Foreign Language Anxiety in in-Class Speaking Activities

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Two Learning Contexts in Comparison

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1. Introduction

"Speaking in the foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experience" (Young 1990: 539) and also "difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students seeking help at the Lsc[1]" (Horwitz et al. 1986: 126).

Starting from the concept that a foreign language process is an activity which goes beyond the mere memorization of linguistic structures, words and rules, the main intent of the present study is the description of foreign language learning as a process which affects directly the emotional sphere of a student. This involves the learner and his personality, emotions and experiences, all facets which in turn determine positive or negative attitudes toward the language studied or the practices used to learn it. In an attempt to establish to what extent speaking English in class is an activity feared by the students of this survey, I will describe the specific variables which contribute to arouse this feeling. Furthermore, recommendations will be provided to teachers and students in order to prevent or alleviate these worries.

Observing 100 Italian and Spanish university students of the English language, the study focuses on the main exposure variable of "time abroad" (i.e. in the foreign language environment) spent by L2[2] students. For this reason, on the one hand it examines a sample of forty-five Italian university students learning English in Italy (i.e. in this case the English classroom was the main opportunity to be exposed to the L2) and on the other hand it analyses a group of fifty-five university–level Spanish Erasmus subjects, studying English in Great Britain, a country where English is the source language.

Does living in the L2 country contribute to heighten the sense of ease felt at the moment of speaking the foreign language in class?

A questionnaire was used based on Young's questionnaire (1990) of sources of anxiety over L2 speaking. This provided an opportunity of measuring students' anxiety during certain in-class practices as well as analysing their opinions about teachers' behaviours and characteristics which might contribute to creating a comfortable environment in the foreign language class. In order to investigate more deeply into learners' personality aspects, some background questions were added, regarding students' gender, self-perception and interest in the English language. Moreover, the survey has turned out to be qualitative to some extent as

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[1] LSC is the Learning Skill Centre at the University of Texas.
[2] "Foreign" language is not intended to be in contrast with "second" language. Wherever a person is learning a language as a result of living in the country where it is spoken, or learning it with an instructor in a classroom, we will use the term "foreign" language learning.

the students were asked to explicitly write and describe their feelings when they are in the situation of speaking English in front of the class.

The present work is organized as follows: a detailed description of Foreign Language Anxiety among students is first given, gradually moving towards the problem of speaking anxiety in the classroom. Reading through the existing literature on this area of linguistics has been indispensable to me in order to shape the actual form of this research and to build the structure and contents of the questionnaire administrated to the students. Students' anxiety will be analysed in its components, symptoms and effects, as it resulted from the theory research and from the students' perspectives.

The results show that in-class speaking activities are fairly stressful practices for the students surveyed in the present research. Reasons for this fear might be attributed to the anxiety about being "over- exposed" in front of others (communicative apprehension), fear of making mistakes which may threaten the students' self-esteem or harsh methods of the instructor for correcting errors. Interestingly and in contrast to my expectations, the speaking anxiety levels of Italian students of English in Italy and Spanish students of English in Great Britain were approximately the same, possibly because of the limited number of the classes observed, inevitably too closely linked to the teaching methodologies of those teachers and the general environment in those two particular classes.

However, as the students' comments about the instructors' attitudes in the L2 are very clear and homogenous in the groups, they may provide good advice to any person involved in a teaching activity. Being friendly, with a good sense of humour, by giving the possibility to work in small groups and to practice the foreign language are activities that make learners comfortable and more willing to participate. Students and teachers should be aware of the possibility of the existence of such a debilitating feeling and should be open to constant collaborations in order to put learners in a more positive condition to take all the advantages from the foreign language learning process. And it needs to be remembered that it is a complex phenomenon, but one that is useful and enjoyable for many people.

1.1 Motivation

The reason for choosing this topic have been suggested by my personal experience as an Italian student of the English language in three different countries.

I started studying in Italy, in Ragusa, a small town where the exposure to English is a rare event except for some contexts (e.g. English language courses at school or University). Then I moved to Norway, to Oslo, in order to attend an English language Master. Norway is a

country in which English may be considered a semi-official language, present in many working sectors, on television (i.e. high occurrence of movies in British [3] or American English, the presence of several American TV programs). If they find themselves in the situation of communicating in English, many Norwegians try to communicate in this language even if they do so with some difficulties. These were all aspects that, in my case, made a big difference in terms of English language exposure, compared to my Italian experience. As a Master student of the English language in Norway I was fully aware of my limited knowledge of English compared to my Norwegian classmates.

I would ask: if you have ever been to Italy, how many Italians have you met speaking English fluently? I am fairly sure that when you met one, you were quite surprised.

What I experienced in Italy is that only a few people have a good knowledge of English, and even if they have it because they studied this language at school or university, they prefer using Italian. From my point of view, the reason for this behaviour is unclear. Probably it might be due to the proud character of Italians and Latin people in general, which makes them unwilling to expose themselves and reveal possible weaknesses or mistakes in social contexts even when interacting with foreigners in a foreign language.

As for myself, I felt the same discomfort. When I was in Italy and I had to speak English with foreigners or people more competent than myself in the language (i.e. with my teacher in my English language classroom) I felt insecure and very embarrassed. I was conscious of my weaknesses in the field of grammar and vocabulary and the fact of not being used to pronouncing sounds different from the Italian ones made me very nervous.

After my experience in Norway, I studied for one year in Great Britain as an Erasmus student. During this academic year, I was exposed to English language every day both at university and in my daily life, thus in formal and informal situations. Being in contact with native speakers, listening to radio and watching TV indeed helped me develop my English language skills and make me feel more confident when the moment came to speak English in the classroom. I felt rather relaxed and inclined to risk more, using the new words and expressions I heard from my British friends, and I even tried to imitate English speakers' intonation and pronunciation.

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[3] Aware of the distinction that several researchers (Tottie, 2002; Algeo, 1988) have made between British and American English, in the following research I will retain the exposure to British and American languages indistinctly as an efficient tool to improve English language skills.

Consequently, I became interested in finding out whether other students of English as a second language, both in Italy and in Great Britain (i.e., the target language country, in this case) experienced the same feelings and fears when speaking in class.

Is living in the L2 environment a predictor for the anxiety felt by students at the moment of speaking in the foreign language class? Which are the factors that produce this feeling? Which are the in class speaking activities which provoke anxiety in students? Such questions will be the main concerns of the present research.

2. Theoretical background

The purpose of the present chapter is to introduce the reader to the wide area of foreign language anxiety research by explaining some of the fundamental concepts which constitute this field. Focusing in particular on foreign language *speaking* anxiety, numerous studies will be mentioned and even quoted as solid guidelines to the interpretation of the structure of the present study as well as of the method I have adopted. Analysing other researchers' findings has been essential to select the relevant questionnaire used in order to gauge the students' level of speaking anxiety. Moreover these have constituted good terms for comparison with the results of this survey.

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

The increasing cross-cultural relations among individuals in society create a need for people to communicate in languages different from their native tongue. Due to reasons such as business or the mere interest in a foreign culture the need to learn how to speak an L2 fluently, correctly and even in a short time is evident. As globalisation increases, people in most nations find themselves in the situation of speaking in front of others in an L2.

However, speaking in the foreign language, both in social and academic contexts, entails risk taking and seems to be a challenging activity, in which learners who are not fluent in the target language experience that they cannot fully express their personality, or their intelligence. Learners attempting to learn a foreign language have difficulties in relating to others, experiencing in some cases a sense of alienation or "cultural shocks" (Crookal & Oxford, 1991: 142).

For this reason the need for a systematic study of how people acquire a foreign language has arisen with origins in the second half of the 20th century.

Researchers have consistently described learning a foreign language as a complex process, which implies the study of a new grammar, pronunciation, memorization of new words; but first and foremost it tests the learner's ability in terms of his flexibility to take risks and making mistakes in front of other people. Over the years, the factors characterizing such processes have been clearly outlined: these factors may be strictly linguistic (e.g. grammar, syntax) or extra-linguistic such as socio-contextual (Schuman, 1978), the input received by the learner (Krashen, 1985).

Learners differ, in fact, along a series of parameters such as age (Lennberg, 1971), mother tongue, general ability, affective factors like motivation and *anxiety* (Kleinmann, 1977; Ely,

1986; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Price, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Aida, 1994). Many investigators have been focusing on this latter aspect, trying to determine the causes and effects which this has on learners (Chastain, 1975; Phillips, 1992; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Bailey & Nunan, 1996).

Attention has been drawn to the feelings of the students during their foreign language lectures. "I just know I have some kind of disability: I can't learn a foreign language no matter how hard I try" (Horwitz et al. 1986: 125) and also "I think my English level is not so good, so I am shy to talk English…I hate English very much because I think English is quite difficult to learn…" (Tsui, 1996: 145) are statements familiar to many foreign language students and teachers. Hence, for many researchers, one of the prerogatives has been the necessity to find teaching techniques and methods which help to lessen eventual feelings of tension (Krashen & Terrel, 1983; Crookall & Oxford, 1991; Young, 1991). It is important, in fact, that the instructor begins exploring instructional strategies that may overcome the student's feeling of inadequacy, confusion, and failure. High levels of anxiety may compromise negatively the forthcoming attitude toward the foreign language studied. Teachers should strengthen students' self esteem in their L2 ability via reassurance, empathy and even by encouraging realistic expectations regarding the time during which fluency in the target language may be acquired.

As confirmed by several surveys (Horwitz et al., 1986; Ely, 1986; Young, 1990; Price, 1991; Aida, 1994), one of the most anxiety-provoking activities in the foreign language is speaking. Unlike writing, where "[…] each writer can get on by himself, without disturbing the rest of the class, at his own speed." (Brown & Yule, 1983: 25) speaking is an activity which involves more than one person, and it tends to threaten one's public standing fairly easily (Tsui, 1996).

Intrinsic factors of speaking are intonation, pronunciation, fluency, all of which are absolutely important for many foreign language students. As Moore (1977: 107) has pointed out "[…] incorrect pronunciation, together with faulty speech melody and rhythm, immediately marks one as a foreigner."

2.1.1 Foreign Language Anxiety in early studies

Due to its emotional and psychological nature, foreign language anxiety was not easy to analyse in early studies. Studies conducted in the 1970s were, in fact, difficult to interpret because of inconsistent findings. At that time, Scovel (1978) in his attempt to clarify the available literature on anxiety and language acquisition pointed out the contradictory

conclusions which the other investigators were reporting. Probably due to the lack of adequate definitions and appropriate instruments used to measure anxiety[4], it was hard to establish a clear-cut relationship between anxiety and overall foreign language achievement.

On the one hand, some investigators found positive correlations between foreign language anxiety and proficiency (Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978). Kleinmann, in his study observed the behaviour of avoidance of certain English syntactic structures, using two groups of ESL[5] students: a group of native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese and one of native speakers of Arabic. He found out that students who experienced high level of "facilitating anxiety" tended to use those English structures which their native language peers avoided instead (e.g. the use of English passive forms by the Arabic student group).

On the other hand, negative connections were discovered (Chastain, 1975; Gardner, Smythe, Clement & Gliksman, 1976; McCoy, 1979; Lucas, 1984; Foss & Reitzel, 1988). Gardner et al. (1976) referring to what they termed "French Classroom Anxiety" described the debilitating effects of anxiety on an oral production test of Speech Skills. Hence, they claimed that, "[…] the most anxious students are less proficient in Speech Skills" (quoted in Bailey 1983: 68).

Surprisingly, even unstable or a total lack of relationships were identified between anxiety and Speech Skills (Hamayan, Genesee & Tucker, 1976; Swain & Burnaby, 1976). Swain and Burnaby, surveying a group of English children attending a full immersion of French, found a negative correlation between anxiety and one measure of the children's proficiency of French, but found no connections with any other proficiency measures.

2.1.2 Debilitating and Facilitating Anxiety

Two interesting definitions of anxiety have been given throughout the investigations. The first one, termed *facilitating anxiety,* is described as the positive force which may lead the student to become even more motivated for language learning. In this case, the subject deals with the task in a more rational way, attempting more interpretive messages. Alpert & Haber (1960) wrote an important paper in which the key point was the **"**description of a new achievement-anxiety scale which has been devised to indicate not only the presence of or absence of anxiety, but whether the anxiety facilitates or debilitates test performance" (Alpert

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[4] "[…] anxiety in itself is neither a simple nor a well understood psychological construct… it is perhaps premature to attempt to relate it to the global and comprehensive task of language acquisition." (Scovel 1978: 132).

[5] ESL: English as a Second Language.

& Haber, 1960: 207). Not all language researchers will term this feeling "anxiety". Terrell, for example, prefers calling it "attention" (Young, 1992).

By contrast, *debilitating anxiety* motivates the learner to withdraw from the language task and leads him to adopt avoidance behaviours (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Scovel, 1978). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), highly anxious students avoid conveying complex messages in the foreign language, or take more time to learn vocabulary items (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In addition, though anxious students tend to over study, their course grades often do not reflect that effort (Price, 1991). The present study will focus solely on debilitating anxiety.

2.1.3 Foreign Language Anxiety in later studies

Despite the discrepant perspectives reported above, almost all studies nowadays describe anxiety as an affective factor which mainly has a stable, *negative* impact at all stages of foreign language learning and production (Horwitz et al., 1986; Tobias, 1986; Price 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner 1991a; Phillips 1992; Aida, 1994; Ellis, 1994; Cheng, Y., Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). This might be due to the uniqueness of foreign language learning itself: students are required to acquire new linguistic rules and to perform in a language which they are still trying to master. Hence the occurrence of frequent mistakes may put them in vulnerable positions open to criticism and negative evaluations (Tsui, 1996: 155).

Language learners develop a new way of perceiving themselves in terms of thinking and acting; they develop a new language ego which "can easily create a sense of fragility, defensiveness, and a raising of inhibitions" (Brown, 1994: 22). There may be a sort of variance between the "true" self as known to the language learner and the more restricted self experienced in any language learning situations. The learner may enter into a profoundly unsettling psychosocial status which threatens his own sense of self and worldview (Guiora, 1983 quoted in Horwitz et al. 1986: 125). Several learners may feel that as they speak an L2 their own personality is reduced and even infantilized (Simensen, 2007).

Steinberg & Horwitz (1986) affirm that persons who usually perceive themselves as sociable and reasonably intelligent may experience difficulties when they have to communicate even basic concepts in the foreign language. Therefore, evidence does indicate that anxiety plays an important psychological role as language students are concerned.

Campbell & Ortiz (1991: 159) consider the level of language anxiety to be "alarming" among university students. Along similar lines, Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a) report that for many students the foreign language class may be the most

anxiety provoking: nervous students may have difficulties in listening comprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986), may be less likely to answer as volunteers in oral activities (Ely, 1986; Tsui, 1996) and may over-study in an effort to alleviate their worries (Horwitz et al., 1986).

2.1.4 Different perspectives: Trait, State and Situation Specific Anxiety

Over the years, foreign language anxiety research has been conducted from different points of views. On the one side investigators have attributed this tension to the general personality of the subject and his way of behaving in various situations. On the other hand, the situation has been identified as being the cause for the students 'anxiety. In this respect, three main approaches have been clearly outlined by MacIntyre & Gardner (1991b) in one of their papers. The first approach considers language anxiety as a *"Trait Anxiety"*. Initially identified by Cattell & Scheier (1961, in Gaudry, Vagg & Spielberger, 1975), Trait Anxiety was later developed by Spielberger and his colleagues, in an attempt to measure it and to evaluate its possible relations with State Anxiety, an emotional state related to the here and now experience. State Anxiety is a sense of uneasiness that may be experienced at a particular moment in time, as a response to a definite situation, for example, prior to an examination (Spielberger, 1983). Devices to measure both Trait and State Anxiety were formulated: one of these is the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) consisting of two 20-item self-report scales.

Through the examination of Australian students attending high school and university, it has been found that Trait Anxiety reflects the stable tendency of the person to respond with nervousness in any threatening situation. Subsequent studies (Young, 1990; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b) have confirmed such conceptualisation of trait anxiety. Spielberger (1983 in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b: 87) states that "Trait anxiety may be defined as an individual's likelihood of becoming anxious in any situation." adopting also avoidance behaviours (Eysenck 1979 in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b: 87). MacIntyre & Gardner (1991b: 87) describe this feeling as "general personality trait that is relevant across several situations".

The second type of perspective describes foreign language anxiety as "*State Anxiety*". People with a high level of Trait Anxiety (i.e. people who are anxious in general) are usually likely to get an increase of State Anxiety.

Last but not least, the third approach considers foreign language anxiety as a kind of "*Situation Specific Anxiety*" (Tobias, 1986; Young, 1991; Aida, 1994; Clement, Dornyei & Noels, 1994; Bailey & Nunan, 1996), originating from the occurrence of well-defined circumstances. "Studying anxiety means studying the interaction of the person in the situation producing that anxiety." (Endler, 1980): for some persons, for example, sitting written

examinations may be a stressful activity (Cheng, et al., 1999). For others, however, speaking in front of their peers in the classroom may cause a high level of anxiety (Price, 1991; Phillips, 1992).

In the present survey, I will proceed from this latter perspective, by focusing on the specific context of the classroom.

In comparison with Trait and State anxiety, the Situation Specific approach has rendered the most meaningful and consistent results and has the advantage of allowing investigators to probe various aspects of foreign language learning. Respondents may be asked, for instance, to attribute anxiety to particular sources, like former negative experiences, or their relationship with the language teacher, or certain activities like being corrected in front of the rest of the class (Young, 1990; Phillips, 1994), or answering as volunteers (Ely, 1986). Hence there is a need to treat this kind of apprehension as a problem related to the area of didactics, language teaching, rather than general psychology. There is a need to elaborate teaching approaches, practices, and materials that may help lessen the discomfort of students in their process of learning a foreign language (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Phillips, 1999).

Possible sources of anxiety in the foreign language classroom are reflected in the questionnaires which many researchers have elaborated. Gardner et al. (1976), have found the existence of what they called French Classroom Anxiety, based on self reports from one thousand high school students learning French. Subsequent studies have developed other scales, as the English Use Anxiety (Clément et al., 1977) or the English Test Anxiety (Clément et al., 1980). Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in order to capture specific reactions of beginner learners of Spanish. In the latter study, particular attention was given to the situation of speaking, as an activity which might easily induce anxiety. Students endorsed statements such as "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language" and showed disagreement with items like "I don't worry about making mistakes in language class".

A good contribution to the theory that explains the differentiation of language anxiety from other forms of apprehension has been offered by MacIntyre & Gardner (1989). In their study of French Classroom Anxiety, they propose that repeated negative experiences with the foreign language may produce elevations in the State Anxiety. After frequent occurrences of State Anxiety, associated with poor performances in the second language, anxiety becomes reliably related with the foreign language class, and distinguished by other contexts. Therefore anxious individuals may tend to be less interpretative in their comments (Horwitz et al., 1986), compared to the more relaxed students. They may experience difficulties with tasks

calling for short or intermediate memory (Tobias, 1986), or they may go "blank", feeling frustrated at not being able to say what they "knew" (Phillips, 1992). Self degradating thoughts (e.g. "I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am." (Horwitz et al., 1986) are also common, moving the focus of the students away from the learning task itself.

Thus, for all the reasons reported above, it becomes fairly understandable that foreign language anxiety can be distinguished from other academic anxieties, such those associated with science or mathematics (Horwitz et al., 1986). In the same way, instructors should not assume that students with high grades in other courses are not experiencing problems in learning a foreign language.

2.1.5 Components and sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

In the last decade, foreign language anxiety research has focused on the examination of the relationship between anxiety and learners' variables, often taking several directions. Investigations have been quantitative studies (Chastain, 1975; Gardner et al., 1976), focusing on the correlation between anxiety and language proficiency (Young, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) in written and oral tests and production. In MacIntyre and Gardner's study (1989) one hundred and four subjects were tested in two different groups. Employing nine scales, measuring various forms of anxiety, they conclude that production would suffer in those students with a high level of anxiety.

