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Preliminary Evidence for the Reliability and Validity of a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale

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■ Research on the relationship of anxiety to achievement in a second language has been hampered by the absence of a validated measure of anxiety specific to language learning. Although teachers and students generally feel that anxiety is an obstacle to be overcome in learning a second language, the empirical literature does not substantiate a clear-cut relationship between anxiety and second language achievement or performance (see Scovel, 1978, and Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, for a fuller discussion). One likely explanation for discrepant findings is that existing measures of anxiety do not test an individual's response to the specific stimulus of language learning. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been developed to provide investigators with a standard instrument for this purpose.

This self-report measure assesses the degree of anxiety, as evidenced by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviors. Sample items are as follows: "I never feel quite sure of myself when speaking in my foreign language class"; "I keep thinking that the other students are better at

languages than I am”; and “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.” Items were developed from student self-reports, clinical experience, and a review of related instruments. Specifically:

1. Two groups of anxious foreign language students were recruited to participate in a “Support Group for Foreign Language Learning.” These first-semester language students met twice weekly and discussed difficulties and concerns with their foreign language classes. (Of the 225 students informed of the support groups, 78—over one third—were concerned enough about their foreign language class to indicate that they would like to join such a group.) Scale items were developed to reflect these students’ experiences in their own language classes.
2. Counselors at the Learning Skills Center at the University of Texas at Austin were interviewed about their experiences with anxious language learners, and relevant items were developed.
3. The author’s experience with anxious students in her own foreign language classes also served as a basis for scale items.
4. The literature on anxiety revealed instruments for several related types of anxiety. Measures of test anxiety (Sarason, 1978), speech anxiety (Paul, 1966), and communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1970) were reviewed to identify relevant items.
5. The five items from the French Class Anxiety Scale (Gardner, Clement, Smythe, & Smythe, 1979) were made generic and added to the item pool.

The 33 items in the FLCAS have significant part-whole correlations with the total scale, are balanced for wording to reduce the effects of acquiescent and negative response sets, and address conceptually and clinically important aspects of anxiety. The FLCAS has been scored on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, but alternative scaling methods, including true/false and frequency ratings (e.g., “very often,” “never”), are currently being studied.

To date, the FLCAS has been administered, in a number of separate studies, to approximately 300 students in introductory undergraduate foreign language classes at the University of Texas at Austin and has demonstrated satisfactory reliability with this population. Possible scores on the FLCAS range from 33 to 165. In one sample of 108 students, scores ranged from 45 to 147 ($M = 94.5$, $Mdn = 95.0$, $SD = 21.4$). Internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, was .93, and test-retest reliability over 8 weeks was $r = .83$, $p = .001$, $n = 78$.¹

Criterion-related studies that bear on the construct validity of the scale have also been conducted. Correlation of the FLCAS with the Trait scale of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1983) obtained $r = .29$, $p = .002$, $n = 108$; with the Personal Report of Communication

¹ All significance tests reported are two tailed.

Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970), $r = .28$, $p = .063$, $n = 44$; with the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969), $r = .36$, $p = .007$, $n = 56$; and with the Test Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1978), $r = .53$, $p = .001$, $n = 60$. These results suggest that foreign language anxiety can be discriminated from these related constructs, although it appears that foreign language classroom anxiety is moderately associated with test anxiety. Scores on the FLCAS have also been associated with expected grade in the foreign language course, $r = .52$, $p = .001$, $n = 108$, and with the item, "Rate your anxiety level concerning foreign language class," $r = .77$, $p = .001$, $n = 108$.

Correlations between the FLCAS and actual final grade were very similar to the one with expected grade. The correlation between the FLCAS and final grade was $r = -.49$, $p = .003$, $n = 35$, for two intact beginning Spanish classes, and $r = -.54$, $p = .001$, $n = 32$, for two beginning French classes. Thus, higher levels of anxiety, as measured by the FLCAS, are associated with lower final grades. On the other hand, the relationship between test anxiety (Sarason, 1978) and final grade was not significant in the French classes; $r = -.16$, $p = .391$, $n = 32$. (Data on test anxiety were not available for the Spanish classes.)

Since test anxiety had achieved the highest correlation with foreign language anxiety, a partial correlation coefficient was computed to determine the relationship between the FLCAS and final grade, with test anxiety statistically controlled. The resulting partial correlation was significant ($r = -.53$, $p = .002$, $n = 29$), suggesting that the relationship between foreign language anxiety and overall classroom achievement is independent of the confounding effects of test anxiety. These results indicate that anxiety specifically related to foreign language class accounts for approximately 25% of the variance in final grades. It seems reasonable to assume that foreign language anxiety would correlate even more strongly with a measure of language proficiency.

Results to date suggest that foreign language anxiety can be reliably and validly measured and that it plays an important role in language learning. Further research with the FLCAS could improve our understanding of the effect of anxiety on language learning as well as the impact of different instructional methods or teaching styles on the learner. It is also hoped that the FLCAS will facilitate the identification of students experiencing debilitating anxiety so that appropriate classroom and individual interventions may be offered.²

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Assessing Language Proficiency From a Sociolinguistic Perspective

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■ The assessment of language proficiency from a sociolinguistic/discourse perspective has been a subject of considerable interest. Rivera's (1983) compilation of recent theoretical advances and empirical findings is a valuable asset to researchers in language proficiency. Slaughter (in press) points out that a sociolinguistic approach attempts to utilize the richness of the linguistic production of children in naturalistic contexts and to avoid the rigid atmosphere sometimes associated with traditional testing procedures.

Researchers and educators in the Tucson (AZ) Unified School District have spent a number of years exploring alternatives to traditional language assessment procedures. In 1979, the Assessment of Language Proficiency of Bilingual Persons (ALPBP) Project, funded by the National Institute of Education, was implemented in three phases. In Phase I, a teacher-training program was initiated with a course on bilingual language proficiency assessment for bilingual program personnel. Phase II consisted of a series of workshops in which participants developed an ethnographic/