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**THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
ANXIETY AND ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION LEVEL**

**Rosa Plana Alemany**

**Tutora:**

**Dra. Carmen Muñoz Lahoz**

**Facultat de Filologia i Comunicació**

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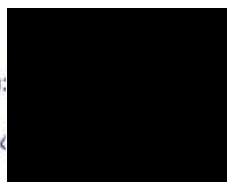


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## **ABSTRACT**

This bachelor thesis examines the link between pronunciation level in English and foreign language anxiety, as well as how self-perception of competence in the former may be associated to the latter. The work is divided into two parts: a theoretical section and a practical part. The first one looks at the already published work on the topic to define and classify foreign language anxiety, focusing on pronunciation anxiety and communication apprehension. The practical part consists of the study conducted with Spanish high school students to answer three research questions.

*Keywords:* foreign language anxiety, English pronunciation, pronunciation anxiety, communication apprehension

## **RESUM**

En aquest treball final de grau s'examina la relació entre el nivell de pronunciació en anglès i l'ansietat a l'hora d'aprendre una llengua estrangera, a més de com la percepció de la pròpia competència en la pronunciació pot estar associada als nivells d'ansietat. El treball està dividit en dues parts: una teòrica i una pràctica. La primera para esment en recerca prèvia feta sobre el tema per tal de definir i classificar l'ansietat al parlar una segona llengua, centrant-se en l'ansietat davant de la pronunciació i l'aprehensió a comunicar-se. La part pràctica consisteix en l'estudi realitzat amb estudiants d'un institut espanyol per contestar tres preguntes d'investigació.

*Paraules clau:* ansietat a l'hora d'aprendre una llengua estrangera, pronunciació de l'anglès, ansietat davant la pronunciació, aprehensió a comunicar-se

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CA: Communication Apprehension

FL: Foreign Language

FLA: Foreign Language Anxiety

FLCA: Foreign Language Class Anxiety

FLCAS: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

L2: Second Language

NS: Native Speaker

OPA: Oral Performance Apprehension

RQ: Research Question

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most students agree that communicating in a foreign language can be a great cause of stress and anxiety. When speaking in a language we do not yet master, a hundred things go through our minds: am I using the correct verb tense? Is this word the right word for what I am trying to say? Am I pronouncing this word correctly? Are they understanding me? All these worries and doubts can lead to foreign language anxiety (FLA), a common occurrence for many second language (L2) learners.

Much research has been conducted to identify the reasons behind FLA and its effects on second language acquisition in a classroom setting and outside of it. In 1986 Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope defined the concept of foreign language anxiety and identified its three main components: Communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. They also developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, which has been used by many studies to assess the FLA levels of their participants. In recent times, many studies have also focused on the connection between FLA and the learner's self-perception of L2 competence. Oral production and pronunciation have also been studied more in depth, and according to many researchers (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Woodrow, 2006), they seem to be the greatest sources of FLA.

After discussing this topic with other English learners, I have realized how much of a handicap some consider their pronunciation to be when speaking the foreign language. This has motivated the study. The aim of the present study is to add to the previous research regarding the relationship between FLA and pronunciation, as well as to see how objective and self-perceived accuracy in pronunciation might affect the proneness to communicate using the foreign language. To do so, a study will be conducted with Spanish high school students using a questionnaire and a text to collect the data, which is later going to be analyzed to draw conclusions on the impact of FLA in communication and pronunciation in the L2.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Definition and classification of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)*

When learning a second language, there are many factors that come into play, anxiety being one of them. According to Brown (2000), “intricately intertwined with self-esteem, self-efficacy, inhibition, and risk taking, the construct of anxiety plays a major affective role in second language acquisition” (p. 148).



There are two types of general anxiety: trait anxiety and state anxiety. The first one is defined by Phillips (1992) as “a relatively stable tendency to exhibit anxiety in a large variety of circumstances” (p. 14). The second one is described as “a situation-specific trait anxiety; that is, an individual suffering from state anxiety will manifest a stable tendency to exhibit anxiety but only in certain situations” (Phillips, 1992, p.14). According to Brown (2000), language anxiety fits in the category of state anxiety, and much research suggests that a great majority of L2 students suffer from average-to-high levels of it (Amengual-Pizarro, 2017; Arnaiz and Guillén, 2012; Liu, 2006).