Other approaches to analysing these relationships have been offered by qualitative researches, which allow the investigator to observe the phenomena from the point of view of the learner. Founded on personal diaries or comments from students, it has been possible to gather important information, otherwise difficult to obtain through empirical studies. In Price's (1991) study, students of French were interviewed about their own experiences with foreign language classes, through direct questions, like "Can you tell me something about how you have felt during your language classes?" (Price, 1991: 103) or "What bothered (bothers) you the most about foreign language classes?". Important findings have been drawn from their answers. The subjects were frustrated with not being able to speak correctly, without any errors and with a "terrible" Texas accent (Price, 1991: 105). Afterwards, Phillips (1992) studied the affective reactions of high and low-ability students toward oral exams in the foreign language. The answers to the questions used for the investigation, indicated the negative attitudes toward the oral test. Students reported of "going blank" or feeling "tense" in this situation.

As we will understand in the course of the present thesis, foreign language anxiety is a complex process, sometimes difficult to describe in all its components. Scovel (1978: 134) points out, "[…] anxiety can be viewed, not as a simple unitary construct, but as a cluster of affective states, influenced by factors which are intrinsic and extrinsic to the foreign language learner…". External factors may be of different character: they could be, for instance, the relationship of the learner with his interlocutor (e.g. formal, informal) or the environment in which communication is taking place (e.g. a classroom, a public conference, a job interview). On the other hand, internal components may be psychological or emotional. They may be the shyness people experience in talking with others, or the embarrassment one has in interacting in public, for instance.

A clear and well established description of the components of foreign language anxiety has been outlined by Horwitz et al. (1986). In their study, considered by many researchers as one of the most reliable guidelines in this psycholinguistic area (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Aida, 1992; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999), Horwitz et al. (1986) identify three related types of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

2.1.5.1 Communication Apprehension

Described by Daly et al. (1997a: 21) as the "people's willingness to approach or avoid social interaction", *communication apprehension* is the fear an individual experiences in oral communication (Horwitz et al., 1986; Daly, 1991).

Since the focus of the present thesis is on speaking activities and on the embarrassment people tend to have when performing in a foreign language, I would like to describe this first aspect accurately.

Communication apprehension may occur in several situations: in using one's own mother tongue (L1) or in using a foreign language, or in both cases. It has been proved that persons who are usually talkative and relaxed in their L1 may become embarrassed or even silent when communicating in the foreign language (Lucas, 1984; Horwitz et al. 1986). Likewise vice versa: people who ordinarily express inhibition in L1 communication, become comfortable when using the second language, as they have the feeling that someone else is speaking. This last phenomenon may be explained in the same way as for those stutterers who are able to sing or act normally (Horwitz et al., 1986). Hence, the modes of behaviours outlined above lend support to the idea that foreign language anxiety is a kind of "situation specific tension".

Manifestations of communication apprehension in the ESL have been reported by Foss & Reitzel and Lucas (in Aida, 1994: 157), giving support to the idea that "[…] people experience anxiety and reluctance in communicating with other people or in expressing themselves in a foreign language in which they do not have a full competence" (Aida 1994: 157). Difficulties in speaking in groups or in pairs, in or out of the classroom are all "manifestations of communication apprehension" (Horwitz et al., 1986: 127).

Research has also consistently demonstrated the negative correlation between communicative apprehension and self-esteem (Daly et al., 1997a). Caccioppo, Glass & Merluzzi (1979) affirm that negative perceptions about the self are closely related with social anxiety[6]. Thus, anxious students tend to underestimate their ability to speak and they focus more on their failures instead of their successes in the foreign language. In a study conducted in 1985 McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond (in Aida, 1994) observe the self-perceived competence of Spanish speaking students receiving instruction in English. The conclusion is that highly communicative apprehensive students have lower levels of self-perception in English.

Very anxious students are more likely to avoid the foreign language class or to withdraw from courses with several communication demands (Ely, 1986; Phillips, 1992). They prefer "masslecture" (Daly et al., 1997a: 40) classes over smaller classes in order to be able to hide themselves in the back rows and to avoid any possible involvements in those class activities which may put the students "on the spot" in front of their peers.

Some investigators have attributed the origin of such anxiety to genetic factors (Kagan & Reznick, 1986) which might be transmitted from parent to child; others have attempted to see whether there are gender differences concerning apprehension. The result is that only a slight correlation exists, and it is more consolidated among female subjects (Gilkinson, 1942; Friedrich, 1970).

Through studies, communication apprehension has been defined by different terms such as, shyness (Buss 1984 in Daly et al., 1997a), reticence (Tsui, 1996), and *social anxiety* (Schlenker & Leary, 1985). In a study carried out by Schlenker & Leary (1985: 171) it has been claimed that "social anxiety occurs when people are motivated to create a desired impression on an audience but doubt they will do so" for some reason. This might be due to lack of knowledge about certain subjects, or, referring to the foreign language, to the low level of certain skills: the lexicon, pronunciation, or grammar, for example. Consequently,

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[6] The construct of "social anxiety" has been generated by Leary (1983) and it is used in the present research with the same meaning of communication apprehension.

anxious learners attempt to avoid topics that might reveal their ignorance, and try to interact "…in a passive yet pleasant fashion, holding up his or her end of conversation…contributing little and taking minimal social risks." (Schlenker & Leary, 1985: 183) preventing any bad impressions. Socially anxious individuals tend to use meaningless expressions which show one is getting information from the conversation: for example, 'uh, huh' (Schlenker & Leary , 1985: 183) or they simply just smile a lot.

In the foreign language class, apprehensive students are unwilling to talk in front of the others and they tend to wait until the end of the lecture to ask a question, not raising their hand, and hoping that somebody else asks the question (Daly et al., 1997a). The same students may also engage in modes of behaviour that tend to vary the speed of speech when in front of others, compared to when there is no audience (Paivio1965 in Daly et al., 1997a).

All these facets, in turn, are manifestations of the debilitating effects of anxiety on the learning process that is affected both quantitatively (Horwitz et al., 1986) and qualitatively (Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft & Evers, 1987).

2.1.5.2 Test Anxiety

The second component, identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) as a characteristic of foreign language anxiety is *Test Anxiety*. Described by Horwitz et al. (1986) as "a type of anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" and by Sarason (1978) as "the tendency to view with alarm the consequences of inadequate performance in an evaluative situation", test anxiety has involved several researchers through the years (Doris & Sarason, 1955; Wine, 1971; Sarason, 1984; MacIntyre & Gardner., 1989).

Originators of test anxiety theory are Mandler & Sarason (1952), who developed a 37 item Test Anxiety Questionnaire (TAQ) in order to measure the self-oriented responses experienced by students prior to and during examinations, evaluative and stressful situations. They have found that high levels of test anxiety have debilitating effects on students' task performance. Highly test-anxious subjects have the tendency of drawing their attention inward, to self deprecatory thoughts and worries about the performance, instead of focusing more fully on the task itself. These findings lend support to Marlett & Watson's assertion (1952): "The high-test anxious person spends a part of his task time doing things which are not task oriented." Along similar lines, Sarason (1984) describes test anxiety as produced by "intrusive thoughts", like the insecurity of responding adequately, which lessen the attention toward the actual task thus causing a poor performance.

Referring to the context of a foreign language class, where quizzes and tests are frequent, highly test-anxious students will experience several difficulties. In her questionnaire about foreign language anxiety in speaking, Young (1990: 543) inserts items such as "I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up." This was formulated in order to observe any sense of tension in evaluative situations. The result is that 51% of the subjects express agreement with this statement.

The anxiety experienced in test situations has also been related to the more general anxiety felt on other occasions (Gordon & Sarason, 1955), being described as a personality trait rather than as a feeling due to the specific situation.

Further causes of test anxiety have been outlined by McKeachie et al. (1955) and Horwitz et al. (1986): these could be, for instance, the high expectations or motivation of some students for achieving a good grade in the course. In a test situation the student inevitably encounters difficulties and demanding obstacles which may increase his tension. Thus the student may become frustrated rather than rational towards the task. Even the manner in which students perceive their L2 teacher is worthy of attention: "student's anxiety in the testing situation derives from his helplessness in relation to the instructor's power" (McKeachie et al., 1955: 97).

Since one of the roles of the teacher is augmenting students' L2 skills, by assigning a low grade, the instructor can preclude the learner from achieving important aims, such as the prestige of college graduation or admission to certain universities. For this reason, it is relevant that the student perceives the instructor as a person whose role is not punitive but helpful as the learning process is concerned. Horwitz et al. (1986), Brandl (1987 in Onwuengbuzie et al., 1999) and Young (1990) report that anxiety is provoked when the teacher corrects students' errors in a non-supportive way.

2.1.5.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

The third main component identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) as relating to foreign language anxiety is the *Fear of Negative Evaluation*. Watson & Friend (1969: 448) define this factor as the "apprehension of other's evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively." Fear of negative evaluation differs from test anxiety in that it is a tension which is not limited to testing situations; rather, it may occur in any social, evaluative context, like a job interview or speaking in public (Horwitz et al., 1986). Interestingly, subjects with high

FNE[7] do not necessarily evaluate themselves negatively. However, when interacting with others they tend to avoid initiating conversations and they give a minimum contribution to the conversation (Cheek & Buss, 1981).

In the case of foreign language learners these students may reduce participation in those activities which could force them to be more exposed to others' judgments (Aida, 1994), like giving volunteer answers or talking about personal opinions (Ely, 1986). Therefore the classroom is a breeding ground for fear of negative evaluation, with instructors as critical evaluators.

In spite of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation constitute fundamental components of foreign language anxiety; Horwitz et al. (1986) further suggest that foreign language anxiety should be more than these three parts. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceive language anxiety as "…a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." (Horwitz et al., 1986: 128). When performing in the foreign language, the subject enters into a completely different dimension, encountering difficulties, especially if the target language is not yet well mastered. In this case, the subject is in fact more exposed to criticism and humiliation than in other courses like mathematics or history, since the probability of making mistakes is much higher. Even if the learner provides the right answer in terms of the content, he may get the pronunciation or the grammar wrong (Tsui, 1996).

 MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a: 296) find that "For many students, language class can be more anxiety-provoking than any other course that they take". Follow-up studies support similar findings (Price, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Aida, 1994; Bailey, 1996). As a consequence, many nervous students prefer quitting the language programme as soon as their requirement is met (Young, 1999). Otherwise, they continue attending the course, even if frustrated by negative thoughts which affect their performance in the language. Students commonly report that they "know" a certain grammatical rule, but they "forget" it at the moment of the test (Horwitz et al., 1986: 126); Price (1991) describes some manifestations of language anxiety, like panic, indecision, anger, and a sense of reduced personality.

All the behaviours and fears described in the present section move the learner away from participation necessary to improve the language skills. When students provide comments, or collaborate with the teacher and the other students, they get involved with the elaboration of

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[7] FNE: Fear of Negative Evaluation.

comprehensible input and output, which are indispensable to language acquisition (Swain, 1985). However, making the students active in classroom activities is not easy. Simply encouraging students to take more risks is not always successful. Instead it is essential to make them "…more psychologically comfortable and safe in their learning environment" (Ely, 1986: 23), and to lessen any sources of stress. Once this is achieved, students will be more inclined to take risks during classroom activities.

As we will understand in the course of the present research, the explanation of these factors at this point is indispensable for a full comprehension of foreign language anxiety in in-class speaking activities. In this way in fact, it will be possible to interpret the specificity of L2 speaking anxiety within the complex phenomenon of foreign language anxiety with which it shares several of the components already outlined. In addition, numerous factors explained above will be endorsed by the items of the questionnaire[8] which I have used in order to measure foreign language anxiety in in-class speaking activities.

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[8] The questionnaire of my research is based on Young's (1990) one. This researcher developed a questionnaire necessary to observe the level of foreign language anxiety in speaking among secondary school and university-level Spanish students.

2.2 Speaking Anxiety in the L2 classroom

2.2.1 Introduction

The present study aims to shed light on any possible anxiety felt by students at the moment of speaking during the L2 class. If this fear is existent in the students interviewed the question is asked: which in-class activities make them particularly uncomfortable? Moreover, does living for a while in the target language country help students to reduce this discomfort?

Many researchers have supported the idea that communicating in the foreign language class may be a traumatic experience causing feelings of fear (Beebe, 1983; Lucas, 1984; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 1989; Phillips, 1992). Ely (1986), MacIntyre & Gardner, (1989), Campbell (1991), Price (1991), Aida (1994) claim that speaking in the target language seems the most threatening aspect of foreign language learning and that the lack of oral skills constitutes serious problems to language learners. Although students show most interest in learning to communicate orally in the foreign language (Phillips, 1991), their anxieties may play debilitating roles. Labov (1969 in Tsui, 1996: 156) affirms that speaking in class is experienced by students as "high-risk" and "low-gain".

In their review of the literature with regard to anxiety and language learning, MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a), observing a sample of thirty-nine students of French, attempt to collect students' reports about positive or negative experiences with the foreign language class. They conclude that the dominant themes of the essays concerned comments on speaking and comprehension activities. Among these, over 87% of the students who write about anxiety-arousing experiences, recall situations involving speaking activities. Moreover, the study supports the idea that people with a high level of anxiety in French, often performs more poorly than their more relaxed colleagues.

As a matter of fact, one of the main problems of speaking anxiety is the negative influence which it has on the L2 performances and on the attitude toward the foreign language tasks. Avoidance behaviours may put the student in the condition of excluding himself from conversations and interactions with people of different cultures and languages, because they do not share a common lingua franca.

Attention has been paid to the correlation between foreign language speaking anxiety and the source and target cultures in various studies. Interestingly, in fact, anxiety in speaking an L2 has turned out to be more frequent in some cultural settings than in others. From an

investigation carried out by Lucas (1984) on communication apprehension in the Japanese society and schools, it has been found that "Japan is the culture in which communication apprehension is most common" (Lucas, 1984: 594). A valid explanation to this may be provided by Japanese society itself. In a country which discourages the expression of open emotions and anxieties, and in which the use of language for reasons of persuasion is considered poor policy, it is not surprising that Japanese students get worried about speaking English with native speakers, or in the classroom. Furthermore and surprisingly, speech communication is not included in any curriculum of Japanese higher education system, except for a few schools. As reported by the English teachers interviewed in Lucas's study, over two thirds of the students are unwilling to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes.

Along similar lines, Aida (1994) contributes to the study of speaking anxiety among students of a very difficult language such as Japanese. The originality of her research lies in the observation of anxiety experienced in learning a non-Western language. As a matter of fact, most studies of language anxiety have concerned Western languages, like Spanish, English, French and German, and little attention has been paid to languages like Korean, Japanese or Arabic. As a Japanese educator, Aida conducted the study with ninety-six subjects who were enrolled in the second-year of Japanese I at the University of Texas in Austin. The main purpose has been to verify whether Horwitz et al.'s (1986) conceptualisation of foreign language anxiety, as constituted by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, was applicable to students of Japanese.

Employing the FLCAS[9] and a background questionnaire, the research confirms that anxiety is a pervasive phenomenon, with a high degree in speaking (i.e. communication apprehension) and failure of failing the class. Items 3, 13, and 20 (Aida, 1994: 160) are indicative of speaking anxiety, proving the reluctance of students regarding the participation in conversation, essential for the L2 improvement. In the subsequent analysis, exposure to Japanese culture and people turned out to be a factor of group difference. Interestingly it was found that the group of students who had been in Japan had a lower level of anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

2.2.2 Sources of speaking anxiety in the L2 classroom

There are several sources of speaking anxiety in the foreign language class; some may be associated with the student's personality, the specific context where L2 is learned, the teacher, or the instructional practice. Anxiety may also arise from certain speaking activities

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[9] FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) measures anxiety mainly related to speaking activities.

experienced by the learner. In the present research a detailed description of such variables will be provided.

2.2.2.1 Gender

In the present study, the relationship between gender and foreign language anxiety will be investigated. In particular, gender as a factor will be analysed referring to certain speaking activities in the L2 class, and to students' self perceptions of their English language oral skills.

In a small number and with inconsistent findings, former research has considered and studied the possibility that gender might be a possible source of anxiety in the L2 (Campbell & Shaw, 1994, in Campbell, 1999; Krohne et al., 2001). Describing and observing individual differences (i.e. nationality and gender) under stressful situations, Krohne et al. (2001: 125) report evident disparities between men and women in relation to "cognitive responses to an aversive situation". They found that women revealed more "vigilance" in their attitudes than men did, while men manifested more avoidance behaviour in anxiety-arising situations.

A detailed analysis of gender as one of the sources of anxiety in the foreign language classroom has been carried out by Campbell (1999). Interestingly, she notices that no significant differences existed between men and women in relation to speaking anxiety at the beginning of a two week language course. Differences in percentage were found only at the end of the course. In that case, for speaking, females' anxiety increased less than 1%, whereas males' anxiety rose approximately 13%. The same occurs for reading and writing. Moreover, listening activities were the most "dreaded" ones by both males and females.

Comparable results had previously been obtained by Campbell & Shaw (1994 in Campbell, 1999). Gender itself was not related to anxiety at the beginning of an L2 course; gender differences were found only in correlation to the time of survey administration. That means that the level of anxiety in males and females was considerably different after 60 hours of instruction, when the survey was administered. In that study men turned out to be more anxious than women.

Aida (1994) reports no significant gender difference in the anxiety analysis. In her research, gender and anxiety are observed as the independent variables in relation to the final course grade, a dependent variable. The result is that gender had an important effect on course grades, where women scored higher than men. There was no significant gender-anxiety interaction effect on course grades. On the whole, among both males and females, those students who were highly anxious received a lower grade than the more relaxed students.

Horwitz (1988) is interesting that it concerns certain beliefs about the foreign language learning process that students tend to hold, even with varying degrees of validity. The statement "Women are better than men at learning foreign languages" (Horwitz, 1988: 287) yielded the conclusion that students do not support this belief.

In the light of the findings above, the present survey will attempt to analyse whether gender is indeed one of the possible parameters affecting levels of anxiety in speaking activities in the L2 classroom.

2.2.2.2 Negative self perception and low self esteem

Experiences of speaking anxiety and foreign language anxiety in general have been considered also in terms of cognitive interference generated by self-related cognition (Tobias, 1986). The study of learners' opinions about language learning constitutes an important area of enquiry and will be observed in this paper.

Anxious learners with regard to speaking continue to think about their learning difficulties and, distracted from negative thoughts, cannot manage to concentrate on the language task. Compared to the less anxious students in the classroom, highly anxious learners engage in rumination over self degradation or poor performance, which considerably restrict their ability to elaborate the information received in the class (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Daly (1997a) states that anxious learners tend to have a more negative self perception and tend to underestimate their quality of speaking ability. MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a) based on the reports of thirty nine adult L2 students, analysed the perceptions which these subjects had about foreign language classes. Students were asked to rate their abilities in speaking, listening, writing and reading in the L2 using a questionnaire made of six anxiety scales and four portions: "Essay", "Can Do", Production Tasks" and "Anxometers". The result was that 87% of the students perceived speaking as the most anxiety-arousing experience; in addition, a significant difference was found for the self rated speaking ability, with those learners writing a relaxed report, perceiving themselves as more proficient than the anxious group.

Young (1999) confirms that anxiety arousal may be associated to self related thoughts of failure and negative self perception about the subject's own L2 capacity. Thus, it is not surprising that learners consider speaking in front of other people one of the most common sources of anxiety, especially if proficiency in the foreign language is perceived as limited (Young, 1999). It would seem, then, that students who begin with a self-perceived low ability level in the foreign language class are perfect candidates for language anxiety. The relation between anxiety, cognition and behaviour is likely to be cyclical, in which one affects the

other (Leary, 1990). For instance, answering a question in the foreign language may be a stressful activity; worry and anxiety make the student concentrate on negative thoughts and rumination. Hence, the cognitive performance will suffer since the student cannot focus on the task and the performance will not be as good as expected. Again, self deprecation will arise and it will damage the performance even more.

For these reasons, considering the debilitating role that negative self perceptions may play in learners' behaviour sometimes and considering that changing a person's self perception of L2 ability is not easy, the aim of teachers should be to encourage more self confident language students focusing their attention on positive experiences in the second language, rather than on negative ones.

Similar to negative experiences, the low self-esteem of a student toward L2 (Cheng et al., 1999; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Young, 1999) could be identified as another source of speaking anxiety. With respect to this topic, Horwitz et al. (1986) points out how the foreign language learning process might be a constant threat to the personality of the learner. In this case, the learner's possibility to express himself in the L2 is fairly limited compared to his mother tongue. As for the question "I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am", 38% of the students of Horwitz's investigation agree with the statement (Horwitz et al., 1986).

