Foreign language communication anxiety in correlation to the sociolinguistic variables gender, age, performance and multilingual competence

- A linguistic pilot study of Swedish students’ attitudes

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Abstract

This data-driven linguistic study investigates if levels of different types of foreign language communication anxiety, such as for speaking, listening, writing and/or reading that Swedish students in compulsory school (grades 7-9) and upper secondary school experience when communicating in English in their foreign language classes have any correlation to sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, performance and/or multilingual competence. The compiled and analyzed self-report data have successfully provided a base for implied correlations between the different sociolinguistic variables and language anxiety. The most prominent indications of correlation to anxiety are the variables gender, performance (course grades) and linguistic competence. The age variable also showed indications of correlation but was less pronounced than the others. It was also found that students generally feel more and/or higher anxiety when speaking the target language than the other types of communication. The didactic implications that this study contributes to is that “communicating” as an activity conducted in the foreign language classroom needs to be further defined and broken down into specific types of skills (speaking, writing, listening, reading) and also be approached accordingly. This also implies that further research is needed to thoroughly examine the correlational effects different sociolinguistic variables have on the foreign language learning.

(Keywords: second language acquisition, foreign language, anxiety, language learning)
# Table of contents

1 Introduction................................................................................................................. 4

2 Background.................................................................................................................. 5
   2.1 Didactical framework .......................................................................................... 5
      2.1.1 English as a school subject in Sweden ...................................................... 7
   2.2 Theoretical framework ....................................................................................... 8
      2.2.1 Terminology .............................................................................................. 8
      2.2.2 The Affective Filter hypothesis .................................................................... 9
         2.2.2.1 Critiques of the Affective Filter hypothesis ........................................ 12
      2.2.3 Previous research on SLA and anxiety ...................................................... 13

3 Method......................................................................................................................... 16
   3.1 The on-line questionnaire ................................................................................... 16
   3.2 Data collection and analysis procedures ........................................................... 18

4 Results and discussion............................................................................................... 19
   4.1 The informants and the overall levels of foreign language communication anxiety .... 19
   4.2 Foreign language communication anxiety and gender ....................................... 23
   4.3 Foreign language communication anxiety and age ............................................. 24
   4.4 Foreign language communication anxiety and multilingual competence ............ 26
   4.5 Foreign language communication anxiety and performance ............................ 27
   4.6 Student attitudes in specific foreign language classroom related situations ......... 29
   4.7 Student perspectives on foreign language communication anxiety .................. 34

5 Conclusions.................................................................................................................. 36

References..................................................................................................................... 39

Appendix 1, Questionnaire in Swedish ........................................................................... 41

Appendix 2, Student answers used as quotes in Swedish .............................................. 44
1 Introduction

English is taught as a foreign language in Swedish schools, and the subject is introduced to schoolchildren around the age of eight. Thus, by the time Swedish students start upper secondary school at the age of sixteen, the majority of them have had this school subject for approximately eight years. The early introduction to and prolonged focus on English reflects the fact that it is a highly valued subject in Sweden. English is in fact referred to as a foundation subject in the steering documents (Skolverket 2013), that is, the set of documents that constitute the framework, goals and guidelines on how education is to be provided and addressed in the Swedish public school system. The subject syllabus for English as a foreign language specifies that the main objective is to give students the opportunity to develop comprehensive “all-round communication skills”. This overall skill is further specified by distinguishing speaking, listening, reading and writing as separate types of communication, which are equally important to acquire and develop for the individual student.

With all pedagogical work, the mechanisms of the learning process are constantly in focus and equally debated on the basis of research results. Different types of research within the linguistic field of second language acquisition (SLA) have focused on investigating these particular learning mechanisms and have consequently produced numerous theories on the subject. One of the most recurring theories in second language literature is Krashen’s Monitor Model from 1981. This overall model for SLA consists of five central hypotheses, which all share the aim of explaining the factors aiding or hindering true language acquisition. One of the five hypotheses, the Affective Filter hypothesis, introduces the concept of a high affective filter, which in a proportional way hinders the learner from maximum acquisition – i.e. higher anxiety levels produce greater hinders for language acquisition. Krashen (1981) also implies that anxiety is the variable that could be the most inhibiting for the student in the learning process. Since Krashen introduced the Affective Filter hypothesis, SLA research has focused on defining different types of language anxiety and the effects they have on the language learning. However, not all SLA research in this field is consistent and sometimes research results have proven to be in contradiction with each other. Still, they all consistently recognize the fact that anxiety is an existing and influential factor in foreign language learning. Also, the examination of previous research on SLA and anxiety implies that there is a consensus forming amongst researchers on acknowledging a difference in learners’ attitudes (including anxiety) towards different types of communication.
skills in the target language such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. This suggests that students may experience varied anxiety levels towards using different types of communication in the target language.

The review of the didactical and theoretical framework for this study show a conformity between the goals and aims of foreign language teaching in English (as specified by the steering documents) and SLA research development regarding the emphasis and differentiation of separating the communication skills into speaking, listening, reading and writing. As a result, the aim of this linguistic study is to investigate if levels of different types of foreign language communication anxiety, such as for speaking, listening, writing and/or reading that Swedish students in compulsory school (grades 7-9) and upper secondary school experience when communicating in English in their foreign language classes have any correlation to sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, performance and/or multilingual competence.

The methodology for this study is primarily quantitative, consisting of an online survey to identify and investigate any valid correlations between levels of different foreign language communication anxieties in speaking, listening, reading and/or writing and the sociolinguistic variables specified previously. A qualitative analysis is also enabled by virtue of a free-writing option, and participant parameters in addition to the sociolinguistic variables. The data was examined and analyzed with the purpose of detecting any probability patterns, which could support different inferences. The findings were graphically prepared for presentation as single or multi-variable tables and graphs.

Due to the difference in analytic method the study is unable to provide data that hold any significance in comparison with other studies that share similarities – the results in this study can only provide a basis for implied correlations. Furthermore, the uncertainty of any self-report data needs to be acknowledged and the main question of validity concerning this, regards the: “extent to which learners are sufficiently aware of their affective states and cognitive processes to report on them” (Ellis 1994:674). However, the effort has been to conduct a study that can provide viable results of indications despite its limitations.

2 Background

2.1 Didactical framework
The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) is the central administrative authority responsible for setting up the framework, goals and guidelines on how education is
to be provided and addressed in the Swedish public school system. Skolverket has
supervising, supporting, follow-up and evaluative functions. These are performed according
to specific steering documents, the school grade system for performance and national tests.

The set of steering documents to regulate the Swedish public school system consists
of the overall Education Act together with the level-specific School Ordinance and
Curriculum plus the subject-specific Diploma Goals and Subject Syllabus. These documents
together constitute the central framework for all educational activity conducted within the
Swedish school system. Furthermore, Skolverket emphasizes the importance of the inter-
relation of these documents by stating that, “all the documents are intended to create a
meaningful whole. They each fulfill an important function but also express together a
common view of schooling” (Skolverket 2012:15). Additional emphasis is made on the
importance for specifically teachers to use all the steering documents in their profession:

For a teacher, it is not sufficient to plan teaching based on the subject
syllabus; he or she must take as the starting point the diploma goals and
the curriculum. In addition, teachers need to be aware of the regulations in
the Education Act and the upper secondary ordinance that af-
fect their work (Skolverket 2012:15).