In the late 1970s scholars started researching about anxiety and its effects on second language acquisition. In the first studies, it was treated as “a transfer of other types of anxiety into the language learning context” (Baran-Łucarz, 2011, p. 492). But due to inconclusive results, the concept of language anxiety was specifically developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) in the next decade. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

## 2.2. *Components of FLA*

Horwitz, et al. (1986) considered the construct of FLA consisted of three main components related to performance anxiety: communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension is defined as “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127), with the speaker especially worrying about being understood and understanding others. Communication apprehension is not exclusive to L2 use, in fact, studies have shown that said apprehension in the L2 tends to be connected to CA in the L1 (McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond, 1985; McCroskey, Gudykunst and Nishida, 1985). Communicating in a foreign language, however, will inevitably be more worrisome and difficult for the speaker, and, consequently, elicit higher levels of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The reluctance to communicate in a language other than the L1 can also be linked to each learner’s individual personality traits (McCroskey, 1980) and can vary depending on the situation. Some studies have shown that out of the three main components of anxiety presented by Horwitz et al. (1986), communication apprehension seems to be the most anxiety-provoking one, especially when it comes to speaking anxiety (Amengual-Pizarro, 2017; Yang, 2012).

Test anxiety is described as “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). This kind of anxiety can be conceivably increased in the case of oral exams, as they can trigger test anxiety as well as speaking anxiety for some students (Horwitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, in classroom settings where tests and other graded activities tend to be very frequent, this component of the FLA construct can be quite prevalent.

Lastly, fear of negative evaluation refers to a kind of fear that may arise in many social situations where an assessment is being conducted and is described as “apprehension about others’ evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (Watson and Friend, 1969, p. 449). While similar to test anxiety, this third component “is broader in scope because it pertains not only to the teacher’s evaluation of the student, but to the perceived reaction of other students as well” (Shams, 2006, p. 10). In foreign language classrooms, this fear may be induced by harsh corrections from teachers or from classmates’ laughter or judgment whenever errors are made. In a study by Amengual-Pizarro (2018) fear of negative evaluation was the second more anxiety-provoking component of FLA after communication apprehension. Participants of this study pointed out oral skills, such as volunteering answers in foreign language class, to be a great stressor. Research by Yang (2012) also shows that fear of negative evaluation was an important contributor to FLA.

However, as Horwitz et al. (1986) note in their definition of FLA, while the distinction between these three kinds of performance anxiety provide a good base to describe foreign language anxiety, it is more than just the combination of these elements. They conceive FLA as a complex concept which entails many components and is affected by various individual traits and differences as well as external influences, such as the learning environment or the situation. Therefore, the uniqueness of L2 acquisition lies in how it interacts with the student’s concept of “self” and how they perceive their own progress.

### *2.3. Facilitating vs. debilitating anxiety*

Studies have also tried to determine whether FLA has a positive or negative effect on second language acquisition, making a distinction between beneficial or facilitating anxiety and inhibitory or debilitating anxiety (Bailey, 1995). Some research suggests that anxiety can be beneficial, as it can be a source of motivation to improve and put in more effort (Eysenck, 1979; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1991). Nonetheless, most studies indicate that anxiety can have a “devastating effect on L2 language use as well as L2 learning” (Zoss, 2015, p. 41),

constituting a hindrance to L2 acquisition. Anxiety when acquiring a second language can manifest in various ways, like avoidance behaviors (not attending class, procrastinating doing assignments or avoiding participating in the classroom), face-saving (joking around), minor psychophysiological symptoms (faster heartbeat or sweating) and major physical symptoms (muscle tension or neuromuscular problems impeding speech) (Gregersen, 2007; Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002; Scovel, 1991).

#### *2.4. FLA in interaction with the self*

While Gardner and MacIntyre added that FLA can appear not only in a classroom setting, like Horwitz et. al (1986) had pointed out, but in any situation which “requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient” (1993, p. 5), research suggests that the classroom context can be a great source of anxiety because of the constant interaction that is usually required (Yang, 2012). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) also emphasize that FLA “is characterised by derogatory self-related cognitions (e.g. ‘I can’t do this’), feelings of apprehension, and physiological responses such as increased heart rate” (p. 5). Additionally, as some studies point out, learning an L2 and expressing oneself in it means “to redefine yourself publicly, socially and personally” (Pellegrino, 2005, p. 7). This can threaten a student’s identity and may be the cause of reluctance or further frustration and anxiety when learning or using a second language. In a study conducted by Waddington (2019) one of the participants saw the acquisition of English as a threat to their Catalan identity, which consequently had a negative effect on the learning of the L2.

As mentioned above, the process of acquiring a second language can pose a significant threat to one’s self-concept as a competent speaker, since when studying an L2 “our self image becomes more vulnerable when our expression is reduced to infantilised levels” (Arnold, 2000, p. 3). As defined by Rosenberg (1979), self-concept is “the totality of an individual’s thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and values having reference to himself as object” (p. 7). This threat to one’s self-concept can make students come up with beliefs, some of them unrealistic, about language acquisition, which may eventually foster further anxiety and frustration (Horwitz et al., 1986). For example, if learners aim for native like pronunciation or think they are expected to produce error-free utterances, these beliefs could lead to potential failure and enhance the feelings of unease and anxiety regarding the process of L2 learning (Kruk and Zawodniak, 2021; Zoss, 2015). Research also suggests that those learners with a higher self-concept or self-esteem are going to show lower levels of anxiety compared to students with lower self-esteem (Horwitz et al., 1986). In consequence, this low-

self-esteem-induced anxiety will also affect the learner's grades. As a study by Phillips (1992) indicates, "students who expressed more foreign LA tended to receive lower exam grades than their less anxious classmates" (pp. 18-19).

