



**UNIVERSITY  
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**“The spoken course crushed me and now I'm afraid of pronunciation”**

Foreign Language Anxiety among Finnish University Students of English

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Minor Subject Thesis

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The aim of this Minor Subject Thesis is to understand how Finnish university students of English, during their first year at university, experience Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) with regards to the four skills of language, levels of language knowledge and the social context. Foreign Language Anxiety is a topic that, since the 1980s, has received more and more attention, but the focus has, typically, been on the modality of speaking and research has been cross-sectional.

The present study sought to understand how English first-year majors (n=27) viewed FLA over the course of their first academic year with regards to the four skills of language, levels of language knowledge and the social context. A Webropol questionnaire was distributed to an English course in April 2023 and included both numerical rating scales and open-ended questions; in the analysis, however, the focus was largely on the qualitative material. Content analysis was used as the method for this.

Based on the analysis, the students reported various experiences of FLA despite their advanced level of English. Quantitative analysis revealed high standard deviation. The findings showed that speaking caused particular feelings of anxiety and stress among the students, and was further highlighted when in a social setting. Additionally, anxiety caused by public speaking was an important finding in the current study. The social context had an effect on the levels of FLA, causing various reactions among the students over the course of the academic year. These differing experiences could be due to various reasons, such as individual differences. Academic writing was a source of worry for many students.

The study showed that grammar and pronunciation were notable causes for FLA and were tightly linked to respective courses that the students needed to take during the first year of their English studies. Moreover, the current study revealed that many students experienced fluctuations and changes in their experiences of FLA over the academic year; however, these changes went in various directions showing a range of different experiences.

Future studies, for example, could compare students from different years of English studies to establish whether there are differences in the experiences of FLA. More variables (such as personality traits) could also be added to the study to enrich knowledge on FLA.

**Key words:** foreign language anxiety, the four skills of language, levels of language knowledge, social context, change

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## List of Abbreviations

CDST	Complex Dynamic Systems Theory
FL	Foreign Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLE	Foreign Language Enjoyment
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
LA	Language Anxiety
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
PA	Pronunciation Anxiety
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	Second Language Learning

## 1 Introduction

It is very likely that many of us have been in a situation where, speaking a foreign language, the interlocutor gazes expectantly into our eyes, but the right words or the correct grammar rules just do not surface; cheeks start to blush and uncomfortableness settles in. Situations like this can cause anxiety, in particular foreign language anxiety. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is understood as various states of tension and anxiety when using a foreign language; it can manifest itself, for instance, as an accelerated heartbeat or as distracting thoughts or frustration (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 125).

FLA has been shown to have a direct relationship with L2 performance (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015) and it has been seen to have a direct consequence on the actions and choices of language students through their decisions to continue or abandon their language studies. Indeed, according to Gardner (2010), FLA is one of the key factors determining the motivation to learn a language. For these reasons it is fundamental to gain more and more knowledge on how to deal with FLA.

Traditionally, research on FLA has been cross-sectional and has, particularly, studied the modality of speaking (see for example Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986; Kitano 2001). Less research has been longitudinal and sought to understand FLA from other points of view. In consequence, the present study seeks to find out how Finnish university students of English experience foreign language anxiety over the course of an academic year; in particular in the areas of the four skills of language and the five levels of language knowledge. The study also seeks to find out whether the social context of learning has an effect on the learners' experiences on FLA over the course of the academic year. The research questions are the following:

1. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe their feelings of foreign language anxiety with regards to the four skills of language (speaking, writing, reading and listening)?
2. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe their feelings of foreign language anxiety with regards to the five components of language (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics)?
3. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe the effect of the social context of learning on foreign language anxiety?

I seek to find answers to these questions through a questionnaire in which the students (n=27) described their experiences on FLA through both numerical rating scales and open-ended questions, with the main focus on the latter.

The outline of the present study is as follows. Section 2 looks at language from the perspectives of both the four the skills of language and the five levels of language knowledge, whilst section 3 explores FLA on various levels: first, the phenomenon is defined and observed historically to help the reader understand its development in research and, then, it is linked to various factors such as language competence, social context, change and the aforementioned levels and skills of language. Section 4 is dedicated to presenting the materials and methods of the study, and section 5 investigates the findings. Finally, in section 6, the findings will be discussed and analyzed in order to establish how the current study places itself in the research field, along with the presentation of its limitations and the offering of ideas for future research.

## 2 L2 learning in the academic context

The current study evaluates how university students experience Foreign Language Anxiety with regards to the four skills of language and the five levels of language knowledge. In consequence, these concepts will be briefly introduced alongside with an overlook of how they connect to academic contexts.

The concept of *academic competence* refers to knowledge needed in academic contexts (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 143): the L2 is used as a medium to deepen knowledge on a specific subject and, thus, requires specific skills to serve academic purposes (Saville-Troike 2017, 144). Academic competence will be particularly relevant in the current study for the target group that is comprised of university students of the English language.

### 2.1 The four skills of language and five levels of language knowledge

L2 (Second Language) skills are typically divided into four components: reading, listening, writing and speaking (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 163–178). According to Saville-Troike and Barto (2017, 164), “reading is the most important area of activity for individuals to engage in for the development of L2 academic competence”. Listening has been regarded as the most difficult skill to learn in an L2 (Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2006, 29), since it requires processing information on multiple levels of language (e.g. phonetic, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic) (Lynch 1998, 3).

Writing is described as a skill that is “a dynamic, creative and contextualized process of communicating meaning” (Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor and Palmer-Silveira 2006, 394). Academic writing is a fundamental skill for learners hoping to fill academic purposes in the L2; for instance, universities often have written entrance exams and require writing extensive essays and theses (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 172). Speaking is cognitively demanding for it necessitates not only the understanding of phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and discourse patterns, but also the knowledge of the functions it enables to fulfill (Tarone 2005, 486), whilst also requiring immediate reactions with limited time for editing (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 172)

Next, the levels of language knowledge will be briefly observed. For purposes of description and analysis, languages are typically divided into six levels: lexicon, phonology, morphology, syntax, nonverbal structures and discourse (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 34–35). It is essential to note, however, that these levels function simultaneously and in actual language use can never be separated (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 34). Starting with

vocabulary, Saville-Troike and Barto (2017, 146) note that it can be considered the most important level of L2 knowledge that needs to be acquired by all learners, despite the functions, whether day-to-day or academic, the learners are seeking to be fulfill.

“Pronunciation could be described as the business card that is first handed to the listener” (Lintunen 2014, 167); mastering the sound system (i.e. phonology) of a L2 might sometimes be the defining factor of how positively others evaluate the speaker’s competence (ibid.). Additionally, learners will aim to produce a specific accent, but will also need to be adaptable and attentive to others’ way of speaking in different accents (Lintunen 2014, 169).

Syntax is “knowledge of how words are grouped together in a sentence” (Lobeck and Denham 2014, 11). This can impose difficulties on the L2 learner: a learner could be studying a language with a completely different syntactic structure to their L1 (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 155-156). Acquiring grammar lies at the heart of language learning since comprehensible output cannot be produced without the understanding of language structures (Sundman 2014, 114). In academic language use, sentences tend to be long and complex and, consequently, requires high proficiency from the L2 learner to decipher them correctly (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 156).

Finally, pragmatics, essentially, looks at language from a macro perspective and observes the broader context of language use (Taguchi 2019, 1). Academia is filled with specific conventions (e.g. writing a research paper, participating in a conference) and will, indeed, require a thorough understanding of purposeful and effective language use (Saville-Troike and Barto 2017, 161).

In the following section, the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety will be introduced along with providing an understanding of how it connects to the four skills of language and the levels of language knowledge.

### 3 Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

In this section, Foreign Language Anxiety will be observed; first, a definition will be provided along with a historical review, and then it will be treated from various points of view relevant to the current study.

#### 3.1 Defining FLA

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA for short) is a concept that continues to pique researchers' interest in the field of Second Language Acquisition (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, 175). It has a direct relationship with how a foreign language use situation unfolds; as Dörnyei and Ryan put it (2015, 176): “[t]here is no doubt that anxiety affects L2 [Second Language] performance – most of us will have had the experience that in anxiety-provoking climate our L2 performance deteriorates: We forget things that we otherwise know and also make silly mistakes.”. Someone freezes, another hears a loud buzz; foreign language anxiety manifests itself in various ways (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 126).

In short terms, FLA refers to various states of tension and anxiety when using a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 125). On top of the aforementioned symptoms, FLA can also manifest itself as an accelerated heartbeat, difficulty in concentrating, distracting thoughts or frustration (*ibid.*). These psycho-physiological symptoms, essentially, are the same as in any kind of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 126). Foreign language anxiety is also tightly connected to the social context of language learning: someone can be fearful and anxious of being misunderstood, another dreads being laughed at (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, 176).

All these symptoms can have significant and harmful consequences. Students might start withdrawing from the language use situations that cause feelings of anxiety and tension; they might start neglecting homework, skipping classes, which, eventually and most regrettably, may lead to them abandoning the language study completely (Liu and Jackson 2008, 72). Consequently, it is no surprise that FLA has been the center of attention of many researchers in the field of SLA; MacIntyre (2017, 11), indeed, states that it has been “the most widely studied emotion in second language acquisition”. Naturally, it is a particularly fruitful area of research for teachers and practitioners; to have more and more students persist with foreign language study is highly beneficial for all.

Next, I will present a brief overview of the research phases in the study of FLA. Foreign Language Anxiety is a relatively new area of research in SLA and started only gaining

attention starting from the 1980s (MacIntyre and Wang 2022, 175). MacIntyre (2017) has identified three historical phases and approaches in the study of this particular emotion: confounded, specialized and dynamic.

Before mid-1980s, SLA research had not really considered the role of anxiety in language learning; it was generally agreed upon that concepts relating to anxiety could simply be copied to SLA research from other disciplines, such as psychology (MacIntyre and Wang 2022, 175). This was the *Confounded Approach* and, as the name tells us, it was “a hodgepodge of anxiety constructs” that did not form a well-constructed whole (ibid.). Additionally, it often neglected the context of learning (MacIntyre and Wang 2022, 176).

The arrival of the *Specialized Approach* marked the end to “[t]he confounding of various types of anxiety and their inconsistent applicability to language” (MacIntyre 2017, 14). This approach had its roots in Gardner’s socio-educational model of language learning motivation (see Gardner 1985; Gardner 2010), which saw anxiety as one of the key factors determining the motivation to learn a language. In this manner, it was generally established that anxiety should be considered a construct of its own in language learning (MacIntyre 2017, 14).