It might be possible that among highly anxious students, those with generally high self-esteem might be handling anxiety better than those with low self-esteem. Greenberg and his colleges (1992: 913), in an attempt to elaborate a theory of terror management, suggest that "self-esteem serves an anxiety-buffering function". It seems that people with the will to maintain a positive self-image are protected by self-esteem, against any type of anxiety-threat. Foss and Reitzel (1988: 440) claim that "perception of the self plays a key role in how students approach the acquisition and use of a second language."

An interesting contribution to the description of the negative thoughts of language students in the classroom has been offered by Crookall & Oxford (1991). These researchers affirm that hindered by the limited communicative competence in the L2, the learner may experience "cultural shocks" (Little 1984 in Crookal et al., 1991: 142) by incurring misunderstanding with his interlocutors, with the need to "re-learn the conventions which surround simple daily events" (Crookall & Oxford, 1991: 142).

2.2.2.3 Competitiveness

Several investigators have identified competitiveness as playing an important role to determine students' speaking anxiety. In his qualitative analysis of ten diary-studies, Bailey (1983) observes such a factor with attention. In a tendency to compare himself to the rest of the students in the classroom, the anxious subject undervalues his own preparedness or language skills, over-thinking about the eventual negative results which may derive from his poor performance. The competitive self-image described by Bailey (1983: 97) may derive from other personality variables like the desire to out-perform other language learners, or the desire to gain the teacher's approval, even overcoming his expectations in the language.

For a number of learners, the worry about derision and peers' laughter turned out to be causes of absence in the foreign language class and reticence at the moment of answering (McCoy, 1979).

The British psychologist Moore (1977) who moved to Denmark to assume a post at the University of Aarhus wrote in his diary about the restricted communicative ability he experienced in the oral language lesson. For him those classes have been sources of anxiety. Hence he claims: "My experience has shown me how communication failure…can produce mystification, frustration, and many counterproductive emotional and behavioural responses" (Moore, 1977: 110).

In this respect, Walsleben reports (in Bailey, 1983) about the sense of competition she felt as a graduate student, during Persian language classes. Considering herself incapable of being one of the less fluent students in the class, she found it impossible to compete with her more proficient classmates. For this reason, she writes:

> Three of the more voluble students delighted in "racing" each other to see who
> could repeat the choral drills first and loudest. My anxiety level
> increased daily and I developed a feeling of frustration and incompetence which
> was only intensified by my wanting so very much to speak the language (ibid., p. 15)

Evidence in favour of Bailey, Moore and Walsleben has been given by Palacios (1998). By surveying Spanish university students, he concludes that low levels of anxiety are associated with a lack of competition among the students in the classroom.

Thus, it is possible to understand that creating a low anxiety classroom atmosphere should be one of the major tasks for language instructors. A variety of techniques have been elaborated in order to deal with personal and interpersonal anxiety. Researchers such as

Young (1991) explain that if students become aware of their fears about language learning, they will be capable of coping with anxiety-arousing situations in more rational ways.

2.2.2.4 Attitudes toward the L2

In the field of personality research, considerable surveys have been conducted on the importance of attitudes and motivations in foreign language learning (Gardner et al., 1976; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Research has proven that favourable orientation in learning a foreign language may stem from the emotional involvement of the learner with the other language community and culture, or from the interest in the language itself (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993) or for some practical reasons as finding a job. Hence, on the one hand researchers have been defined motivation as "integrative" and on the other hand as "instrumental" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 in Oller et al., 1980b; Ely, 1986).

In the present paper attention will be given to "integrative orientation", to the interest and enjoyment experienced by students for a second language. At the moment of speaking, this will be analysed in relation to the possible level of anxiety felt by learners in foreign language classes. Do students interviewed like the L2? If the answer is yes, are these students anxious when speaking in the L2 classroom?

Favourable attitudes towards the foreign language may imply a positive involvement in the L2 learning process, encouraging frequent contact with native speakers of the other language, active participation in the L2 learning situations (i.e. in class activities in the foreign language class), exposure to the L2 itself (watching television in the other language, or travelling to the TL country, for example), all of which are indispensable activities for the improvement of one's own L2 skills (Gardner et al., 1976; McCoy, 1979).

Speculations about the relationship between integrative motivation and L2 achievement have been made (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, in Gardner et al., 1976) leading to the conclusion that motivational variables are powerful predictors of second language learning success (Gardner et al., 1976; Johnson & Krug, 1980). Once a student perceives his L2 to be developed, his sense of insecurity and anxiety in the L2 will tend to decrease, both inside and outside the classroom (Bailey, 1983; Ellis, 1984; Horwitz et al., 1986; Skehan, 1989).

Students interviewed by Horwitz (1988: 290) confirm the hypothesis that learners' interest and motivation for the subject studied is a relevant matter, endorsing the statement "I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better." Being attracted by the sounds of a foreign language, by the desire to have friends of the other language may be valid

reasons for participating in L2 activities as well as possible, in order to acquire the fluency which many students see as very important to communicate with foreigners (Horwitz, 1988).

Another factor worth considering as regards the development of attitudinal behaviour may be the cultural milieu in which the learner lives (Gardner et al., 1976). From my personal point of view it could be possible that students living in the TL country may increase their positive attitude toward the L2, as contact with the other culture and native speakers is more frequent. Moreover, the cultural milieu influences the types of skills acquired (Gardner et al., 1976); that is, acquiring a foreign language in informal contexts (as talking with native speakers, or watching television in the L2) will differ from the acquisition of various structural features of the language, such as grammar, vocabulary, etc acquired in the classroom (Gardner et al., 1976).

Aware of the findings outlined above, the present research will attempt to observe students' attitudes toward the English language as possible predictors of the students' feeling in the L2 classroom. This feeling will be also the object of comparison of students of English in Italy and students of English in the United Kingdom, country in which exposure to the target language may be a good source of curiosity and interest toward English language and its people.

2.2.2.5 Negative experiences

Former negative experiences the learner has had in the course of the L2 learning may constitute a further source of speaking anxiety.

In a qualitative study based on interviews with highly anxious students, Price (1991) got gradually more interested in students' reluctance to speak French. The technique of the interview enabled the researcher to get close the learners' personal points of view regarding foreign language learning processes and L2 class experiences. As the students explain their feelings, it is clear that many of them "hated" the class or they write how "awful" they felt (Price, 1991: 103). Due to the fear of a negative evaluation by the language teacher and to the classmates' derision, students may experience problems when performing orally, especially in novel, ambiguous, evaluative situations (Lucas, 1984; Daly, 1991). Joan, one of the students interviewed by Price describes her numerous efforts at accomplishing her French language requirement. Before the course started, she was initially enthusiastic. She was, however, terrified when her language instructor came to the class "speaking French a mile a minute." (Price, 1991: 104). From that time onwards, she failed all the tests she had in that language, even during other French courses for which she was enrolled.

The learner's experience in acquiring each of the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, writing and reading) has triggered the interest of researchers such as Cheng (1999). Hence he claims that the learner's "history of success and failure in performing each skill might lead to differentiated attitudes, emotion and expectations about each of the language skills" (Cheng, 1999: 438).

In the light of this explanation, it is easy to understand why some students feel more anxious in speaking the L2 than in writing or reading activities (Young, 1990). Fifty-percent of Koch & Terrell's students (1991) report oral skits and oral presentations in front of the others as very stressful and embarrassing in their Natural Approach classes.

Apart from the difficulties originated sometimes from the language skill itself which may discourage the learner, negative experiences may stem from the teacher, the methods he adopts and the relation he establishes with his students (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Being friendly, having a good sense of humour, being relaxed and patient, telling students that everyone makes mistakes are all qualities of a good teacher. These may make learners comfortable in the foreign language class and that may encourage students to see the L2 class as a positive experience and environment in which to learn (Young, 1990). It is important for the teacher giving his students constant reinforcements and help develop more realistic expectations about the L2 (Young, 1991).

For this purpose, Krashen (in Horwitz, 1990) exhorts language instructors to share with their students the experiences they had as language learners. Perceiving the teacher as a successful language learner, students may get aware of the fact that negative experiences of failing exams or oral tests, or making errors or feeling anxious when speaking an L2 are normal experiences, indispensable and unavoidable in order to learn a foreign language. Problems occur when the instructor's belief about his role in the class is far removed from that of a person who should create a relaxed atmosphere in the class. As for the Audio-lingual[10] Method (Young, 1991), where the teacher behaves as a drill sergeant, many instructors believe they have to correct every single error making the student constantly anxious as if living in a minefield. Brown and Yule (1983: 53) report "…the last thing a

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[10] This is a teaching method based on behaviorist theory, which recognizes *reinforcements* as fundamental to develop an L2. Starting from the idea that there is no explicit grammar instruction, the instructor presents new forms in a systematic way, until the learner will use it spontaneously. In this case, the teacher is expecting a particular response and not providing the correct response will result in a student receiving negative feedback.

teacher should be thinking of is correcting that student's pronunciation or intonation." when a student is trying to formulate a sentence in the L2. In that case, the learner may forget or go blank about what he is intending to say, withdrawing into self doubt which lead him to consider the foreign language as a negative experience to be avoided as soon as possible (Horwitz et al., 1986). And these are modes of behaviour which no language instructor would like to see in his students.

If students believe that they must acquire a perfect accent and pronunciation, similar to native speakers, they start worrying when they realize that it is almost impossible to acquire these in a short time (Horwitz, 1988; Cenoz & Lecumberri, 1999).

Aware of the significant role attributed by students to a correct pronunciation, Cenoz and Lecumberri (1999) conducted a study with eighty-six university students, native speakers of Basque and Spanish and learning English. The aim of these researchers has been to observe whether beliefs and attitudes toward the acquisition of English pronunciation and accents were consistently independent of the students' first languages. Due to the lack of correspondence between sounds and spelling the students surveyed were highly concerned about the difficulties which English pronunciation generates with its vowels, consonants and intonation. Students making errors of intonation in the foreign language may easily run into misunderstandings with their interlocutors.

Interestingly, referring to pronunciation, researchers have pointed out how this may reflect the willingness to belong to some groups instead of others: "One natural way of showing which of these groups we are loyal is through our speech" (Labov 1966: 487, quoted in Stevik, 1976: 52). Similar remarks were made by Rivers (1968, quoted in Stevick, 1976: 132) explaining that during one period of English history, no gentlemen learning French at that time "would stoop to adopt the effeminate and obviously degenerate way of speaking that is used by French people", since this was considered a threat to the speaker and listener's identity. If did in fact happen, then it was tantamount to being loyal to a dangerous group not your own.

Stevick (1976) reports the example of her daughter, a learner of the French language. Although eager and able to speak French "so it could sound like the voice on the tape" (Stevick, 1976: 52), she was unwilling to sound unacceptable to her classmates. For this reason, she restricted herself to speaking as the others did in her classroom.

In the light of the observations described above, it seems possible to affirm that when the classroom is the only context to learn a foreign language and to compare one's own abilities to the others' around you, ways of behaviour which reflects Stevick's affirmations may tend

to occur. On the other hand, if the student is learning the foreign language in the TL country, he may be more inclined to acquire the pronunciation and accents of L2 native speakers, who are from outside of the language class group. This is a strategy recognized by a great number of students as indispensable and helpful in order to gain a better fluency in a foreign language (Suter, 1976; Horwitz, 1988; Cenoz & Lecumberri, 1999).

2.2.2.6 Fear of taking risks

As it appears from the explanation above, students need to be encouraged to participate more in class activities, even facing the risks which language learning entails.

Termed the "can-do" attitude, the risk taking attitude toward the foreign language tasks is defined as the "individual's tendency to assume risks in using the L2 in the second language class" (Ely, 1986: 3). This variable was carefully analysed by Ely (1986) who surveyed students enrolled in the first year Spanish courses at a university in northern California. In her conceptualisation of Language Class Risktaking, Ely identified four dimensions of the construct: a willingness to use linguistic structures perceived as difficult; a self confidence about using a new linguistic element; an acceptance of potential mistakes in the language; and the tendency to repeat a new element silently before using it aloud in front of the others. In the questionnaire of her research, in fact, items like "I like to wait until I know exactly how to use a Spanish word before using it" or "In class, I prefer to say a sentence to myself before I speak it." (Ely, 1986: 9) were included, as signs of this potential feeling during the foreign language learning process.

Whereas the use of the native language does not threaten the individual's self perception of one's own intelligence, communication in the foreign language does, since it demands non-spontaneous mental operations. In this case, the learner is aware of the difficulty of making himself understood by the others in the way he intends (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Ely's investigation shows that the degree of anxiety or embarrassment experienced when speaking an L2 in the classroom (i.e. "Language Class Discomfort", Ely, 1986: 3) is a negative predictor of Language Class Risktaking. Moreover, Language Class Risktaking is a significant positive predictor of Classroom Participation[11]. Sixty-eight percent of the students interviewed by Young (1990) agreed with the statement "I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced speaking more" and seventy-two percent of them strongly supported the statement "I feel very relaxed when I have studied a great deal the night

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[11]In Ely's study, Classroom Participation "was operationalized as the number of times a student asked or answered a question…without being individually nominated to do so."(Ely, 1986: 13).

before". Hence the importance students attributed to practice and preparedness emerged. But how can students practice speaking if practicing means participating in those activities which cause anxiety? This would be an interesting question to answer.

Naiman, Frohilich, Stern & Todesco (1978, in Ely, 1986: 8) show interest in this source of anxiety forming a variable termed Overall Classroom Personality. The intent is the analysis of personality traits in relation to specific situations. Their students were asked to answer to questions which also denote the feature of Language Class Risktaking as in "Do you wait until you are absolutely certain before you put your hand up or do you take a chance and attempt an answer anyway?" (quoted in Ely, 1986: 8). As a conclusion they describe the anxiety for taking risk as debilitating toward foreign language achievement. Closely related to the fear of taking risks is the fear of exposing themselves in front of their classmates. As shown by Young's analysis (1990) this fear tends to arise in speaking-oriented practices which require a high level of self exposure. Therefore 63%, 89% and 67%[12] of the three groups observed by the researcher agreed with the statement "I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question" and analogous results are reported by Woodrow (2006). Woodrow, in fact, identifies as major stressors for in-class situations "Performing in English in front of classmates" (44.7%) and "Giving oral presentation" (42.7%). Compared to in-class practices as reading silently in class, or doing exercises in the book, speaking in front of classmates spotlights the learner and his potential weaknesses.

However the effectiveness of oral activities should be always supported and recognised by both students and instructors since these help students to get used to speaking for an extended time and helping the learner's audience themselves to listen to someone other than the teacher (Koch & Terrell, 1991).

2.2.2.7 Students' beliefs

Among the personal factors contributing to the development of language anxiety, FL researchers have abundantly speculated about the beliefs held by students concerning the foreign language learning process and the speaking task. Language learners bring a variety of preconceived beliefs to the foreign language class, sometimes based on unrealistic expectations which produce and increase feelings of tension and worry (Ellis, 1994; Ganschow et al., 1994).

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[12] The percentages reported above refer to three learner groups, interviewed by Young (1990): 109 Spanish language students enrolled in Austin high schools, 72 intensive university level students of Spanish, 63 students enrolled in the first semester of university.

Scales adopted for assessing students' opinions on a variety of issues and controversies about foreign language learning have been developed. One the best known is Horwitz's BALLI scale (The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory), investigating learners' attitudes and beliefs about difficulties in language learning, or communication strategies, motivations and expectations. Using a questionnaire consisting of thirty-four items, Horwitz surveyed three language groups (i.e. Spanish, German, French) in relation to the acquisition of English language, confirming the importance which such personal factors have on determining certain levels of anxiety.

Students come to the class with the preconceptions that some languages are more difficult to learn than others (Ellis, 1994), that speaking a foreign language helps to learn a new one, that everyone (with no gender distinctions) can learn a foreign language (Horwitz, 1988). Subjects of Ganschow et al.'s survey (1994) reveal that anxious students tend to perceive the L2 course as more difficult than the more relaxed students. Phillips (1992) affirms that students do believe that their ability to perform is affected by anxiety.

On the other hand, only a minority of the fresh university students of Horwitz's investigation (1988) disagreed with the statement "I believe that I will ultimately learn to speak this language very well" and even in a short time ranging from one to two years. Thus the students were showing a general optimism regarding language learning. It is when expectations are high and numerous that a sense of frustration tends to occur. Holec (1981 in Horwitz, 1988: 283) comment that "language learners must go through a sort of psychological preparation or "deconditioning" to rid themselves of preconceived notions and prejudices which would likely interfere with their language learning".

 Referring to the speaking task itself, it has been found that this is perceived as more difficult than reading, writing, or listening (Horwitz, 1988). Kim (1998 in Horwitz, 2001) reports that students in a conversation class are more embarrassed and anxious than students in a reading class. Moreover, with regard to culture, ninety-four of Ellis's students believe that in order to speak English well it is a prerequisite to know something about English speaking cultures.

Numerous researchers emphasize the study of the attitudes and beliefs held by students on the possibility of making mistakes in the L2 classes and of the method used by instructors to correct them. Identified by Young (1990) as the primary reason for students' reticence during speaking activities, a significant number of learners have been worried about making mistakes in the language class (Horwitz et al., 1986). The subjects of the present survey will be

examined even from this perspective: a sample of Italian learners of English language in Italy and a sample of Spanish students of English in the United Kingdom.

Students surveyed by Young (1990) declare they would be more inclined to give volunteer answers if they weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing. Similar results are reported by Horwitz et al. (1986: 543).

Learners also endorse statements such as "If you are allowed to make mistakes in the beginning it will be hard to get rid of them later on" (Horwitz, 1988). On the other hand, a general optimism has been observed with respect to classroom participation, in that learners believe it could be useful to improve language achievement to say something in the L2 even if it is not perfectly correct. Apart from a few exceptions, we may conclude that students have indeed shown high levels of concern over foreign language errors. Students fear risking their own self-esteem in front of their classmates, or to be derided by the language teacher as he corrects their mistakes with harsh manners (Horwitz, 1988; Young, 1990; Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991). Moreover some students easily get nervous when they are corrected by their classmates: forty-one percent, forty-seven percent and thirty-one percent of the students interviewed by Young (1990) agreed with the questionnaire item "I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class".

However, if students show anxiety over L2 errors, they are also aware of the importance of error correction. Language learners would be uncomfortable if the language teacher would never correct their errors in class. Eighty-seven, sixty-eight and forty-nine of Young's students (1990) disagreed with the statement "I would enjoy the class if we weren't corrected at all in class." Interesting results have been reported by Koch and Terrell's (1991) students. Basing on NA[13] techniques, these researchers believe that correcting students' speech errors during communication activities make students anxious. Unexpectedly, it seems that this technique had the opposite effect on students. On the one hand, thirty percent of the learners judged this activity as producing comfort, since they considered speech correction to be useful means of learning to speak a language well. On the other hand, thirty-two percent of them considered this practice to be anxiety-provoking. One of the students interviewed by Wenden (1986) reported that one of his strategies to learn was asking his friends to correct him. Hence he said (ibid: 193):

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[13] Natural Approach (NA) is an approach to foreign language instruction, which is affectively oriented. Developed between the 1970s and 1980s, this approach is mainly aimed to build students' communicative competence by the use of certain L2 classroom activities.

"…when I talk, I always have the feeling that I'm making a mistake. So

I ask my friends to correct me. It's a good way to learn from your mistakes.

After they explain, *I try to remember...*"

The issue for students is not error correction itself, but the *method* of error correction; "when, how often and, most importantly, how errors are corrected" (Young, 1991: 429).

Hence as it appears in these pages, being aware of the importance which students' beliefs and attitudes have toward the foreign language learning process and speaking activities, the attention of instructors should be caught immediately. Shaping students' expectations, making them more realistic in terms of time of learning and level of achievement, is to be seen as the imminent duty of language teachers.

2.2.2.8 Exposure variables and "time abroad"

Attention to the analysis of the context where foreign language learning occurs, has led to the consideration of exposure variables as possible predictors of language anxiety even in speaking activities (Murakami, 1980; Oller et al., 1980; Krashen, 1982).

Considering *length of residence* (LOR) as the exposure variable, Fathman (1975) finds in her study that those children who lived for more than three years in a L2 environment performed better in the foreign language. Aware of this fact and as demonstrated by Ely (1986) and later by MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a), it is possible to affirm that a good perception of their own L2 skill tends to lessen students' anxiety. It is common that highly anxious students tend to perform more poorly than their colleagues and in the same way students who have a low self perception of L2 skills are likely to get worried more easily in the foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; 1991a). Hence the importance of giving L2 learners optimal opportunities to improve the target language is to be recognized.