Nevertheless, most studies suggest that students tend to rank their competence lower than an objective evaluation would (Baran-Łucaraz, 2011; MacIntyre, Noels, Clément, 1997; Szyszka, 2011). MacIntyre et al. (1997) identify two approaches regarding student's bias in self-assessment, which they refer to as "self-enhancement" (p. 269) and "self-derogation" (p. 270). The first one refers to students overestimating their skills in order to save face and protect their feelings of self-worth, while the second one refers to a learner's underestimation of their competence because of low confidence in their abilities. In line with what prior research suggests, a study conducted by Szyszka (2011) regarding FLA and the self-perceived English pronunciation competence of teachers in training showed that "more apprehensive teacher trainees perceived their pronunciation as poor, whereas those with lower levels of anxiety declared higher pronunciation competence" (p. 283). As stated, self-concept and anxiety are closely connected and self-perception will greatly affect how L2 learners communicate in and use the foreign language.

## *2.5. FLA and communicating in the L2*

According to many researchers, oral production in the L2 seems to be the greatest source of anxiety (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, Gardner, 1991; Woodrow, 2006). What seems to be particularly anxiety-inducing is talking to native speakers (NS) (Woodrow, 2006), and some students may resort to avoiding communication with NSs so as not to experience a stressful situation (MacIntyre, 2007). The two main reasons behind this anxiousness when speaking to NSs appear to be "skill deficit" and "retrieval interference" (Woodrow, 2006, p. 308). The first one refers to "the lack of a specific linguistic skill, such as pronunciation" (Zoss, 2015, p. 43), while the second one is the "inability to recall linguistic information" (Zoss, 2015, p. 43). Although research indicates that interacting with NSs is crucial for the development of L2 pronunciation and greater linguistic self-confidence along with overall improvement in the L2 skills (Hummel, 2013), many students may choose not to communicate with natives regularly due to factors like negative self-perception and low linguistic self-confidence (Zoss, 2015). A study carried out by Hummel (2013) concluded that involvement in the target language community increased the participants' linguistic self-confidence as they had perceived an improvement of their L2 skills.

## 2.6. *FLA and pronunciation*

An aspect that may add to the communication apprehension when it comes to interacting with NSs is the learner's self-perceived level of pronunciation. As MacIntyre (2007) pointed out, students who have difficulties with pronunciation or perceive their pronunciation level to be bad may not be inclined to communicate with NSs. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Zoss (2015) with adult English learners, results showed that at least half of the participants perceive that they would feel more comfortable talking to NSs if their pronunciation was better. Especially in a classroom setting, where learners have to communicate and express their ideas in a language they do not fully grasp yet, oral production and pronunciation can also be a significant source of anxiety for many L2 students (Horwitz et al., 1986; Prince, 1991; Woodrow, 2006). In the research carried out by Price (1991), speaking in front of the whole class in the foreign language was claimed as the most anxiety provoking activity by the highly anxious students interviewed. They were mostly afraid of humiliation, ridicule and being laughed at by their fellow classmates. Their self-perceived low levels of pronunciation, which lead to embarrassment, and their worry of making pronunciation mistakes were some of the reasons behind their anxiety. Although, as the aforementioned studies and many more show, pronunciation is a big stressor for L2 learners, it is often neglected in classrooms (Alfonso, 2020; Case, 2012; Marks, Łeba, 2011). Textbooks do not tend to focus on pronunciation and usually just briefly touch on the subject by dedicating a couple of activities to it, yet there is evidence that "many English-as-a-second-language students would like more opportunities to improve their pronunciation" (Derwing et al., 2012, p. 23). A study carried out by Shams (2006) showed how pronunciation practice resulted in improved pronunciation as well as lower levels of FLA. Shams (2006), also posits that pronunciation may play a role in the forenamed three anxiety components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Anxiety may be brought about by communication apprehension, in the cases where the student feels like communication will not be successful because of their poor pronunciation. If the learner feels like the teacher is evaluating and grading the accuracy of their pronunciation, test anxiety can be triggered. Lastly, fear of negative evaluation may appear if the speaker fears what others will think about the way they pronounce the L2. These worries may be based on the actual low pronunciation level of the student or on their self-perception of their pronunciation level (Baran-Łucarz, 2011). Nonetheless, if language learners do not actively communicate in the L2, they have no way of reassessing their oral competence (Szyszka, 2011).