The Swedish school system underwent an extensive reform in 2011 where not
only the steering documents were thoroughly revised, but also the national school grading
system for performance changed from a 4-stage to a 6-stage scale. The range for passing
grades was set to A-E, where A indicates the highest level of fulfillment of the national
knowledge requirements and the grade E accordingly indicates the minimum level of
requirements. In addition to these five passing grades, a sixth grade, F, is available to denote a
failing grade. Included in each school subject’s course syllabus is a progression matrix giving
guidelines on how to evaluate the levels of assessment for each performance-grade level.

The national tests are constructed and distributed by Skolverket each year and
primarily aim to support teachers’ assessment and grading in the so-called foundation
subjects, that is, the school subjects specified in the steering documents, of which English is
one. Furthermore, these tests are also aimed at contributing to making each syllabus more
specific as well as at providing a basis for an analysis of the performance levels and the
distribution of knowledge fulfillment on a national level. Consequently, the national tests are
highly valued by Skolverket, teachers and students as an important indication of the official
requirements regarding contents and knowledge levels in each foundation subject. However,
the steering documents also emphasize that the national tests should not constitute the entire basis for assessment for course grades.

Since English is defined as a foundation subject in Sweden, it is a subject that is tested every year through national tests, which in turn aim to support teachers in their assessment of the students’ knowledge fulfillment and also function as an aid in setting grades. Consequently, the content and structure of the national tests provide the framework, goals and guidelines for both teachers and students regarding requirements for progression in the school subject. The specific construction of the national tests in English and what they indicate in forms of requirements in knowledge and skills will be discussed further in the next section.

2.1.1 English as a school subject in Sweden

English is referred to as a foundation subject in the steering documents, which in turn indicates its highly valued position in Sweden. The wording used in the subject syllabus (Āmnesplan) to describe the aim of the subject further emphasizes the importance credited to the knowledge of English:

Knowledge of English increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in global studies and working life. Knowledge of English can also provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts, and greater understanding of different ways of living (Skolverket 2013).

Furthermore, the subject syllabus specifies that the main objective of the school subject of English is to give the students the opportunity to develop comprehensive “all-round communication skills” and that:

[These] skills cover both reception, which means understanding spoken language and texts, and production and interaction, which means expressing oneself and interacting with others in speech and writing (Skolverket 2013).

Thus, the referred to all-round communication skill is broken down into four equally important parts and defined as knowledge in, respectively, speaking, listening, reading and writing in English.

The structure of the national tests strictly follows the same segmentation of the communication skills defined in the subject syllabus, hence consisting of four parts where
each part focuses on a specific communication skill. In addition, the diploma goals specifically state that all of these four skills are equally important and that the reception, production and interaction skills in English together should form the grounds of assessment for the individual grades.

An examination of the steering documents indicates that the four separately identified communication skills of speaking, listening, writing and reading in English are considered equally important to acquire for the Swedish student. The significance of this and its relation to the linguistic research field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and what previous research indicates will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 Theoretical framework

In the previous section, the didactical framework was established by reviewing the steering documents that constitute the central framework for the educational activity conducted within the Swedish school system and, accordingly, in order to establish a theoretical framework for this study, a review of the linguistic research field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is required. However, in contrast to the steering documents’ distinctive hierarchal structure where the relationship between the predominant and the subordinated positions are clear and where the terminology is fairly self-evident, the theories and terminology in the research of language learning are not. Therefore, in order to establish a concordance between the terminology used and what is intended, this section will begin by defining some of the key terms before going on to the specific theories and previous research.

2.2.1 Terminology

A distinction between second, third or foreign language acquisition is often made in SLA research, where the institutional and social role of the learnt language in that particular community marks the general difference between them. However, since it is not the specific position of the English language in Sweden that is under examination or discussion, the terms foreign (FL) and second (SL/L2) language will be used interchangeably and will consistently refer to the English language as the school subject in Swedish schools. The term multilingual is used to define the language competence of those students who have acquired an additional language to their native language along with English, instead of the term third language. The target language is in general reference to whatever language that is being studied, i.e. in this paper it is the English language. Also, the term native language refers to the first language
acquired, but seeing that it would be inaccurate to generalize about the participants in this study having Swedish as their native language, the term, when used, will refer to their respective unspecified native languages.

The term *acquisition* is sometimes contrasted to *learning*, referring to different mental processes with distinctly different results of achieved language skills. For example Krashen (1981) uses this distinction between two mental processes as a main point of departure in describing his Monitor Model – this theory will be discussed further in a later section and at that point, a specific context will be discussed where the distinction between acquisition and learning is of relevance – but since it is not the exploration of these specific terms that is within the scope of this paper, the term *learning* is used throughout the paper for the sake of consistency and refer to the general process of achieving communication skills in the target language, but in some cases, this term may preferably be exchanged for *acquisition*.

Finally, the term *learner*, particularly in the context of *learner language*, deserves a special note. The use of this term is intended to denote the student who is in the process of learning an additional language in an organized didactical environment with specific goals of achievement – i.e. in this paper the term *learner* refers to the student(s) in a Swedish school attending a foreign language class of English.

### 2.2.2 The Affective Filter hypothesis

Perhaps one of the most recurring theories in second language literature is Krashen’s Monitor Model (1982), especially in literature that aims to create a historical overview of the development of the SLA research field where the cornerstones are presented and discussed (Ellis 1985, 1994, Larsen-Freeman et al. 1991, Gass & Selinker 2008).

The Monitor Model is an overall model for SLA consisting of five central hypotheses, including the Affective Filter hypothesis. All of the hypotheses are interconnected and based on the argument that separate knowledge systems are at work when a L2 is studied. Therefore, a brief account for this central argument is crucial before presenting the Affective Filter hypothesis.

As mentioned, Krashen (1981, 1982) distinguishes between two separate and independent types of knowledge systems, claiming that *acquiring* a language is significantly different from *learning* it. Language *acquisition* is described as a subconscious process where the result is a “feel” for correctness of the target language:
Other ways of describing acquisition include implicit learning, informal learning, and natural learning. In non-technical language, acquisition is “picking-up” a language (Krashen, 1982:10).

Language learning on the other hand is described as a different way of developing competence in L2 and is the result of a conscious process:

... the term “learning” ... refers to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. In non-technical terms, learning is “knowing about” a language, known to most people as “grammar”, or “rules”. Some synonyms include formal knowledge of a language, or explicit learning (Krashen, 1982:10).

Furthermore, Krashen argues that the acquired knowledge takes precedence over the learnt and he also claims that learnt language cannot be converted into acquired:

A very important point that also needs to be stated is that learning does not “turn into” acquisition. The idea that we first learn a new rule, and eventually, through practice, acquire it, is widespread and may seem to some people to be intuitively obvious (Krashen 1982:83).

The didactical implications of this claim are major, since the definition of learning a language directly falls under the constitution and framework of any school environment where a target language is being taught and the goals are bound by official steering documents. Consequently, Krashen’s collection of hypotheses all share the aim not only to describe the difference between the two knowledge systems, but also to explain the factors aiding or hindering true acquisition.

The important question is: How do we acquire language? If the Monitor hypothesis is correct, that acquisition is central and learning more peripheral, then the goal of our pedagogy should be to encourage acquisition. The question of how we acquire then becomes crucial (Krashen 1982:20).