Exposure to the foreign language may be achieved in different ways. One of the most efficient and common ways is living in the target language country, spending a short or longer time there (Oller et al., 1980b; Carroll, 1967 in Krashen, 1982). Living in the L2 environment and being constantly exposed to the foreign language means listening to and speaking the L2, with the possibility of improving it by daily practice. In this context learners have many opportunities of getting involved with native speakers and of getting used to authentic sounds and L2 pronunciation. All facets which, in turn, make the learner more familiar with any future foreign language situation, even in formal contexts such as the classroom.

Chihara & Oller (1978 in Krashen, 1982), observing students of English in Japan, finds some correlations between the time spent abroad and the self perceptions of students concerning their speaking ability.

Getting involved in foreign language conversations and speaking in general are ideal conditions to improve L2: "the more you talk, the more people will talk to you!" (Krashen[14], 1982: 60), affecting in the end the quality and quantity of linguistic input addressed to you. It is through conversation that the learner will "manage and regulate the input" (Krashen, 1982: 61) making it comprehensible for him. In this way, high levels of difficulties and anxiety might be avoided. Many learners observed in the research (McCoy, 1979; Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; Woodrow, 2006) have admitted getting worried when they cannot understand what the native speaker or the teacher are saying in the foreign language.

Referring to the foreign language classroom as the only context for receiving L2 input, students need to see this moment as a good opportunity to interact, speaking and taking part of in-class activities, by preparing themselves for the forthcoming L2 situations in the external world.

Brière (1978) explains that attendance in an L2 classroom was the best predictor of Spanish proficiency for 920 Mexican children who were not exposed to Spanish out of class. Consistent findings are reported by Chihara & Oller (1978 in Krashen, 1982) examining a sample of Japanese students of English in Japan. In that case, the English classroom was the only occasion for receiving L2 input.

Interest in this topic has been shown by Onwuegbuzie (1999: 230) and a similar investigation was carried out by Woodrow (2006) in Australia. Subjects of Woodrow's study were international students attending an intensive English course for academic purposes. In a country where English is the target language spoken even outside of the classroom, Woodrow intended to extend the investigation to communication events outside the classroom.

The Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (SLSAS) was developed to identify those factors that may contribute to anxiety and to measure the correlation between oral proficiency and L2 speaking anxiety in and out of the classroom. Emerging from the data, 85% of the students experienced foreign language speaking anxiety. Major stressors were speaking activities outside of the classroom: speaking with native speakers was the most dreaded one.

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[14] Making a distinction between foreign language learning and acquisition, Krashen (1982) described the *comprehensible input* as the primary causative variable only in foreign language acquisition and not learning. However, as I have already explained, L2 learning and acquisition will be treated indistinctly.

Respondents reported anxiety reactions of different types as palpitations, blushing and sweating as well as going blank at the moment of speaking.

On the other hand, in-class activities as "*performing* in English in front of the classmates" (Woodrow: 2006: 319) or "*role- play* in front of class" (Woodrow, 2006: 317) were experienced by several students. Lesley, a student, stated (Woodrow, 2006: 320):

> When I speak to my teacher and ask some question to my teacher I usually feel very anxious. And when I say to the in front of the English class and speak some question some topic I usually very anxious. I can't remember anything I just maybe ah…ah…ah.

Desrochers & Gardner (1981 in Onwuegbuzie, 1999: 230) find that a group of Anglophone students of French, after a four day journey in a French speaking community felt a diminution of anxiety in foreign language classes.

2.2.2.9 In-class activities

As explained in the course of the present research, there are several sources of anxiety for foreign language learning and L2 speaking. Among these, an essential role is played by certain classroom practices, methodologies adopted, and relations established by instructors with their students in the classroom[15].

Albeit with different manifestations and degrees, a high concern among students has been shown over speaking oriented activities with high exposure requirements. Hence, speaking in front of their classmates or the teacher is likely to be an activity which deeply worries students. They are afraid of losing their own self-esteem, or showing their language weaknesses. Seventy-five, sixty-eight and seventy-nine percent of Young's students (1990: 543), though belonging to three different language groups, agreed with the statement "I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class." With similar results, Daly (1991) and Mejías et al. (1991) conclude that learners do feel anxious when speaking the L2 in front of an audience, thus confirming the hypothesis that speaking anxiety is due to communication apprehension.

Giving oral presentations is the practice feared by seventy-five and one hundred percent of Koch and Terrell's students, and by forty-two percent of Woodrow's subjects. Dividing her

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[15] Basing on Young's (1990) questionnaire measuring anxiety in L2 in-class activities and speaking, the present research aims to investigate whether speaking anxiety is indeed a source of embarrassment among Italian and Spanish students of English in Italy and Great Britain. For this reason, the need to outline detailed results of Young's survey (1990) and other researchers could be an efficient way to understand whether the findings of the present paper are along a similar line.

students' sample into "Moderately Relaxed, Neither Anxious Nor Relaxed and Moderately Anxious" subjects, Young (1990: 547) noted that this latter group included students anxious about "presenting a prepared dialogue in front of the class" and about "making an oral presentation or skit in front of the class". While the entire class waits silently to hear their classmate, for the student called up to the top of the class time seems infinite. Students report that they start trembling and feeling panic struck in such situations. All performance activities should be properly tailored in relation to the affective needs of the students, and should not be completely avoided (Horwitz, 1990).

Conflicting results were reported, instead, referring to role-playing activities. In Koch and Terrell's research, half of the students described this in-class practice as provoking anxiety, while the other half had a positive attitude toward this activity. Along similar lines, no relevant differences were found in the number of students who agreed and disagreed with the questionnaire item "I like going to class when we are going to role-play situations" (Young, 1990: 544).

It is also interesting to consider the conclusion which Koch and Terrell (1991) report referring to group activities. Based on the NA[16], where teaching techniques aim at the respect of students' affective states, group activities are seen as fundamental methods for foreign language learning and instruction. However, as demonstrated by Foss and Reitzel's (1988) investigations, students seem to be sensitive to the dimension of group work. Carrying out activities in large groups of 7 to 15 students was perceived as an anxiety producing situation, probably because learners did not notice any difference when interacting within a large group and the whole class. On the contrary, working in small work groups or in pairs are cited by students as activities where language anxiety is alleviated (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Omaggio, in Young, 1991; Price, 1991). Seventy-seven, ninety-two and fifty-seven of the students surveyed by Young (1990) agreed that they enjoyed the class when they could work with another student. Working in small groups or in couples, in fact, helps learners to speak more freely in the foreign language and to know the other classmates in a better way. A significant number of students expressed that they would feel less apprehensive about speaking in class in front of others if they knew them better (Young, 1990). For this reason, for example, activities such as interviews with other students could be promoted by instructors.

As a matter of fact, most anxiety producing activities are those which "spotlight" the language learner in front of others. There is no risk and no threat to one's own personality in

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[16] NA: Natural Approach.

writing a composition at home, reading silently in class or repeating as a class after the instructor (Brown & Yule, 1983). In this respect, students surveyed by Young (1990: 547) were "Moderately Relaxed". There is anxiety, however, when called to write their own work on the board (Young, 1990: 547), and to give answers especially when the subject is not ready to speak. Fifty-seven percent of the students of the NA expressed their concern regarding non-volunteered responses and oral quizzes, practices effective to evaluate students' comprehension particularly at the early stages of the L2 class though (Koch & Terrell, 1991).

A good remedy for such embarrassment could be provided by giving students the opportunity to answer voluntarily, an activity which has been rejected only by a minority (nine percent) of the students interviewed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and which has been positively judged by seventy-nine, eighty-two and forty-three percent of Young's students (1990: 544), who agreed with the questionnaire item " I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer". Learners showed interest in activities such as discussions of current events or interesting topics. One of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety could be to "make the message so interesting that students forget that this is in another language" (Krashen in Young, 1991: 433).

A very high percentage (ninety-four, eighty-nine and seventy-five) of Young's subjects endorsed the statement "I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting" and fifty-five percent of Koch & Terrell's (1991) students described classroom topical courses as producing comfort. On the other side, students did not like speaking in the classroom when the debate was scheduled (Young, 1990). Language learners worry about not understanding what the instructor is explaining in the foreign language or they fear that the language class moves so quickly that they can be left behind (Horwitz et al., 1986). Therefore, language teachers should make sure that students are actively involved in the activities. The L2 practices should be proposed by teachers as "useful" or "not recommended" for some students at particular levels of acquisition, rather than "intrinsically bad or good" (Koch & Terrell, 1991).

As affirmed by Young (1991: 433) it would be advisable for teachers "testing what they teach in the context of how they teach it.".

2.2.3 Manifestations of anxiety

Considerable attention has been given in the course of foreign language research to the effects which anxiety has produced on individuals. Although these may vary from person to

person, anxious students report a number of similar problems affecting both physiological and cognitive levels.

Physiological manifestations and symptoms of anxiety are often easy to describe since they are observable. Learners who cite that they experience worry or even panic feel palpitations and sweat when they have to perform in the foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Phillips, 1992). Without any doubt, instructors are used to seeing students squirming in their seats, fidgeting, playing with their hair, clothes, or manipulating objects, stuttering or stammering as they talk in the L2 (Leary, 1982 in Young, 1991). Phillips's students (1992: 19), reported to feel "intimidated", "dumb-founded" and nervous when describing their affective reactions to the oral exam. Even distortions of the sound, inability to reproduce the intonation and rhythm of the language may be interpreted as manifestations of anxiety in speaking. Students may tend to laugh nervously, avoiding eye contact or joking (Young, 1991).

Referring to the psychological effects of anxiety, these are hard to analyse since they cannot be perceived empirically. They may vary from subject to subject and even in the same subject they may vary over time.

As previously explained in the present paper, researchers have reported positive (Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978) and negative effects of anxiety (Lucas, 1984; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Phillips, 1992; Cenoz & Lecumberri, 1999) on the acquisition of a foreign language. However the debilitating consequences which such a feeling has on language learners have been recognized in the majority of investigations.

Investigations have showed the interference of anxiety at three different levels of cognition: Input, Processing and Output (Tobias, 1986). Proposing this model, the researcher noticed that anxious students are likely to concentrate on self directed derogatory cognition rather than the task itself.

At the input level, anxiety may cause "attention deficit" which blocks the student from perceiving the information received. For this reason, for instance, highly anxious subjects tend to experience difficulties in understanding what the teacher is saying in the L2. Horwitz et al. (1986: 126) report that one of their male students admitted to hearing "only a loud buzz" whenever his teacher spoke the foreign language, complaining about the difficulties in distinguishing the sounds of the message. Even Krashen (1985) in his Monitor Theory demonstrates that anxiety functions as an affective filter, regulating the income of the foreign language: very nervous students, in this way, will be less receptive to L2 inputs.

The second influence level of anxiety is that of Processing (Tobias, 1986): if the foreign language task is moderately easy, the effect of anxiety is not relevant to processing. On the contrary when the task's difficulty increases, the effect of anxiety on processing will increase.

Last but not least, language anxiety may interfere on the Output level (Tobias, 1986), making the student experience problems with the L2 performance.

Several researchers have investigated whether language anxiety has any effects on student's ability to perform orally even in evaluative situations such as oral tests or exams (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Phillips, 1992; MacIntyre, Noels & Clement 1997). A consistent number of the students interviewed by Young (1990) reported they believed to be able to speak the foreign language pretty well, but when they knew that they were being graded, they messed up, thus giving support to the idea that oral test anxiety does exist among foreign language learners (Horwitz et al., 1986) and that this is often a valid reason for negative attitudes toward the foreign language learning process itself.

Certainty the relationship between language anxiety and oral performance has been the object of contradictory investigations. Spielberger (1983, quoted in Young, 1986: 440) asserts that anxiety does not have any effect on L2 performance when "the individual has adequate capacity to perform the task". Along similar lines, Young's findings (1986) report that ability plays a more significant role than anxiety regarding the effects on the OPI[17] scores, at least when the administration of the OPI occurs in unofficial conditions.

However, a considerable number of researchers have recognized anxiety as a negative predictor of students' oral performance; anxiety, for instance, influences both an individual's willingness to communicate and the quality of communication (Lucas, 1984; Daly & Stafford, 1997a). High and low ability students were carefully observed by researchers such as Phillips (1992). These reached the conclusion that anxious learners tend to receive lower exam grades than their less anxious classmates, and tend to perceive the oral exam as a negative experience. Even though the instructor took the precautions necessary to make the students comfortable during the exam, by chatting before the test, anxious students persisted to feel confused or to go "blank" during the oral exam (Young, 1992: 19). Compared to more comfortable learners, nervous students are likely to say less, to use fewer dependent clauses and to produce shorter Communication Units (CU), all effects consistent with those of previous researchers (Steinberg, 1982 in Young, 1986). In order to measure the effects which anxiety has on oral performances, Steinberg divided her sample of students into two groups:

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[17] OPI is the Oral Proficiency Interview designed to assess the personal oral proficiency basing on a face to face structured conversation (Young, 1986).

she induced anxiety in one half of the students and not in the other half. Comparing the oral performance by groups, she concluded that more anxious students are less subjective in their oral responses.

Also Gardner et al.'s report (1976) proves that poor proficiency may be due to high levels of anxiety, showing that anxiety is tends to increase as the student starts achieving a better grasp of the language. Referring to the students of their sample, MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a) deduce that since L2 beginners suffer very little anxiety, their L2 learning is not affected at all. For these researchers, as the learner proceeds to study the foreign language, poor performances and negative experiences may also subsequently occur. For this reason their worries may tend to increase, influencing future performances.

At this point, we could ask: "Does anxiety impair students' oral fluency, or do they become anxious in oral production tasks because their speech skills are low?" (Bailey 1983: 68). Certainly, close, negative and persistent correlations exist between language anxiety and oral performance, particularly in evaluative situations. Students often say that they "freeze" in role playing situations and when they have to answer in front of their classmates, feeling worried and "dumb founded" because they cannot remember what they studied (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991; Phillips, 1992). One of the anxious students interviewed by Young (1990: 539) said: "I hate when my teacher calls on me to speak. I freeze up and can't think of what to say or how to say it…"

Anxious students are less likely to initiate conversations frequently than their interlocutors, avoiding interrupting them and giving nods with sounds as "uh, huh" (Leary, 1990). For a significant number of students, merely talking about the L2 could be a manifestation of anxiety (Rardin in Young, 1991). Students highly concerned about their performance in the class may become so sensitive about the potential mistakes they could make, that many of them tend to react by studying even more, without achieving a big improvement in the L2 grades. Over-studying is, in fact, a frequent phenomenon mentioned by Horwitz et al.'s (1986: 127) students: "One bright woman who had lived in Mexico spent eight hours a day preparing for a big Spanish class and still did poorly."

Frequent among nervous students is silence. Learners' silence has created problems to ESL teachers for a long time now (Lucas, 1984). Learners can be silent for several reasons: lack of interest, uncertainty around the pronunciation of certain sounds in the L2, general sense of discomfort during the L2 class. Regarding this problem, Tsui (1996) reports teachers' perceptions over the reasons which may contribute to students' reticence. A consistent

number of language instructors attributed it to the possible low English proficiency of students, to their fear of making mistakes and to the incomprehension of the input.

Students find anxiety a cause for poor performances in the foreign language (Phillips, 1992) and "what they believe may be more important than any external reality" (Bailey, 1983: 86). Thus "remodelling" and talking with the students about their L2 preconceptions would probably be one of the most effective ways to cope with this debilitating feeling.

2.2.4 Solutions

As explained previously, correlations exist between *speaking* a foreign language and *language anxiety*. This may produce negative behaviours which interfere with the development of L2 oral skills and communicative competence.

The purpose of this section is to outline a series of teaching and in-class practices identified by researchers to help teachers overcome and cope with students' speaking anxiety, in order to encourage authentic communication within a cooperative and supportive context. Anxious students and students in general may get involved in the learning process, using anxiety-management activities designed to lower the stress experienced in the classroom.

Researchers have consistently attempted to discover and elaborate valid techniques that could promote oral practice in non-threatening manners. These might foster an in-class environment where the learners feel more at ease: the atmosphere must consist of "mutual acceptance and mutual respect, where students know how to appreciate other students, teachers appreciate students, and students appreciate the teacher." (Young, 1999: 5). A dilemma occurs when many language teachers realize that in order to improve students' oral competence by practice, anxiety is caused by the oral work itself and those activities which should improve learners' competence in the language.

Since the students' beliefs are often responsible for positive and negative behaviours toward the foreign language studied, it has been indispensable finding teaching approaches aimed to provide good learning strategies and to create optimistic attitudes in the learners. A good method for discovering students' feelings toward L2 learning could be that one suggested by Phillips (1999): he suggests the administration of foreign language scales such as the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) and BALLI[18] (Horwitz, 1988) to language students; after the collection of learners' answers, the teacher may detect students' reactions and may discuss them with his students. At this point, he might spend more time in the class explaining that a wide range of techniques and strategies are required to become a good language speaker, by

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[18] BALLI: Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory.

dispelling common myths about foreign language learning and by developing foreign language study skills. An alternative approach might be to have the students fill out the questionnaire and discuss their answers in pairs. Afterwards, the learner may join the rest of the class by talking with the others about his responses. This might be an effective method to make the student aware of the fact that he is not alone in his worry and to make clear the idea that language anxiety particularly in speaking is a frequent phenomenon.

Foss and Reitzel (1988) provide several techniques for decreasing the language anxiety originated from learners' beliefs. Based on the idea that once learners get aware of their fears, they may get ready to live anxiety-producing situations in a more positive way, these researchers recommend teachers to ask their students to write about their anxieties on the blackboard in order to share them with their peers in the class. Similarly, Price (1991) asked his students to comment about their experiences with the foreign language classes. The result proved a high concern about making mistakes in pronunciation.

As already explained, students fear being laughed at by their peers for the possible errors they can make in the oral practice (Young, 1990; Phillips, 1999). Thus students get silent unless they are sure they are giving the correct answer (Wenden, 1986). Regarding this, the technique adopted by Young (1990) is interesting; using a questionnaire measuring anxiety levels over speaking activities she asked her students to comment and give suggestions about efficient ways to reduce their worry of making mistakes. The result was that the majority of the students "would not be so self conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes, and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake" (ibid.: 544). Students commented on the instructor's reactions to this problem, reporting that the teacher helps when he avoids correcting mistakes in a harsh manner or when he explains that mistakes may be made by everyone. Reassurances, however, will have little or no effects if the teacher believes he has to correct every single mistake in form. Letting students communicate in the L2, guaranteeing them a certain level of linguistic accuracy at the same time, may be challenging for some teachers. In this case, a solution might be provided by limiting overt correction only to those errors in form which occur in mechanical practices; on the contrary, if the learner believes to be involved in an authentic communication, overt correction is best to be avoided (Phillips, 1999).

A positive way to provide correction without creating anxiety in the student might be *modelling* students' answers by repeating the correct form of what the learner is attempting to say. If a teacher in a Spanish language class asks "¿Qué *quiere* hacer el Presidente Bush?" and the student answers "*Quieres* subir los presupuestos", the instructor should answer: "Sí,

quiere subir los presupuestos" (Young, 1991: 432). In this way the learner will receive the right input without being offended or ridiculed in front of the others.

Besides students' beliefs, it is also interesting to consider instructors' beliefs referring to certain in-class activities or students' stereotypes about foreign language learning. Do instructors know students' beliefs on language learning? And what do they know?

The administration of foreign language tests such as the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) or the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) might be used to understand language teachers' viewpoints (Horwitz 1988; Phillips, 1999).

Unlike the Audio-lingual method, already mentioned, where the teacher believes to be a drill sergeant, the instructor needs to be aware that his role is that of a "facilitator" (Young, 1991: 431) who gives regular and ongoing information about language learning, by encouraging students to speak the L2. Instead of focusing exclusively on a "teacher-student communication" which highlights students' mistakes in front of the others, "student to student interactions" need to be promoted so that the emphasis will be on "…conveying meaning rather than underscoring mistakes." (Phillips, 1999: 144).

Teachers may be helped to approach good methods for lessening anxiety, by attending language teaching conferences and workshops which suggest practices to use in the foreign language class.

Proper teaching methodologies have been elaborated with the aim of alleviating students' fear and developing communicative competence; these approaches are the Natural Approach already mentioned and the Communicative Language Teaching. The main focus in these methods is the use of in-class practices which considerably reduce the performance activities dreaded by learners.