To summarize, much research has been conducted to investigate the complex construct that is FLA and how it may affect L2 acquisition and performance. As a foreign language learner myself and after seeing how anxiety-inducing communicating in English is for those around me who consider their accent a hindrance, I have set out to further explore the impact FLA can have on L2 use and, specifically, on Spanish/Catalan natives. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to see if there is a connection between pronunciation level and foreign language anxiety in Spanish high school students. It also seeks to investigate the relationship between self-perception of competence in pronunciation and anxiety levels. The study aims to answer the following 3 research questions (RQ):

1. Is there a relationship between accuracy in pronunciation and level of foreign language anxiety?
2. Is accuracy in pronunciation associated with the student's will to communicate in the foreign language?
3. Are language anxiety levels and self-perception of competence connected?

### **3. THE STUDY**

#### *3.1. Participants*

The participants of this study are a group of 38 students ( $N=21$  male,  $N=17$  female) attending a high school in Barcelona. The number of participants was originally higher (40 students) than the final number (38). Given that two students did not answer all of the questions in the survey, they were excluded from the study. They are students of *Segon de Batxillerat* with the average age being 18 years old. The 38 students were divided in three smaller groups, one comprising 14 students and two made up of 12 students. Majority of participants had either Spanish or Catalan as their L1 ( $N=31$ ). The remaining 7 students spoke Arabic ( $N=1$ ), French ( $N=1$ ), Russian ( $N=1$ ), Chinese ( $N=1$ ), English ( $N=1$ ), and German ( $N=2$ ) at home as well as Spanish or Catalan. All participants had been taking English classes all throughout primary school and high school, and some had taken or are currently taking English classes as an extracurricular activity. As seen in their answers to the 6<sup>th</sup> survey question (see below), “How often do you use English (reading, podcasts, watching TV...) outside of the classroom?”, majority of participants use English on a daily basis outside of the classroom environment (55% of students), for example when playing video games, on social media, speaking to friends, etc.

### 3.2. *Materials used*

The materials used to collect the data were a survey consisting of two parts and a short text, which participants were asked to read out loud and recorded.

The first part of the survey contained personal questions (name, age, mother-tongue) and an English background questionnaire, as well as questions about how often they used English outside of the classroom, and, more specifically, how frequently they spoke English. The second part consisted of 23 statements about FLA and pronunciation self-assessment, which students had to rate in a 4 point Likert scale with the anchors “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree”. When the questionnaire was distributed, statements were randomized in order to avoid influencing the answers and to make the survey more reliable. Statements were adapted from Horwitz et al.’s 1986 FLCAS and Zoss (2015) (see Appendix 1). Cronbach’s alpha was used so as to test the index of internal consistency of the items included in the questionnaire and ensure its reliability. The value was .89, which is high. This indicates that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument for data collection.

Additionally, all participants read a short 137-word text out loud. The passage contained specific words and sounds, which research shows can cause difficulties in pronunciation for L1 Spanish and Catalan speakers (Fullana and MacKay, 2008; Gleason, 2012; Rallo and Jacob, 2015): stress placement in words which share meaning and near identical, or identical, spelling in the three languages (e.g. Catalan and Spanish “examen” and English “exam”), the /h/ sound, s+consonant in word initial position, the /b/- /v/ sound distinction, verbs ending in -ed, /ɔ/-/ow/ distinction, and word final obstruents. A total of 15 words containing one of these sounds were chosen to later analyze and rate the participants’ pronunciation. The following 7 words were also included in the text as challenging words for L1 Spanish and Catalan speakers based on my own English learning experience as well as words I have perceived L1 Spanish/Catalan speakers around me struggle to pronounce: island, really, comfortable, poor, money, beach, dessert (see Appendix 2).

### 3.3. *Procedure*

Data was collected during English class. Participants were informed that both the questionnaire and the voice-recording would only be used for research purposes and their teacher would have no access to them. Additionally, they were asked to sign a consent form to partake in the study. The teacher was asked to step out of the classroom while participants were filling out the questionnaire, which was administered in Catalan so as to make sure the participants fully understood the questions and statements. The voice-recordings were taken

individually, and outside of the classroom. An Iphone 6 was used to tape the voice-recordings. Participants were given approximately one minute to read the text over before recording.

### 3.4. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data from the questionnaires, a score from 1 to 4 was ascribed to the answers, where 4 points indicated high anxiety while 1 point indicated low anxiety. Statement 19 was taken out of the study as it was badly formulated and answers could be ambiguous. As a result, a total of 22 statements were analyzed, meaning that the highest points a survey could gather were 88 (highest anxiety level) and the lowest 22 (lowest anxiety level). The answers to the English background and exposure questionnaire questions were taken into account when interpreting the results.

