students answer that they strongly disagree. The perceived answer, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 1 (strongly agree). However, a majority of the participants chose 3 (neutral), 2 (sort of agree) and 4 (sort of disagree). This indicates that a large number of the participants do worry about making mistakes in English class, and high doses of worrying could further trigger levels of anxiety.
4.1.3 Statements 5

In statement 5: “I am usually at ease during tests in my English class”, 18 students answer that they strongly agree, 26 students answer that they somewhat agree, 24 students answer that they are neutral to the statement, 12 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 7 students answer that they strongly disagree. The perceived answer to this statement, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 1 (strongly agree). However, a majority of the students chose 2 (sort of agree), followed by 3 (neutral). This indicates that a majority of the participants do not feel at ease during tests in English class.

4.1.4 Statement 8

In statement 8: “In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know”, 14 students answer that they strongly agree, 13 students answer that they somewhat agree, 14 agree that they are neutral to the statement, 27 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 19
students answer that they strongly disagree with the statement. The answer, “sort of disagree”, is the most chosen one among the students. The perceived answer to the statement, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 5 (strongly disagree). However, the answer most participants chose is 4 (sort of agree). This indicates that a number if the participants become nervous in English class, which results in them forgetting things they know.

4.1.5 Statement 12

In statement 12: “I feel confident when I speak in English class” 20 students answer that they strongly agree, 23 students answer that they somewhat agree, 22 students answer that they are neutral to the statement, 15 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 7 students answer that they strongly disagree. The perceived answer to this statement, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 1 (strongly agree). However, a majority of the participants chose 2 (sort of agree) or 3 (neutral). This indicates that these students do not feel entirely confident when they speak in English class.
4.1.6 Statement 15
In statement 15: “I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students”, 7 students answer that they strongly agree, 21 students answer that they somewhat agree, 26 students answer that they are neutral to the statement, 19 students answer that they somewhat disagree and 14 students answer that they strongly agree with the statement. The perceived answer to this statement, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, would be 5 (strongly disagree). However, a majority of the participants chose either 3 (neutral), 2 (sort of agree) or 4 (sort of disagree). This indicates that a majority of the participants feel self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.

4.2 Discussion
The first part of the results shows that out of the 20 questions, the answer 5 (strongly disagree) has the majority in 12 out of the 20 statements, and all 12 allude to a negative experience when speaking English. This indicates that a majority of the participants do not perceive themselves to suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety. The other answer alternatives, 1 (strongly agree), 2 (somewhat agree), 3 (neutral) and 4 (somewhat disagree), all have a majority of the students’ answers two times each. In 6 of the 20 statements a large number of the participants answers indicate that they feel self-conscious about: speaking English in front of others, are not confident when speaking English in class, can get so nervous in English class that they forget things they already know, are not at ease during tests in English class, worry about making mistakes in English class and do not feel sure of themselves when speaking in English class. This indicates that foreign language speaking
anxiety exists among the students. However, a majority indicated that they do not perceive themselves suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety, and the levels are therefore low overall.

An interesting finding is that all the answer alternatives on the Likert scale, 1-5, have been chosen in all 20 statements. This indicates that even though a majority of the students do not perceive themselves as suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety, there are some students among the participants who perceive that they are to some extent suffering. This is indicated by not choosing the expected answer, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety, in regard to the statement. The result also shows that the neutral answer on the Likert scale, 3, is chosen as either the most common answer, second most common answer or third most common answer in 17 out of the 20 statements. The neutral answer is the most chosen answer in 2 statements, the second most chosen answer in 9 statements and third most chosen answer in 7 statements. This result indicates that a large number of the participants either do not want to take a stand in the presented statement, or do not have a perceptive ability in regard to the statement.