During this time, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed their well-known *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) that, even today, continues to be widely utilized in research (MacIntyre 2017, 15). It quickly proved to be a highly reliable and valid tool to measure language anxiety; this, in turn, cemented the construct of foreign language anxiety for good (MacIntyre 2017, 15). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) included multiple variables in the anxiety scale such as communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. *Communication apprehension*, according to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, 127), refers to “shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people”, whilst *test anxiety* examines the fear and anxiety of a possible failure in a language test. *Fear of negative evaluation*, on the other hand, has to do with the social setting of language learning and the anxiety caused by being judged and evaluated by others (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 128).

Lastly, the *Dynamic Approach* represents a recent trend in FLA studies (Gregersen, MacIntyre and Meza 2014, 575). Its theoretical roots are in the Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), which was developed by Larsen-Freeman at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Larsen-Freeman 1997). MacIntyre describes the dynamic tradition:

This new, emerging tradition emphasises situating anxiety among the multitude of interacting factors that affect language learning and development. Anxiety is continuously interacting with a number of other learner, situational and other factors including linguistic abilities, physiological reactions, self-related appraisals, pragmatics, interpersonal relationships, specific topics being discussed, type of setting in which people are interacting and so on. Anxiety is an emotion that fluctuates over time [...]. (MacIntyre 2017, 23)

As of yet, much research has not been conducted in this tradition (MacIntyre and Wang 2022, 176). To date, the Specialized Approach has been the most influential in FLA research (ibid.). The current study represents the tradition of the Dynamic Approach.

Next, I will introduce some recurring themes and debates that, in particular, have featured in the study of foreign language anxiety, following MacIntyre's (2017, 27-28) order of presentation. The first one has to do with FLA being *facilitating* or *debilitating* – research has sought to understand whether foreign language anxiety actually makes the learner study even more and, thus, has a positive effect on language learning, or whether it only hinders learning (ibid.). Another heated debate concerns whether FLA is the cause or effect of language performance (ibid.). The last debate arises from language anxiety viewed either as an internal state or as a social construction. As the characteristics of the before mentioned CDST reveal, affective variables like FLA, are more and more considered as part of a great whole of different variables in play in Second Language Learning (SLL); variables that are both internally and externally constructed.

Finally to conclude this section, a quick review of specific factors affecting FLA relevant to the current study will be provided: level of language competence and social setting. Logically, one would assume that anxiety levels decrease with more knowledge; this has been reported by, for example, Gardner, Smythe and Brunet (1977) in their study of French learners from different levels. According to Horwitz (2000, 257), however, “advanced and successful students also report anxiety reactions”; similarly, and quite interestingly, nonnative foreign language teachers have been proved to suffer from FLA even if they are considered to be experts of the target language (Horwitz 1996). Zhang (2019, 763) reports similar results and states that “the role of FL [Foreign Language] anxiety should not be ignored regardless of the FL learners' proficiency level”. Finally, Saito and Samimy (1996) discovered that advanced American students of Japanese were clearly more anxious compared to students on the beginner and intermediate level. Interestingly, a link has also been found between FLA and perfectionism (Gregersen and Horwitz 2002).

Reviewing the historical trends in the research of FLA in the last chapter, we noticed that the social context of language learning being connected to anxiety started gaining more attention in the Dynamic Approach. We also noted that one of the primary debates concerned viewing FLA as an internal or social construct with a general tendency to lean towards the latter. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), in their aforementioned FLCAS scale, include the social setting of foreign language learning and its effect on FLA; students' anxiety levels may be affected by the fear of being evaluated negatively by their teacher or peers. Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008), in their article on FLA amongst multilingual adults, also call for more consideration of different social variables in the study on FLA (e.g. socialization and network of interlocutors) and confirm the idea that individuals' anxiety is alleviated in a context with familiar people (Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham 2008, 946). Pan and Zhang (2021) in their study on FLA and FLE (Foreign Language Enjoyment) also noted that a friendly classroom atmosphere alleviated students' anxiety, whilst a negative one induced it.

Finally, the concept of *ought-to L2* self has also been linked to FLA in previous studies: this term, created by Dörnyei as part of a motivation theory (see Dörnyei 2005), refers to “the attributes that one believes one ought to possess” (Dörnyei 2005, 105-106) and in a L2 learning context, it is no surprise that when these expectations are not always met, feelings of FLA can arise; this has been shown in studies by Papi (2010) and Jiang and Papi (2022).

### **3.2 FLA across language skills and levels of language knowledge**

In this chapter, FLA will be discussed with regards to the four skills of language and across levels of language knowledge.

Speaking has been considered the most anxiety provoking of the four language skills (see for example Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999; Kitano 2001; Ellis 2008). Reasons for it are many: many students believe that speaking is the most important skill to learn in a foreign language (Guntermann, Hendrickson and de Urioste 1996, 34), and students tend to easily compare their speaking skills, in particular, to peers, teachers and native speakers (Kitano 2001, 550). Interestingly, research, as a matter of fact, has focused so much on speaking that some researchers have begun to question whether instruments, such as FLCAS with a significant amount of items concerning speaking, are able to measure other skills of language.

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, more and more research has started supporting the idea of FLA as a skill-specific construct (Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999, 439). FL writing anxiety is particularly interesting, since many instructional settings place a big importance on written language tests with pen and paper being the most important tools to

show language ability (Woodrow 2011, 511). Zhou, Wang and Wang (2022, 2) state: “[w]hen writing, L2 learners often encounter various difficulties involving linguistic knowledge and writing skills which may result in writing anxiety, a lack of self-confidence, and fear of negative evaluation”. Accordingly, there is a large body of research between the negative relationship writing self-efficacy and L2 writing anxiety (for example Woodrow 2011; Kirmizi and Kirmizi 2015).

FL reading anxiety is another interesting area of research: “[a]t first glance, reading would seem to be the component of FL performance least susceptible to anxiety effects. Unlike speaking a FL, reading—at least silent reading—is done privately with unlimited opportunity for reflection and reconsideration.” (Saito, Garza and Horwitz 1999, 202). However, the same authors came to realize that FL reading anxiety deserved a measuring instrument of its own and created the *Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale* (FLRAS) (see Saito, Garza and Horwitz 1999), in which they highlighted two aspects that were of particular cause for anxiety in this modality: “(a) unfamiliar scripts and writing systems” and “(b) unfamiliar cultural material” (Saito, Garza and Horwitz 1999, 203). In current language teaching, where much focus is given to oral performance, they call for “more instructional effort [...] to teaching target language literacy explicitly” since “teachers cannot assume that reading proficiency automatically follows the development of oral proficiency” (Saito, Garza and Horwitz 1999, 217). This trend of accentuated focus on oral performance, in turn, could cause students to have an increased reading anxiety level.

FL listening anxiety has received the least amount of attention in research, again, much due to the fact that speaking skills are oftentimes the center of attention in teaching, as Vogely (1998, 68) states: “LC [listening comprehension] is more often than not treated as a passive skill that will “happen” during the regular classroom activities”. However, if the learner does not succeed in decoding the input message, communication will fail; as a matter of fact, Zhang (2013) found a direct relationship between FL listening anxiety and listening performance, as well as Elkhafai (2005), who noted that FL listening anxiety negatively contributed to overall performance in language class.

Observing the phenomenon of FLA from a different perspective, we note that research, even if to a lesser extent, has also looked at feelings of apprehension and worry in the sphere of levels of language knowledge. “[P]ronunciation is a very (and probably the most) emotionally loaded aspect of a given language, the learning and use of which evoke an array of feelings” (Baran-Łucarz 2014, 452); as a consequence, Baran-Łucarz (2014) conceptualized Pronunciation Anxiety (PA) and defined it as “a multidimensional construct

referring to the feeling of apprehension experienced by non-native speakers in oral-communicative situations, due to negative/low pronunciation self-perception and to beliefs and fears related to pronunciation” (Baran-Łucarz 2014, 453). In the Finnish context, Lintunen and Skaffari (2014) found pronunciation to be a notable source for stress in L2 speech performance among university students of English.

Vocabulary has been found to be a cause for FLA as well; Liu (2006), studying Chinese university students’ FLA in English classes, discovered that lack of vocabulary knowledge was one of the biggest factors to cause FLA. Similar conclusions were drawn in studies by Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) and Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022).

Significantly less research has been conducted on grammar and syntax as a cause for FLA. Recently, however, Ekinci Çelikpazu and Taşdemir (2022) developed a measurement tool for analyzing LA in the process of learning grammar; the tool was created, however, for the analysis of native language grammar. Lintunen and Skaffari (2014), in the aforementioned study on Finnish university students, also noted grammar to be one of the most salient linguistic levels to cause stress and anxiety in L2 speech performance. As for pragmatics, “misunderstanding communication or using incorrect words” was mentioned by MacIntyre (2017, 21) as one cause for language anxiety; additionally, Brown, Robson and Rosenkjar (2001) found a link between FLA and pragmatic competence.

### **3.3 FLA and change**

Research on Foreign Language Anxiety has, for the most part, been cross-sectional and has rarely sought answers to its potential dynamic nature. A recent body of research, however, has begun to investigate whether FLA could be a phenomenon that fluctuates over time. Results are slowly confirming this; Gregersen (2020, 1) states: “it forms part of an interconnected, constantly-in-flux system that changes unpredictably over multiple time scales”. Next, a review of studies will be presented on the relationship between FLA and change.

Gregersen, MacIntyre and Meza (2014) studied whether six American university students experienced fluctuations in their levels of anxiety while giving a presentation in Spanish. The results showed that, over the few minutes, there was a significant amount of variation and the participants’ levels of FLA interacted with multiple internal and external factors (e.g. confidence, topic, the audience’s reaction).

In a study of a more longitudinal manner, we have two pieces of research conducted by Kruk. In a piece of research published in 2018, Kruk explored whether Polish high school students experienced changes in their levels of FLA over a semester of 121 English lessons.

As a result, there was proof of fluctuation both within a single lesson and between multiple lessons; the most significant causes for anxiety between lessons were writing tests and grammar practice (Kruk 2018). In 2021, Kruk conducted a case analysis observing the levels of FLA of a student of English philology who, over a university semester, visited a virtual world as a means to practice English. Kruk's finding was that the student's levels of FLA did, indeed, fluctuate: "[t]hese ups and downs in FLA levels were affected by a host of negative (e.g. conversations with strangers, the lack of sufficient language, negative experience) and positive (e.g. conversations with familiar interlocutors, interesting topics, language progress) factors." (Kruk 2021, 393).

In a Chinese university context, Pan and Zhang (2021) studied FLA and FLE in a single study among English majors. The results revealed that FLA was less subject to change than FLE: "motivational factors were found to be more closely related to the magnitude of changes in FLA as compared to FLE" and that "[s]ome of these FLA-enhancing motivational factors included motivated behavior, ought-to L2 self, and family influence." (ibid.). Piniel and Csizér (2014, 185) reported a similar finding also in the university context; "[t]he motivational components most susceptible to change were learning experience and the ought-to L2 self".