The rating of the participants' pronunciation was conducted by an American English native speaker and me, a Catalan/Spanish native. Since in Spain English textbooks and teachers usually favor Southern British English (SBE) pronunciation, the SBE and General American English (GAE) pronunciation for each of the targeted words was compared so as to see if there were noticeable differences that should be taken into account when giving the pronunciation score. The only noteworthy difference that was found was in the pronunciation of the diphthongs in the words *bought* (SBE /bɔ:t/, GAEP /bɑ:t/) and *boat* (SBE /bəʊt/, GAEP /bout/). The American English speaker was made aware of the difference. Therefore, both SBE and GAE pronunciation were accepted and counted as correct.

A point was given to each of the previously chosen 15 words if the challenging sound was pronounced accurately by the participant. Additionally, another 5 points were awarded for overall pronunciation (taking into account diction and intonation) and correctness of the pronunciation of the 7 words, mentioned in the previous section, which I deemed difficult to pronounce based on my own experience and observation. In total, the maximum pronunciation score attainable was 20 points. Each of us listened to the recordings and gave the score separately and then came together to share our ratings. Out of the 38 recordings, we gave the same score to 71% of the cases (27 recordings) of them. For the remaining 29% of cases (11 recordings) where we did not agree, we listened to the recording together and reached an agreement.



## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Questionnaire

Responses to the 22 analyzed questionnaire items are reported in Table 1. Numbers reflect the total of participants who agreed or disagreed. So as to better analyze the data, statements were rearranged and subdivided into the 4 sections mentioned below:

- Foreign Language Class Anxiety (FLCA): statements 1-5
- Oral performance apprehension (OPA): statements 6-11
- Pronunciation and self-image: statements 12-18
- Self-perception of pronunciation and attitudes towards English pronunciation: statements 19-22

Table 1: Questionnaire items with the number of students who selected each possible choice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I frequently participate in class (all subjects).			
	6	6	17	9
2	I frequently participate in English class.			
	5	11	15	7
3	I hardly ever participate in English class.			
	5	16	12	5
4	I am as calm in English class as I am in other subjects.			
	17	10	9	2
5	I feel more tense and nervous in English class than in my other classes.			
	3	4	10	21
6	I do not mind speaking English with native speakers.			
	13	13	8	4
	I do not want to talk with native speakers because my English pronunciation is not good			

7	enough.			
	1	5	17	15
8	I get more nervous before a written exam than an oral exam.			
	1	9	14	14
9	English oral exams intimidate me more than written exams.			
	11	10	11	6
10	If I do not participate in English class, it is because I am not confident in my grammar or vocabulary.			
	5	11	12	10
11	If I do not participate in English class, it is because I am not confident in my pronunciation.			
	2	9	12	15
12	When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a language problem like grammar or vocabulary.			
	9	15	11	3
13	When I have problems speaking in English it is because of my pronunciation.			
	2	8	15	13
14	I do not think people around me judge or laugh at my pronunciation.			
	11	19	6	2
15	I feel like people around me laugh or judge my pronunciation.			
	0	6	17	15
16	I do not mind it when the teacher corrects my mistakes.			
	28	9	1	0
17	I do not speak because I am afraid of being corrected.			
	0	7	13	18

18	I feel like my classmates have a higher English level than me.			
	10	5	18	5
19	I am satisfied with my English pronunciation.			
	7	13	14	4
20	My English pronunciation is not good enough.			
	8	13	11	6
21	It is important for me to speak English without an accent.			
	0	7	19	12
22	I do not mind speaking English with an accent.			
	7	13	15	3

As seen in Table 1, regarding Foreign Language Class Anxiety (FLCA), most students do not participate frequently in any subjects, including English. Majority of participants also note that they do not feel particularly anxious in language class.

Concerning the statements about Oral Performance Apprehension (OPA), most students do not mind speaking with native speakers, and only 6 of them avoid it because they feel like their pronunciation is not good enough. Majority of participants agree that oral exams are a bigger stressor than written tests. Finally, results show the reasons for not participating in English class for most students are neither low confidence in their grammar or vocabulary nor in their pronunciation.

When it comes to statements about pronunciation and self-image, most students agree that when speaking English, their problems stem from a lack in grammar or vocabulary rather than issues with pronunciation. A large majority of participants do not feel like those around them judge or laugh at their pronunciation, and are not afraid of being corrected by the teacher. As for statement number 18, results are distributed rather evenly, with 15 participants who feel like their classmates have a higher English level than them, while the remaining 23 disagree with the statement.

Lastly, as for statements regarding self-perception of pronunciation, approximately half of the participants are pleased with their English pronunciation, whereas the other half feels like it is not good enough. The two statements regarding their attitudes towards speaking English with an accent show very ambiguous results. While only 7 students agree that it is important for them to speak English without an accent, 18 do mind speaking with an accent.