The concept of an affective filter is often but unfortunately erroneously credited to be an invention of Krashen. According to Krashen himself it is in fact a concept proposed by Dulay and Burt in 1977 (Krashen 1981:31). Even so, Krashen states that the concept of different affective factors playing a crucial role in the acquisition of a language is consistent with his own hypotheses. The Affective Filter hypothesis aims to explain the relationship between the different affective variables and the successful acquiring of a second language.
The affective variables in reference are *motivation*, *self-confidence* and *anxiety*, and the hypothesis claims that high levels of the affective filter can be compared to a barrier that prevents optimal input for acquisition. If the affective filter is up it prevents the input from getting through, thereby making acquisition impossible. On the other hand, if the affective filter is down (or low) the comprehensible input is able to reach the language acquisition device and thus optimal language acquisition can be achieved (*see Fig. 1*).

![Figure 1. The Affective Filter at work (Krashen 1982:32)](image)

Accordingly, Krashen’s Affective Filter hypothesis claims that a high level of an affective filter results in low or even non-existing language acquisition.

The Affective Filter hypothesis captures the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition by positing that acquirers vary with respect to the strength or level of their Affective Filters. Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter – even if they understand the message, the input will not reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike “deeper” (*Krashen 1982:31*).

Consequently, the overall affective filter is of great significance for the learner’s ability to fully acquire the target language. One of the affective variables specified is *anxiety*, which Krashen emphasizes and specifically indicates as inhabiting a more prominent position among the three variables:
There appears to be a consistent relationship between various forms of anxiety and language proficiency in all situations, formal and informal. Anxiety levels may thus be a very potent influence on the affective filter (Krashen 1981:29).

In conclusion, according to Krashen (1981, 1982) there is a significant difference between acquiring and learning a second language, where the acquisition process is the robust and desirable one. The Monitor Model consists of five hypotheses, each of which addresses different aspects of how to achieve an optimal acquisition process as well as how to define those variables that have a negative influence on it. One of the variables in the Affective Filter hypothesis is anxiety, which Krashen argues has a more significant position than the others. In addition, it is assumed to have an important impact on the L2 learning situation:

The input hypothesis and the concept of the Affective Filter define the language teacher in a new way. The effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation (Krashen 1982:32).

### 2.2.2.1 Critiques of the Affective Filter hypothesis

Even if Krashen’s Monitor Model enjoys the privilege of being frequently mentioned in SLA literature it has equally frequently been criticized and questioned. Some of the criticism bears highlighting at this point. Each of the hypotheses has received separate criticism, but one of the main issues to have been questioned is the claim of the two knowledge systems of acquiring/learning and their separated existence. However, for the purpose of this paper the accounts of the criticism raised is limited to only cover the Affective Filter hypothesis.

The main concern with the Affective Filter hypothesis seems to be that it does not sufficiently explain the specific functions and mechanisms at work. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) illustrate the specific criticism dealing with the insufficient explanation of how the affective filter works:

Krashen would need to specify which affect variables, singly or in what combinations, and at what levels, serve to “raise the filter”. For example, is it sufficient for one aspect of a learner’s affective state, such as attitude, to be negative, or do all aspects have to be negative, and if so, to what degree? Can one positive aspect, e.g. high motivation, offset a negative one, e.g. low self-esteem? (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:247)

Gass & Selinker (2008) highlight a similar criticism of the hypothesis when asking the question of “how does it work” (Gass & Selinker 2008:15) in terms of explaining how exactly
the combination of the different affective variables influence L2 learning. They specifically raise the question of “how can affect be selective” (Gass & Selinker 2008:15) when illustrating the following:

Gregg (1984) gave the example of a Chinese native speaker with near native-like knowledge of English. This speaker, however, had not acquired certain rules, such as 3rd person singular –s. In Krashen’s view, this incomplete knowledge of English would be due to the Affective Filter, but there is no explanation as to how the Filter could let most of the input pass through and filter out 3rd person singular (Gass & Selinker 2008:151).

However, an important note to make at this point is that the claims of the existence of affective variables that influence SLA seem to be unchallenged – only the determination of what they are, how they operate and to what extent they influence the L2 learning process.

2.2.3 Previous research on SLA and anxiety

While Krashen’s Affective Filter hypothesis identifies a general anxiety as an affective variable that hinders the ability to achieve maximum language acquisition, researchers have since been more inclined to try to identify specific types of anxiety and their causes. However, the literature to date offers an inconsistent account of how and to what extent anxiety affects language learning. In 2010, Horowitz published an overview of the historical development of SLA research regarding anxiety reactions in response to L2 learning and her compilation of the 44 research milestones will assist in the revision of relevant SLA research for this study.

According to Horowitz (2010) a research article by Scovel in 1978 marks a turning point in the study of language learning and anxiety due to the author’s claims that the inconsistent results from earlier SLA studies are the consequence of an inconsistency when referring to anxiety. Scovel’s (1978) arguments contribute to a shift in the demands for careful and specific definitions of the type of anxiety examined. From this point the differentiation of types of anxiety connected to L2 and the examination of the effects of them are in focus. A diary study conducted by Bailey (1983) focuses on anxiety from the learner’s perspective. The study found relationships between students’ negative self-comparison with others and high anxiety, and that their levels of anxiety decreased as they perceived themselves as becoming more proficient in the target language. Also, Bailey (1982) draws the conclusion that anxiety is associated with tests, the student’s perceptions of their relationships with their teachers as well as the student’s expressed need for the teacher’s approval.
Gardner (1985) is credited for being a pioneer in studying affective variables in connection to the specific SLA environment and he concludes that it is “a construct of anxiety which is not general but instead is specific to the language acquisition context” (Gardner 1985:34). His findings pave the way for the introduction of a new term in the research field by Horowitz, Horowitz and Cope (1986), namely the construct of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). Also, this research team argues that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a situation-specific anxiety and they discuss the possibility that different levels of this anxiety may have various negative effects on the students’ ego and self-esteem in L2 learning. With the aim of measuring this specific type of anxiety, they constructed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Furthermore, the authors have identified related situation-specific anxieties to FL anxiety, namely communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA). Horowitz (2010) clarifies a frequent misinterpretation of the study conducted by Horowitz, Horowitz and Cope (1986): “this article has sometimes been misinterpreted to mean that FL anxiety is composed of CA, FNE and TA rather than simply being related to them” (Horowitz 2010:158). A subsequent study on the development and validation of the FLCAS conducted by Horowitz (1986) only found moderate and significant relationships between FLA and test anxiety but neither of the other anxieties (CA, FNE), which the author claims to “offer strong evidence that language anxiety is an independent situation-specific anxiety” (Horowitz 2010:158).

The results of Hilleson’s (1996) qualitative study indicate that FL anxiety is also closely connected with reading and writing and not only with speaking and listening which has been the general FL anxiety association among scholars up to this point. Further identification of additional types of FL anxieties were described by Saito, Horowitz & Garza (1999) where the research team proposed an extension of the FLCAS to include a Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS). Also adding to the extension of FLA, Elkhafafi (2005) succeeded in identifying a specific Foreign Language Listening Anxiety (FLLA).

A recent addition to the scope of FLA research is a large-scale study of multilingual adults around the world (Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham 2008), the results of which suggest a correlation between low FLA and the knowledge of more languages. In addition, Horowitz (2010) concludes that this particular research suggests that “in addition to individual characteristics, larger social circumstances such as the availability of supportive conversational partners and L2 role models may play a role in helping language learners avoid or overcome FLA” and she concludes that “it also suggests that foreign language anxiety research should play closer attention to social variables” (Horowitz 2010:166).
In conclusion, however inconsistent or occasionally even contradictory the SLA research is regarding the causes and effects of foreign language anxiety, there is consistent recognition of the fact that *anxiety* is an existing and influential factor in foreign language learning:

Anxiety is a psychological construct, commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971 cited in Scovel, 1991:18).