In a similar study by Dewaele and Dewaele exploring the dynamicity of FLA and FLE, they concluded that "the causes of positive and negative emotions are dynamic and change over time" (Dewaele and Dewaele 2017, 12). Liu and Yuan (2021), in their longitudinal study on Chinese undergraduate students, reported that the levels of both FLCA and listening anxiety remained high; with few changes, however, over the 16-week semester.

These findings shed some light on the possible dynamic nature of FLA. Still, much work needs to be done in order to grasp a better idea of the phenomenon as a whole.

## **4 Materials and Methods**

### **4.1 Research questions**

As was seen in the previous section on the relationship between FLA and change, much research still needs to be conducted to explain the link between the phenomena. For this reason, the goal of the present Minor thesis is to shed some light on Finnish university students' experiences about foreign language anxiety over the course of an academic year. The students are first-year students majoring in English; their levels of FLA will be observed through the four skills of language and the five levels of language knowledge, along with observing whether social context has an effect on the experiences on FLA. This thesis is an exploratory study since, to my knowledge, there has not been a similar research design used in the study of FLA. The research questions are the following:

1. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe their feelings of foreign language anxiety with regards to the four skills of language (speaking, writing, reading and listening)?
2. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe their feelings of foreign language anxiety with regards to the five components of language (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics)?
3. Over the course of an academic year, how do university students of English describe the effect of the social context of learning on foreign language anxiety?

### **4.2 Data collection and participants**

The data for the present study were collected during a lesson of the course "Second Language Acquisition", which, typically, is taken in the second semester of the student's first year studying English at the University of Turku. The course is part of intermediate studies and is one of the five so-called "core courses", which introduce the main areas of research at the department of English.

Questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method; Webropol survey tool provided the means to collect the data via an online questionnaire. Questionnaires are one of the most popular research instruments due to their versatility, straightforwardness and, in general, cost-effectiveness (Dörnyei 2007, 101-102). They are well suited to gather opinions and experiences and give the participants time to reflect on their answers (Friedman 2012, 190).

The present thesis sought to find answers to the students' experiences on FLA and, thus, a questionnaire was well suited for this purpose. As Dörnyei and Dewaele (2022, 52) put it: "the quality of the obtained data increases if the questionnaire is presented in the respondents' first language"; since Finnish was the most likely mother tongue of the participants, the questionnaire was chosen to be administered in Finnish.

The thesis could be described as a mixed-methods research, since the questionnaire included both numerical rankings and open-ended questions. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to mark their age, their major and year of studies at university. In the second part of the questionnaire, they were asked to put the four skills of language (speaking, writing, reading and listening) into a numerical order according to how anxious they felt about them (1=skill that made the participant the most anxious, 4=skill that made the participant the least anxious) at three different stages in time (start of the academic year, middle of the academic year and end of the academic year). Then, through an open-ended question, they were asked to explain and describe their choices.

In the third part of the questionnaire, following the same exact procedure, the participants were asked to evaluate their FLA, this time, however, according to the five levels of language knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, pragmatics). The fourth part of the questionnaire included an open-ended question regarding the possible effect of the social context on the level of FLA during the academic year and, additionally, gave the participants the chance to voice other thoughts about their experiences on the phenomenon of FLA over the course of the academic year.

Since the participants were asked to think back on their experiences of FLA from the past academic year, the research design shares similar characteristics to a stimulated recall (for more information on stimulated recall see Dörnyei 2007). One of the most significant weaknesses of a stimulated recall concerns time: "there is an inevitable information loss due to the time lapse" (Dörnyei 2007, 151). However, this method offers a unique way to access the participants' mental processes (Dörnyei 2007, 150).

The questionnaire was distributed to the students on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2023 and 31 students responded to the questionnaire. As the focus of the present study was on first-year students majoring in English, only 27 answers were chosen as the data for the current study; of the four answers excluded one was of a minor student and three of students at a later stage in their English studies. The participants were aged between 19 and 26. The small number of participants (n=27), naturally, makes it so that no generalizations can be made based on the results. However, since the focus of the present study is mostly on the open-ended questions

and gathering qualitative information, the sample size allows an interesting look at this particular university course participants' experiences on FLA.

### 4.3 Data analysis

Since this is a mixed-methods study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The focus of the study is, however, more qualitative and, thus, only the measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and standard deviation were derived from the quantitative data. These calculations were made with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics 27, whilst Microsoft Excel was used for all the figures in the study.

As for the qualitative data analysis, content analysis was used as the method to analyze the open-ended questions of the questionnaire. Content analysis refers to a method in which data is organized to form a systematic and objective whole (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018, 117); this is done through coding, which leads to themes, which then lead to interpretations and conclusions (Dörnyei 2007, 245–257). First, the data was color-coded with regards to students mentioning either the four skills of language or the five levels of language knowledge causing some kind of FLA; these, then, were counted and transferred into two figures. Thus, the number of comments shown in these figures only include ideas expressing some kind of distress and anxiety towards a specific skill or level of language knowledge; comments, such as “I do not feel anxious about reading”, have not been included in the counting.

Next, each comment on change regarding FLA was marked and a counted; and, again, were presented in two figures. Finally, in the last open-ended question regarding the effect of social context, the answers were grouped into categories and counted, and, finally, presented in a figure.

After the color-coding and counting, salient themes from each category represented in the figures were sought after. These, again, were counted and are to be introduced in the following results section, through various examples, in order to elaborate what can be observed in the figures. It is crucial to note, however, that only the most important themes were presented; single cases were not included for the brevity of the present thesis. The examples are the writer's own translations of the original responses written in Finnish.

As Dörnyei (2007, 64) points out: “qualitative research intrudes [...] into the human private sphere: it is inherently interested in people's personal views and often targets sensitive or intimate matters”. For this matter indeed, it is important to ensure that ethical matters are taken into consideration throughout the research process. Firstly, participation in the study was voluntary and, secondly, full anonymity was ensured via an anonymous online

questionnaire. Thirdly, the participants, before filling out the questionnaire, were provided a privacy notice to inform them on the ethical proceedings of the study. Fourthly, the materials and data will not be used for any other purposes and will be destroyed once the study has been concluded.

## 5 Results

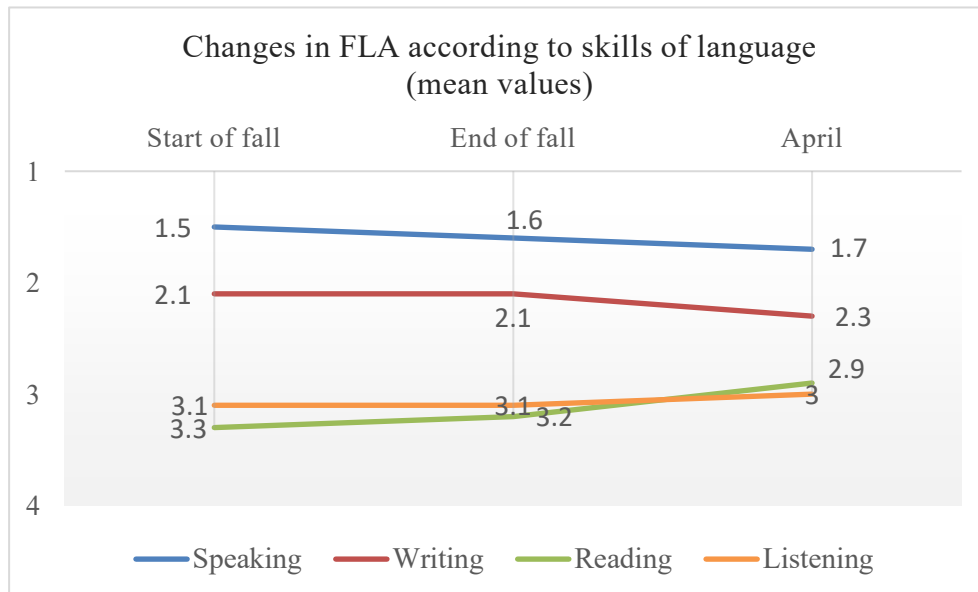
Next, the results will be presented. First, measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and standard deviation were derived from the data; see Appendix 3 for details. It is crucial to note that, most probably due to the small sample size, there is substantial variation in the data, particularly in the quantitative analysis of the levels of language knowledge. Consequently, mean was the most reliable measure to utilize in the analysis of the quantitative data, since it takes into account the outliers of the data – for this reason, the figures in this chapter have been created using mean values. However, great generalizations cannot be attached to the results of the quantitative data due to its high standard deviation. The high standard deviation also, simply, shows that people experience FLA differently and, thus, a focus on qualitative individual analysis is called for.

In the subsequent sections, the qualitative data (i.e. the open-ended questions) will be treated with support from the quantitative data. Additionally, a comparison will be drawn between the two to establish whether the two data sets align; to see whether, for example, the most anxiety provoking skill, measured by quantitative data, resulted in the most amount of comments in the qualitative data.

### 5.1 The four skills of language

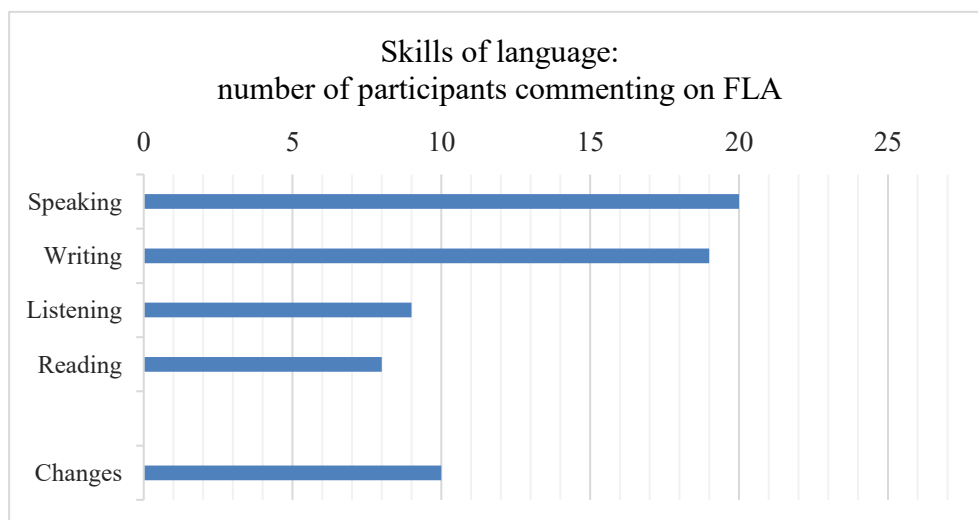
Before observing the figures in this section, it is important to remind the reader of the scale that the participants utilized to rank their levels of FLA – 1 being the most anxiety provoking skill, and 4 being the least anxiety provoking skill.

As Figure 1 shows, it is speaking to cause the most amount of FLA amongst the participants throughout the academic year (mean=1.5, 1.6 and 1.7). As for qualitative data, on the other hand, Figure 2 shows the results of its coding with the amount of comments given for each skill.