After counting the points from the survey, students were classified into 5 anxiety levels depending on their global anxiety score. The moderate anxiety level includes the average general anxiety score (48.52). Based on this level, the students were distributed evenly in the low, moderate, and high levels. Since it was considered that the very low and very high levels should only be populated with students with exceptional scores, the points in those levels are not so equally divided.

- 22-32 points: very low level
- 33-43 points: low level
- 44-52 points: moderate level
- 53-65 points: high level
- 66-88 points: very high level

The following table (Table 2) shows how many students were assigned for each category and the percentage. Only one student showed high anxiety levels, the level was high for 12 participants and moderate for 13. The 12 remaining students presented low anxiety levels.

Table 2: Classification of participants' anxiety levels depending on their questionnaire score

Anxiety level	Very low	low	moderate	high	very high
No. of Students	0	12	13	12	1
% of students	0	31.6	34.2	31.6	2.6

#### 4.2. Pronunciation score

After rating the participants' pronunciation, students were divided into the following 5 pronunciation levels depending on their awarded score. The highest pronunciation score attainable (20 points) was divided into 5 equal levels taking into account the average pronunciation score was 14.13:

- 1-4 points: very poor pronunciation
- 5-8 points: poor pronunciation
- 9-12 points: moderate pronunciation
- 13-16 points: good pronunciation
- 17-20 points: very good pronunciation

Table 3 shows the amount of students assigned in each level. 13 participants had very good pronunciation, 12 displayed a good level, and 10 had a moderate pronunciation level. 3 of them showed low pronunciation skills.

Table 3: Classification of participants' pronunciation level according to their awarded score

Pronunciation	very poor	poor	moderate	good	very good
No. of students	0	3	10	12	13
% of the students	0	7.9	26.3	31.6	34.2

#### 4.3. Association between students' answers and their anxiety and pronunciation scores

In order to answer the research questions, a set of Pearson correlations was performed. The results are as follows: When computing the correlation between the negative self-perception scores and the anxiety scores, a medium-high positive correlation coefficient ( $r=0.7362$ ) was obtained. This was the highest correlation computed. The correlation between the pronunciation scores and the OPA scores gauged a low correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.3229$ ). This was the lowest correlation computed. When performing the correlation between the pronunciation scores and the FLCA scores, a medium negative correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.4517$ ) was obtained. The correlation between pronunciation score, and the combination of the FLCA and OPA scores gave a medium negative correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.4945$ ). When computing a correlation between the pronunciation scores and the negative self-perception scores, a medium negative correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.5463$ ) was obtained. Upon performing a correlation between the pronunciation scores and the negative self-image scores, a medium negative correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.6002$ ) was obtained. A medium-high negative correlation coefficient ( $r=-0.6090$ ) was obtained when computing a correlation between the pronunciation and anxiety scores. Lastly, the correlation calculated between the anxiety and OPA scores gave a medium-high positive correlation coefficient ( $r=0.6327$ ).

The following table (Table 4) illustrates all correlations performed.

Table 4: List of all correlations performed

	Pronunciation Scores	OPA	Self-perception
General Anxiety Score	$r = -0.6090$	$r = 0.6327$	$r = 0.7362$
FLCA	$r = -0.4517$	-	-
OPA	$r = -0.3229$	-	-
Negative self-Image	$r = -0.6002$	-	-
Negative self-perception	$r = -0.5463$	-	-
FLCA + OPA	$r = -0.4945$	-	-

## 5. GENERAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I will discuss the results mentioned in the section above along with a more detailed analysis of the individual learners' answers and performance in the pronunciation test. I will follow the items of the questionnaire and answer the three research questions at the end.

### 5.1. Foreign Language Class Anxiety (FLCA) statements

As stated in the previous section, most students do not participate in class, no matter the subject. Only 5% of participants said that they participate more often in other subjects than they do in English class. These students have below average pronunciation scores and high anxiety levels, which suggests they might not feel confident enough in their English skills. This may be the reason behind their more limited participation in English class. On the contrary, participants who answered that they participate more in English class compared to other subjects tend to have very good pronunciation scores (71%) and moderate anxiety levels (57%). Additionally, they have been taking extracurricular English classes, which might lead to them feeling more comfortable with providing answers in an English classroom.

Results also show that students who participate in English class are those with lower levels of anxiety: 76% of participants who participate in English class report below average anxiety levels. However, the link between participation and pronunciation level is not so clear.

Participants with lower pronunciation scores do not tend to participate, but there are students with very high pronunciation scores who also prefer not to: 70% of students with below average pronunciation levels refrain from participating in class, and 38% of participants with very high pronunciation scores do so as well.