The first part of the result, regarding the students’ perceived foreign language speaking anxiety, indicated that the majority of the students indicate a low level of from foreign language speaking anxiety. The specific situations in which the students seemed to indicate a low-medium to medium level on anxiety are when the students reflect on their own language abilities and the chances of making mistakes as well as during test situations, when the chance of evaluation is high. These results are similar to previous investigations, especially Horwitz et al (1986) and their conclusions on foreign language speaking anxiety being situation-based. Awan et al (2010) found that language anxiety and achievement are negatively related to each other in their result. The result also revealed that speaking in front of others was rated as the greatest cause of anxiety followed by worries about grammatical mistakes, pronunciation and being unable to talk spontaneously. Hui-ju & Ting-han’s (2013) result illustrate two major components of foreign language anxiety: general worry over language class performance and little confidence in speaking ability. The authors also found language anxiety to be significantly and negatively related to all variables they studied, multiple intelligence and learner attitudes. As the result indicates, not all situations to do with speaking in English create speaking anxiety. However, some of them do. These kinds of situations could differ from class to class and most likely from school to school, but the
results in this essay are similar to the results presented by Awan et al (2010) as well as Hui-ju & Ting-han (2013). These results also fall in line with the research done by Horwitz et al (1986), the creators of FLCAS, and indicate that some classroom activities or situations can trigger speaking anxiety on a greater level than others.

4.3 The perceived anxiety and its potential relationship to gender

The second part of the result shows that 46 male students and 38 female students have registered their answers. The male and female answers have been analyzed and compared to one another and the result was put in a diagram (see appendix 4).

4.3.1 The male result

The male result shows that in 14 out of 20 statements, the majority of the male participants answer in the expected way for one who does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety. In statement 1,2,7,8 and 15 however, the majority of the male participants´ answers indicate that foreign language speaking anxiety exists, but on a relatively low level. In 2 out of 20 statements, a majority of the male participants answer neutrally. The most chosen answer by the male participants is 5 (strongly disagree), chosen in 11 out of the 20 statements. The second most common answer is 1 (strongly agree) and 4 (sort if disagree), which is used in 3 statements each. The least commonly picked answer by the male participants is 2 (sort of agree).
4.3.2 The female result
The female result shows that in 8 out of 20 statements, the majority of the female participants answer in the expected way, if one does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety. In statement 1,2,5,8,10,12,14,15,19 and 20, however, the majority of the female participants’ answers indicate that foreign language speaking anxiety exists, but at a medium level. An interesting finding is that in statement 6 and 18, the female participants’ answers are divided between the expected answer (if ones does not suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety) and an answer that deviates. The most chosen answer by the female participants is 3 (neutral), in 5 out of the 20 statements. The second most common answer is 5 (strongly disagree) followed by 1 (strongly agree) and 2 (somewhat agree). The least common answer by the female participants is 4 (somewhat disagree).

4.4 The statements
In 6 out of the 20 statements, there is a significant difference between the male and female answers. These results show that male participants and female participants indicate different levels of foreign level speaking anxiety.
4.4.1 Statement 7

In statement 7: “I worry about the consequences of failing English class”, the majority of the male participants answer either 4 (somewhat disagree) or 5 (strongly disagree), while the majority of the female students answer either 2 (somewhat agree) or 5 (strongly disagree). There is a significant difference in the male and female answers to this statement, and the most significant one is that the answer that most female students chose is tied between 2 and 5. This indicates a splitting opinion among the female students in terms of worry when it comes to passing or failing English. This indicates a split between the genders in the perceived foreign language speaking anxiety.

4.4.2 Statement 8

In statement 8: “In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know”, The majority of the male students answer as expected for one not suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety, 4 (somewhat disagree) and 5 (strongly disagree). In contrast, the majority of the female answers indicate a split between 1 (strongly agree) and 4 (somewhat disagree). The result indicates that the female students are split in their perceived nervousness while speaking English, while the male students answer more collectively in regard to the statement and their nerves while speaking in English class.
4.4.3 Statement 9

In statement 9: “It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class”, a majority of the male students answer as expected for one not suffering from foreign language speaking anxiety, while a majority of the female students answer either 2 (somewhat agree) or 3 (neutral). This indicates that a majority of the female students perceive themselves as suffering from embarrassment when it comes to volunteering answers in English class while a majority of the male students do not feel that they are too embarrassed to do so. This result indicates different levels of foreign language speaking anxiety among the genders.
4.4.4 Statement 12
In statement 12: “I feel confident when I speak in English class”, the answers indicate that a majority of the male students chose either 1 (strongly agree) or 2 (somewhat agree) and that a majority of the female students chose either 3 (neutral) or 2 (sort of agree). This indicates that a majority of the male students do feel confident when they speak English in class, while a majority of the female students relate to the statement neutrally. The levels of perceived foreign language speaking anxiety differ among the genders in this statement and indicates that the female participants suffer on a medium level while the male participants suffer on a low level.