**Figure 1** Foreign Language Anxiety expressed through mean values at three different points in time according to skills of language

Observing the most significant category of Figure 2, speaking is the one to receive the most amount of comments (n=20). In consequence, a positive relationship can be noted between the quantitative and qualitative data.



**Figure 2** Number of comments, regarding FLA, for each category of the qualitative data, skills of language

Next, to grasp a more satisfactory overview on speaking being a cause for FLA, several elaborations given by the participants will be presented. Six students mentioned the stress and anxiety caused by the surrounding social context (example 1 and 2):

(1) Speaking English with others is particularly stressful for me. (Student 26)

(2) I make the most mistakes in speaking, which I notice myself and which I think others notice, which is why it's the most anxiety provoking. (Student 8)

Many students (n=6) believed that their speaking skills in English are just not sufficient enough (example 3):

(3) Speaking is the most anxiety provoking [skill], because I feel I don't speak English well enough. (Student 19)

Finally, an interesting theme arose in the comments: public speaking was voiced by six students. These students felt like it was not so much to do with the language (many felt anxious even speaking in their mother tongue Finnish), but more the general anxiety arising from speaking in public (example 4):

(4) The anxiety of public speaking is not related to the language in question. (Student 15)

Turning to writing, we note that it is the second most anxiety provoking skill, as can be observed in Figure 1 (mean=2.1, 2.1 and 2.3). Again, it goes hand in hand with Figure 2; it is the second most commented skill (n=19). Analyzing the comments made by the participants, the topic of academic writing was raised by many (n=7, examples 5 and 6):

(5) [A]cademic writing is surprisingly stressful and I often find myself thinking about sentences for a long time. (Student 25)

(6) Sometimes, when I write, I get a bit frustrated if I don't think I'm expressing things "academically" enough (i.e. too simply). (Student 26)

Producing text was also a cause for anxiety amongst the participants (n=5, example 7):

(7) I'm still a bit unsure about producing my own text. (Student 7)

Listening placed third in the ranking of anxiety provoking skills (mean=3.1, 3.1 and 3). Figure 2 reveals that listening received 9 comments; consequently, once again, the quantitative data support the qualitative material. Three participants worried about missing a crucial part of information in interaction, especially with native speakers of English (example 8):

(8) [T]here are so many different accents in English and [...] I most likely have to ask the speaker to repeat what they said. (Student 21)

Misunderstandings were also a source for FLA (n=2, example 9):

(9) [L]istening can lead to possible misunderstandings with other people if you do not understand the content correctly. (Student 16)

Finally, reading resulted to be the least anxiety provoking skill (mean=3.3, 3.2 and 2.9). It also received the least amount of comments (n=8) – although only one less than listening. The most significant type of comment dealt with challenging texts, especially in academic reading (n=5, examples 10 and 11):

(10) [S]ometimes it is difficult to make sense of textbooks, which is frustrating and weakens [my] concentration. (Student 26)

(11) The difficulty level of the [course] material reading has increased, so I get more anxious about it because I'm not sure if I understand the content of the text correctly. (Student 12)

Observing Figure 1, until this point, possible changes in the FLA levels have been mostly ignored; the last part of this section will be dedicated to this matter, taking, however, the high variation of the data into account. Figure 1 provides an idea that there are only slight changes in the feelings of FLA at three different points in time during the academic year; reading and listening switch places in April, but, nevertheless, stay very close to one another according to their mean values. Additionally, speaking and writing became less anxiety provoking with the passing of time, whilst reading and listening became slightly more anxiety-provoking.

Figure 2, on the other hand, shows that 10 students commented on change making it slightly more than one third of the participants; consequently, the fact that this many students experienced some changes reveals that Figure 1 is not sufficient enough to show the true findings through mean values. There is, indeed, a need for individual analysis.

Next, a few elaborations by the students will be presented. Three students commented on their improvement in listening skills, making listening less distressing (example 12):

(12) If I missed a word in a speech, I started to get stressed and anxious about it. But now I am very used to the lectures already. (Student 4)

Making a habit out of speaking helped two students feel less anxious about it (example 13):

(13) [D]uring the academic year I have spoken to so many people whose first language is not English, that I have become convinced that there is no need to be nervous about the language. (Student 13)

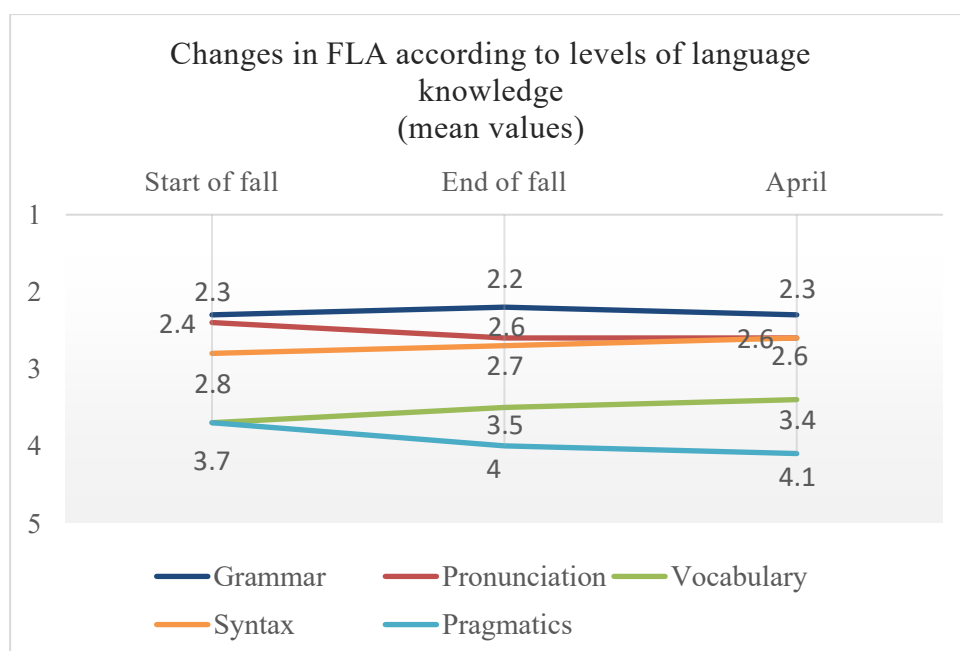
Reading, on the other hand, started causing more feelings of anxiety with the passing of the academic year (n=3). Example 11 already served as illustrative material on this; example 14 brings forward another one:

(14) But now I stumble when I read and I read more slowly. (Student 11)

These examples give support to the changes in the FLA levels presented in Figure 1.

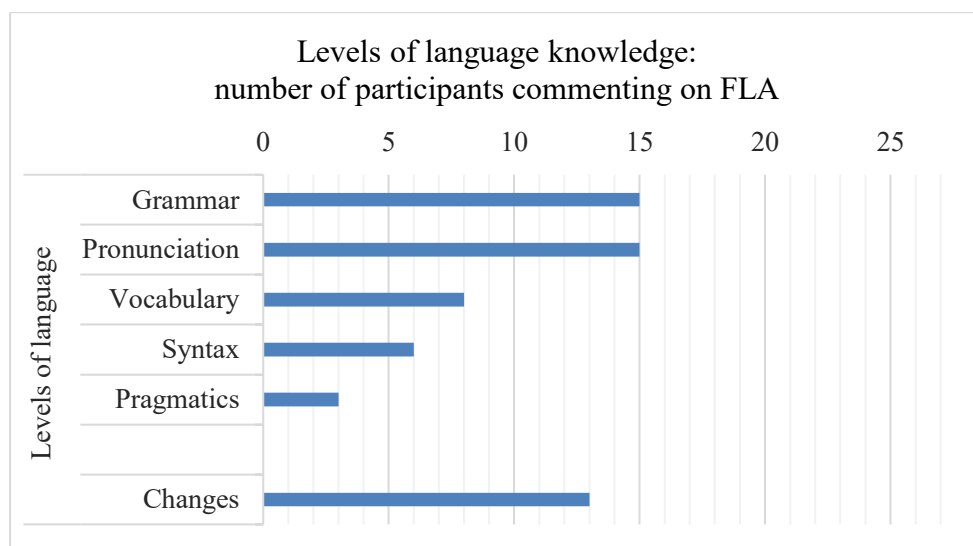
## 5.2 Levels of language knowledge

Turning to FLA experienced in different levels of language knowledge, it is crucial to remind the reader of the high standard deviation particularly in the quantitative analysis of these variables. General ideas can be formed, but no great conclusions can be drawn based on the quantitative results. Figure 3 reveals that grammar caused the most amount of distress for the students (mean=2.3, 2.2. and 2.3).



**Figure 3** Foreign Language Anxiety expressed through mean values at three different points in time according to levels of language knowledge

Observing Figure 4, grammar was the one to receive the most amount of comments in the elaborations of the students (n=15). Grammar 1, a course the students typically take in the first semester of their first year of English studies at university, got mentioned by seven students.



**Figure 4** Number of comments, regarding FLA, for each category of the qualitative data, levels of language knowledge

Four of them mentioned its anxiety-provoking effect (example 15), three instead saw it as anxiety-relieving (example 16):

(15) After the Grammar course, I have [...] been left with a little uncertainty[.] (Student 4)

(16) Grammar has definitely become less anxiety provoking since the first Grammar course. It gave me more confidence in using grammar. (Student 3)

This disparity reflects well the cause for substantial variation in the quantitative data. Four participants did not mention the grammar course specifically, but referred to the generally challenging nature of grammar at university level:

(17) Grammar is difficult for me. My explanation for my linguistic choices is always, like, "I put it that way because it sounded good", which is not good enough for a university-level answer. (Student 27)

Pronunciation ranked very close to grammar (see Figure 3, mean=2.4, 2.6 and 2.6). It received 15 comments (see Figure 4); the same amount as grammar. Seven students mentioned the various courses dealing with pronunciation in the first semester; five participants commented on their anxiety-inducing nature (example 18) and two students, instead, considered these courses to alleviate their levels of FLA (example 19):

(18) [T]he spoken course crushed me and now I'm afraid of pronunciation. (Student 4)

(19) [P]ronunciation [seemed] to get easier with practice. (Student 16)

Again, these examples are a testimony of the substantial variation of the data. Syntax was the third most anxiety provoking level of language knowledge (see Figure 3, mean=2.8, 2.7 and 2.6). However, it did not result to be the third most commented (6 comments); vocabulary took this place (8 comments). One reason, besides the high variance of the data, could be that grammar and syntax are sometimes considered to belong to the same category (see for example Saville-Troike and Barto 2017). Thus, by commenting on grammar, the participants, perhaps, considered to have commented on syntax, as well. Examples 20 and 21 support this idea:

(20) After the Grammar course, I have also been left with a little uncertainty about how right I am about syntax and grammar. (Student 4)

(21) Grammar and syntax sometimes cause anxiety, because sometimes mistakes are made and I am misunderstood. (Student 11)

Other reason might be that the idea of syntax is unclear to the participants, as put forward by one student in example 22:

(22) I didn't understand syntax when I started, and I don't [understand it] now, which is why it's number one in all of them (I am getting a bit worried that I should understand [it] by now). (Student 26)

Nevertheless, since this was stated only by one student, only very cautious conclusions can be drawn.