In the case of Communicative Language Teaching considerable attention is given to students' interest for developing speaking ability in a L2. Here, interactions, conversations and language use are emphasized (Lightbown & Spada, 1993) through student to student interaction in pairs or small groups, based on the belief that this practice will make language learning enjoyable and more comfortable.

In this case, students may get to know each other more easily, talking the foreign language in a more natural way. Hence, language games might be good alternative activities to make in class. Saunders & Crookall (1985) propose language games which include problem-solving activities: student A, for instance, has a diagram which he has to describe as best as possible in the foreign language to allow student B to draw it. After that, the students may compare their drawings.

In order to alleviate students' fear of speaking, McCoy (1979) suggests simulation activities where a student imagines being in one of the situations which may trigger his anxiety. In the language classroom these situations may be: a telephone conversation, a scene at the restaurant etc…Through these practices the student may talk to himself and to the others in the class, making himself prepared to teacher-cued questions and to that difficult situation. An alternative might be the participation in non-imaginary situations where the student feels uncomfortable. These could be: ordering food in a restaurant, exchanging courtesies with a native speaker, etc…

As for the foreign language class, researchers (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Phillips, 1999) point out the necessity for developing a classroom *community*, that increase the amount of time spent by students communicating in the L2. A community might be created by providing a spectrum of communicative expressions useful for classroom activities and by giving students the feeling of being involved in a "natural" conversation (Phillips, 1999: 129). Thus students will learn expressions necessary to start conversation (e.g. "By the way") or to show agreement or disagreement (e.g. "Absolutely"; " You are right"; "No way!") or to interact with the teacher (e.g. "What does…mean?") (ibid.: 129). All linguistic tools which allow the learner to take part in oral activities without experiencing high levels of difficulties or worries.

Young (1991: 431) reports, as a method to reduce the specific anxiety experienced during oral presentations, the participation to certain group support works or language clubs, where the practice of self–talk could be central. Hence she quotes an example from the Learning Resource Centre at the University of Texas, Austin:

> *Situation:* Walking toward the front of the room for an oral presentation.
> *Anxiety-Provoking Self-Talk:* "I can't talk in public, I'll forget everything…
> Last time I was so nervous I sounded like a robot…"
> *Productive Self-Talk:* "I can handle this…Just relax…take a deep slow breath and
> I'll start as I rehearsed it."

Oral tests have been reported by learners as highly anxiety provoking (Phillips, 1992). In these cases the same techniques adopted to reduce in-class anxiety in oral activities can be used (Phillips, 1999): hence students could be tested in pairs or small groups, or during simulation activities.

Above the broad range of methodologies developed by researchers to cope with language speaking anxiety, great consideration has been showed toward the strategies adopted by

learners in order to cope with their worries and to improve their language competence. Students, in fact, recognize the in-class activities which make them comfortable.

Wenden (1986), Horwitz (1988), Oxford and Crookall (1989), Cenoz And Lecumberri (1999) and others carefully observe students' remedies to their fears, in order to make language teachers and other learners aware of the variety of solutions already adopted by many anxious people. Diary studies, for example, have been seen by several learners as good tools to observe their own language learning process and to "become participant observers" of their study (Oxford & Crookall, 1989: 408). The discussion of current events or interesting topics is suggested by the students as an efficient method to get involved in class practices and to gain a better L2 proficiency (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Young, 1991). Horwitz et. al' s students (1986) and Young's subjects (1990) report they start to panic as they are required to speak without preparation in the class, even before an exam. A great number of students agrees that "I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class" and almost all of them endorse the statement "I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced speaking more" (Young, 1990: 544).

McCoy (1979) encourages language teachers to use the foreign language in the class as much as possible and to put the students in "vivo language situations" where they can listen to radio or television, for example. In this way students may get the opportunity to practice the L2.

Emphasizing the acquisition of pronunciation as the most difficult skill of a L2, Cenoz and Lecumberri's students (1999) believe that good techniques to improve it could be ear training exercises or contact with native speakers (visiting the foreign language country, listening to the radio and TV or interacting directly with native speakers). Talking with native speakers may induce anxiety in some learners (Woodrow, 2006), but in most cases it is recognised as very effective (Purcell & Suter, 1980).

In conclusion, instructors should be called to explore instructional techniques that ease the amount of worry and fear and they should also enable students to make full advantage of the resources available to them. The teacher should avoid saying "I should do this, otherwise my students will get anxious", but "if the students and I feel anxiety is a little too high, perhaps we could stop for a while and together see what its causes are and how we may reduce it." (Crookall & Oxford, 1991).

3. Methodology

In order to proceed with the present research, I decided to use a questionnaire which would allow me to measure students' anxiety level in a more objective way. This choice, in fact, gave me the possibility to quantify and classify my findings by comparing them with those of previous studies, identifying those factors and activities which contribute to increase and lower students' anxiety in the foreign language class. In addition, a quantitative methodology as the one adopted in the present research helped me calculate the results more easily, avoiding the difficulties which a qualitative approach might produce. In the last section of the questionnaire, I gave the students the opportunity to express freely their thoughts referring to the activities I expected to be the most anxiety-producing. However, the students' thoughts were not easy to analyse. As the comments are fairly different from each other, I have selected the most interesting ones, those which supported my initial hypothesis and the ones I did not expect.

3.1 Sample of students

100 university-level students were interviewed. All the subjects were enrolled in the third year of a Bachelor degree in English language.

Considering that the main focus of this survey is the observation of speaking anxiety experienced in the English classroom in relation to the context where this language was learned, two groups of students have been observed: one group of 45 Italian students (37 females and 8 males), learning English at the University of Ragusa, Italy, where the first language is Italian; a second group consisting of 55 Spanish students (32 females and 23 males), learning English at the University of Cardiff, Wales, [19] Great Britain, country of the target language. The members of this latter group were Erasmus students, spending 6 months in Great Britain, thus in the situation of using and speaking English even out of the classroom.

In an attempt to avoid considerable inconsistencies, the groups selected were culturally similar. Attention has been given, in fact, to the recommendations of Horwitz (2001: 119) where she declared that:

> "When considering the issue of language anxiety and classroom practice, it is important
> to keep cultural differences in mind. In addition to the individual variation in students
> reactions that Koch and Terrell found, it is entirely possible that some practices

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[19] Official language of Wales is Welsh. However, English is the language most widely spoken.

perceived by one group of learners as comfortable may prove stressful for learners from a different cultural group who are used to different types of classroom organizations."

Hence Italian and Spanish students were considered similar enough to be compared since they belong to Latin cultures.

Both groups of students in Italy and Great Britain were interviewed at the beginning of the second term of the present year (2009).

3.2 Questionnaire

To examine students' reactions to speaking, a three-page questionnaire was administrated to both groups of students. The questionnaire may be found in the Appendix p.96. The language of the questionnaire was English, and students also gave their comments in English. This survey has the characteristic of being based on a previous study questionnaire (Young, 1990) which I partially modified. Furthermore, in order to observe the aspects I perceived to be relevant through the study of foreign language anxiety literature, some background and specific questions were added. In the attempt to get my findings comparable and compatible with those ones of former research, I calculated the results based on the methodologies already adopted by other investigators: in particular Horwitz et al. (1986) and Young (1990).

The questionnaire of the present research consists of five sections. The first section (see p. 96 in the Appendix) includes background questions about learner' s gender, his native language and personal perceptions toward his own English oral skill, his degree of interest in the foreign language and weekly hours of English language class. An interesting question is to what extent (in a range from 1 to 3) students believe that living for a while in the L2 speaking country would help or has been helping them to develop their oral ability in the language. All of them are also asked whether they have ever thought about the embarrassment which some students may experience in speaking English.

The second section of the questionnaire (see Table I, p. 96 in the Appendix) asks students to rate their anxiety level in respect to twenty-one in-class activities. The subjects have to express their level of anxiety for each activity based on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from Very Relaxed, Moderately Relaxed, Neither Relaxed Nor Anxious, Moderately Anxious to Very Anxious. The present section is taken from Young's study (1990). In the attempt to measure in-class speaking anxiety, Young developed this table from an examination of certain activities analysed and recorded over a two-year period as a supervisor of first-year Spanish courses at the university level.

The third section (see Table II, p. 97 in the Appendix) is again based on Young's study (1990). In this case, students are asked to answer a twenty-four items table, related to general foreign language class anxiety and to in-class activities. Young elaborated this section in order to expand findings from Horwitz[20] et al. (1986) for language class anxiety and to study additional activities such as preparedness, pair work and motivation. However, while Young's students were asked to express only agreement and disagreement to each item of the table, the students of the present research have to express their anxiety level using a five point Scale,[21] ranging from "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree". In this way, more detailed levels of anxiety may be gauged.

The next section of the questionnaire (see p. 98 in the Appendix), as in Young's study (1990), asks students to comment a teacher's behaviours and characteristics which may lessen students' speaking anxiety during error-correction and certain in-class activities.

Last but not least, the fifth section (see p. 98 in the Appendix) asks students to describe what they feel when speaking English in front of their classmates. As reported by a consistent number of researchers (Young, 1990; Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Price, 1991; Aida, 1994; Woodrow, 2006) performing in front of the others in the class is the most dreaded activity for several L2 students. Hence it has been interesting to ask directly students about their personal experience.

3.3 Limitations

Although the students interviewed were informed about the anonymity of their answers, it has been difficult to establish whether the subjects expressed what they actually thought. It might be, of course, that students selected answers which did not represent their real opinions, in order to satisfy my expectations. Similarly, it might be that the subjects tended to undervalue their anxieties and to ignore certain worries, in order to avoid any possible threat to their image. This is difficult to know accurately.

A further limitation of the present paper might be the limited number of students surveyed, especially of males. Doubtlessly, if there had been more than two, it would have

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[20] In their attempt to investigate foreign language anxiety in students, a thirty-three item Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was elaborated. FLCAS is based on the responses of seventy-five students in beginning language classes at the University of Texas and joining the "Support Group for the Foreign Language Learning" (Horwitz *et al.* 1986: 128). FLCAS was found to be reliable (Aida 1994; Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999) and was used by other researchers (Young 1990; Phillips 1992; Aida 1994; Ganschow and Sparks 1996; Coulombe, 2000 in Horwitz 2001: 116; Rodriguez 1995 in Horwitz 2001: 116).
[21] Based on Horwitz et al. FLCAS (1986).

been easier to generalize the results. For this reason, the findings of the present research need to be treated with some precaution.

3.4 Results: Data Analysis Procedures

The data in the first section (see p. 96 in the Appendix) are analysed by calculating the percentage of students' answers to each question. In addition, I calculate a speaking anxiety mean for each group. To the question "How do you rate your oral skills of English language?" students are divided into four groups, depending on how many students answered "Bad", "Good", "Very Good", "Excellent".

To determine the "weekly hours of English language lectures" I calculate the mean of students answers. Referring to the items "How much do you like English Language?" and "Living for a while in an English speaking country may help me/ has been helping me to improve my English language oral skills" students are divided into three groups on the base of students' percentage who answered "1= not very much", "2" or "3= very much". Furthermore, I calculate the percentage of learners who answered "yes" or "no" to the question "Have you ever thought about embarrassment in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

The data in the second section (Table I in the Appendix, p. 96) are analysed with the same method adopted by Young (1990). In this case, the subjects` responses to each activity are ranked based on their mean.[22] Furthermore, the mean of the table is calculated.[23]

As for the data of the third section (Table II in the Appendix, p. 97) I calculate the percentage of students who "Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree".[24] Considering that each of the twenty-four items of Table II endorse students' anxiety in the foreign language class, students' answer "Strongly Disagree" is evaluated as 1 point (Very relaxed student), answer "Disagree" was evaluated as 2 points (Moderately Relaxed) until "strongly Agree" which is evaluated as 5 points (Very Anxious). In this way it is possible to calculate the mean of each student's foreign language anxiety.[25]

In order to calculate students' anxiety mean, even among females and males, the way of calculating the results was based on Horwitz et al.'s (1986) study. Referring to the fourth section, students' comments to "What does your instructor do to decrease any anxiety you may have in your foreign language class?" in relation to errors correction and in-class

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[22] (see Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 p. in the Appendix, p.99- 100)
[23] (see Table 1.3, in the Appendix, p. 101)
[24] (see Table 2.1 in the Appendix, p.105-106)
[25] (see Table 2.2 in the Appendix, 107)

activities are ranked in accordance to students' number of comments. The same procedure is adopted for the question "What characteristics does your instructor have which tend to reduce you anxiety about speaking in class?"

For the last section of the questionnaire where students are asked to explicitly describe their feelings about speaking English in front of their classmates (see p.98 in the Appendix), learners' comments will be presented in the course of the research.

The calculation procedure outlined above has been adopted for analysing the responses of both groups: Italian students of English in Italy and Spanish students of English in Great Britain. In this way it will be possible to observe students' speaking anxiety in the classroom even in relation with the context of learning.

4. Results

In the present chapter it will be possible to observe directly the results obtained through the administration of the questionnaire. Hence tables summing up my findings will be integrated with the presentation and discussion of their Items and Values. Charts will be also included to make the findings more easily understandable to the reader.

First of all, I will start presenting the results tables showing the anxiety level means experienced during several kinds of in-class activities. These practices may vary from writing, to reading, to speaking in the foreign language. As a second step, attention will be drawn to the results found in respect for students' anxiety at the specific moment of speaking and in respect for the ways these fears tends to be experienced by the subjects interviewed. In this case, tables showing percentage and means of anxiety will be shown. The tables will be analysed as in Young's study (1990). She has been, in fact, the main source of inspiration and comparison for the present research.

Proceeding with the analysis, I will present the findings coming out from students' answers to questions concerning their self-perceptions, beliefs, degree of interest for the language studied, in order to determine to what extent these factors influence their language anxiety.

To conclude, the end of the chapter will sum up learners' comments about their instructors' teaching methodologies, in-class activities and instructor characteristics, recognized as producing a comfortable atmosphere, which does induce students to actively participate in the foreign language class.

4.1 In-Class Activities

The results produced through the administration of Table I (see the Appendix p. 96) will be analysed and explained by five tables (Tables 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5).

Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 list the activities arranged by anxiety level by means reported by students of English as an L2 respectively in Italy and Great Britain.

On the one hand, I initially expected that Italian students would have been more anxious than the Spanish learners in Great Britain, since they are inevitably less exposed to the English language input.

Table 1.1 In-Class Activities Arranged by Anxiety Level Means in Italy

Activity number[26]	Activity type[27]	Anxiety Mean
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.42
19	Speak in front of the class	3.40
21	Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.19
17	Role play a situation	3.13
3	Open a discussion based on volunteer participation	3.13
18	Present a prepared dialog in front of the class	3.11
4	Speak individually with the instructor in his/her office	3.06
8	Write your work on the board	3.04
15	Write a composition in class	2.58
16	Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.45
2	Compete in class games by teams	2.32
13	Read orally in class	2.25
14	Interview each other in pairs	2.20
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor	2.09
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.08
20	Work on projects (i.e. newspapers, film strips, photo album)	1.98
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	1.95
10	Write a composition at home	1.89
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.78
5	Read silently in class	1.40
11	Do exercises in the book	1.39

[26] The Activity numbers are reported as they appear in the questionnaire Table I, given to the students interviewed.

[27] The Activities are reported in a decreasing order based on the anxiety means: from the most anxiety-producing activity to the most comfortable one.

Table 1.2 In- Class Activities arranged by Anxiety Level Means in Great Britain

Activity number[28]	Activity type[29]	Anxiety Mean
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.47
21	Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.33
17	Role play a situation	3.24
19	Speak in front of the class	3.08
18	Present a prepared dialogue in front of the class	3.05
3	Open a discussion based on volunteer participation	2.69
16	Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.65
4	Speak individually after the instructor in his/ her office	2.45
8	Write your work on the board	2.42
15	Write a composition in class	2.40
13	Read orally in class	2.35
2	Compete in class by teams	2.29
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.13
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	2.03
20	Work on projects (i.e. newspapers, film strips, photo album)	2.01
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor	1.89
14	Interview each other in pairs	1.88
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.84
10	Write a composition at home	1.62
5	Read silently in class	1.53
11	Do exercises in the book	1.41

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[28] The Activity numbers are reported as they appear in the questionnaire Table I, given to the students interviewed.

[29] The Activities are reported in a decreasing order basing on the anxiety means: from the most anxiety-producing activity to the most comfortable one.

However, on the other hand, the speaking anxiety means found respectively for both students groups is not as high as I predicted, and they are under the mean of 3 (Italian students' anxiety level: 2.47; Spanish students' anxiety level: 2.37). I do not know whether the present anxiety means could be explained by the fact that the teachers of the two groups interviewed had already built up a certain degree of confidence in performing orally in the L2 class.[30]

Interestingly, in both groups of students the in-class activities rated as the most anxiety-provoking and the most comfortable ones are also the same (i.e. reading silently and doing exercises). Hence, "Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class" (Activity 9) is rated by Italians and Spanish respectively with a mean of 3.42 and 3.47. Similar findings are reported by Young[31] (1990: 547). In this context students of the present research feel quite nervous irrespective of the country where they are learning the foreign language.

As the most comfortable activity, doing exercises in the book (Activity 11) is the practice to make students moderately relaxed in the L2 class. In this case, students are not exposed to teacher's evaluation or classmates' observation. There is no risk in listing the answers in the book (Activity 7) or in reading silently in the class (Activity 5).

As it appears in Table 1.1, within the variety of in-class practices observed, students do fear speaking-oriented activities. Speaking in front of the class (Activity 19) is rated with a mean of 3.40 by the Italian students, slightly higher than the Spanish subjects with a mean of 3.08; making an oral presentation (Activity 21) and presenting a prepared dialogue (Activity 18) are activities with a high self-exposure requirement. Opening a discussion based on volunteer participation (Activity 3) is an activity slightly more dreaded by Italian students than Spanish ones and the same occurred for writing one's own work on the board (Activity 8).

Means below 3 are found for those activities where the student is required to work in small groups, instead (Activity 1: "Work in groups of 3 or 4"; Activity 14: "Interview each other in pair"; Activity 16: "Work in groups of two and prepare a skit") or individually without performing in front of other people (Activity 7: "Listen to questions and write answers to questions"; Activity 10: "Write a composition at home"). Interestingly, these

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[30] This would have been an interesting question to ask directly to the teachers of the two classes.
[31] This activity was rated as the most anxiety-provoking practice by Young's students.

results are in line with those of Foss and Reitzel (1988 in Young, 1991: 433) and Koch and Terrell[32] (1991: 121).

   Table 1.3 sums up Anxiety Means of Tables 1.1 and 1.2; in addition it shows clearly that no significant differences result in the anxiety level experienced by students in Italy and Great Britain during in-class activities. Italian students, on the whole, came out a little more anxious (mean 2.47) than Spanish subjects in Great Britain (mean 2.37).
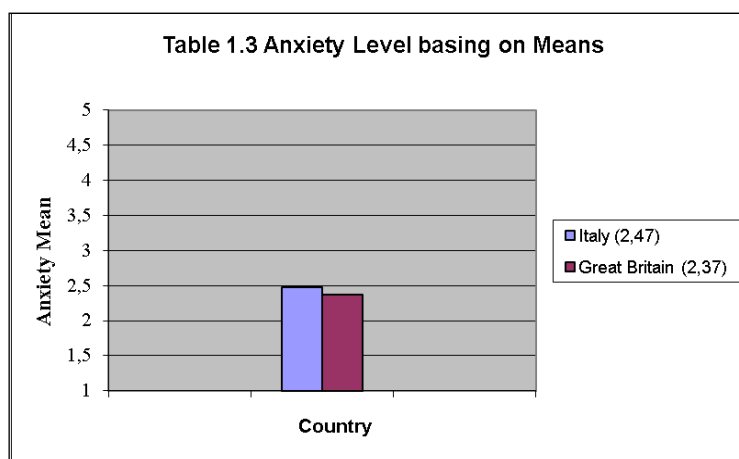
A particularly noteworthy feature in common is that for both groups of students, irrespective of the country of study, a higher level of anxiety exists especially for those in-class practices involving speaking and with a high self exposure requirement (Activities 3, 4, 8, 9, 17, 18, 19, 21).On the contrary, the activities which are judged as more comfort-producing are those ones where the students are given the opportunity to work in small groups (Activities 1, 2, 14, 16), or as a whole with the class (Activity 6) or individually without being spotlighted in front of the class (Activities 5, 7, 10, 11).