In addition, the examination of previous research on SLA and anxiety implies that there is a consensus forming amongst researchers on acknowledging a difference in learners’ attitudes (including anxiety) towards different types of communication skills in the target language such as *speaking*, *listening*, *writing* and *reading*. This suggests that students may experience varied anxiety levels towards using different types of communication in the target language.

The review of the didactical and theoretical framework for this study shows a conformity between the goals and aims for foreign language teaching in English (as specified by the steering documents) and the SLA research development regarding the emphasis and differentiation of separating the communication skills into *speaking*, *listening*, *reading* and *writing*. Research (Horowitz & Cope 1986; Hilleson 1996; Saito, Horowitz & Garza 1999) has proven that each communication skill can evoke different levels of anxieties within the same student, hence the identification of separate anxiety types such as speaking anxiety and writing anxiety etc. The implication of this development from a didactical perspective is that foreign language communication *should* be acknowledged as a divided activity – i.e. similar to the division made in the steering documents. Recent SLA research (Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham 2008) also suggests that different social variables may have a more significant influence on foreign language learning and anxiety levels than has been acknowledged previously. However, to date, no SLA research has pinpointed any specific social variables that may have any correlation to different communication anxieties. As a result, the aim of this linguistic study is to investigate if levels of different types of foreign language communication anxiety, such as for *speaking*, *listening*, *writing* and/or *reading* that Swedish students in upper secondary school and compulsory school (grades 7-9) experience when communicating in English in their foreign language classes have any correlation to the sociolinguistic variables gender, age, performance and/or multilingual competence.
3 Method

This data-driven study falls under the linguistic research field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The methodology is primarily quantitative, consisting of an on-line survey to identify and investigate any valid correlations between levels of different foreign language communication anxieties in speaking, listening, reading and/or writing and sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, performance and/or multilingual competence. A qualitative analysis is also enabled by virtue of a free-writing option, and participant parameters in addition to the sociolinguistic variables.

The study is based on self-report data from students in compulsory school (classes 7–9) and Swedish upper secondary school (classes 1–3). The age variable was determined to differentiate between 4 groups; the students attending the three last years of compulsory school, i.e. classes 7–9 (ages 14-16) in one group and the students attending classes 1, 2 and 3 in upper secondary school (ages 17–19) in 3 separate groups.

The survey was distributed through e-mail and to foreign language (English) teachers in the form of an URL-link. The teachers who chose to participate made the URL-link accessible to their students and the survey was available during a period of three weeks, giving the teachers the opportunity to introduce the survey to their students when they felt it was appropriate. This solution was chosen with the ambition of giving the teachers sufficient time to conduct the survey and thereby reducing the risk for low participation due to time pressure.

3.1 The on-line questionnaire

The on-line questionnaire was constructed following the recommendations of Dörnyei & Csizér (2012) with regards to formulation, structure and the variation of type of questions and answer options. The questionnaire consists of a total of 12 questions (Appendix 1), divided into four different sections separated by the type of questions. In addition, the language of the survey was chosen to be Swedish in order to minimize contributing to the elevation of students’ anxiety levels when answering. The following is a complete account of the structure of the questionnaire. The explicit content of each section is specified along with an account for what the questions aim to receive information about.

Section 1 – Sociolinguistic variables

The composition of this section aims to elicit information on the participants’ sociolinguistic
status of age (Q 2), gender (Q 3), performance (Q 9) and multilingual competence (Q 8) and consists of six predominantly close-end questions:

Q 1: Which school do you attend?
Q 2: Which level/class do you attend?
Q 3: Are you a girl/boy?
Q 8: Do you speak other languages than Swedish at home?
Q 9: What is your latest course grade in English?
Q 11: When did you start taking English classes?

Note on Q8: The close-ended answer options are: “NO” (registered as monolingual), “YES one other” (registered as bilingual), “YES several” (registered as multilingual).

Note on Q 1 and Q11: these questions were omitted before analysis since the variation of the answers proved to be far too inconclusive to interpret.

Section 2 – Perceived levels of Foreign Language Communication Anxiety
The questions in this section aim to provide information on the perceived anxiety levels the individual student experiences in association with different types of communication in the English foreign language classroom. The construction of the graded response options is referred to as a semantic differential scale (Dörnyei & Csizér 2012:77) where the respondents are asked to mark their specific level of anxiety along a 10-point scale continuum, where (1) marks the minimum level along in connection with the statement “I NEVER feel anxious” and (10) marks the maximum in connection with the statement “I ALWAYS feel anxious”.

Q 4: Do you ever feel anxious when SPEAKING English during class?
Q 5: Do you ever feel anxious when LISTENING to spoken English during class?
Q 6: Do you ever feel anxious when READING in English during class?
Q 7: Do you ever feel anxious when WRITING to spoken English during class?

Note: it was specified under each question that it is NOT their anxiety regarding TESTING situations that is intended.

Section 3 – Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
This set of close-end questions were designed in accordance with the definition of a Likert
scale item (Dörnyei & Csizér 2012:76) where each statement is accompanied by three response options: “Yes I agree”, “No I disagree” and “Undecided”. The wording of the questions has been inspired by the questions in the form used to measure Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horowitz, Horowitz & Cope 1986). The aim of this section is to evaluate the students’ attitudes regarding specific FL classroom situations.

Q 10 a: I become anxious when I do not understand what my teacher says in English.
Q 10 b: I feel that all the other students speak English better than I do.
Q 10 c: I am worried that I can’t write proper English (grammar, spelling, vocabulary).
Q 10 d: I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak in front of the class unprepared.
Q 10 e: I am worried that the other students will comment on my pronunciation.
Q 10 f: I am used to reading books in English.

Section 4 – Student attitudes (qualitative aspect)
This last section consists of one optional open-end question giving the students the opportunity to express their personal perspectives/attitudes on anxiety related to communicating in English in their foreign language class. The restriction for the free text answer-field was set to a fairly generous level (250 words) giving space for a lengthy answer if needed.

Q 12: What are your own views regarding anxiety and communicating in English in your foreign language class?

Note: Additional text in connection with the question: here you can write your own opinion with your own words. For example, what you believe is the cause of it, what affects it, how could it be reduced etc.

3.2 Data collection and analysis procedures
The dominant form of statistical analysis in quantitative linguistic research is a one-way or a two-way analysis of variance – ANOVA (Woods, Fletcher & Hughes 1986), used to detect frequencies. However, for the purpose of this pilot study it was decided that it would suffice to analyze the results and investigate any relational factors with the help of basic summary measures.
The questionnaire was only available as an on-line form and the database software used for construction automatically collected, registered and compiled the answers into a spreadsheet. First, an examination of the raw data was made and any inconclusive or in other ways unusable data were omitted, thereafter the data were analyzed using summary measures by calculating percentages of representation (Woods, Fletcher & Hughes 1986). After examination of the analyzed data, a search for detectable probability patterns was made. The findings were graphically prepared for presentation as single or multi-variable tables and graphs.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 The informants and the overall levels of foreign language communication anxiety

A total of 206 \( (N_{\text{total}}=206) \) students attending different English foreign language classes in Swedish upper secondary schools and compulsory schools (classes 7-9) participated in the study. Since the on-line questionnaire was distributed to English FL teachers in general and not to the students directly, and due to the inconclusive self-report information to question 1 \( (\text{Which school do you attend?}) \), there is no possibility to determine representation of specific schools. The different age groups are labeled as follows: all the classes 7-9 in compulsory school put together constitute a separate group \( (Högst) \) and the classes in upper secondary school constitute three separate age groups – first year \( (Gy 1) \), second year \( (Gy 2) \) and third year \( (Gy 3) \). The gender representation was evenly distributed with a slightly higher representation of boys: 53% boys \( (N_{\text{boys}}=109) \) and 47% girls \( (N_{\text{girls}}=97) \). The distribution of the different age/grade groups relative to gender is shown in Figure 2.