Vocabulary was the second least anxiety provoking level of language knowledge (mean=3.7, 3.5 and 3.4); as stated before, eight students commented on it. Academic vocabulary was the most significant cause for anxiety (n=6, example 23):

(23) [T]here are quite a few words in the lectures that I don't understand. (Student 18)

Finally, pragmatics was considered the least anxiety-inducing level of language knowledge (see Figure 3, mean=3.7, 4 and 4.1). Additionally, it was only commented by three participants. The few who had commented on it, felt particularly strongly about it and had ranked it high (examples 24 and 25):

(24) Pragmatics is always the most distressing [level of language knowledge]. (Student 22)

(25) [Understanding] pragmatics is a bit challenging for me, regardless of the language, because I sometimes find it difficult to understand different social situations. (Student 7)

As can be seen, example 25 introduces other themes as well.

Always keeping in mind the high standard deviation of the data, we turn to observe the dynamic nature of FLA regarding the levels of language knowledge. As mentioned before, observing mean values to seek answers to possible changes does not provide a sufficient idea of the true findings as there is a crucial need for individual analysis. However, these values can offer an idea; Figure 3 shows that all of the levels maintained their ranking throughout the year. Pronunciation and pragmatics, however, became slightly less anxiety-inducing, whilst syntax and vocabulary became, in modest terms, more anxiety-provoking. Grammar was subject to very few changes.

As much as 13 students commented on change, making it slightly less than half of the participants (see Figure 4). We see that examples 15, 16, 18 and 19, already, serve as illustrative material on change mentioned by the students. Additionally, the four examples are well suited to show the differences in experiences amongst the participants; testimony of the high variance of the data set. Interestingly, indeed, there was an equal amount of students who saw grammar getting easier and less distressing with the passing of the academic year (n=4), and of students who considered the exact opposite (n=4). Pronunciation, on the other hand, resulted more straightforward: of those who commented on it, four saw it getting less anxiety-inducing, and two the contrary. On top of these, vocabulary also received a few comments:

two students considered it to cause more anxiety (example 26), one student felt the feelings of stress alleviate. Let us look at a few more examples:

(26) Anxiety concerning vocabulary has probably increased recently, because it has sometimes been difficult to understand all the nuances in the academic texts we have read recently. (Student 10)

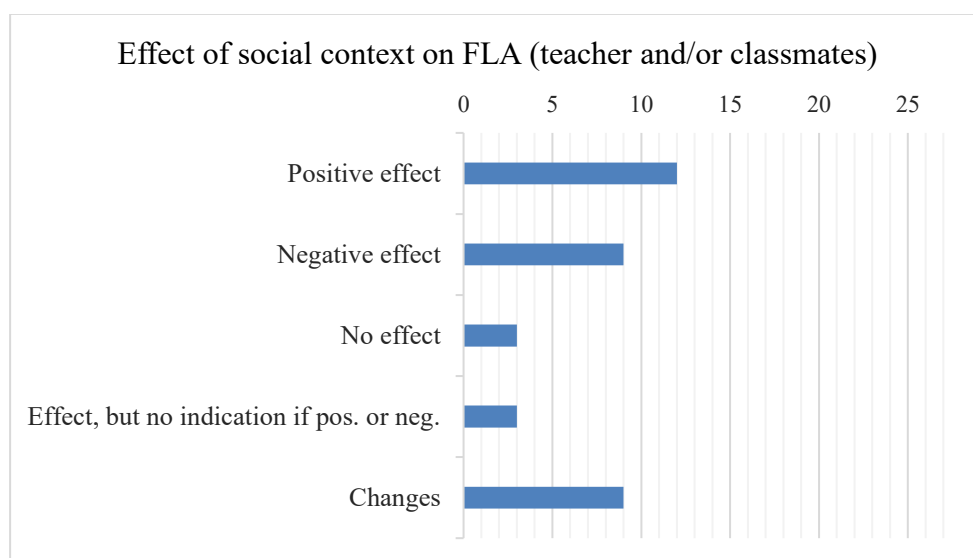
(27) Somehow, at the beginning of the academic year, I felt I didn't know anything about anything, but gradually I'm realizing that skills aren't always about how well you do in a particular situation. (Student 13)

Example 27 is an interesting look at the general idea of language learning; it, perhaps, encapsulates the complex nature of a student's first year at university.

### 5.3 Social context

Finally, the last part of the questionnaire included a question on the significance of the social context of learning and its effect on FLA over the course of the academic year.

Figure 5 offers an overlook of the results: 12 students considered the social context of learning to be anxiety-relieving (example 28), and 9 anxiety-inducing (example 29). Three stated that it had no effect on their levels of FLA, and three students confirmed its effect but did not further elaborate on it. As for changes throughout the academic year in the effect of the social context on FLA, nine participants confirmed its dynamic nature (example 30).



**Figure 5** The effect of the social context on FLA, open-ended question coded

Some illustrative examples to be followed:

(28) The classmates have definitely had a positive impact on my anxiety. When you realize that other fellow students are also struggling with new concepts and terms, it goes a long way in alleviating also your own negative feelings. (Student 3)

(29) [S]ome lecturers seem to expect dazzling English skills. Some classmates are easier to talk to than others. (Student 14)

(30) I have the courage to speak more freely in some teachers' classes and I'm not so afraid of making mistakes. I'm also not so afraid to speak up now that I know most of the people in the lectures and have made friends. (Student 4)

Furthermore, these results on social context can be linked to examples 1 and 2 that we saw in the earlier section; they, as a matter of fact, revealed that the social context was a significant cause for FLA among the participants.

In the next chapter, these results will be discussed with reference to earlier studies in order to establish their broader significance in the field.

## 6 Discussion

Having examined the results, a discussion of their broader significance is presented. For the high standard deviation of the quantitative data, as already established, the numbers will merely serve as a tool to support and reinforce the results of the qualitative data. Luckily, however, as was seen in the previous section, the qualitative material gained continuous support from the quantitative data; what was perceived the most anxiety-inducing in the open-ended questions, was equally reflected on the respective numbers. The high standard deviation also, simply, shows that people experience FLA differently and, thus, a focus on qualitative individual analysis was called for. Next, the research questions will be answered and discussed by bringing forward the most important findings of the present study, along with an overlook of how they reflect previous studies in the field.

First of all, the present study immediately gains support from other studies; despite the advanced level of the students, they, nonetheless, report and experience foreign language anxiety in their use of English (see Horwitz 2000; Zhang 2019). This, however, is not in line with the idea that anxiety decreases with more knowledge (see for example Gardner, Smythe and Brunet 1977). This anxiety and distress English students experience in their first year of studies might be the cause of the heightened consciousness of everything an English major *should* know; as expressed by one student:

(31) The stress is increased somewhat by the knowledge that I should know well because I'm a major and I've had practice. [...] I get stressed because I "should know", but then I'm not sure. (Student 26)

Kitano's (2001, 558) research supports the argument: "[b]ecause experienced language learners have probably acquired much more knowledge than less experienced language learners, they may have more chances of noticing their own errors". This is also reflected in the many comments in which the students voiced that they felt like their English (speaking) skills just were not sufficient enough; these thoughts reflect ideas of the concept of *ought-to L2 self* (Papi 2010; Jiang and Papi 2022).

The present study showed that speaking was the skill to cause the most amount of distress among the first-year students majoring in English. The result is vastly supported in previous research (see Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert 1999; Kitano 2001; Ellis 2008). For many, the social context was a major cause for speaking anxiety; this, along with the results provided by the students in the open-ended question concerning the effect of social context,

highlight the significance of the surrounding learning environment on foreign language anxiety. Previous studies have, indeed, raised its overarching significance (see Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986; Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham 2008). The Dynamic Approach (see MacIntyre 2017), with its growing understanding of the importance of the social context and many other situational factors in language learning, is clearly an important direction for research in SLA.

Moreover, in the present study, it is interesting to note that one group considered being affected by the social context positively, and the other group, of almost an equal amount of students, considered the effect to be negative on their levels of FLA. Therefore, it seems to be a highly individual matter amongst the participants; this result, again, gains support from the Dynamic Approach, in which affective variables, like FLA, are seen to be constructed in a flux of internal and external factors, dependent on each individual learner (MacIntyre 2017, 23). However homogenous this group of English students of a similar age could be considered, each of them in this particular class come from a different background with different experiences of language learning; these factors, among multiple others, shape how, in this case, the social aspect of language learning is essentially viewed.

Public speaking as a source for anxiety was raised by multiple students in the current study; according to these students, it was not so much about the L2, but more so the general anxiety of needing to express oneself in front of others. Lintunen and Skaffari (2014, 60), in their study on Finnish university students of English, found that public speaking stress was “a generic feature of presentations in any language”, but, interestingly, also noted that performing in an L2 made it more challenging for some students.

Academic writing, in particular, is also a noteworthy source of FLA for the students. On top of academic writing, many worried about producing text, exhibiting signs of low self-confidence in the modality of writing. It is interesting, then, to note the vast amount of research that has been conducted on the confirmed positive relationship between writing self-efficacy and L2 writing anxiety (for example Woodrow 2011; Kirmizi and Kirmizi 2015); this study clearly is in line with the previous research conducted. Writing, and in this case academic writing, requires the knowledge of many specific conventions and rules; therefore, it is no wonder that it may seem daunting for first-year students and that it can have an effect on their self-efficacy in writing. Similarly, it would be fascinating to conduct a study on older English students to see whether there would be evidence of higher self-efficacy.

Turning to the levels of language knowledge, grammar and pronunciation were the ones to cause the most amount of distress according to both the quantitative and qualitative data.

Kruk (2018), in her mixed-methods study, confirmed that grammar exercises, along with writing tests, sparked the most amount of FLA among the high schoolers in her study. In another Polish study conducted by Baran-Łucarz (2014), university English major students reported significant levels of anxiety in pronunciation class; the more anxious the students were, the lower scores they got. Here we notice a direct connection with one student's elaboration in the current study:

(32) I got a grade 3 in my Spoken English test when I was expecting at least a 4. Since the lower grade was mainly due to the fact that the test was so stressful that I could not speak with a natural rhythm, my confidence in my pronunciation and fluency in challenging situations declined afterwards. (Student 17)

Moreover, as already observed, both grammar and pronunciation sparked comments on specific courses taken during the first year of English studies; some considered the courses to help better understand the concepts, while others, instead, regarded them as highly stressful making the participants pay excessive attention to grammatical and/or pronunciation-related matters. This finding reflected the fact that people simply experience FLA in different ways. The concept of test anxiety (see Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986) could, from one side, explain the distress experienced by the students; each of these courses led to an exam that needed to be passed in order to progress in the studies.