4.4.5 Statement 14
In statement 14: “I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do”, the most chosen male answer is 5 (strongly disagree) while the most chosen female answer is 3 (neutral). However, the second most common female answer is 5 (strongly disagree), which indicates a split among the female students’ perception of their foreign language speaking ability. Specifically, the result indicates that female students compare their foreign language speaking abilities to others on a greater scale than male students do. This result shows that the female participants experience foreign language speaking anxiety on a medium level while the male participants experience foreign language anxiety on a low level.
4.4.6 Statement 20

In statement 20: “I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance”, the majority of the male students chose either 5 (strongly disagree) or 4 (somewhat disagree) while the majority of the female students chose either 2 (somewhat agree) or 1 (strongly agree). The result shows that the male and female answers are very different and separate in this statement and indicate that the majority of the female students do become nervous when they have to answer questions unprepared, while the majority of the male students do not become nervous when they have to answer questions unprepared. This statement demonstrates the existing gap in the levels of foreign language speaking anxiety between the male and female participants. The result indicates that the male participants suffer on a low level while the female suffer on a rather high level.
4.5 Discussion

It can be seen in the results that female students experience a higher level of speaking anxiety than the male students, based on their answers in the survey. With regard to these results, it can be determined that the female students, in this specific context, indicate a higher level of anxiety when it comes to volunteering answers in English class and speaking in English class. The results also show that the female students in this survey compare their language skills to others on a greater scale that the male students do. The results also suggest that the female students find it easier forget things that they normally would know when having to speak in English class than the male students. The male students, however, indicate a higher level of anxiety compared to the female students when it comes to reflecting about the consequences of failing English class.

An interesting finding in the results is that the female students’ answers indicate a perceived speaking anxiety in more than half of the statements in the survey, while the male participants’ answers result in a perceived speaking anxiety in simply one quarter of the statements. This gender difference is not in line with all previous research. For example, MacIntyre (2002) found no statistically significant gender related differences in language anxiety experienced by students learning French as a second language. The result in Stawiarska’s (2014) research on gender differences in foreign language speaking anxiety states that no gender differences was found in the level if anxiety measured with FLCAS. However, Stawiarska (2014) found some gender differences in the apprehension level in the case of speaking activities and patterns of interactions, where females were found to be more
anxious while speaking in front of the class, in small groups and during presentations and role plays.

The result in Stawiarska’s research falls in line with what Tannen (1990) argues regarding female and male language use. Tannen (1990) likens speech between men and women to cross-cultural communication and claims than men, for example, seek to establish hierarchy and status through talk, whereas women look to create solidarity and connection. Tannen (1990) also underlines that a consequence from this cross-cultural talk is that men have often devalued women’s speech. Tannen (1990) asserts that male and female students learn different approaches to language and communication early in their childhood. These differences in metamessages are what Tannen (1990) claims result in miscommunication between men and women, hence different approaches to weaknesses and anxiety.

Our society has gone through several changes in the last 20 years, one of them being advancement in women’s rights and equality between the sexes. This evolution includes how one speaks about women and to women, as well as how one speaks about men and to men. However, the gender differentiated communicational roots, which Tannen argues exist, could still have affected and still affect the way our children and young adults communicate with each other through speech, even though years have passed, and our society has gone through changes. Maltz and Borker (1982) state that speech between men and women seem too often exhibits the power relationship that exists in society, with men dominant and women subservient, and therefore come from different sociolinguistic subcultures. A possible connection can therefore be said to possibly exist between the results in this essay, regarding the gender differences in levels of foreign language speaking anxiety, and the theory that the male and female participants in this survey have learned to use their language differently at a young age, especially in conversation.