### *5.2. Oral Performance Apprehension (OPA) statements*

As commented above, for most students, the reason for not participating in English class is neither problems with grammar or vocabulary nor their pronunciation. Results suggest that, while they do not volunteer answers in foreign language class, they do not do it either in other classes. Therefore, the lack of participation in English class might not be related to FLCA, but to apprehension or unwillingness to participate in general.

The majority of participants do not mind speaking with English native speakers, and as expected, students with low anxiety levels and good pronunciation feel less reluctant to speak with natives, probably because they feel more confident in their L2 skills.

As anticipated, data shows that oral exams are a bigger stressor for students than written tests. This is in line with previous research, which shows that test anxiety can be increased during oral exams, as they can generate both test anxiety and speaking anxiety for some students (Horwitz et al., 1986).

### *5.3. Pronunciation and self-image statements*

Most participants stated that, rather than pronunciation, their main problem when speaking English comes from lack in grammar or vocabulary. However, those with good and very good pronunciation noted that their problems when speaking stem from neither of the two. Because level in grammar and vocabulary often tend to go hand in hand with pronunciation accuracy, it makes sense that those with higher pronunciation levels do not struggle as much with grammar or vocabulary. We have also seen that, for those students who do not participate in English class, when speaking English outside of the classroom their concerns seem to be caused by grammar and vocabulary, not by pronunciation.

While a large majority of participants stated that they do not feel like those around them laugh at or judge their pronunciation, those with higher anxiety levels were more likely to agree with the statement. In relation to their pronunciation scores, participants with good and very good pronunciation did not feel like their pronunciation was judged, while those with poor pronunciation levels did feel more like it. Similarly, most students do not mind being corrected by the teacher (97%), and for 84% of participants, corrections are not

something that prevents them from speaking. This might be because they feel comfortable in English class (most noted that they did not feel particularly anxious in FL class), because the teacher may be gentle with her corrections and does not seek to humiliate the students with her feedback, or because maybe there is a good classroom dynamic.

Students seem to be very aware of their English level in comparison with their classmates. Those with very high pronunciation levels disagree with the statement “I feel like my classmates have a higher English level than me”, whereas those with poor pronunciation agree with it. Regarding their satisfaction with their pronunciation level, those participants with moderate and low anxiety levels are satisfied with it. Meanwhile, those with high and very high anxiety levels agree that their pronunciation is not good enough.

#### *5.4. Self-perception of pronunciation and attitudes towards English pronunciation statements*

Participants with high and very high anxiety levels consider that their pronunciation is not good enough. Upon comparing statement 22 “My English pronunciation is not good enough” with the pronunciation scores, however, results were inconclusive.

Generally, students with a very high pronunciation level are satisfied with their pronunciation. This shows once more, that their self-assessment of their pronunciation level is accurate. Finally, no clear connection between anxiety or pronunciation scores and worries over accentedness was found.

Interestingly, the 7 participants with another L1 other than Catalan or Spanish have anxiety levels ranging from low to moderate and above average pronunciation scores (except for two of them). This suggests that speaking another language, even if it is not similar to English, may give them more confidence or more tools to speak and learn another language.

A case worth mentioning is that of the only L1 English participant. He scored 20 points (the highest score attainable) for his pronunciation, which puts him in the *very good pronunciation* category, and got a 42 anxiety score, which is low, but higher than one would probably expect for a native speaker. The reason behind his anxiety score may be because even if he is a native speaker, he may have a more introverted personality, which makes him less prone to participate. In the survey, he agreed with the statements “I frequently participate in class (all subjects)” and “I hardly ever participate in English class”. If he were not a native English speaker, aware of his better level compared to the other classmates, he might have obtained a higher anxiety score. Being an L1 English speaker may have given him a higher confidence level. Even if he had the same English level as he does now, if he were not native



he might feel more anxious as he would not have the assurance that his pronunciation was that of a NS. Another possible reason might be the fact that this participant did not choose strongly agree/strongly disagree for many of the questions, selecting the middle options more frequently instead. Since these answers awarded 2-3 points, they might have contributed to his higher anxiety score.

### *5.5. Answers to the Research Questions*

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between accuracy in pronunciation and level of foreign language anxiety?

As expected, the negative correlation between pronunciation and anxiety scores suggest that participants reporting higher levels of anxiety also received lower pronunciation scores. This conforms with previous research on the topic (Phillips, 1992) and answers my first research question, as we have seen that accuracy in pronunciation and FLA are, indeed, related.

The negative correlation between negative self-perception of their own pronunciation and pronunciation points to the fact that students have an accurate perception and have correctly assessed their English level in comparison to their peers, as also seen above. Those who believe they speak worse English, also report lower pronunciation scores.

RQ 2: Is accuracy in pronunciation associated with the student's will to communicate in the foreign language?