**Age and gender distribution of informants**

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*Figure 2. Age and gender of the informants.*
The level of multilingual competence amongst the informants was investigated through question 8 (*Do you speak other languages than Swedish at home?*) and the close-ended answer options were: “NO” (registered as monolingual), “YES one other” (registered as bilingual), “YES several” (registered as multilingual). The results show a majority of monolinguals (*Ling_{mono} = 58%*) but a significant representation of bilinguals (*Ling_{bi} = 32%*) and a minor representation of multilinguals (*Ling_{multi} = 10%*) as shown in the Figure 3.

**Linguistic competence amongst the informants**

![Linguistic competence amongst the informants](image)

*Figure 3. The spread of linguistic competence amongst the informants.*

The performance levels of the informants are attributed to the last recorded school grades in English and a surprisingly high level of the highest grade (A) was represented. Also, the representation of boys who attained the highest grade (A) is over the national average, which deserves special attention and will accordingly be addressed in the section discussing FLCA and performance. Furthermore, 3% of the informants did not give any reports of their latest grades. This information was decided to be included in the statistic calculations as a separate variable in contrast to the reported grades instead of omitting them as inconclusive data. Its possible significance will be discussed further in the section specifically attributed to performance. The distribution of the self-reported performance levels in connection with difference in gender is shown in Figure 4.
Section 2 of the questionnaire aims to examine the perceived anxiety levels the individual student experiences in association with different types of communication activities (speaking, listening, reading and/or writing) in their English foreign language classroom. The students were asked to mark their specific level of anxiety along a 10-point scale continuum, where (1) marks the minimum level along in connection with the statement “I NEVER feel anxious” and (10) marks the maximum in connection with the statement “I ALWAYS feel anxious”. It was stressed that the question is NOT addressing their anxiety regarding TESTING situations.

All the reported values of communication anxiety were added together, and Figure 5 shows the overall distribution between the different types of communication anxiety (speaking, listening, reading and/or writing). The results indicate that the students overall feel more and/or higher anxiety when speaking the target language – with 35% of the total anxiety attributed to this particular activity. The three other activities of listening, reading and writing are assigned equivalent anxiety levels with listening contributing to slightly lower levels. Since the anxiety levels for listening are only slightly lower than those for reading and writing, this result does not denote a significant low. Thus, the only significant implications are the peak for speaking and the even distribution between the other skills.
Figure 5. The overall distribution of anxiety levels between different types of communication in the target language (English).

The specific distribution of the anxiety levels for each communication skill is presented in Figure 6 and shows that the informants in this study generally experience very low anxiety towards communication in English with the majority of markings in levels 1–3. As indicated in the accumulated figures shown in Figure 6, speaking has a noticeably different distribution pattern over the anxiety spectrum with a higher representation in each level than the other skills. Also, this is the skill with the highest amount of students claiming to experience the maximum level (6%). In addition, there is a significant peak for speaking in the anxiety level 8 (6%) in comparison to the other skills’ steady decrease in amount of students for each raised level of anxiety. How the specific anxiety levels were distributed amongst the informants in correlation with the sociolinguistic variables of gender, age, multilingual competence and performance and its possible significance will be discussed in the following sections.

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Figure 6. The specific distribution of anxiety levels for the different communication skills.
4.2 Foreign language communication anxiety and gender

The reported levels of anxieties for each communication skill in correlation to gender are shown by Figures 7 a–d and show a significant difference between the genders regarding the highest as well as the lowest levels of anxieties. Considering that the maximum level (10) is equivalent to the state of *always feeling anxious*, the range of levels 8–10 all denote high levels of anxiety. Even if the number of students who experience very high levels of anxiety is low in comparison to the total, the results indicate that there is a significant difference in which communication type girls and boys experience as being highly anxiety provoking.

*Figures 7a–d. The gender distribution of anxiety levels for each communication skill.*
The results indicate that the student experiencing very high anxiety levels (9-10) for writing and/or listening in the FL English classroom is probably a boy. There is no representation of girls at these levels. For reading it is the opposite: only girls reported the highest levels. Even in speaking there was an over representation of girls indicating high levels of anxiety. Since the majority of the informants participating in this study claimed to have generally low anxiety levels and predominantly marked the levels 1–3, where the lowest level (1) states that the student never feel anxious, it is interesting to note that boys are over-represented in this interval. The representation of boys in the minimum anxiety level (1) for each communication skill is respectively: 39% for speaking, 75% for listening, 66% for reading and 65% for writing. Especially the distinctively high representation of boys never feeling any anxiety for listening to English is noteworthy. These results indicate that boys generally experience lower anxiety levels than girls.

In conclusion, the results indicate that students who have a tendency to feel higher anxiety levels for listening and writing in English are boys, whereas those who are more inclined to experience high anxiety towards speaking and reading are girls. Also, boys are overall more inclined to claim that they do not experience any anxiety at all towards communication in their FL English classes.

4.3 Foreign language communication anxiety and age

The reported communication anxiety levels in correlation to age differences are shown by Figures 8 a–d, which shows a distinguishably different pattern for speaking than the other communication skills. Compared to the other skills, the pattern for speaking anxiety shows a more evenly distributed representation of all age groups over the entire spectrum without any detectable distinctive features. Consequently, the distribution pattern for speaking anxiety does not reveal any distinguishable differences in relation to age. In contrast, the other skills display more noticeable differences. Examining the maximum level of anxiety for each other skill reveals that the student experiencing high levels of anxiety in writing and/or listening is probably a second year student in upper secondary school (Gy 2) and for reading, it is probably a first year student (Gy 1). Interestingly, the oldest students (Gy 3) have no representation at all in the levels over 5 for writing, which could indicate an increased sense of self-reliance in producing written work in the target language.
In the lower spectrum of each anxiety scale all the age groups are represented but there is a detectable difference between the age groups in which type of skill they perceive as least anxiety provoking. The results imply that students in upper secondary school generally regard listening to be the skill that never causes them any anxiety with 66% (Gy 1), 65% (Gy 2) and 71% (Gy 3) of the students claiming this. The youngest group (Högst)

*Figures 8 a–d. The distribution of anxiety levels over age groups.*
however, considers writing to be the type of communication that never causes them any anxiety at all, with a representation of 60% of them marking the lowest anxiety level (1).

4.4 Foreign language communication anxiety and multilingual competence

Figures 9 a–d. The distribution of anxiety levels in correlation with multilingual competence.
The analysis of students’ multilingual competence in correlation to levels of anxiety shows indications of very distinct differences (Figures 9a–d). One of the most prominent results is that the students with bilingual competence placed themselves in the highest anxiety levels in all of the communication skills.