In addition to this, Donovan´s & MacIntyre´s (2004) overall results suggest that patterns of willingness to communicate across different age groups are likely to be different in men and women. Specifically, males appear to increase in willingness to communicate as they grow toward adulthood, and females may show a parallel decrease in willingness to communicate according to Donovan & MacIntyre (2004). Females show higher willingness to communicate than males among the junior high students and the predicted differences in willingness to communicate occur for males and females, but not to such a degree as to
produce significant gender differences in willingness to communicate past the junior high level (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). The authors also indicate that these differences may originate in junior high girls having higher willingness to communicate than boys of the same age (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). This reflects norms of sustained, intimate conversation among girls, which contrast with norms of shared physical activities among boys (Tannen, 1990). As females move toward an adult world where women continue to seek equality of opportunity in many domains, social factors might impact their willingness to communicate (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004).

Since the results indicate a difference between the male and female students’ answers in the FLCAS survey, and since the female students perceived themselves to sustain a higher level of anxiety while speaking English than the male students, it would be interesting to further investigate what other variables contribute to these gender differences in levels of foreign language speaking anxiety. Interestingly enough, the results appear to conflict with several similar conducted studies, which indicates that male participants appear to suffer from anxiety on a higher level than female participants (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002). However, the results in this essay have come to the same conclusion as other similarly conducted studies, which discovered and identified gender differences in foreign language speaking anxiety (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2005; Park & French, 2013). In the study by Park and French (2013) the results indicated “females self-reported higher levels of anxiety compared to their male counterparts” (p. 467). Park and French (2013) attributed these conflicting findings to socio-cultural differences, motivational variations as well as to facilitating and debilitating anxiety. Moreover, these results appear to raise the question of the relationship between gender, culture, and feelings of anxiety.

5. Conclusion

An conclusion regarding language acquisition is that some learners are more successful than others. Just as Krashen (1985) has suggested, the notion of an affective filter can hinder language learning. The social context of learning and the psychological perspective reveal that learners have differences among themselves and that these differences affect our success in language learning. Variables such as motivation, learning strategies and interaction play a part, as well as gender and age. This has shown to be true in this specific essay, regarding the 87 participating Swedish eighth-grade students at a specific International English school, and
their levels of foreign language speaking anxiety. The results indicate a difference between these students’ levels of speaking anxiety in English classes. However, this essay has solely focused on the overall answers from the participants regarding their perceived level of speaking anxiety as well as the variable gender. Other variables that are of importance, such as the students’ backgrounds and previous encounters with the English language have not been taken into a count. Another variable that has not been taken into count is the students’ parents. The International English school, where all the participants are students, generally has students who come from strong socioeconomic backgrounds and multilingual homes enrolling. A high percentage of the students’ parents are educated at a university level and it is important to reflect on how this variable might generate levels of performance anxiety among the students due to high academic expectations. The International English school also expects high academic results from their students, which could also generate a higher risk of students developing anxieties about preforming academically in school. There is a great chance that these variables might have affected the results in this survey, and it would be interesting to compare these results with results from a similar participant group at a public compulsory school in the same area as the International English school, and compare the contexts and possible differences between the groups.

Since the results in this essay exhibit some differences regarding levels of foreign language speaking anxiety between male and female students, the question of what to do to minimize or eliminate these levels of anxiety comes to mind. First, the issue of students’ fears and anxiety levels needs to be acknowledged and brought into debate. Expectations on students’ academic results from parents as well as schools might need to be reconsidered though discussion and research to find a sustainable path for students, schools and society. Even though the participants in this essay showed a relatively low level of foreign language speaking anxiety, there were some situations which triggered the anxiety levels more than others. For example, situations in which the students were expected to speak unprepared. These results might give faculty as well as teachers an indication of what a problematic area of language classes can or could be for students, and can hopefully, based on the results, create a plan to find, minimize and eventually eliminate the students’ levels of anxiety connected to specific situations. Second, this essay also concluded an existing gender difference in the perceived levels of foreign language speaking anxiety. Due to this, several preventive actions should be taken into a count with the aim to identify and minimize the possible reasons behind these gender differences. For example, reflections regarding the
existing classroom environments could be done, for instance via video and audio recordings by teachers, with the aim to find certain patterns and situations in which students generate anxiety. Many language and gender studies have investigated and frequently also challenge stereotypes about gendered language use. It is important for future debates regarding gender stereotypes that these should not be dismissed, as they reveal interesting ideologies about how women and men “ought” to speak. These ideologies shape dominant discourses which are accepted as common sense by many members of socio-cultural groups, and therefore serve as points of orientation for speakers in their actual language use according to Pichler & Preece in Mooney et al (2011).