   Table 1.4 shows these in-class activities organized in relation with the level of self exposure. The main goal of the table 1.4 is the comparison and observation of the results of the present research with those ones of other investigators such as Horwitz et al. (1986), Young (1990) and Koch & Terrell (1991), who described the in-class practices with a high self-exposure requirement as the most stressful for the L2 learners. Table 1.4 lists the activity means in an increasing order, from the most comfort producing activity to the most anxiety producing one. Moreover, neither of the practices is unanimously evaluated as "very relaxing" and with a mean of "1"; similarly, neither of the activities result as particularly uncomfortable for the students, with a mean ranging from 4 to 5.

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[32] Working in pairs was rated by sixty-two percent of students as producing comfort. Sixty-seven percent of their students rated working in small groups of 3 to 6 as a comfortable practice in the class.

Table 1.4 In-Class Activities arranged by Self- Exposure requirement

Activities	Italy	Great Britain	Activities
Activities with a low self exposure requirement			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
11. Do exercises in the book	1.39	1.41	**11.** Do exercises in the book
5. Read silently in class	1.40	1.53	**5.** Read silently in class
7. Listen to questions and write answers to questions	1.78	1.62	**10.** Write a composition at home
10. Write a composition at home	1.89	1.84	**7.** Listen to questions and write answers
15. Write a composition in class	2.58	2.40	**15.** Write a composition in class
Activities in groups			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
1. Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.08	1.88	**14.** Interview each other in pairs
6. Repeat as a class after the instructor	2.09	1.89	**6.** Repeat as a class after the instructor
14. Interview each other in pairs	2.20	2.13	**1.** Work in groups of 3 or 4
2. Compete in class games by teams	2.32	2.29	**2.** Compete in class games by teams
16. Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.45	2.65	**16.** Work in groups of two and prepare a skit
Activities with a high self exposure requirement			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
12. Repeat individually after the instructor	1.95	2.03	**12.** Repeat individually after the instructor
13. Read orally in class	2.25	2.35	**13.** Read orally in class
8. Write your work on the board	2.04	2.42	**8.** Write your work on the board
4. Speak individually with the instructor in his/ her office	3.06	2.45	**4.** Speak individually with the instructor in his/her office
18. Present a prepared dialogue	3.11	2.69	**3.** Open discussion based on volunteer participation
3. Open discussion based on volunteer participation	3.13	3.05	**18.** Present a prepared dialogue
17. Role play a situation	3.13	–	
21. Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.19	3.08	**19.** Speak in front of the class
19. Speak in front of the class	3.40	3.24	**17.** Role play a situation

Table 1.4 In-Class Activities arranged by Self- Exposure requirement

Activities	Italy	Great Britain	Activities
Activities with a high self exposure requirement			
	Anxiety Mean	Anxiety Mean	
9. Role play a situation spontaneously or skit in front of the class	3.42	3.33	21. Make an oral presentation
	-	3.47	9. Role play a situation in front of the class.

The gender variable is also observed in relation to the in-class practices. Do males and females have different levels of anxiety during the activities made in class?

From my personal point of view and based on the literature I have read on gender differences in L2 acquisition (Campbell & Shaw, 1994 in Campbell, 1999; Krohne et al., 2001), I expected no evident disparities between males and females levels of anxiety, with men more nervous than women, but only to some extent. Table 1.5 presents the means of in-class activities based on gender variable.

Interestingly, in the present survey females turn out to be slightly more anxious (mean 2.51) than males especially in those practices which require oral performance in front of others. Opening discussion based on volunteer participation (Activity 3) is rated by males with a mean of 2.58 and females 3.24. The same occurs for Activity 13 "Read orally in class" and Activity 21 "Make an oral presentation". Males are neither anxious nor relaxed for role playing a situation (mean 2.80) while females appear moderately anxious during this situation (mean 3. 56).

Furthermore, in the particular situation of initiating a role play practice spontaneously in front of the classmates (i.e. Activity 9 "Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class"), females students report a high anxiety mean (3.68). In this case, males students experienced an anxiety mean of 3.21.

As it appears in Table 1.5, males judge as the most comfortable practices "Doing exercises in the book" (Activity 11) with a mean of 1.31 and "Listening to questions and writing answers in the book" (Activity 7) with a mean of 1.59. As for the girls, Activity 5 "Reading silently in class" is very comfortable, with a mean of 1.32. In spite of the fact that the activities above are useful in developing English language skills, by limiting the possibility of competitiveness among students or the possibility of teacher's evaluation in front of others they are not speaking oriented.

Table 1.5 Anxiety Level, among Males and Females, based on in-Class Activities

Activity number	Activity Type	Males[33]	Females[34]
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4.	2.11	2.10
2	Compete in class games by teams	2.29	2.32
3	Open discussion based on volunteer participation	2.58	3.24
4	Speak individually with the instructor in his/ her office	2.73	2.78
5	Read silently in class.	1.61	1.32
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor.	1.97	2.01
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.59	2.03
8	Write your work on the board	2.61	2.85
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.21	3.68
10	Write a composition at home.	1.90	1.61
11	Do exercises in the book	1.31	1.49
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	1.85	2.13
13	Read orally in class	2.17	2.43
14	Interview each other in pairs.	1.99	2.09
15	Write a composition in class	2.61	2.36
16	Work in groups of two and prepare skits	2.33	2.77
17	Role play a situation	2.80	3.56
18	Present a prepared dialogue	2.92	3.23
19	Speak in front of the class	3.16	3.32
20	Work on projects	1.97	2.03
21	Make an oral presentation	3.06	3.46

However, considering the importance that the oral competence in the L2 may have for students (Phillips, 1992) it would be recommendable promoting the in-class activities that are

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[33] *Males and Females' means are calculated irrespective of the country of study.

speaking-oriented but not very stressful. Examples of these practices could be provided by those activities judged by the students interviewed with a mean below the 3: Activity 1 "Working in groups of 3 or 4" with a mean of 2.11 for males and 2.10 for females, Activity 2 "Competing in class games by teams" with a mean of 2.29 for males and 2.32 for females or "Interviewing each other in pairs" with a mean of 1.99 for males and 2.09 for females.

4.2 Speaking-Oriented in-Class Activities

4.2.1 Overview

Table II (see Appendix p. 97) was given to students in order to observe whether students experience speaking anxiety in the foreign language class, apart from the specific activities proposed by the instructor. In this way, it will be easier to observe and analyse the particular beliefs, preconceptions, expectations and fears of the students interviewed. Table II will be analysed into three parts (Tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).

In Table 2.1 questionnaire items are listed along with the percentage of students who expressed "Strong Disagreement", "Disagreement", "Nor Disagreement Nor Agreement", "Agreement" and "Strong Agreement". Table 2.2 shows students' responses organized by means. Hence, when referring to results in percentages look at Table 2.1, and when referring to means, look at Table 2.2.

Interestingly, both groups of students report consistent results, with slight differences only in relation to single activities. The presentation of the results will follow three headings[35]: activity task, speaking errors and preparedness.

4.2.2 Activity task

This section first discusses those activities perceived by students as anxiety-producing. Then the practices judged as more comfortable for students will be outlined.

In analysing Table II, I have realized that speaking oriented activities do not produce such a high level of anxiety as I expected. The total speaking anxiety mean for both Italian and Spanish students is of 3.45. Speaking results as very stressful for a great number of students, irrespective of the country where they are learning English (Italy or Great Britain).

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[35] These three headings are in line with Young's (1990).

Table 2.1 Questionnaire Items and Student Responses to In-Class Activities Based on Percenatges

	Items	Italy (n= 45)					Great Britain (n=55)				
		*SD	D	N	A	SA	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more.	0%	2%	18%	62%	18%	2%	9%	25%	36%	27%
2	I would feel less self-conscious about speaking in class in front of others if I knew them better.	2%	13%	22%	51%	11%	4%	13%	22%	45%	16%
3	I feel very relaxed in class when I have studied a great deal the night before.	2%	24%	33%	31%	9%	4%	11%	25%	45%	15%
4	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	0%	16%	22%	51%	11%	0%	9%	25%	47%	18%
5	I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up.	7%	20%	22%	47%	4%	4%	9%	33%	33%	22%
6	I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing.	2%	16%	18%	40%	24%	7%	13%	24%	38%	18%
7	I enjoy class when we work in pairs.	7%	11%	27%	47%	9%	2%	15%	42%	35%	7%
8	I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class.	0%	11%	13%	62%	13%	2%	2%	29%	53%	24%
9	I would enjoy class if we weren't corrected at all in class.	20%	22%	40%	16%	2%	44%	20%	29%	7%	0%
10	I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events.	0%	18%	33%	38%	11%	0%	7%	45%	36%	11%
11	I would get less upset about my class if we did not have to cover so much material in such a short period of time.	2%	9%	53%	36%	0%	4%	25%	55%	16%	0%
12	I enjoy class when we do skits in class.	2%	16%	58%	24%	0%	4%	27%	51%	18%	0%
13	I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller.	0%	7%	31%	53%	9%	2%	13%	27%	45%	13%
14	I feel comfortable in class when I come to class prepared.	0%	2%	9%	62%	27%	0%	5%	16%	49%	29%
15	I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled.	0%	2%	56%	33%	9%	0%	22%	45%	29%	4%
16	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	0%	9%	29%	51%	11%	0%	11%	18%	51%	20%

Table 2.1 Questionnaire Items and Student Responses to In-Class Activities Based on Percentages

	Questions	Italy (n=45)					Great Britain (n= 55)				
		*SD	D	N	A	SA	SD	D	N	A	SA
17	I like going to class when we are going to role play situations.	11%	24%	42%	22%	0%	4%	20%	62%	15%	0%
18	I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake.	0%	11%	31%	47%	11%	2%	11%	38%	44%	5%
19	I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer.	4%	9%	27%	38%	22%	2%	15%	22%	44%	18%
20	I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting.	0%	4%	7%	69%	20%	0%	2%	7%	64%	27%
21	I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class.	0%	4%	22%	47%	27%	2%	7%	22%	53%	16%
22	I enjoy class when I can work with another student.	0%	13%	42%	40%	4%	0%	11%	44%	42%	4%
23	I would feel uncomfortable if the instructor never corrected our mistakes in class.	9%	16%	22%	29%	24%	9%	4%	11%	44%	33%
24	I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class.	4%	9%	38%	33%	16%	4%	11%	42%	35%	9%

*SD= Strongly Disagree   D= Disagree   N= Nor Disagree Nor Agree   A= Agree

SA= Strongly Agree

In particular it seems that both groups of students are greatly concerned about the relationship they establish with their classmates.

Almost sixty percent of each group in Italy and Great Britain endorse the statement "I would feel less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question" (Item 4; 16). Surprisingly, 0% of students express "Strong Disagreement" with these items. Students want to avoid any kind of competitiveness with their fellows and they admit to being more relaxed if they know the rest of the class. In respect of this, most of the students report they would feel less anxious about speaking in class in front of their classmates if they knew them better (Item 2). Speaking in the foreign language in front of the classmates put students in a vulnerable

position where weaknesses in the L2 may rarely be hidden. Item 8 in Table 2.1 confirms that more than seventy percent of learners fear this practice in Italy and Great Britain.

Table 2.2 Questionnaire Items and Student Reactions to In-Class Activities based on Means

Items	Italy	Great Britain
1 I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more.	3.97	3.75
2 I would feel less self-conscious about speaking in class in front of others if I knew them better.	3.38	3.61
3 I feel very relaxed in class when I have studied a great deal the night before.	3.26	3.56
4 I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	3.44	3.75
5 I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up.	3.23	3.52
6 I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing.	3.66	3.42
7 I enjoy class when we work in pairs.	3.34	3.29
8 I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class.	3.57	4.05
9 I would enjoy class if we weren't corrected at all in class.	2.49	1.98
10 I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events.	3.41	3.53
11 I would get less upset about my class if we did not have to cover so much material in such a short period of time.	3.33	2.84
12 I enjoy class when we do skits in class.	2.92	2.81
13 I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller.	3.53	3.52
14 I feel comfortable in class when I come to class prepared.	4.02	3.99
15 I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled.	3.44	3.14
16 I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	3.48	3.74
17 I like going to class when we are going to role play situations.	2.70	2.86
18 I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake.	3.64	3.4
19 I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer.	3.43	3.61
20 I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting.	4.26	4.18
21 I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class.	3.87	3.75
22 I enjoy class when I can work with another student.	3.31	3.36
23 I would feel uncomfortable if the instructor never corrected our mistakes in class.	3.80	3.91
24 I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class.	3.54	3.31

Looking at Table 2.2, means of 3.57 (for Italian students) and 4.05 (for Spanish students in Great Britain) are found for Item 8. Similar results are reported by Young (1990)[36] and Woodrow[37] (2006). For this reason, a great number of learners in Italy and Great Britain affirm to feel more willing to volunteer answers instead of being asked (Item 19), especially if they are not so afraid to say the wrong thing (Item 6), thus in line with Horwitz et al.'s findings (1986: 129, Item 13) and Koch and Terrell[38] (1991: 119).

Fear of being negatively evaluated or corrected in a harsh manner are feelings experienced by several students in the present investigation. Many of them report, in fact, that they consider themselves able to speak the foreign language pretty well, but when they know they are being graded, they mess up (Item 5): more than fifty percent of students in Italy and Great Britain show this fear. Fifty–nine and thirty seven percent of Koch and Terrell subjects (1991) worry about the evaluation of their oral performances.

In the light of the answers above it is relevant enhancing activities which put students in a relaxed atmosphere. Some of them may be easily identified by the analysis of students' answers: fifty-six percent of learners in Italy and forty-two percent of students in Great Britain agree and strongly agree with the statement "I enjoy class when we work in pairs" (Item 7) and report analogous results when expressing that they like working with another student (Item 22). Class dimensions are, in fact of great importance for most of the students of the present study: sixty-two percent and fifty-eight percent endorse Item 13: "I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller". These findings give support to Young's results (1990: 543); forty-six, thirty-five and forty-one percent of her students agree with the same Item.

Even doing skits in class is an activity which students do not fear very much. More than fifty percent of both groups of students express "Neither agreement nor Disagreement" with this practice (Item 12). Interestingly 0% of the students strongly disagree with this Item and two and four percent of them show "Strong Disagreement". A practice which results nor highly anxiety-provoking nor particularly comfortable for both groups of students is the role playing situation. Forty-two percent of Italian students and sixty-two percent of Spanish students neither agree nor disagree with Item 17 "I like going to class when we are going to

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[36] She finds that seventy-five, sixty-eight and seventy-nine students agreeing with Item 8 (Young, 1990: 543).

[37] Performing in English in front of classmates has been rated an anxiety provoking activity by 44.7% of her students. (Woodrow, 2006: 319)

[38] Seventy-five percent of Koch and Terrell's students rate "being called on in class to speak" as producing anxiety.

role play situations. Consistent results have been found by Koch and Terrell [39](1991), Young[40] (1991), Woodrow[41] (2006: 317). As it appears in Table 2.2 Spanish students in the United Kingdom seem to appreciate this activity a bit more.

Getting the attention and interest of students might be relevant enough to make them comfortable. A good number of learners express agreement with the Item 10 "I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events". In Table 2.2 it is possible to understand that anxious students judge this activity as important in order to be involved in speaking practices: Italian students report a mean of 3.41 and Spanish students a mean of 3.53. Along similar lines, and even more definitely sixty-nine percent of Italian students and sixty-four percent of Spanish students agree with Item 20 "I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting". 0% strongly disagree with this Item and when disagreement is expressed, this occurs only for two percent of the students interviewed. Table 2.2 shows that high concern exists among students of English in Italy and Great Britain referring to the topics dealt in the class. Means of 4.26 for Italian students and 4.18 for Spanish students are found[42].

Students report a medium level of anxiety as they have to speak in class when they have a debate scheduled. In this case, fifty-six percent of Italian students and forty-five percent of Spanish students express neither "Neither Agreement nor Disagreement" with Item 15. As it appears in Table 2.2 it seems that Italian students would be slightly more willing to participate in this situation than the Spanish subjects in Great Britain. Scheduling a debate might be seen by some students as a mean to prepare themselves psychologically, in order to perform with less risks of making mistakes, for example.

To have a more complete idea about the level of speaking anxiety experienced by Italian students of English in Italy and that one felt by Spanish students of English in Great Britain, Table A sums up that only a slight difference exists.

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[39] Fifty percent of their students (1991) judge role-play activities as producing anxiety.
[40] Almost half of her students Agree and Disagree with Item 17 (1991: 544).
[41] Students interviewed by Woodrow (2006: 317) report in the Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale a mean of 2.73 for role playing activities in front of the class.
[42] Discussing current events and interesting topics are activities usually described by researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young1990; Koch & Terrell, 1991) as producing comfort in very nervous students. The same occurs for some activities of the present paper: Activity 7 "working in pairs" and 22 "working with another student".

Table A   Anxiety Level in Italy and Great Britain basing on Table 2.2 means
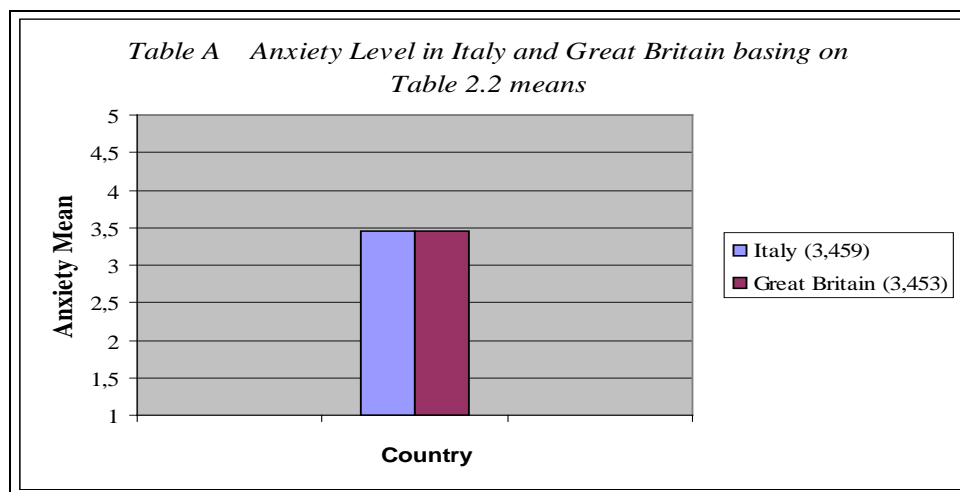
4.2.3 Speaking errors

A great number of students of English as a foreign language in Italy and Great Britain report to be concerned over the possibility of making mistakes in front of the teacher and their classmates.

According to Item 6 of Table 2.1 sixty-four percent of Italian students and fifty-six percent of Spanish students agree and strongly agree with the Item "I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing". Congruent results have been found by Young[43] (1990: 545) and Horwitz[44] et. al (1986: 129). Interestingly enough, most students affirm they feel uneasy when their fellow students are asked to correct their mistakes in the foreign language class. Item 24 shows that only four percent of both Italian and Spanish students strongly disagree with this practice; furthermore, thirty-three percent of the Italian students and thirty-five percent of the Spanish ones show agreement. Young reports similar findings (1990: 544).

Almost half of the students of each group endorse the statement "I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes and it were not such a big deal to make a mistakes" (Item 18). Moreover, only a restricted percentage of learners express disagreement or strong disagreement: eleven percent in Italy and thirteen percent in Great Britain. Once more Young (1990: 544) has similar findings. Although students fear the possibility of making speaking mistakes, they recognize the importance of being corrected for improving their L2 skills, especially Spanish subjects in Great Britain (Item 9, 23). Koch and Terrell (1991: 119) observe that forty-four percent of their students got anxious when their speech errors are not corrected.

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[43] More than fifty percent of her students agree with Item 6.
[44] Sixty-five percent of their students express disagreement with the item "I don't worry about making mistakes in language class" (1986: 129).

Preparedness: Students of the present research express the importance that preparedness and practice have in order to lessen their foreign language speaking anxiety. The result is that the more students practice the more comfortable they feel when they speak the L2.

As regards Item 1 most students agree or strongly agree with the statement "I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more." Especially sixty-two percent of Italian students in Italy show agreement and only two percent of them reject this Item. This may be probably interpreted by the fact that for a great number of Italian students, the English class is almost the only opportunity to practice the language studied. Students would feel less nervous about taking an oral exam if they got more practice speaking in class (Item 21). Means of 3.87 and 3.75 respectively for Italian and Spanish students appear in Table 2.2.