Another prominent pattern reveals that the multilingual students have an overall very low anxiety. Aside from speaking, these students seem to experience only moderate levels of anxiety, not exceeding level 6. Even in these cases, i.e. listening and writing, the amount of representation is only 5% of all of the multilingual informants.

As mentioned previously, the majority of all of the informants indicated having very low anxiety levels overall, and the examination of the representation in the lowest level (1) in this specific section reveals that 66% of the monolingual students never experience any anxiety when listening to English, whereas 66% of the bilingual and 58% of the multilingual students indicate that they feel least anxious in writing.

These results strongly imply that the student experiencing high levels of anxiety in all types of communication is bilingual, while the monolingual students are most anxious about speaking English. In contrast to this, the multilingual students have a generally more relaxed attitude towards communication in their target language.

### 4.5 Foreign language communication anxiety and performance

The informants were asked to specify their latest registered course grades in their FL English class. This self-report data constitute the degrees of FL performance, which in turn has been investigated as a factor correlating with foreign language anxiety levels. Tables 1 a–d display the results for this examination.

As mentioned previously, 3% of the informants did not give any reports on their latest grades. This information was decided to be included in the calculations instead of omitting them as inconclusive data for the purpose of examining if it has any significance. When investigating the results, it was found that the blank reports constitute a confusing distribution pattern over the anxiety levels in connection with the different types of communication, with both high and low levels marked except for writing, where there is no blank representation over level 5 in anxiety. Consequently, the examination of the distribution pattern for the blank reports provides no evidence for which grade they could actually be in the vicinity of, except for the indication that these students do not experience high anxiety levels for writing.
listening, reading

group included surprisingly high amounts of students never experiencing any anxiety at all in

performance grades and communication anxiety levels. Overall, there is a very high

(over 60%) representation of students with top grades (A-B) in the minimum level of anxiety

for three out of four communication skills. In speaking there is a significantly lower amount

of the top grade students not feeling anxious (55% and 33%), but still they have a higher

representation in that anxiety level compared to the students with lower grades. The group of

students belonging to the lowest grade group (E-F, where F is a failing grade) was the only
group that had no (0%) representation in the minimum anxiety for speaking. However, this
group included surprisingly high amounts of students never experiencing any anxiety at all in
listening, reading and/or writing.

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Tables 1 a–d. The distribution of anxiety levels in correlation to self-reported performance.

In general, the results indicate that there exists some correlation between performance
grades and low communication anxiety levels. Overall, there is a very high
(over 60%) representation of students with top grades (A-B) in the minimum level of anxiety
for three out of four communication skills. In speaking there is a significantly lower amount
of the top grade students not feeling anxious (55% and 33%), but still they have a higher
representation in that anxiety level compared to the students with lower grades. The group of
students belonging to the lowest grade group (E-F, where F is a failing grade) was the only
group that had no (0%) representation in the minimum anxiety for speaking. However, this
group included surprisingly high amounts of students never experiencing any anxiety at all in
listening, reading and/or writing.
The data on the highest anxiety levels proved to be even more challenging to interpret. Considering the maximum anxiety level (10) in all of the communication skills, it is revealed that the F-students are more inclined to always feel anxious about writing, with 20% of them marking this answer, which in relation to the other students is a significantly higher representation in this skill. However, there is an additional representation in the maximum anxiety about writing, which is noteworthy, namely 1% of the A-students. This result could indicate that there exists a specific type of performance anxiety in correlation to producing written work and that this type of anxiety is not exclusively a trait that only students with lower performance levels experience.

The E-F students also indicate that they experience higher levels of anxiety about speaking (21% and 20%) than the other students, which adds to the notion that their higher anxiety is correlated to special performance activities where they feel at a disadvantage. Another significant, and also puzzling, peak in the maximum level is the 2% of C-students experiencing this in listening to English.

In conclusion, examining the different anxiety levels in relation to performance (course grades) shows indications of correlation, but the result is difficult to interpret – especially the representations in the highest anxiety levels. However, the data suggest that the majority of the students with high performance (and course grades) experience low anxiety in communication in the target language.

4.6 Student attitudes in specific foreign language classroom related situations

The questions 10 a—f in the questionnaire were designed to investigate students’ attitudes regarding a set of statements that are frequently associated with the foreign language classroom and learning situation. The possible answers were to agree, disagree or to be undecided with regards to the specific statement. These answers were investigated for any correlation to gender, age, multilingual competence and/or the performance level of the individual student and the specific answer given. The compiled results for these statements are shown in Figures 10 a-f.
10 a) I become anxious when I don't understand what my English teacher is saying.

The first statement, *I become anxious when I don’t understand what my English teacher is saying*, showed that 54% of the informants *disagreed* with this statement, indicating a relaxed attitude towards this type of common situation in a foreign language class. The monolingual boys, attending the last year of upper secondary school (Gy 3) and with high performance grades were in majority of those who *disagreed*. In contrast, the students who reported belonging to the lowest grade group (F) *agreed* to this statement to a significantly higher degree (80%) than the other students. Also, the blank reported performance levels distinguish themselves by the high amount of *undecided* (71%) for this statement.

10 b) I feel that the other students speak English better than I do.

The statement *I feel that the other students speak English better than I do* proved to be a statement that 71% of the informants *disagreed* with, which also proved to be the highest level of representation in any of the statements in this section, i.e. the highest degree of conformity amongst the informants in disagreeing that their peers are better in English than themselves. The strongest correlation to *disagreeing* with this statement is
gender and grades, where 81% of the boys and 91% of the A-students claimed to feel this way. In general, the students with high grades were proportionally far more inclined to disagree to this statement, which indicates an accurate self-awareness regarding their levels of proficiency. Even for this statement there was a high representation (80%) of the F-students who agreed with this. Also, this statement is one (of two) that none (0%) of the F-students disagreed with, which is a strong indication of correlation between low performance grades and low self-evaluation.

10 c) I am worried that I can't write proper English (grammar, spelling, vocabulary).

The 3rd statement, I am worried that I can’t write proper English, directly relates to the students’ attitudes towards producing written work in their foreign language class and the results confirm the previously implied correlation between high anxiety levels for writing and the fear of not being able to produce it “correctly”. The level of agreement to this statement is 80% for the F-students, and almost a third of the girls (28%) feel this way, while only 13% of the male students do.

The high levels of disagreement to this statement reveal a correlation between A-students and the oldest ones (Gy 3), which also confirm previous indications of a development of self-assurance regarding writing proficiency with age.
The examinations of data in previous sections have all implied that the students’ attitudes towards speaking have a special status compared to the others. The results for agreeing or disagreeing to the statement in question 10 d (I feel uncomfortable when I have to speak without preparation in class) are in correlation with those previous results. The statistics imply that the A-B students are the majority of those not feeling anxious about speaking in English, which is in strong contrast to the majority of all the other students who do feel anxious, that is to say, who agreed with the statement. Also, a high amount of boys (62%) attending the first (63%) or second (65%) year of upper secondary school expressed that they disagreed with this statement. So, even for this statement, the results show a strong correlation between high performance and gender with the addition of an indication of age, i.e. students who are boys with high grades and probably attend first/second year in upper secondary school feel more comfortable speaking the target language in their foreign language class.