The conflicting results of this essay, in regard to gender, indicate females’ fear of negative evaluation when they speak in a foreign language. Even though the participants in this essay may not be fully conscious of their anxieties, they are nevertheless influenced by variables such as dominant norms, practices and discourses which circulate in our society. More specifically, the participants are influenced by factors such as their friendships, sports, family, activities and other communities of practice that speakers belong to. People evaluate and judge others based on how they speak, and this is as true for gendered ways of speaking as it is for social or regional varieties. It can be interpreted that students today, compared to older generations, are more aware of their rights in society and have grown up during times of change in gender roles and equality. This change will hopefully be seen in future generations as boys and girls learn a second or foreign language and will hopefully bring change to the stigma of embarrassment when speaking.

As previously mentioned, The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) emphasizes that students need to have communicative competence in English, and to use the English language for interaction in different social and cultural contexts to be able to acquire new perspectives of the surrounding world. But to be able to develop language competence and skills, the students need to be able to speak and communicate unhindered. However, just as this study suggests, students can experience anxiety when having to speak in a second or foreign language, even if they are exposed to a bilingual environment and are taught by international teachers. The international English school should be a place were willingness to communicate is the norm. Nevertheless, even the sun has its spots. The reasons for the higher levels of speaking anxiety among the students must be located and dealt with appropriately, because, as Krashen (1982) mentions “language is best taught when it is used for what it was
designed for: communication” (19). And even though we use language constantly, we don't normally pay a great deal of attention to it. In the future, we might look at language differently and evolve in our fears and anxiety of saying the right or wrong thing. Hopefully there can be situations in language studies the future where silence is silver, and speech is golden.
6. References

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1. FLACAS by Horwitz et al (1897)

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class
2. I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class
3. I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in language class
4. It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language
5. It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more foreign language classes
6. during language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages that i am
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class
11. I don’t understand why some people get so frustrated in language class
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in language class
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers
15. I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it
17. I often feel like not going to language class
18. I feel confident when I speak in language class
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in language class
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get
22. I don’t feel pressure to prepare very well for language class
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students
25. Language class moves so quickly I am worried about getting left behind
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class
28. When I am on my way to language class, I feel relaxed and sure
29. I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the language teacher says
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language
31. I would probably feel comfortable around naive speakers of the foreign language
32. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance

Appendix 2. The survey

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class
2. I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class
3. It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language
4. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am
5. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class
6. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class
7. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class
8. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know
9. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in language class
10. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers
11. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it
12. I feel confident when I speak in language class
13. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make
14. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do
15. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students
16. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes
17. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language
18. I would probably feel comfortable around naive speakers of the foreign language
19. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language
20. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance

Appendix 3. The survey results
It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in English
87 svar

I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am
87 svar

I am usually at ease during tests in my English class
87 svar
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class
87 svar

I worry about the consequences of failing English class
87 svar

In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know
87 svar
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class
87 svar

I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers
87 svar

Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it
87 svar
I feel confident when I speak in English class

87 svar

I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make

87 svar

I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do

87 svar
I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students
87 svår

I feel more tense and nervous in English class than in my other classes
87 svår

I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English
87 svår
I would probably feel comfortable around naive speakers of the foreign language
87 svar

I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language
87 svar

I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance
87 svar
Appendix 4. The male and female survey result

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