The negative correlation obtained from the pronunciation score, and the combination of the FLCA and OPA scores reveal that participants with higher pronunciation scores show a tendency to be more prone to speaking English in a classroom environment and outside of it. These findings give an answer to my second research question. As explained above, lower pronunciation levels tend to make students shy away from using the L2 to communicate. Furthermore, the correlation between anxiety scores and OPA suggests that those participants with higher anxiety levels will be less willing to communicate in English in any given environment. These findings support prior research on the topic (Amengual-Pizarro, 2017; Yang, 2012).

When correlating the pronunciation scores with the FLCA and OPA scores separately, the following results were found: the negative correlation obtained between the pronunciation and FLCA scores seems to indicate that students with lower pronunciation levels also feel less comfortable in the FL classroom because of it. However, the correlation with the OPA scores

was not significant enough to draw conclusions on how pronunciation levels affect out-of-the-classroom communication.

RQ 3: Are language anxiety levels and self-perception of competence in pronunciation connected?

The positive correlation between the anxiety and negative self-perception scores, showing that students with high anxiety scores also have a negative self-perception of their L2 use, solves my third research question. The lower participants perceive their English pronunciation level to be, the higher their reported anxiety level will be. This seems to indicate that low self-esteem or confidence in the L2 can be a trigger for FLA, and supports previous research on the topic stating that the close connection between anxiety and negative self-perception will inevitably affect communication in the L2 (Price, 1991; MacIntyre, et al., 1997; Szynszka, 2011). Likewise, the negative correlation obtained from the pronunciation and negative self-image scores shows that students with low pronunciation scores also report higher negative self-perception.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this Bachelor's Thesis was to study the connection between FLA and pronunciation level along with how self-perception of competence in pronunciation can influence FLA.

The study revealed that, in line with previous research, a relationship between accuracy in pronunciation and level of FLA does exist. Data from the study suggests that participants who received lower pronunciation scores also reported higher anxiety levels. It also seems to point to the fact that accuracy in pronunciation is associated with willingness to communicate, since participants with higher pronunciation scores tended to be more inclined to using English in any given environment. Lastly, data indicates that anxiety levels and self-perception of competence are connected, in that participants who perceive their pronunciation level to be low also have higher anxiety levels, regardless of their actual pronunciation level.

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## 8. APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1: Questionnaire*

#### ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

1. Name:
2. Birth Year:
3. Which language or languages do you speak at home? With who?
4. Are you taking or have you ever taken English as an extracurricular activity?  
For how long?  
Which activities did you focus on? (Grammar, reading, listening, speaking...)?
5. In comparison to your classmates, would you say your English level is high, medium or low?
6. How often do you use English (reading, podcasts, watching TV...) outside of the classroom?
  - ☐ Everyday
  - ☐ 1-2 times a week
  - ☐ 3-4 times a month
  - ☐ 1-2 times a month
  - ☐ Never
7. If you use English in activities outside of the classroom, do any of those activities have to do with speaking? (speaking to friends, video games, extracurriculars...)

Select an option:

1. When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a language problem like grammar or vocabulary.*			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. I do not think people around me judge or laugh at my pronunciation.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
3. I do not mind speaking English with an accent.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. I do not mind speaking English with native speakers.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. English oral exams intimidate me more than written tests.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. I often participate in class (all subjects).			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7. When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a pronunciation problem.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
8. I hardly ever participate in English class.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
9. I am as calm in English class as I am in other subjects.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
10. I am satisfied with my English pronunciation.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11. If I do not participate in English class, it is because I am not confident in my pronunciation.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. I do not mind it when the teacher corrects my mistakes.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. I get more nervous before a written exam than an oral exam.			
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree



14. I do not want to talk with native speakers because my English pronunciation is not good enough.*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15. I feel like my classmates have a higher level than me.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
16. I frequently participate in English class.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
17. If I do not participate in English class, it is because I am not confident in my grammar or vocabulary.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
18. I do not speak because I am afraid of being corrected.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19. I feel like I have a similar English level as my classmates.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
20. I feel like people around me laugh at or judge my pronunciation.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
21. I feel more tense and nervous in language class than in my other classes.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
22. My English pronunciation is not good enough.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
23. It is important for me to speak English without an accent.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

\*Questions from Zoss (2015)

With the following signature I authorize my answers to be used anonymously for university research purposes.

Student's signature

*Appendix 2: Test*A WEEKEND GETAWAY

After our last exam, my friends and I went on a little trip to an island in Spain. Although we were poor and didn't have much money, we found a nice, comfortable hotel at a very good price. We were all happy to get away for a couple of days. We went to the beach to do some water sports and even rented a boat. For lunch, we usually made pasta with some vegetables on the side and then bought dessert at a nearby coffee shop. At night, we went to a pub next to the hotel to grab some drinks. We didn't have many problems during our weekend getaway, but my friend Joe had to go to the hospital one day because he broke his ankle!

It was a really pleasant trip filled with wonderful memories.