10 e) I am worried that my classmates will comment on my pronounciation.
The statement *I am worried that my classmates will comment on my pronunciation* (10 e) implies an anxiety of negative evaluation. The results indicate that there exists a strong correlation between either agreeing or disagreeing with this and the performance variable, i.e. course grades. The majority of the A and B students claimed that they do not feel uncomfortable when they have to speak without preparation in class (i.e. disagreed to the statement), with a representation of respectively 69% of the A-students and 79% of the B-students asserting this. Agreeing with this statement implies a fear of negative evaluation from peers and/or the teacher, and students with grades C-F were overrepresented in doing so, where a noteworthy 80% of the F-students feel this way.

In addition, there is a detectable difference between the genders regarding this statement. The majority of the boys (62%) disagreed, implying a relaxed attitude towards the described situation. In contrast to this, over half of the girls, 58% of them, chose to agree instead, implying that they feel uncomfortable when they have to speak without preparation in class.

Also, there is an indication that the oldest (Gy 3) and the youngest students (Högst) are more prone to agree to the statement than the students in the other age groups, with 53% of the oldest giving this answer, followed by 42% of the youngest. The majority of the students in Gy 2 (63%) and 3 (65%) claimed to disagree with the statement.

10 f) *I am used to reading books in English.*

The last statement (*I am used to reading books in English*) differs from the others in that it does not evaluate the informants’ attitudes towards a specific statement on feelings, but instead asks them to agree or disagree with a statement regarding an activity. The value of reading, and especially literature, is often highlighted and debated regarding its positive effects on language development and its strong correlation to language proficiency is
often emphasized (Krashen 1993). The question 10 d was added to the questionnaire with the aim of trying to identify any implications of validity of these claims. The results show that there is in fact a detectable correlation between high grades and reading books, with 76% of the A-students agreeing to it and 0% (!) of the F-students. This is the second statement where the F-students have no (0%) representation in one of the answer options, which in itself is a strong indication of validity for each separate statement and answer for that particular group of students.

The highest representation of those who agreed to being used to reading books in English were the oldest (69%) and monolingual (57%) students. Also, 60% of the boys agreed to the statement, which is a higher representation than the girls, where only 45% of them agreed. The gender distribution of those who agreed is not in agreement of the conventionally accepted attitude that girls generally are more used to reading books.

A majority of the students disagreeing with the statement were students with lower grades (D: 43%, E: 57%, F: 60%) Otherwise, the results imply that there is no other significant distinction between the students disagreeing to the statement in regards to their linguistic competence or age.

4.7 Student perspectives on foreign language communication anxiety

The last section of the questionnaire consisted of an optional open-end question giving the students the opportunity to express their personal perspectives/attitudes on anxiety related to communicating in English in their foreign language class. Overall, there was a surprisingly high response rate in this section with 29% of the informants leaving thought-out, content-rich answers, implying that foreign language anxiety is a subject that many students are familiar with. The following is not a complete account of all of the answers received; instead the aim is to highlight some of the attitudes the students’ expressed regarding FL anxiety when given the opportunity. The answers used as quotes in this section have been translated with the ambition to represent the Swedish original (Appendix 2) as true as possible.

Those students who claimed to have very low anxiety (or none at all) towards communicating in English, showed a tendency to articulate an explanation for their low anxiety levels, rather than pointing out causality factors, which was more frequent amongst the other students. For example, an A-student attending the second year in upper secondary school expressed himself in the following way:
I don’t feel any anxiety at all for communicating in English, regardless if it is speaking or writing. I don’t experience any problems with either reading, writing, speaking or listening in English. If I don’t understand something I look it up in order to fully grasp it.

This answer indicates a high degree of self-awareness and a sense of responsibility regarding the individual learning situation. Most of the students with the highest grades (A-B) expressed themselves in similar ways. A girl, also an A-student who marked the minimum levels of anxiety in all communication skills, expressed:

I feel very secure in my English language skills. I like my pronunciation and I teach myself by doing a lot of reading and listening to English outside the classroom. I choose to do this because it improves my English and I like that.

At the opposite end of the anxiety spectrum the most recurring comments reflected two major themes: the classroom specific situation and/or low self-evaluation. For the classroom specific situations, the teacher and peers were the main focus. The importance of the teacher was frequently mentioned and was claimed to be a source of either reassurance or evoking anxiety. The teachers’ level of knowledge in the target language and/or the ability to make the students feel reassured about their efforts in trying to communicate in English were key issues in many of the comments. The following two comments convey attitudes that were expressed by many of the students, regardless of grades:

I mean, I don’t think I’m actually ‘afraid’ of speaking English… but I always think ‘hope (s)he doesn’t pick me…’ because (s)he always corrects you if you use the wrong words in front of everybody else.

I don’t respect my English teachers. It’s as simple as that. I mean, if the teacher can’t even speak the language how are we students supposed to learn it?

Receiving negative evaluation from peers was frequently mentioned as the cause of high anxiety for speaking in class:

The guys in middle school always commented on the pronunciation or what was wrong when somebody spoke in English class and I guess that stuck with me. I feel very uncomfortable speaking in class even if I know I am correct in everything. Now when I’m older I often wonder why the teacher allowed it…
I’m afraid to make a fool of myself when talking in front of my peers. I guess the only way to lower the anxiety is to be more sure of myself and not to be so preoccupied with what others think of me. But honestly, I have no idea how to achieve this…

Finally, there was a high frequency of comments relating to different levels and forms of low self-evaluation; however, it was only students in the lower grade spectrum (D-F) who mentioned this as an explanation for their anxiety. Interestingly, these students all reported above average levels of anxiety (5<) in all of the four communication types and consequently implying that they experience a very high overall anxiety for any type of communication in English. The following statement encapsulates the general attitude:

I believe it is because I don’t know English as well as everybody else and I don’t feel as good as they are.

5 Conclusions
The aim of this linguistic study has been to investigate if different types and levels of foreign language communication anxiety that Swedish students in upper secondary school and compulsory school (grades 7-9) experience when communicating in English in their foreign language classes have any correlation to sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, performance and/or multilingual competence.

The methodology for this data-driven study was primarily quantitative. With the help of an on-line survey that provided a number of self-report data, the aim has been to identify and investigate any valid correlations between the reported anxiety levels in different types of communication (speaking, listening, reading and/or writing) and the sociolinguistic variables mentioned previously. A qualitative analysis was also enabled by virtue of a free-writing option, and participant parameters in addition to the sociolinguistic variables.

The results in this study indicate that the students generally feel more and/or higher anxiety when speaking the target language than the other types of communication. This is in line with the findings Horowitz, Horowitz and Cope (1986) did when they concluded that language learners expressed more anxiety over speaking the target language than any other type of communication skill.

Examining each sociolinguistic variable separately in relation to different levels of anxiety revealed significant differences. The most prominent indications of correlation to anxiety levels were the variables gender, performance (course grades) and linguistic
competence. The age variable also showed indications of correlation but was less pronounced than the others. However, one distinguishable result was that the oldest students (attending the last year in upper secondary school) did not have any representation at all in the anxiety levels over 5 for writing, which could indicate an increased sense of self-reliance in producing written work in the target language. The gender differences revealed that only girls expressed the highest levels for speaking and/or reading in English. Boys, on the other hand marked the highest levels of anxiety in listening and writing. Also, boys seemed to be overall more inclined to claim that they do not experience any anxiety at all towards communication in their FL English classes. Performance in the form of course grades also proved to be in correlation with anxiety levels; however, the results are difficult to interpret – especially the representations in the highest anxiety levels. Nevertheless the data suggest that the majority of the students with high performance (and course grades) experience low anxiety in communication in the target language, which validates Krashen’s (1981) Affective Filter hypothesis and the theory of the affective filter creating a barrier that prevents optimum learning when anxiety levels are high. The examination of the multilingual competence as an aspect of correlation to anxiety showed results that strongly imply that the student most likely to experience high levels of anxiety in all types of communication is bilingual. In contrast to this, the multilingual students have a generally more relaxed attitude towards communication in their target language, which is similar to the findings by Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008) whose results suggested a correlation between low foreign language anxiety and the knowledge of more languages.