Baran-Łucarz (2014, 75), on the other hand, points to each individual's personal and interpersonal anxieties as the cause for FLA in learning pronunciation. This, indeed, could explain the differing views of the students on the helpfulness of these courses. Baran-Łucarz (2014, 76), additionally, emphasizes that "a sense of security during the lesson and a positive pronunciation self-image are necessary conditions for some learners to benefit from the practical course of phonetics".

Having reported the most salient results regarding the four skills of language, the levels of language knowledge and the effect of the social context, we turn to observe changes in FLA over the course of the academic year. For the lack of research on the dynamic nature of FLA, it is difficult to draw well-suited comparisons to previous studies; however, some ideas can be formed. Contrary to studies by Pan and Zhang (2021) and Liu and Yuan (2021), the current study found that a notable amount of students experienced changes in their levels of FLA. On the other hand, the finding is, in general terms, in line with Kruk (2018), Kruk (2021) and Dewaele and Dewaele (2017), which all witnessed fluctuations in the levels of FLA.

What is particularly interesting was that, especially with regards to the levels of language knowledge, many students reported differing experiences on change. Some, for example, saw a specific course to alleviate the feelings of anxiety, whilst others considered the effect to be the opposite. These discrepancies might, again, reflect the individual differences highlighted in the Dynamic Approach (MacIntyre 2017), and could touch upon concepts such as learners' the ought-to L2 self and perfectionism, both the connection of which have been proved to FLA (for the former see Piniel and Csizér 2014, for the latter Gregersen and Horwitz 2002). However, since the current research did not target these concepts, more research needs to be conducted in order to be able to explain the discrepancy.

Next, before turning to conclusions, some limitations must be taken into consideration. Firstly, as mentioned on multiple occasions, the high standard deviation, largely due to the small sample size of the study, makes it so that the quantitative data have to be treated with caution. It directly links to the second, and biggest, limitation, which is the low number of participants. Thirdly, since the participants in the questionnaire had to reflect on past experiences on FLA, there might be some skewedness of the results due to memory loss caused by the passing of time. Therefore, these results cannot be largely generalized, but, instead, serve the important purpose of shedding light, in a qualitative manner, on the experiences on FLA of the participants of this specific English course.

Finally, ideas for future research are presented. As already mentioned, it would be interesting to compare students from different years of English studies to establish whether there are differences in the experiences of FLA. Secondly, as the social environment was a notable finding in the current study, it would be interesting to center a future study on the social aspect of FLA. Thirdly, other additional variables (such as FLE, personality traits and the concept of self-efficacy, to name a few examples) could be added to the study to further deepen the knowledge of FLA.

## 7 Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to understand how Finnish university students of English, during their first year at university, experienced Foreign Language Anxiety with regards to the four skills of language, levels of language knowledge and the social context. The phenomenon was not unfamiliar to these students; they reported various experiences on the phenomenon despite their advanced level of English. High standard deviation was an important finding in the current study showing that individuals experience FLA in various different ways.

The findings showed that speaking caused particular feelings of anxiety and stress among the students, and was further highlighted when in a social setting. Additionally, anxiety caused by public speaking, with its general anxiety-inducing effect, was an important finding in the current study. The role of the social context is not to be neglected, since it caused various reactions among the students over the course of the academic year; the discrepancy could be due to various reasons, such as individual differences. Academic writing was a source of worry for many students and caused feelings of inadequateness.

Grammar and pronunciation were continuously accentuated in the students' responses and were tightly linked to respective courses that the students needed to take during the first year of their English studies. Moreover, an important finding of the current study was that it revealed many students to experience fluctuations and changes in their experiences of FLA over the academic year. Even more interesting was that these changes went opposite ways; some reported being even more anxious, and some, on the other hand, less anxious after certain experiences during the first year. It is challenging to get to the very root of the reasons behind this, but a possible explanation for the differing experiences could be individual differences with concepts of ought-to L2 self and personality (e.g. perfectionism) as potential causes.

The current study highlighted the fact that Foreign Language Anxiety is a topic in SLA that should not to be neglected in the future and, instead, should be further explored especially with regards to its dynamic nature and the effect of the social environment. Teachers and educators alike also need to understand how it can affect students from all age groups in order to encourage more and more learners to persist at language study and to provide tools to overcome the feelings of anxiety; so that, perhaps, one day that uncomfortable feeling of anxiety, caused by an interlocutor gazing expectantly into one's eyes and the right words or the correct grammar rules not appearing, just simply does not surface.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Questionnaire in Finnish

#### Kysely englannin kielen käyttöön liittyvästä ahdistuksesta

Tämän tutkimuksen pyrkimyksenä on selvittää minkälaisia englannin kielen käyttöön liittyviä ahdistuksen tunteita ja kokemuksia yliopisto-opiskelijat kokevat englannin opinnoissaan. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on lisäksi tutkia ilmiön muutosta ja dynaamisuutta lukuvuoden aikana.

Kysely sisältää 4 osiota ja sen vastaamiseen menee noin 15 minuuttia. Kysely sisältää monivalintakysymyksiä sekä avoimia kysymyksiä. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti ja niitä käytetään vain tutkimustarkoitukseen.

*Tutkimuksen tekijä: Aliisa Ketonen*

Hyväksytkö, että kyselyssä antamiasi tietoja käsitellään anonyymisti opinnäytetyön tekemiseen? Olen lukenut tietosuojailmoituksen ennen hyväksymistä. Lue tietosuojailmoitus [tästä linkistä](#).

kyllä  
 ei

#### Osio 1/ Perustiedot

Ikä:

Englanti on minun: \_\_\_ pääaineeni \_\_\_ sivuaineeni

Kuinka monetta vuotta opiskelen yliopistossa? \_\_\_ ensimmäistä vuotta \_\_\_ muu (mikä?)

Vieraan kielen käyttöön liittyvä ahdistus viittaa erilaisiin jännitys- ja ahdistustiloihin vierasta kieltä käytettäessä. Se voi esimerkiksi ilmetä kiihtyneenä sydämen tykytyksenä, vaikeutena keskittyä, häiritsevinä ajatuksina tai turhautumisena. Vieraan kielen ahdistus voi lisäksi ilmetä vetäytymisenä niistä kielen käytön tilanteista, jotka aiheuttavat ahdistuksen ja jännityksen tuntemuksia.

Seuraavissa osioissa pääset arvioimaan miten kyseiset ahdistuksen tunnetilat ja kokemukset ovat läsnä **englannin kieltä käyttäessäsi englannin oppiaineen kursseilla**. Pääset lisäksi arvioimaan näiden tunnetilojen muutosta lukuvuoden aikana.

## Osio 2/ Produktiiviset ja reseptiiviset taidot

Ensimmäiseksi pyydän sinua arvioimaan ahdistuksen tuntemuksiasi **puhumisen, kirjoittamisen, lukemisen ja kuuntelemisen** osa-alueilla **kolmena eri lukuvuoden ajankohtana** (syyskuu, joulukuu ja nykyhetki).

Aseta englannin kielen puhuminen, kirjoittaminen, lukeminen ja kuunteleminen järjestykseen **(1-4, 1=kaikista ahdistavin, 4=vähiten ahdistava)** kolmena eri ajankohtana kokemasi ahdistuksen mukaan.

Ensimmäisen lukukauden alku (syyskuu)	Ensimmäisen lukukauden loppu (joulukuu)	Nykyhetki
<input type="checkbox"/> puhuminen	<input type="checkbox"/> puhuminen	<input type="checkbox"/> puhuminen
<input type="checkbox"/> kirjoittaminen	<input type="checkbox"/> kirjoittaminen	<input type="checkbox"/> kirjoittaminen
<input type="checkbox"/> lukeminen	<input type="checkbox"/> lukeminen	<input type="checkbox"/> lukeminen
<input type="checkbox"/> kuunteleminen	<input type="checkbox"/> kuunteleminen	<input type="checkbox"/> kuunteleminen

**Miten päädyit näihin järjestyksiin? Kuvaile järjestyksiin johtaneita syitä. Kuvaile myös syitä, jotka johtivat järjestyksen mahdollisiin muutoksiin.**

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## Osio 3/ Kielen osa-alueet

Seuraavaksi pyydän sinua arvioimaan ahdistuksen tuntemuksiasi **englannin kielen eri osa-alueilla** (kielioppi, ääntäminen, sanasto, syntaksi\* ja pragmaattiset tilanteet\*\*) **kolmena eri lukuvuoden ajankohtana** (syyskuu, joulukuu ja nykyhetki).

Aseta englannin kielen eri osa-alueet järjestykseen **(1=kaikista ahdistavin, 5=vähiten ahdistava)** kolmena eri ajankohtana kokemasi ahdistuksen mukaan.

Ensimmäisen lukukauden alku (syyskuu)	Ensimmäisen lukukauden loppu (joulukuu)	Nykyhetki
<input type="checkbox"/> Kielioppi	<input type="checkbox"/> Kielioppi	<input type="checkbox"/> Kielioppi
<input type="checkbox"/> Ääntäminen	<input type="checkbox"/> Ääntäminen	<input type="checkbox"/> Ääntäminen
<input type="checkbox"/> Sanasto	<input type="checkbox"/> Sanasto	<input type="checkbox"/> Sanasto
<input type="checkbox"/> Syntaksi	<input type="checkbox"/> Syntaksi	<input type="checkbox"/> Syntaksi
<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmaattiset tilanteet	<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmaattiset tilanteet	<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmaattiset tilanteet

**Miten päädyit näihin järjestyksiin? Kuvaile järjestyksiin johtaneita syitä. Kuvaile myös syitä, jotka johtivat järjestyksen mahdollisiin muutoksiin.**

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\*syntaksi eli lauseoppi, miten kielen sanat sijoittuvat lausetasolla toisiinsa

\*\*pragmaatiikka viittaa sääntöihin siitä, kuinka kieltä käytetään eri konteksteissa

**Osio 4/ Avoimet kysymykset**

**Koetko, että opetustilanteen sosiaalinen konteksti (kurssikaverisi ja opettaja) on vaikuttanut/vaikuttaa ahdistuksen tuntemuksiisi englannin kielen käytössä? Onko tilanne muuttunut lukuvuoden aikana?**

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**Muita mahdollisia tekijöitä, jotka koet merkityksellisiksi ahdistuksen tuntemuksessa ja sen mahdollisissa muutoksissa englannin opetustilannekontekstissa lukuvuoden aikana:**

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**Muita mahdollisia kommentteja:**

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Lämmin kiitos osallistumisestasi!