Consistent with Young's findings (1990: 543) students explain they feel more relaxed in class when they have studied a great deal the night before (Item 3): forty-one per cent of Italian students and sixty percent of Spanish subjects agreed with the same Item. Students in Great Britain found studying a lot the night before as very efficient to reduce their worry about speaking in the class. Who knows if this may be due to the fact that the Spanish students interviewed are Erasmus students, thus spending most of the time at parties, country visits and not studying constantly?[45]

Covering much material in a short period of time does not result as particularly stressful for students of both groups (Item 11), especially for Italian students (see Table 2.1). Moreover a great deal of students agrees they would feel more comfortable in class when they come to class prepared. Significantly sixty-two percent of Italian students agree with Item 14 and twenty-seven strongly agree with it. As for the Spanish students, forty-nine percent of them express agreement and twenty-nine percent strongly agree. This is understandable considering students' fear of making mistakes in front of others, and for taking risks in the foreign language.

Referring to Table 2.2 it is possible to conclude that both groups of students are very careful about their preparation. Young's students put great emphasis on this aspect: eighty-seven, ninety-six and ninety-five of her students agree with Item 14 (1990: 544). Horwitz et al.' s (1986: 129) report that forty-nine percent of the students interviewed endorse the Item "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class". More than fifty percent of Aida's students (1994: 160) affirm that "I get nervous when the Japanese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance".

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[45] I know this is not a well founded assertion as it is based on my personal experience, but this is something I have noticed especially among the Bachelor Erasmus students I have surveyed.

4.3 Students' self perception and speaking anxiety

Table 3.1 lists students' responses in percentage terms to the question "How do you rate your oral skills in English language?" Students had the opportunity to answer "Bad", "Good", "Very Good" and "Excellent". As it appears in the table, most students learning English in Italy and Great Britain are quite positive in their answers. 66.66% of Italian students in Italy and 54.54% of Spanish students in Great Britain answer "Good".

Table 3.1 Students' self evaluations of oral English competence

Student's self evaluation	Italy	Great Britain
Bad	13.33%	18.88%
Good	66,66%	54.54%
Very Good	15.55%	27.27%
Excellent	4.44%	0%

In Great Britain students who value their English oral skills as "Very Good" are more numerous (27.27%) than Italians (15.55%). However, at the same time students in Great Britain are more than Italians in evaluating their oral competence in the language as "Bad". Only 4.44% of Italian students and 0% of students in Great Britain answer "Excellent".

For this reason, in the total, the level of perception for oral language competence is fairly similar among both groups of students, irrespective of the country of study. A flaw worth mentioning here is that students' actual proficiency level has not been tested for this investigation; for this reason students' self perception may not reflect the actual language speaking ability.

A further aspect investigated in the present study is the relation between students' perception of their own oral language competence and gender. According to Table 3.2 no considerable differences exist between males and females. Almost the same percentage has been found for those males and females who evaluate their English language oral competence as "Bad". Females tend to be more positive in their responses as 24.63% of them answer "Very Good" compared to the 16.12% of males. Only a minority rates its own ability to speak English as "Excellent".

Table 3.2 Gender in relation with students' perceptions of their own oral English competence

Students' perceptions	Males	Females
Bad	16.12%	15.94%
Good	64.51%	57.97%
Very Good	16.12%	24.63%
Excellent	3.22%	1.44%

Table 3.3 shows students' self perception in relation with students' level of anxiety[46].

Table 3.3 Students' self perception in relation with students' level of anxiety

Students' self perceptions	Speaking Anxiety Mean
Bad	3.56
Good	3.44
Very Good	3.43
Excellent	3.19

Considering the 100 students examined, the result is that students perceiving their oral language competence as "Bad" have the highest level of speaking anxiety (3.56- Moderately Anxious)[47]. One of the students interviewed thinks to have a bad competence in speaking English; hence he comments: "I feel embarrassed stupid and shy when I have to speak in front of my classmates"; another one wrote "I feel anxious and I'm afraid to do mistakes. However, I know that speaking is the only way to improve, so I have to overcome my fear"[48].

On the other hand, subjects with a high perception of their oral ability are less nervous (mean: 3.19, Neither anxious Nor relaxed). Therefore, it seems here it could be possible to assert that as long as the perception of one's own oral competence in the L2 increases and gets more positive, the level of speaking anxiety tends to decrease[49].

Interestingly, in Great Britain one of the students answering "Excellent" comment to be relaxed every time she uses to speak in front of the class "I feel well because I know my

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[46] Students' level of anxiety is based on the mean of students' responses to Table II (see the Appendix, p. 97).
[47] Similar findings have been reported by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a), Daly (1997a), Cheng et al. (1999).
[48] This student comment is reported as it was written by the student interviewed. For this reason some mistakes could be found.
[49] However the following findings need to be treated with some precautions, considering that the mean range in anxiety spanned slightly (from 3.56 to 3.19).

classmates are also foreign student and we're learning the same language. So I know it's common to make mistakes.[50]" However, the mean of her speaking anxiety resulted through her answers to the questionnaire is very high (3.99), showing this student is probably not conscious enough about her fear. The same phenomenon occurs for a male student in Great Britain. He reports to be very good at speaking English and explicitly writes that he can keep his anxiety under control when he has to perform in front of the others "I feel at first nervous, but after 5 minutes or so I calm down and speak fluently". In spite of this his speaking anxiety mean is of 4.08, probably one of the most anxious subjects in the research.

4.4 Interest in the English language

Table 4.1 lists students' answers to the question "How much do you like English language?" The purpose is to understand whether living and studying in the foreign language country contributes to an increase in the enjoyment and interest for the language. According to Table 4.1 little difference exists between the two groups. More than seventy percent of them are very interested in the language as a matter of fact. To be more precise, on the whole, a slightly higher percentage of students learning English in Great Britain reported that they like English "Very Much" compared to the Italian students.

Table 4.1 How much do you rate your like for the English language?

Students' answers	Italy	Great Britain
1= Not very much	2.22%	0%
2	26.66%	21.81%
3= Very much	71.11%	78.18%

Students' interest in English is also analysed in relation to their speaking anxiety. Are interested students less anxious at the moment of speaking the L2? Table 4.2 sums up learners' responses to this question.

Although the anxiety level spans only a little (from 3.25 to 3.42), it seems that as students' interest in English increases, their level of anxiety increases consequently: "When I study English, I have the feeling that I never do enough" is one of the comments reported by a female student who explains to "love" the language.

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[50] This comment, as the previous ones, is reported as written by the student.

Table 4.2 Interest for English and speaking anxiety organized by Means

Student's interest for English	Speaking Anxiety Mean
1= Not very much	3.25
2	3.39
3= Very Much	3.42

This might be probably due to the fact that when students are ambitious, they tend to have higher expectations for the language or they are more exigent with themselves. Similar conclusions have been reported by Gardner et al. (1976) and Horwitz (1988). However my findings unexpectedly contradict my initial hypothesis. I believed, in fact, that students interested in learning a foreign language are also more open to accept those risks which L2 learning process entails, not getting particularly worried and anxious in that situation.

4.5 Students' beliefs

In this section students are asked to answer in a range from 1 to 3 to the statement "Living for a while in the foreign language country has been helping/ would help me to improve my English language oral skills". The intention is to measure whether students who are actually taking advantage of this experience feel more relaxed as they speak English in the foreign language class. Table 5.1 lists the percentage of students in Italy and Great Britain who answer "Not very much", "2" and "Very much". In addition, within each group of students, the mean is calculated based on the anxiety level they experience.

Table 5.1 "Living for a while in the foreign language country has been helping/ would help me to improve my English language oral skills".

Country	Students' Answers					
	1= Not Very Much		*2*		*3= Very Much*	
	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean
Italy	0	0	17.77%	3.13	82.22%	3.52
Great Britain	1.81%	3	25.45%	3.39	72.72%	3.55

According to Table 5.1, only 1.81% of students consider living for a while in the target language country as not helpful, and surprisingly this percentage is made up of students

already living in Great Britain. Most of the students 82.22% (in Italy) and 72.72% (in Great Britain) recognized the importance of living for a while in the L2 country to develop the oral competence in English. Such a belief has been already mentioned by Cenoz and Lecumberri (1999: 8).

Referring to the mean, it is worth mentioning that, even though students in Great Britain affirmed that living in the L2 country has been helping them to get more fluent in speaking English, their level of speaking anxiety is quite high, thus classifying them as moderately anxious. As it appears in Table 5.1, 72.72% of students answering "Very much" have a speaking anxiety mean of 3.55 while 25.45% of students answering "2" have an inferior mean of 3.39.

A noteworthy finding concerns the time spent by students learning English in Italy and Great Britain at the university. According to students' answers to the question "How many weekly hours do you spend for English language lectures?" the mean is of 5 weekly hours for Spanish students in Great Britain and 6 for Italian students in Italy.

Taking into consideration the importance of being exposed to the foreign language (Oller et al., 1980), L2 students who do not have the opportunity to live and learn English in Great Britain and who experience the foreign language class as the only context in which they are in contact with the language should be guaranteed by their university or school the chance to be exposed more to the language (Briére, 1978), in particular as they are students attending a Bachelor in English language.

An interesting aspect investigated in the present study is students' belief about the possibility that other learners may experience embarrassment in speaking English. Many students do not realize that some of their classmates possibly experience the same sense of uncertainty and discomfort as they do during the foreign language class. For this reason, I have considered important to ask students directly about this specific matter.

Table 6.1 "Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

Country	Students' answers	
	Yes	*No*
Italy	85.45%	14.54%
Great Britain	91.11%	8.88%

Table 6.1 shows the percentages of students who answer "Yes" and "No" to the question "Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

A great number of learners are conscious about the existence of such a feeling, especially in Great Britain, without considerable differences between males and females (see Table 6.2). Females come out as slightly more sensitive about this possible feeling.

Table 6.2 "Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

Gender	Students' answers	
	Yes	No
Males	80.64%	19.35%
Females	91.30%	8.69%

4.6 Anxiety-reducing characteristics of the instructor

The last section of the questionnaire (Table III in the Appendix p. 98) consists of two parts. The first one asks students to express their comments about their instructor's characteristics which might contribute to create a relaxed atmosphere in the foreign language class, referring to the behaviour adopted during error correction and certain in-class activities. In the second one, students are asked about teacher's characteristics which might help students feel more comfortable when speaking the foreign language.

Table 7.1 lists students' comments to each item without any distinction between Italian students in Italy and Spanish students in Great Britain. The total number of students surveyed is 100; in addition students have had the possibility to select more than one answer.

Referring to error correction, to the question "What does your instructor do to decrease any anxiety you may have in your foreign language class?" sixty-four students (out of 100) answer that it helps when your "Instructor does not make you feel stupid when you make a mistake". Even telling that everyone can make mistakes is considered by the students of the present research as one of the most useful manners to create a relaxed atmosphere in the class (thirty-eight students). Twenty-nine students report to feel less anxious when the "Instructor does not over-react to mistakes", twenty-five select the answer when "Instructor's manner of

correction is not harsh" and twenty when the "Instructor has attitude that mistakes are not a big deal".

Table 7.1 Instructor's characteristics[51]

What does your instructor do to decrease any anxiety you may have in your foreign language class?

Error Correction	No. of Comments
Instructor does not make you feel stupid when you make a mistake	64
Instructor has the attitude that mistakes are made by everyone	38
Instructor does not over- react to mistakes	29
Instructor's manner of correction is not harsh	25
Instructor has the attitude that mistakes are no big deal	20
Activities	
All students are called on equally	52
Students get practice speaking	51
Instructor prepares class well and reviews	29
Students can volunteer answers and are not called on to provide responses	24
Students are asked to work in groups or pairs	24
Students are not put "on the spot"	14

What characteristics does your instructor have which tend to reduce your anxiety about speaking in class?

Instructor Characteristic	No. of Comments
Friendly	67
Patient	57
Good sense	56
Helpful	52
Encourages students to speak	51
Relaxed	47
Makes students comfortable	47
Smiles	44
Explains material well	33
Understanding	31
Creates casual atmosphere	21
Compliments students	15
Cares	10

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[51] The Table above is based on Young's questionnaire Table (1990: 549).

Interestingly, Young's students (1990: 549) evaluated this last option "Instructor has attitude that mistakes are no big deal" as the most effective.

As for in-class activities learners feel more comfortable (fifty-two students selected this answer) when the instructor calls students equally. Twenty-nine students suggest that it helps when "Instructor prepares class well and reviews" and twenty-four students comment similarly about the possibility of giving volunteer answers and to work in groups or pairs. Surprisingly, only fourteen students select the activity "Students are not put "on the spot" ". In contrast, this last characteristic has been rated by Young's students (1990: 549) as the most useful to make learners comfortable in the foreign language class.

To the question "What characteristics does your instructor have which tend to reduce your anxiety about speaking in class?" the highest number of students (sixty-seven) answer "Friendly", then "Patient" (fifty-seven), "Good sense of humour" (fifty-six), "Helpful" (fifty-two). Important for students is having an instructor who "Encourages students to speak" (fifty-one comments), who smiles (forty-four comments) or who explains material well (thirty-three comments). Only fifteen students comment "Compliments students" and only ten answer "Cares", almost in line with Young's findings[52] (1990: 549).

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[52] Within the fifteen instructor's characteristics suggested by Young (1990: 549) to her students, "Compliments students" and "Smiles" are rather low in the table showing the number of comments.

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Summary

Students surveyed in the present study demonstrate that speaking a foreign language in the class is a fairly stressful activity. A consistent number of them proves to be aware of the possible embarrassment experienced by other learners when they speak English as a foreign language, thus proving the importance which such a feeling has among language learners. Learners surveyed report medium levels of anxiety and not very high as I expected; however, they demonstrate that speaking activities are indeed the in-class practices which make foreign language students most nervous and tense. Students show to experience communication apprehension in the context of the English class.

Females being a little more anxious than males, most of students feel worried in those activities with a high self exposure requirement, as already found by Lucas (1984), Horwitz et al. (1986), Price (1991) and Young (1991). Making oral presentations, speaking spontaneously in front of the classmates, writing one's own work on the board turn out to be in-class practices which put the student in a very stressful situation, where he is "the main protagonist" at that moment. In these cases, learners may feel uncomfortable because they fear teachers' harsh ways of correcting errors and the possibility to make mistakes.

A considerable number of students affirm to be more willing to give volunteer answers if they are sure to say the right thing, thus demonstrating a worry about taking risks. Ely (1986) has explained that high levels of "Language Class Discomfort[53]" are negative predictors for "Language Class Risk-taking". Although the anxiety about making mistakes is one of the main reasons for students' reticence, learners are conscious about the importance of being corrected as a good way to improve English, in line with Wenden' findings (1986). One of her students declares that an efficient strategy for gaining a better ability in the L2 is learning from his friends' correction of the mistakes he makes when he speaks. However, as reported by the students of the present survey, in the formal context of a classroom, being corrected by the classmates is an uncomfortable activity, which may increase competitiveness among students and which should be avoided by teachers. Activities which should be promoted, instead, are those ones rated by a high number of students as comfortable and not anxiety-provoking. Students report to feel more relaxed when they work in small groups, or in pairs, conducting interviews with each other; all practices which give students the opportunity to

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[53] Language Class Discomfort indicates students' anxiety for speaking the foreign language.

practice speaking without being spotlighted in front of the rest of the class and which give students the opportunity to know the classmates at the same time. Calling students equally or giving them the possibility to answer spontaneously is an activity rather useful to create a comfortable atmosphere in the class. Students report to be more willing to participate by discussing current events or interesting topics.

Activities which create contradictory reactions are the role play practices: some students evaluate this type of activity as stressful, while others affirm to feel comfortable. Understandably, students tend to be less stressed in those practices with a low self exposure requirement. Writing answers in the book, reading silently in the class do not threaten students self esteem.

Besides external factors such as the activities made in class, it has been important to analyse the beliefs held by students towards the foreign language learning process, as well as observing their attitudes and degrees of interest for the language studied. Students in the present research have been asked directly about teachers' behaviours which contribute to create a relaxed environment in the class. A great concern in respect of this is given to teacher's reactions to students' mistakes. It would be recommendable for many instructors to correct errors without making the learner feeling "stupid" or by having the attitude that mistakes are made by everyone and are not a big deal in the foreign language learning process.

Students are positive in the perception of their oral skills of English and only a minority rates the oral competence as 'Bad'. In line with McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond (1985) the result is that those students with a negative self perception experience higher levels of communication apprehension, with no big distinction between males and females. The majority of the learners surveyed is very interested in English and likes this language very much. Interestingly enough, those students who enjoy English more result in them being more anxious about speaking, probably because they are more willing to get a greater knowledge of the language and better performances in the L2, compared to the less interested students. Another noteworthy finding of the present survey is what students think about the possibility to live for a while in Great Britain as an efficient way to improve their oral skills in English. Most of the students, especially in Italy rate this experience as very useful. Spanish students, already living in Great Britain as Erasmus students, value positively their journey in the foreign language country as an opportunity to get more fluent in the L2. However, even if students has this good attitude, their speaking anxiety level is rather high. On the whole, in fact, anxiety levels respectively for Italian students in Italy and Spanish students in Great

Britain are almost the same leading to the unexpected conclusion that the exposure variable of "living for a while in the foreign language country" does not always correspond to learner's improvement in the language perception or to students' comfort in speaking, being in contrast with several researchers' findings. As Cenoz and Lecumberri report (1999) being in contact with the foreign language (i.e. living in the foreign language country, having native speakers as friends, watching TV in the L2, listening to the radio) are all described by their students as efficient means to gain a better proficiency in the L2, as well as to gather a better confidence in the speaking situations.

Referring to this latter matter, a reason for the discrepancy between my results and those ones of other investigations may be the limited number of students I surveyed: only two groups of learners have been interviewed. Each group had one English teacher, with his teaching techniques and methodologies. Hence students' answers and behaviours may be probably due to that specific learning context, and may not be generalized enough. Even in the light of this, the results of the present research need to be treated with some precautions, as fruits of a work which involved a restricted number of learners and teachers interviewed in a particular moment of foreign language learning/teaching process.

5.2 Conclusions

The findings of the present research are likely to support other studies, by asserting that foreign language anxiety is a common debilitating feeling which affects students in a variety of ways. Particularly frequent during speaking activities, I think the awareness of such a feeling should be heightened and not be undervalued by teachers and learners. This could be realized through workshops or the adoption of certain teaching methodologies aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom especially during speaking practices (e.g. Communicative Language Teaching; Natural Approach). Making students comfortable by avoiding activities which increase competitiveness or which threaten students' self esteem is very important. Working in small groups and discussing interesting topics are good activities that allow students to know each other and to practice the foreign language. Teachers could use gentle and flexible approaches of error correction, being friendly and with a good sense of humour.

At the same time students might cope with their anxiety by talking with their classmates about this problem since they are not the only ones to experience it and by consulting with their teachers, themselves "successful" language learners for many students, about their points

of view towards the foreign language learning process, a process where difficulties and debilitating feelings as anxiety are unavoidable sometimes.

In contrast with my expectations, students of the present research has turned out to be anxious almost at the same level, with no big difference between L2 learners in the L2 country and L2 learners in another country. However, being exposed to the language studied is without doubt a good predictor for L2 improvement and this should be encouraged as much as possible.

Taking into account the limitations of the present survey, due to the restricted number of students, recommendations for future research should thus include investigations on the same problem but with a wider sample, including more foreign language classrooms with instructors with very different teaching techniques.

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Appendix

Gender   **M**   **F**

Your native language   _____

How do you rate your oral skills of English language ?   **(be honest ☺)**

BAD   GOOD   VERY GOOD   EXCELLENT

Weekly hours of English language lectures (include also lectures with other teachers of English) _____

How much do you like English Language?   **1**   **2**   **3**

                                         (not very much)   **(very much)**

In a range from 1 to 3, evaluate the sentence:

"L*iving for a while in an English speaking country may help me/ has been helping to improve my English language oral skills"*

          1   **2**   **3**

    (not very much)   **(very much)**

Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?   **YES**   **NO**

TABLE I

In a range from 1 to 5, how do you feel during each in- class activity?