One section of the questionnaire was designed to investigate students’ attitudes regarding a set of statements that are frequently associated with the foreign language classroom and learning situation. They were asked if they agreed with, disagreed with or were undecided towards each statement. Similarly to the conclusions drawn by Bailey (1982) about the relationship between students’ negative self-comparison with others and high anxiety, the results in this study imply the same correlation. One of the strongest indications for this is the result for the statement I feel that the other students speak English better than I do, which none (0%) of the F-students disagreed to. There was an additional statement with the same result, i.e. where the students with the failing grades (F) were in total agreement, and it proved to be whether the students were used to reading books in English and they all disagreed to this statement.

The results of the qualitative part of the study, where the students had the opportunity to express their opinions regarding foreign language classroom anxiety, showed
indications that confirm the presence of two of the situation-specific anxieties described by Horowitz, Horowitz & Cope (1986), namely communication apprehension (CA) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). These two anxieties were expressed by pinpointing different anxiety provoking situations and the most frequently mentioned cause was the fear of being regarded as foolish and/or incapable by peers. Also, in this section a distinguishable difference between the A-students and the others were noticed, where a majority of their answers indicated that they possessed a high degree of self-awareness along with a strong sense of responsibility regarding the individual learning situation.

Finally, as Horowitz (2010) concludes in a different paper regarding specific SLA research results: “it also suggests that foreign language anxiety research should play closer attention to social variables” (p. 166), this pilot study has attempted to take aim in that direction. Even though the results in this study have been successful in providing a base for implied correlations between different sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age, linguistic competence and performance with foreign language anxiety levels they can only be regarded as just that – implications. Further research is needed to thoroughly examine the correlational effects different sociolinguistic variables have on the foreign language learning.

The implications are as follows: the best language lessons may be those in which real communication takes place, in which an acquirer understands what the speaker is trying to say. Similarly, a reading passage is appropriate for a student if he or she understands the message. Finally, the teacher-talk that surrounds the exercises may be far more valuable then the exercise itself. We teach language best when we use it for what it was designed for: communication (Krashen 1982:19).
References


Appendix 1, Questionnaire in Swedish

Elevattityder kring engelska i klassrummet.

Detta är en anonym undersökning av elevers attityder kring olika typer av kommunikation via engelska i klassrummet. Dina svar kommer att behandlas statistiskt och användas i en C-uppsats. Om du har frågor kan du nå mig via mail: andrea01.ekstrom@student.sh.se

Dina svar är viktiga och jag tackar på förhand för att du tar dig tiden att besvara dem!

1) Vilken skola går du i?

2) Vilken årskurs går du i?
   - Gymnasiets årskurs 1
   - Gymnasiets årskurs 2
   - Gymnasiets årskurs 3
   - Högstadiet

3) Du är:
   - Tjej
   - Kille

4) Känner du någonsin oro inför att PRATA engelska under lektionen?
   Gradera ditt svar mellan 1 (Aldrig) och 10 (Alltid). OBS! Frågan gäller EJ för provsituat.
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Jag känner ALDRIG oro  Jag känner ALLTID oro

5) Känner du någonsin oro inför att LYSSNA på (förstå) engelska under lektionen?
   Gradera ditt svar mellan 1 (Aldrig) och 10 (Alltid). OBS! Frågan gäller EJ för provsituat.
   
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Jag känner ALDRIG oro  Jag känner ALLTID oro
6) **Känner du någonsin oro inför att LASA engelska under lektionen?**
Gradera ditt svar mellan 1 (Aldrig) och 10 (Alltid). OBS! Frågan gäller EJ för provsituation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Jag känner **ALDRIG** oro □□□□□□□□□□□ □ Jag känner **ALLTID** oro

7) **Känner du någonsin oro inför att SKRIVA engelska under lektionen?**
Gradera ditt svar mellan 1 (Aldrig) och 10 (Alltid). OBS! Frågan gäller EJ för provsituation.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Jag känner **ALDRIG** oro □□□□□□□□□□□ □ Jag känner **ALLTID** oro

8) **Pratar ni fler språk än svenska hemma?**
- [ ] Ja, ett annat språk.
- [ ] Ja, flera andra språk.
- [ ] Nej.

9) **Vad är ditt senaste betyg i engelska?**

10) **I vilken grad håller du med i nedanstående påståenden?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Påstående</th>
<th>Ja, jag håller med</th>
<th>Nej, jag håller inte med</th>
<th>Obestämd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jag blir orolig när jag inte förstår vad läraren säger på engelska.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jag tycker att alla mina klasskamerater är bättre på engelska än mig.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jag är orolig för att jag inte kan skriva korrekt engelska (grammatik, stavning, ordval).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jag tycker det är obehagligt om jag måste prata inför klassen när jag inte är förberedd.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jag är orolig för att mina klasskamerater ska kommentera mitt uttal.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jag är van vid att läsa engelska böcker.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11) I vilken årskurs började du med engelska?

12) Dina egna synpunkter kring din eventuella oro inför att kommunicera på engelska i klassrummet.

Här kan du skriva vad tyder med egna ord. (Till exempel: vad du tror att den beror på, vad påverkar den, hur den skulle kunna minskas, eller liknande.)

Skicka

Skicka aldrig lösenord med Google Formulär

Tillhandahålls av Google Drive

Det här innehållet har varken skapats eller godkänts av Google.

Anmäl otillåten användning · Användarvilkor · Ytterligare villkor
Appendix 2, Student answers used as quotes in Swedish

“Jag känner ingen oro alls för engelskan oavsett om jag ska prata eller skriva. Tycker over huvud taget inte att jag har några problem med att läsa, skriva, prata eller lyssna på engelska. Om jag inte förstår någonting så slår jag upp det så att jag ska förstå.”

“Jag är mycket säker på min engelska. Jag tycker att jag har ett bra uttal och jag lär mig själv genom att läsa och lyssna mycket på Engelska på fritiden. Jag väljer att göra det för att bli bättre på språket vilket jag gillar.”

“Jag skulle väl inte säga att jag är direkt ‘rädd’ för att prata på engelska… men jag tänker alltid typ hoppas läraren inte väljer mig…” för att han/hon alltid påpekar vad man säger för fel inför alla.”

“Jag har ingen respekt för min lärare i engelska. Så enkelt är det. Jag menar, om hon/han inte ens kan prata språket hur ska vi elever kunna lära oss det?”

“Grabbarna i mellanstadiet kommenterade typ jämt hur man uttalade ord eller när någon sa nåt fel och jag antar att det ligger kvar. Jag gillar inte alls att prata inför klassen även om jag vet att jag kan. Nu når jag är äldre undrar jag varför läraren aldrig sa något…”

“Jag är rädd för att göra bort mig inför klassen. Jag antar att det enda sättet att komma ifrån det är att bli mer säker på sig själv och inte bry mig så mycket om vad andra tycker. Men ärligt, hur gör man det…”

“Jag tror att det är för att jag inte kan lika bra engelska som alla andra och jag känner mig inte lika duktig.”