## Appendix 2 Questionnaire in English

### Questionnaire on Foreign Language Anxiety in English

The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of Foreign Language Anxiety experienced by university students majoring in English. The study also aims to investigate possible changes of this phenomenon over the academic year.

The questionnaire consists of 4 sections and takes about 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire includes multiple choice and open-ended questions. All answers will be treated anonymously and used for research purposes only.

*Researcher: Aliisa Ketonen*

Do you agree that the information you provide in the survey will be processed anonymously for the purposes of the thesis? I have read the privacy notice before accepting. Read the privacy notice [here](#).

yes

no

### Section 1/ Basic information

Age:

English is my:  major  minor

What year of university studies am I on?  first year  other (what?)

Foreign Language Anxiety refers to various states of tension and anxiety when using a foreign language. For example, it can manifest itself as an accelerated racing heartbeat, difficulty concentrating, distracting thoughts or frustration. Foreign language anxiety can also be manifested as withdrawal from the language use situations that cause feelings of anxiety and tension.

In the following sections, you will assess how these feelings and experiences of anxiety are present when using **English at the department of English in the university context**. You will also assess how these feelings change over the course of the academic year.

## Section 2/ Productive and receptive skills

First, I ask you to evaluate your feelings of anxiety in the skills of **speaking, writing, reading and listening at three different points in the academic year** (September, December and the present).

Please rank speaking, writing, reading and listening in English in order **(1-4, 1=the most anxiety provoking, 4=the least anxiety provoking)** at three different points in time according to the level of anxiety you experience.

The start of the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Sep)	The end of the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Dec)	Present
<input type="checkbox"/> speaking	<input type="checkbox"/> speaking	<input type="checkbox"/> speaking
<input type="checkbox"/> writing	<input type="checkbox"/> writing	<input type="checkbox"/> writing
<input type="checkbox"/> reading	<input type="checkbox"/> reading	<input type="checkbox"/> reading
<input type="checkbox"/> listening	<input type="checkbox"/> listening	<input type="checkbox"/> listening

**How did you choose this particular order? Describe the reasons that led you to these orders. Also describe the reasons that led to any changes in the order.**

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## Section 3/ Levels of language knowledge

Next, I ask you to assess your feelings of anxiety **in different levels of the English language** (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax\* and pragmatics\*\*) **at three different points in time in the academic year** (September, December and the present).

Please rank the levels of language knowledge in order **(1-5, 1=the most anxiety provoking, 5=the least anxiety provoking)** at three different points in time according to the level of anxiety you experience.

The start of the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Sep)	The end of the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester (Dec)	Present
<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/> Grammar
<input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/> Pronunciation
<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary
<input type="checkbox"/> Syntax	<input type="checkbox"/> Syntax	<input type="checkbox"/> Syntax
<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmatics	<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmatics	<input type="checkbox"/> Pragmatics

**How did you choose this particular order? Describe the reasons that led you to these orders. Also describe the reasons that led to any changes in the order.**

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\*syntax, how words of a language are placed together at sentence level

\*\*pragmatics refers to rules about how language is used in different contexts

**Section 4/ Open-ended questions**

**Do you feel that the social context of the teaching situation (your classmates and the teacher) has influenced your feelings of anxiety in using English? Has the situation changed during the academic year?**

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**Other possible factors that you find relevant in the perception of foreign language anxiety and its possible changes in the English teaching context during the academic year:**

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**Other possible comments:**

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A warm thank you for your participation!

### Appendix 3 Measures of central tendency and standard deviation of the data

		START OF FALL	END OF FALL	APRIL
<b>SKILLS OF LANGUAGE</b>				
<b>speaking</b>				
	mean	1.5	1.6	1.7
	median	1	1	1
	mode	1	1	1
	std. deviation	0.8	1.0	1.1
<b>writing</b>				
	mean	2.1	2.1	2.3
	median	2	2	2
	mode	2	2	2
	std. deviation	0.9	0.8	0.9
<b>reading</b>				
	mean	3.3	3.2	2.9
	median	4	3	3
	mode	4	4	3
	std. deviation	0.9	0.8	1.0
<b>listening</b>				
	mean	3.1	3.1	3
	median	3	3	3
	mode	3	3	4
	std. deviation	0.8	0.9	1.0
<b>LEVELS OF LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE</b>				
<b>grammar</b>				
	mean	2.3	2.2	2.3
	median	2	2	2
	mode	1	1 & 2	1 & 2
	std. deviation	1.3	1.3	1.3
<b>pronunciation</b>				
	mean	2.4	2.6	2.6
	median	2	2	2
	mode	1	1	1
	std. deviation	1.6	1.7	1.6
<b>vocabulary</b>				
	mean	3.7	3.5	3.4
	median	4	4	4
	mode	4	4	4 & 3
	std. deviation	1.1	1.2	1.3
<b>syntax</b>				
	mean	2.8	2.7	2.6
	median	3	3	2
	mode	2	3	2
	std. deviation	1.1	1.0	1.1
<b>pragmatics</b>				
	mean	3.7	4	4.1
	median	4	4	4
	mode	5	5	5
	std. deviation	1.3	1.1	1.1

## Appendix 4 Finnish summary

### Johdanto

Tässä sivuainetutkimuksessa pyrittiin selvittämään miten suomalaiset englannin pääaineopiskelijat kokevat vieraan kielen ahdistusta (*Foreign Language Anxiety*) lukuvuoden aikana erityisesti kielitaidon neljän osa-alueen ja kielen viiden osa-alueen osalta.

Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin myös ymmärtämään vaikuttaako oppimisen sosiaalinen konteksti oppijoiden kokemuksiin vieraan kielen ahdistuksesta lukuvuoden aikana.

Vieraan kielen ahdistusta koskeva tutkimus on ollut perinteisesti poikittaistutkimusta, jossa on keskitytty etenkin puhumisen osa-alueeseen (ks. esimerkiksi Horwitz, Horwitz ja Cope 1986; Kitano 2001). Pitkittäistutkimuksia sekä muita näkökulmia huomioivia tutkimuksia on aiheesta huomattavasti vähemmän.

Vieraan kielen ahdistuksella on osoitettu olevan suora yhteys siihen kuinka oppija suoriutuu vieraalla kielellä (Dörnyei ja Ryan 2015), ja sillä on nähty olevan suora yhteys kieltenopiskelijoiden valintoihin joko jatkaa tai keskeyttää kieliopinnot. Gardnerin (2010) mukaan vieraan kielen ahdistus on yksi keskeisistä tekijöistä, jotka vaikuttavat vieraan kielen oppimisen motivaatioon. Muun muassa näistä syistä on tärkeää saada yhä enemmän tietoa siitä miten vieraan kielen ahdistus ilmenee luokkahuoneessa.

Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat:

1. Miten englannin yliopisto-opiskelijat kokevat vieraan kielen ahdistusta neljällä kielitaidon osa-alueella lukuvuoden aikana (puhuminen, kirjoittaminen, lukeminen ja kuunteleminen)?
2. Miten englannin yliopisto-opiskelijat kokevat vieraan kielen ahdistusta viidellä kielen osa-alueella lukuvuoden aikana (kielioppi, ääntäminen, sanasto, syntaksi ja pragmatiikka)?
3. Miten englannin yliopisto-opiskelijat kokevat sosiaalisen kontekstin vaikuttavan vieraan kielen ahdistukseen lukuvuoden aikana?

Aineisto kerättiin kyselyllä, jossa opiskelijat (n=27) kuvasivat kokemuksiaan vieraan kielen ahdistuksesta sekä numeeristen arviointiasteikkojen että avointen kysymysten avulla.

Tutkimus edustaa laadullista tutkimusta, johon tukea antaa sen määrällinen data.

## **Kielestä: kielitaidon neljä osa-alueetta ja viisi kielen osa-alueetta**

Vieraan kielen taidot jaetaan tyypillisesti neljään osa-alueeseen: lukemiseen, kuuntelemiseen, kirjoittamiseen ja puhumiseen (Saville-Troike ja Barto 2017, 163–178). Saville-Troike ja Barto (2017, 143) loivat akateemisen kompetenssin käsitteen (*academic competence*), jolla viitataan osaamiseen, jota vaaditaan akatemian maailmassa. Siinä vieras kieli toimii välineenä syventää tietämystä tietyistä tutkimusaiheista, ja näin ollen se edellyttää erityisiä vieraan kielen tietotaitoja (Saville-Troike 2017, 144). Akateeminen kompetenssi on tässä tutkimuksessa merkityksellinen, sillä tutkimuksen kohderyhmä koostuu englannin kielen yliopisto-opiskelijoista.

Saville-Troiken ja Barton (2017, 164) mukaan lukemista voidaan pitää tärkeimpänä taitona akateemisen kompetenssin kehityksen kannalta. Kuuntelemista on pidetty vaikeimpana vieraan kielen taitona oppia (Martínez-Flor ja Usó-Juan 2006, 29), koska se edellyttää tiedon käsittelyä useilla eri kielen tasoilla (Lynch 1998, 3). Akateeminen kirjoittaminen on taas olennainen taito hallita, jos oppija toivoo käyttävänsä kieltä akateemisiin tarkoituksiin; yliopistoissa on tyypillisesti esimerkiksi kirjalliset pääsykokeet ja niissä edellytetään laajojen esseiden ja tutkielmien kirjoittamista (Saville-Troike ja Barto 2017, 172). Puhuminen on oppijoille kognitiivisesti vaativaa, sillä se edellyttää niin fonologian, morfologian, syntaksin, sanaston kuin diskurssin hallintaa (Tarone 2005, 486).

Kielten luokittelua ja analysointia varten kielet jaetaan yleensä kuuteen osa-alueeseen: sanastoon, fonologiaan, morfologiaan, syntaksiin, nonverbaalisiin rakenteisiin ja diskurssiin (Saville-Troike ja Barto 2017, 34-35). Osa-alueet toimivat kuitenkin samanaikaisesti, eikä niitä todellisessa kielenkäytössä voida koskaan erottaa toisistaan (Saville-Troike ja Barto 2017, 34).

## **Vieraan kielen ahdistus**

Vieraan kielen ahdistus viittaa erilaisiin jännitys- ja ahdistuneisuustiloihin vierasta kieltä käytettäessä (Horwitz, Horwitz ja Cope 1986, 125). Se voi esimerkiksi ilmetä kiihtyneenä sydämen sykkeenä, keskittymisvaikeutena, häiritsevinä ajatuksina tai turhautumisena (ibid.). Kaikilla näillä oireilla voi olla merkittäviä ja haitallisia seurauksia vieraan kielen oppimiselle. MacIntyren (2017, 11) mukaan vieraan kielen ahdistus on ollut viime aikojen ”kaikista tutkituin tunne”. Se on erityisen hedelmällinen tutkimusalue opettajille ja kouluttajille sen tarjoamista konkreettisista apuvälineistä johtuen.