*1= Very Relaxed; 2= Moderately Relaxed; 3= Neither Relaxed Nor Anxious; 4=Moderately Anxious; 5= Very anxious.

1	Work in groups of 3 or 4.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Compete in class games by teams.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Open discussion based on volunteer participation.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Speak individually with the instructor in his/her office.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Read silently in class.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Write your work on the board.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Write a composition at home.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Do exercises in the book.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Repeat individually after the instructor.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Read orally in class.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Interview each other in pairs.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Write a composition in class.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Work in groups of two and prepare a skit.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Role play a situation.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Present a prepared dialog in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Speak in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Work on projects (i.e., newspapers, filmstrips, photo albums).	1	2	3	4	5
21	Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5

Table II Questionnaire Items and Student Reactions to in-Class Activities

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Neither agree nor disagree 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

1	I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I would feel less self-conscious about speaking in class in front of others if I knew them better.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I feel very relaxed in class when I have studied a great deal the night before	1	2	3	4	5
4	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I enjoy class when we work in pairs.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I would enjoy class if we weren't corrected at all in class.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I would get less upset about my class if we did not have to cover so much material in such a short period of time.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I enjoy class when we do skits in class.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I feel comfortable in class when I come to class prepared.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I like going to class when we are going to role play situations.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes, and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I enjoy class when I can work with another student.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I would feel uncomfortable if the instructor never corrected our mistakes in class.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class.	1	2	3	4	5

TABLE III

What does your instructor do to decrease any anxiety you may have in your foreign language class?
Circle the Items you retain relevant from both "Error Correction" "Activities" lists.
(you can choose more than one item in each list)

Errors correction	Activities
1. Instructor has attitude that mistakes are no big deal.	6. Students are not put "on the spot."
2. Instructor has attitude that mistakes are made by everyone.	7. Students can volunteer answers and are not called on to provide responses.
3. Instructor does not make you feel stupid when you make a mistake.	8. Students are asked to work in groups or pairs.
4. Instructor's manner of correction is not harsh.	9. All students are called on equally.
5. Instructor does not over-react to mistakes.	10. Instructor prepares class well and reviews.
	11. Students get practice speaking.

What characteristics does your instructor have which tend to reduce your anxiety about speaking in class?

(Circle the Items which you retain relevant

"Instructor Characteristic" list	How do you feel when you speak English in front of your classmates?
Instructor Characteristic	
Good sense of humor	
Friendly	
Relaxed	_____
Patient	
Makes students feel comfortable	_____
Encourages students to speak	_____
Understanding	_____
Helpful	
Compliments Students	_____
Explain material well	
Understanding	
Creates casual atmoshere	
Smiles	
Cares	

The following questionnaire will be anonymous, and its results will be used for research purposes.

Thank you very much for your collaboration to my Master Thesis, ☺   *Alessia*

Results' Tables

Table 1.1 In-Class Activities Arranged by Anxiety Level Means in Italy

Activity number[54]	Activity type[55]	Anxiety Mean
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.42
19	Speak in front of the class	3.40
21	Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.19
17	Role play a situation	3.13
3	Open a discussion based on volunteer participation	3.13
18	Present a prepared dialogue in front of the class	3.11
4	Speak individually with the instructor in his/her office	3.06
8	Write your work on the board	3.04
15	Write a composition in class	2.58
16	Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.45
2	Compete in class games by teams	2.32
13	Read orally in class	2.25
14	Interview each other in pairs	2.20
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor	2.09
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.08
20	Work on projects (i.e. newspapers, film strips, photo album)	1.98
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	1.95
10	Write a composition at home	1.89
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.78
5	Read silently in class	1.40
11	Do exercises in the book	1.39

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[54] The Activity numbers are reported as they appear in the questionnaire Table I, given to the students interviewed.

[55] The Activities are reported in a decreasing order based on the anxiety means: from the most anxiety-producing activity to the most comfortable one.

Table 1.2 In- Class Activities arranged by Anxiety Level Means in Great Britain

Activity number[56]	Activity type[57]	Anxiety Mean
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.47
21	Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.33
17	Role play a situation	3.24
19	Speak in front of the class	3.08
18	Present a prepared dialogue in front of the class	3.05
3	Open a discussion based on volunteer participation	2.69
16	Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.65
4	Speak individually after the instructor in his/ her office	2.45
8	Write your work on the board	2.42
15	Write a composition class	2.40
13	Read orally in class	2.35
2	Compete in class by teams	2.29
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.13
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	2.03
20	Work on projects (i.e. newspapers, film strips, photo album)	2.01
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor	1.89
14	Interview each other in pairs	1.88
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.84
10	Write a composition at home	1.62
5	Read silently in class	1.53
11	Do exercises in the book	1.41

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[56] The Activity numbers are reported as they appear in the questionnaire Table I, given to the students interviewed.

[57] The Activities are reported in a decreasing order basing on the anxiety means: from the most anxiety-producing activity to the most comfortable one.
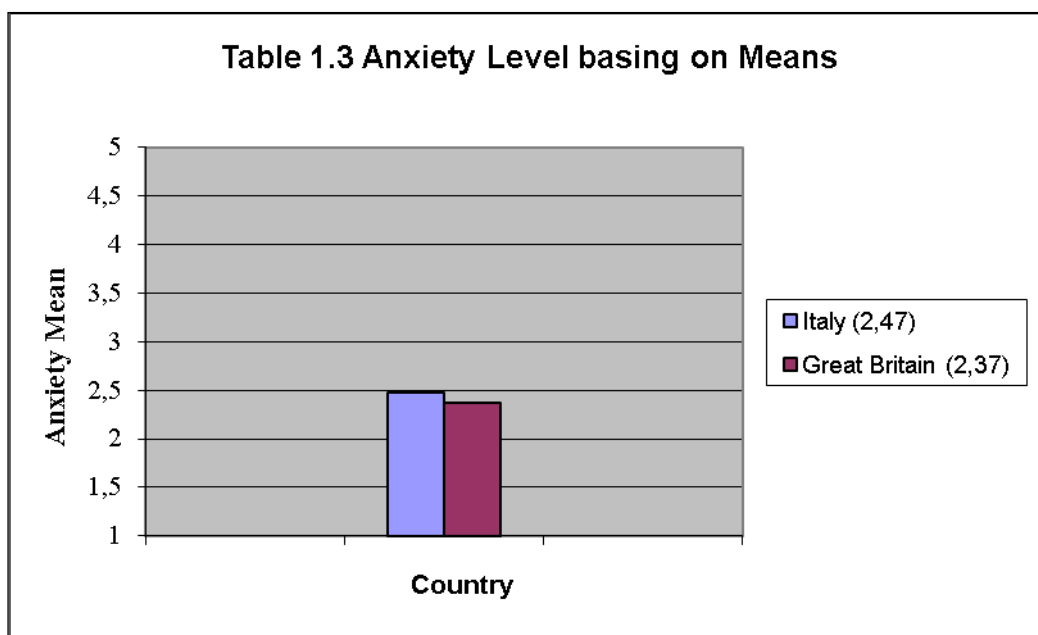
Table 1.3 sums up Anxiety Means of Tables 1.1 and 1.2

Table 1.4 In-Class Activities arranged by Self- Exposure requirement

Activities	Italy	Great Britain	Activities
Activities with a low self exposure requirement			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
11. Do exercises in the book	1.39	1.41	**11.** Do exercises in the book
5. Read silently in class	1.40	1.53	**5.** Read silently in class
7. Listen to questions and write answers to questions	1.78	1.62	**10.** Write a composition at home
10. Write a composition at home	1.89	1.84	**7.** Listen to questions and write answers
15. Write a composition in class	2.58	2.40	**15.** Write a composition in class
Activities in groups			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
1. Work in groups of 3 or 4	2.08	1.88	**14.** Interview each other in pairs
6. Repeat as a class after the instructor	2.09	1.89	**6.** Repeat as a class after the instructor
14. Interview each other in pairs	2.20	2.13	**1.** Work in groups of 3 or 4
2. Compete in class games by teams	2.32	2.29	**2.** Compete in class games by teams
16. Work in groups of two and prepare a skit	2.45	2.65	**16.** Work in groups of two and prepare a skit
Activities with a high self exposure requirement			
	Anxiety Mean	**Anxiety Mean**	
12. Repeat individually after the instructor	1.95	2.03	**12.** Repeat individually after the instructor
13. Read orally in class	2.25	2.35	**13.** Read orally in class
8. Write your work on the board	2.04	2.42	**8.** Write your work on the board
4. Speak individually with the instructor in his/ her office	3.06	2.45	**4.** Speak individually with the instructor in his/her office
18. Present a prepared dialogue	3.11	2.69	**3.** Open discussion based on volunteer participation
3. Open discussion based on volunteer participation	3.13	3.05	**18.** Present a prepared dialogue
17. Role play a situation	3.13	−	
21. Make an oral presentation or skit in front of the class	3.19	3.08	**19.** Speak in front of the class
19. Speak in front of the class	3.40	3.24	**17.** Role play a situation

Table 1.4 In-Class Activities arranged by Self- Exposure requirement

Activities	Italy		Great Britain		Activities
	Anxiety	**Mean**	**Anxiety**	**Mean**	
Activities with a high self exposure requirement					
9. Role play a situation spontaneously or skit in front of the class		3.42		3.33	**21.** Make an oral presentation
	-			3.47	**9.** Role play a situation in front of the class.

Table 1.5 Anxiety Level, among Males and Females, based on In-Class Activities

Activity number	Activity Type	Males[58]	Females[59]
1	Work in groups of 3 or 4.	2.11	2.10
2	Compete in class games by teams	2.29	2.32
3	Open discussion based on volunteer participation	2.58	3.24
4	Speak individually with the instructor in his/ her office	2.73	2.78
5	Read silently in class.	1.61	1.32
6	Repeat as a class after the instructor.	1.97	2.01
7	Listen to questions and write answers to the questions	1.59	2.03
8	Write your work on the board	2.61	2.85
9	Role play a situation spontaneously in front of the class	3.21	3.68
10	Write a composition at home.	1.90	1.61
11	Do exercises in the book	1.31	1.49
12	Repeat individually after the instructor	1.85	2.13
13	Read orally in class	2.17	2.43
14	Interview each other in pairs.	1.99	2.09
15	Write a composition in class	2.61	2.36
16	Work in groups of two and prepare skits	2.33	2.77
17	Role play a situation	2.80	3.56
18	Present a prepared dialogue	2.92	3.23
19	Speak in front of the class	3.16	3.32
20	Work on projects	1.97	2.03
21	Make an oral presentation	3.06	3.46

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[58] *Males and Females' means are calculated irrespective of the country of study.

Table 2.1 Questionnaire Items and Student Responses to In-Class Activities Based on Percenatges

	Items	Italy (n= 45)					Great Britain (n=55)				
		*SD	D	N	A	SA	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more.	0%	2%	18%	62%	18%	2%	9%	25%	36%	27%
2	I would feel less self-conscious about speaking in class in front of others if I knew them better.	2%	13%	22%	51%	11%	4%	13%	22%	45%	16%
3	I feel very relaxed in class when I have studied a great deal the night before.	2%	24%	33%	31%	9%	4%	11%	25%	45%	15%
4	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	0%	16%	22%	51%	11%	0%	9%	25%	47%	18%
5	I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up.	7%	20%	22%	47%	4%	4%	9%	33%	33%	22%
6	I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing.	2%	16%	18%	40%	24%	7%	13%	24%	38%	18%
7	I enjoy class when we work in pairs.	7%	11%	27%	47%	9%	2%	15%	42%	35%	7%
8	I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class.	0%	11%	13%	62%	13%	2%	2%	29%	53%	24%
9	I would enjoy class if we weren't corrected at all in class.	20%	22%	40%	16%	2%	44%	20%	29%	7%	0%
10	I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events.	0%	18%	33%	38%	11%	0%	7%	45%	36%	11%
11	I would get less upset about my class if we did not have to cover so much material in such a short period of time.	2%	9%	53%	36%	0%	4%	25%	55%	16%	0%
12	I enjoy class when we do skits in class.	2%	16%	58%	24%	0%	4%	27%	51%	18%	0%
13	I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller.	0%	7%	31%	53%	9%	2%	13%	27%	45%	13%
14	I feel comfortable in class when I come to class prepared.	0%	2%	9%	62%	27%	0%	5%	16%	49%	29%
15	I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled.	0%	2%	56%	33%	9%	0%	22%	45%	29%	4%
16	I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	0%	9%	29%	51%	11%	0%	11%	18%	51%	20%

Table 2.1 Questionnaire Items and Student Responses to In-Class Activities Based on Percentages

	Questions	Italy (n=45)					Great Britain (n= 55)				
		*SD	D	N	A	SA	SD	D	N	A	SA
17	I like going to class when we are going to role play situations.	11%	24%	42%	22%	0%	4%	20%	62%	15%	0%
18	I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake.	0%	11%	31%	47%	11%	2%	11%	38%	44%	5%
19	I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer.	4%	9%	27%	38%	22%	2%	15%	22%	44%	18%
20	I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting.	0%	4%	7%	69%	20%	0%	2%	7%	64%	27%
21	I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class.	0%	4%	22%	47%	27%	2%	7%	22%	53%	16%
22	I enjoy class when I can work with another student.	0%	13%	42%	40%	4%	0%	11%	44%	42%	4%
23	I would feel uncomfortable if the instructor never corrected our mistakes in class.	9%	16%	22%	29%	24%	9%	4%	11%	44%	33%
24	I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class.	4%	9%	38%	33%	16%	4%	11%	42%	35%	9%

*SD= Strongly Disagree

D= Disagree

N= Nor Disagree Nor Agree

A= Agree

SA= Strongly Agree

Table 2.2 Questionnaire Items and Student Reactions to In- Class Activities based on Means

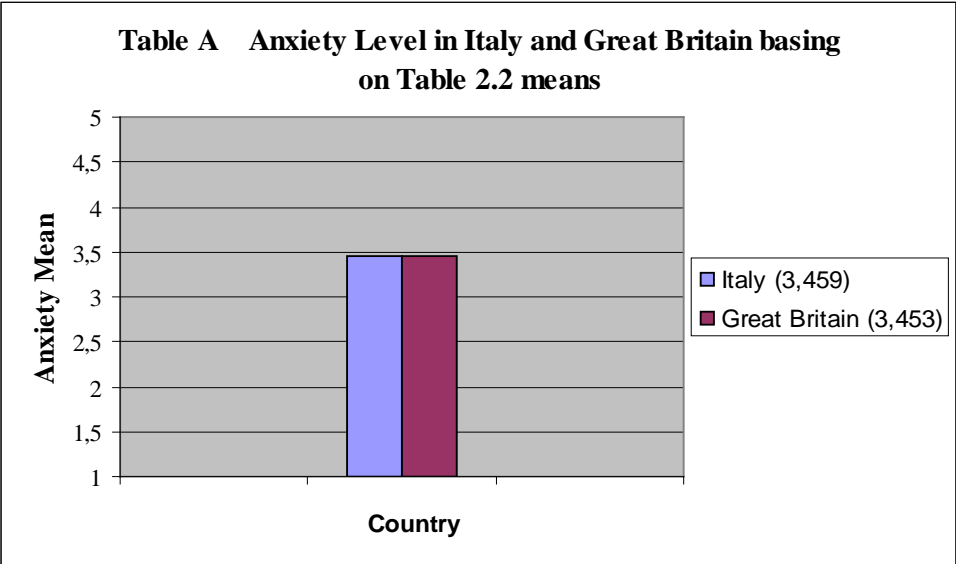| Questions	Italy	Great Britain
1 I would feel more confident about speaking in class if we practiced more.	3,97	3,75
2 I would feel less self-conscious about speaking in class in front of others if I knew them better.	3,38	3,61
3 I feel very relaxed in class when I have studied a great deal the night before.	3,26	3,56
4 I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	3,44	3,75
5 I think I can speak the foreign language pretty well, but when I know I am being graded, I mess up.	3,23	3,52
6 I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so Afraid of saying the wrong thing.	3,66	3,42
7 I enjoy class when we work in pairs.	3,34	3,29
8 I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class.	3,57	4,05
9 I would enjoy class if we weren't corrected at all in class.	2,49	1,98
10 I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events.	3,41	3,53
11 I would get less upset about my class if we did not have to cover so much material in such a short period of time.	3,33	2,84
12 I enjoy class when we do skits in class.	2,92	2,81
13 I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller.	3,53	3,52
14 I feel comfortable in class when I come to class prepared.	4,02	3,99
15 I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled.	3,44	3,14
16 I am less anxious in class when I am not the only person answering a question.	3,48	3,74
17 I like going to class when we are going to role play situations.	2,70	2,86
18 I would not be so self-conscious about speaking in class if it were commonly understood that everyone makes mistakes and it were not such a big deal to make a mistake.	3,64	3,4
19 I prefer to be allowed to volunteer an answer instead of being called on to give an answer.	3,43	3,61
20 I am more willing to participate in class when the topics we discuss are interesting.	4,26	4,18
21 I would be less nervous about taking an oral test in the foreign language if I got more practice speaking in class.	3,87	3,75
22 I enjoy class when I can work with another student.	3,31	3,36
23 I would feel uncomfortable if the instructor never corrected our mistakes in class.	3,80	3,91
24 I feel uneasy when my fellow students are asked to correct my mistakes in class.	3,54	3,31

Table A   Anxiety Level in Italy and Great Britain basing on Table 2.2 means

Anxiety Mean (Y-axis): 1, 1,5, 2, 2,5, 3, 3,5, 4, 4,5, 5

Country (X-axis)

Legend:
- Italy (3,459)
- Great Britain (3,453)

Table 3.1 Students' self evaluation of oral English competence

Student's self evaluation	Italy	Great Britain
Bad	13.33%	18.88%
Good	66.66%	54.54%
Very Good	15.55%	27.27%
Excellent	4.44%	0%

Table 3. 2 Gender in relation with students' perceptions of their own oral English competence

Students' perceptions	Males	Females
Bad	16.12%	15.94%
Good	64.51%	57.97%
Very Good	16.12%	24.63%
Excellent	3.22%	1.44%

Table 3.3 Students' self perception in relation with students' level of anxiety

Students' self perceptions	Speaking Anxiety Mean
Bad	3.56
Good	3.44
Very Good	3.43
Excellent	3.19

Table 4.1 How much do you rate your like for the English language?

Students' answers	Italy	Great Britain
1= Not very much	2.22%	0%
2	26. 66%	21.81%
3= Very much	71.11%	78.18%

Table 4.2 Interest for English and speaking anxiety organized by Means

Student's interest for English	Speaking Anxiety Mean
1= Not very much	3.25
2	3.39
3= Very Much	3.42

Table 5.1 "Living for a while in the foreign language country has been helping/ would help me to improve my English language oral skills".

Country of Study	Students' Answers					
	1		2		3	
	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean	Percentage	Speaking Anxiety Mean
Italy	0	0	17.77%	3.13	82.22%	3.52
Great Britain	1,81%	3	25.45%	3.39	72.72%	3.55

Table 6.1 "Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

Country of study	Students' answers	
	Yes	*No*
Italy	85.45%	14.54%
Great Britain	91.11%	8.88%

Table 6.2 "Have you ever thought about "embarrassment" in speaking English as a feeling that many students may experience?"

Gender	Students' answers	
	Yes	*No*
Males	*80.64%*	*19.35%*
Females	*91.30%*	*8.69%*

Table 7.1 Instructor's characteristics[60]

What does your instructor do to decrease any anxiety you may have in your foreign language class?

Error Correction	No. of Comments
Instructor does not make you feel stupid when you make a mistake	64
Instructor has the attitude that mistakes are made by everyone	38
Instructor does not over- react to mistakes	29
Instructor's manner of correction is not harsh	25
Instructor has the attitude that mistakes are no big deal	20
Activities	
All students are called on equally	52
Students get practice speaking	51
Instructor prepares class well and reviews	29
Students can volunteer answers and are not called on to provide responses	24
Students are asked to work in groups or pairs	24
Students are not put "on the spot"	14

What characteristics does your instructor have which tend to reduce your anxiety about speaking in class?

Instructor Characteristic	No. of Comments
Friendly	67
Patient	57
Good sense	56
Helpful	52
Encourages students to speak	51
Relaxed	47
Makes students comfortable	47
Smiles	44
Explains material well	33
Understanding	31
Creates casual atmosphere	21
Compliments students	15
Cares	10

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[60] The Table above is based on Young's questionnaire table (1990: 549).