Vieraan kielen ahdistus on suhteellisen uusi vieraan kielen oppimisen tutkimusalue, ja se on saanut enemmän ja enemmän huomiota 1980-luvulta lähtien (MacIntyre ja Wang 2022,

175). Tietyt teemat ovat toistuneet aiheen tutkimuksen saralla; on esimerkiksi tutkittu saako vieraan kielen ahdistus oppijan opiskelemaan entistä enemmän ja vaikuttaako se siten myönteisesti kielen oppimiseen (MacIntyre 2017, 27-28); lisäksi on pohdittu onko vieraan kielen ahdistus syy vai seuraus kielisuoritukseen (ibid.); on myös tutkittu tulisiko vieraan kielen ahdistus nähdä joko yksilön sisäisenä tai sosiaalisena konstruktiona.

Horwitzin (2000, 257) mukaan myös edistyneet opiskelijat kokevat vieraan kielen ahdistusta. Zhang (2019, 763) toteaa, että edistyneiden vieraiden kielten opiskelijoiden vieraan kielen ahdistusta ei pidä jättää huomiotta. Perfektionismin ja vieraan kielen ahdistuksen välillä on myös löydetty yhteys (Gregersen and Horwitz 2002). Horwitzin, Horwitzin ja Copen (1986) kehittämässä tunnetussa vieraan kielen ahdistuksen kysymyspatteristossa he sisällyttivät sosiaalisen ympäristön ja sen vaikutuksen vieraan kielen ahdistukseen; oppijan ahdistuneisuustasoon voi vaikuttaa pelko siitä, että opettaja tai kurssitoverit arvioivat oppijaa negatiivisesti.

Puhumista on pidetty neljästä kielitaidon osa-alueesta kaikista ahdistavimpana (Cheng, Horwitz ja Schallert 1999; Kitano 2001; Ellis 2008). 2000-luvulta lähtien yhä useammat tutkimukset ovat kuitenkin alkaneet nähdä vieraan kielen ahdistuksen koskettavan myös muita taitoalueita. Kirjoittamisesta nouseva ahdistus on muodostunut merkittäväksi tutkimusaiheeksi, sillä monissa opetusympäristöissä kirjallisille kielikokeille annetaan suuri merkitys ja kynä ja paperi ovat ainoat välineet kielitaidon osoittamiseen (Woodrow 2011, 511). Nykyisessä kieltenopetuksessa keskitytään laajasti suulliseen suoritukseen, ja lukeminen tyypillisesti jää vähemmälle huomiolle; Saito, Garza ja Horwitz (1999) vaativatkin vieraan kielen lukutaidon eksplisiittistä opetusta sillä ”opettajat eivät voi olettaa, että lukutaito seuraa automaattisesti suullisen taidon kehittymistä” (Saito, Garza ja Horwitz 1999, 217). Kuuntelemisen taitoalue on saanut tutkimuksessa vähiten huomiota ja sitä on pidetty passiivisena taitona, joka kehittyy ”kuin itsestään” – taas, pitkälti johtuen suullisen kielitaidon ylikorostumisesta kielenopetuksessa (Vogely 1998, 68).

Vieraan kielen ahdistusta on tutkittu, jokseenkin vähemmän, kielen osa-alueiden näkökulmasta. Ääntämisen on todettu olevan erityisen tunteita herättävä kielen osa-alue (Baran-Lucarz 2014, 452), suomalaisessa kontekstissa Lintunen ja Skaffari (2014) havaitsivat ääntämisen olevan huomattava stressin lähde englannin kielen yliopisto-opiskelijoiden keskuudessa. Lintunen ja Skaffari (2014) samassa tutkimuksessa totesivat kieliopin olevan myös yksi merkittävistä ahdistusta aiheuttavista kielen osa-alueista. Myös sanaston on todettu olevan merkittävä syy vieraan kielen ahdistukselle (Liu 2006).

Viimeaikaisessa vieraan kielen ahdistusta koskevassa tutkimuksessa on tutkittu ilmiön muuttumista ja dynaamisuutta. Kruk (2018) tutki muuttuiko lukiolaisten vieraan kielen ahdistuksen kokemukset sekä yhden oppitunnin sisällä että useamman englannin oppitunnin välillä ja huomasi, että merkittävin ahdistuksen aiheuttaja oppituntien välillä olivat kirjoitustestit ja kielioppiharjoitukset. Toisessa tutkimuksessa Kruk (2021) havainnoi vieraan kielen ahdistuksen muutoksia yhdellä englannin yliopisto-opiskelijalla lukukauden aikana. Kruk havaitsi, että opiskelijan ahdistuksen tasot vaihtelivat. Liu ja Yuan (2021) taas tutkivat kiinalaisia perustutkinto-opiskelijoita ja totesivat, että opiskelijoiden vieraan kielen ahdistuksen taso pysyi korkeana, mutta jokseenkin muuttumattomana.

### **Tutkimuksen aineisto ja metodit**

Tämän tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin "Second Language Acquisition" -kurssin luennolta, joka tyypillisesti suoritetaan Turun yliopiston englannin oppiaineen ensimmäisen opiskeluvuoden aikana. Kurssi kuuluu aineopintoihin. Webropol-kyselylomake jaettiin opiskelijoille 3.4.2023, ja siihen vastasi 31 opiskelijaa. Vain 27 vastausta valittiin tämän tutkimuksen aineistoksi, sillä tutkimuksen kohderyhmäksi valittiin ensimmäisen vuoden englannin pääaineopiskelijat. Opiskelijat olivat 19–26-vuotiaita. Osallistujien pieni määrä (n=27) kertoo sen, että tuloksisista ei voida tehdä yleistyksiä – pienestä otoskoosta huolimatta tutkimus antaa mielenkiintoista dataa tämän tietyn yliopistokurssin osallistujien vieraan kielen ahdistuksen kokemuksista.

Tiedonkeruumenetelmäksi valittiin kyselylomake. Kyselylomake on akateemisen tutkimuksen yksi suosituimmista tutkimusvälineistä muun muassa sen monipuolisuuden vuoksi (Dörnyei 2007, 101-102). Tutkielma yhdistää sekä määrällistä että laadullista tutkimusta, joskin sen pääpaino on laadullisessa tutkimuksessa – määrällisestä aineistosta laskettiin vain keskiarvo, mediaani, moodi sekä keskihajonta. Laadullisen aineiston analyysissä käytettiin sisällönanalyysiä (ks. Dörnyei 2007). Sisällönanalyysillä tarkoitetaan menetelmää, jossa aineisto järjestetään systemaattiseksi ja objektiiviseksi kokonaisuudeksi (Tuomi ja Sarajärvi 2018, 117); tämä tapahtuu koodaamalla, joka puolestaan johtaa tulkintoihin ja johtopäätöksiin (Dörnyei 2007, 245-257).

### **Tutkimukset tulokset ja pohdinta**

Tutkimuksen tulokset esitellään seuraavaksi. Määrällisen datan analyysi paljasti, että aineiston keskihajonta on hyvin suuri. Tämä kertoo sen, että opiskelijat kokivat vieraan kielen ahdistusta eri tavoin ja näin data vaati yksilöllistä analyysiä. Tutkimuksen tuloksissa

löydökset käytiin läpi niin, että määrällisen aineiston keskiarvoja vertailtiin laadullisen tutkimuksen koodaukseen tarkoituksena nähdä tukivatko nämä toisiaan. Huolimatta määrällisen aineiston suuresta keskihajonnasta laadullinen ja määrällinen data tukivat toisiaan.

Tutkimuksen ensimmäinen merkittävä tutkimustulos on se, että opiskelijat kokivat vieraan kielen ahdistusta englannin kielen käytössä huolimatta heidän edistyneestä tasosta. Puhuminen aiheutti eniten vieraan kielen ahdistusta osallistujien keskuudessa koko lukuvuoden ajan. Tulos saa runsaasti tukea aiemmista tutkimuksista (Cheng, Horwitz ja Schallert 1999; Kitano 2001; Ellis 2008). Useampi opiskelija koki ympäröivän sosiaalisen oppimiskontekstin aiheuttavan stressiä ja ahdistusta. Aiemmissä tutkimuksissa on tuotu esiin sen kokonaisvaltainen merkitys vieraan kielen ahdistukselle (Horwitz, Horwitz ja Cope 1986; Dewaele, Petrides ja Furnham 2008). Osa opiskelijoista toi esiin myös julkisen puhumisen aiheuttaman yleisen esiintymisjännityksen; Lintunen ja Skaffari (2014, 60) totesivat suomalaisia englannin kielen yliopisto-opiskelijoita koskevassa tutkimuksessaan, että julkisen puhumisen stressi on läsnä kyseessä olevasta kielestä huolimatta.

Tutkimuksen tärkeä löydös oli myös se, että kaksi samankokoista ryhmää kokivat sosiaalisen kontekstin vaikutuksen hyvin eri tavoin; toiseen se vaikutti myönteisesti, ja toinen katsoi vaikutuksen olevan kielteinen heidän vieraan kielen ahdistukseensa. Samantapaisia tuloksia sai aikaan se, miten opiskelijat näkivät ensimmäisen lukuvuoden kielioppi- ja ääntämiskurssit; osa näki niiden helpottavan vieraan kielen ahdistustaan, toiset kokivat kurssien vaikutuksen päinvastaisesti. Kyse näyttää siis olevan hyvin yksilöllisestä seikasta, joka voisi juontaa juurensa esimerkiksi yksilöllisiin eroihin, kuten esimerkiksi perfektionismiin (Gregersen ja Horwitz 2002) ja aiempiin kokemuksiin kielenoppimisesta.

Akateeminen kirjoittaminen, kielioppi ja ääntäminen olivat myös merkittäviä vieraan kielen ahdistusta aiheuttavia tekijöitä opiskelijoiden keskuudessa. Moni opiskelija koki muutoksia ahdistuksen tuntemuksissaan lukuvuoden aikana, tämä tulos oli linjassa Krukin (2018), Krukin (2021) ja Dewaelen ja Dewaelen (2017) tutkimusten kanssa.

Tämä tutkimus osoitti, että tutkimus vieraan kielen ahdistuksesta on aina yhtä ensisijaisen tärkeää. Opettajien ja koulutusalailla työskentelevien on hyödyllistä tietää kuinka vieraan kielen ahdistus vaikuttaa kaikenikäisiin oppijoihin: näin yhä useampia oppijoita voidaan rohkaista jatkamaan kieltenopiskelua ja yhä useammalle voidaan tarjota välineitä vieraan ahdistuksen tunteiden käsittelemiseksi. Olisi hedelmällistä jatkaa tutkimusta vieraan kielen ahdistuksesta esimerkiksi vertaillen englannin eri vuosikurssien opiskelijoiden kokemuksia, jotta voitaisiin selvittää ilmenisikö vuosikurssien välillä merkittäviä eroja.