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## Reading Aloud and Foreign Language Learner Communication\*

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### Abstract

In my paper, I will examine the liability of advanced English language learners to foreign language anxiety (FLA) and in what ways they could cope with this phenomenon. I will also examine the impact of the reading aloud (RA) technique on the oral performance of my participants. I focus on speaking skills in my paper because these skills proved to be the most anxiety-provoking to the majority foreign language (FL) learners. The improvement in speaking skills were the most important for many FL learners (see those studies I note in the introduction and in the literature review). My results showed similarities with other studies: advanced language learners are also liable to experience FLA (six out of twelve participants were considered anxious students based on their answers in the questionnaire) and they find the same situations anxiety-provoking. My participant reported that the RA technique had positive impact on them; I achieved higher level anxiety in the case of one participant who did not want to continue the tasks. Despite critics' doubts, if we pay attention to the length and complexity of sentences, learner proficiency and we have a clear objective, the RA technique can indeed be a useful learning aid both for those learners who have higher level of anxiety and those who only would like to practice and get into the language before performing a task in English.

### 1. Introduction

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been a main focus of applied linguistics research for decades with many researchers having attempted to identify sources of anxiety and possible solutions for the reduction of the negative impacts of this phenomenon among foreign language (FL) learners. In first defining FLA, researchers differentiated those anxieties which are present in learning a foreign language from those which are considered as general anxiety. For example, Gordon and Sarason (1955) who separated test anxiety from other anxieties and examined how test anxiety is affected by other, more generalized anxieties.

The study which can be considered as a milestone in distinguishing FLA was Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), which determined three interrelated manifestations of FLA and Horwitz (1983), which introduced the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) which is still used even today for measuring language learners' anxiety level.

With the greater recognition of FLA, more and more studies have investigated which techniques can offer possible solutions to mitigate its adverse impacts on FL learners' performance in the four skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) with a particular focus on speaking skills since these skills seem to create the most anxiety-provoking situations among language learners.

However, many of these studies, including some I note later, mainly concentrated on those FL learners who were at the beginning stages of their language learning or those who learned English in tertiary education but not as their major or minor. Therefore, little is known about how advanced foreign language learners, particularly English majors are liable to experience

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FLA and how the available techniques and solutions can be beneficial to them. There are even fewer studies in this field in connection with how English majors in Hungary are affected by FLA and how they cope with this phenomenon.

In my paper, I will demonstrate the complexity of FLA through Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). I will also show how volition and perfectionism affect FL learner's performance, how FL learners themselves perceive the notion of FLA and how they can cope with it both in foreign and Hungarian contexts. Furthermore, I will highlight some techniques and possible solutions from previous studies in connection with improving speaking skills because I have also chosen a topic which measures and examines FLA through speaking: the reading aloud (RA) technique.

The utility of the RA technique is highly questionable among academics; in that, if it is not used properly, it can easily intensify FL learners' anxiety. I have chosen this technique because I have used it myself in the past for improving my pronunciation and intonation in English and I have also used it as a warm-up activity for those students who had difficulties in speaking English and asked for help.

The paper examines advanced learners' liability to experience FLA; furthermore, it explores the anxiety-provoking situations which may contribute to their FLA and the way in which the RA technique affects the oral performance of the participants of my study in terms of fluency and level of anxiety. I will also focus on the following hesitation phenomena: silent and filled pauses and repetitions. I will analyse my recordings based on the proportion in which these phenomena are present in the participants' talks, thus exploring possible relationships between the number of hesitation phenomena and my participants' fluency and level of anxiety. Then, I will compare my results with previous studies and propose some recommendations for further studies on this topic due to the limitations of this study. The research questions of my paper are therefore the following:

- 1) In what way(s) are my advanced language learner participants liable to experience FLA?
- 2) What do my participants consider as anxiety-provoking situations compared to the answers from FL learners of previous studies?
- 3) How does RA impact their fluency and level of anxiety during our discussions?

## 2. Literature review

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been studied extensively in recent decades with the aim of identifying factors that contribute to this kind of anxiety and find solutions which can mitigate its adverse impacts on foreign language learning. Although a lot of research has been conducted in this field and possible causes have been identified, there are still some aspects which require more investigation to understand the notion of FLA and to help those foreign language learners in whom this phenomenon generates difficulties in learning and performing in a foreign language.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) attempted to define FLA to differentiate it from other anxiety reactions and interpret it within the framework of specific anxiety reactions perceived in other areas and they conceived FLA as "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning" (p.128).

The term specific anxiety reaction is used by psychologists to refer to stress in a specific situation only, in this case in language learning. After interpreting previous studies in this field (e.g. Savignon, (1972) and Krashen, (1980)), they concluded that there are three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension is manifested in various ways, including a general fear or anxiety of communicating with other people, speaking in groups or in public. This tension can

increase in a foreign language class when students need to communicate in a language from which they could only use limited vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Test-anxiety is connected to fear of failure on tests in any forms and in many cases, anxious students are more affected by it than their non- or slightly anxious peers. Fear of negative evaluation can lead to lack of motivation in participating in tasks in foreign language classes but it can also influence any utterances in other social contexts which pertain to an evaluative situation.

The results of this study suggest that with the alteration of the foreign language curriculum, both teachers and students should pay more attention to this phenomenon, since with the ever-growing requirements, teachers may encounter more anxious students than before, particularly in speaking which the authors indicated as one of the most anxiety-provoking aspect of FL learning. However, with careful awareness and firm suggestions, teachers can shape students' experiences in such a way that the hindering effects of FLA can be overcome to the extent that anxious students might be able to cope with any emerging difficulties.

For today, with the increased recognition of FLA and its effects, a growing body of research has been conducted to provide a better insight into this notion and recommendations for reducing those responses which have hindering effects on students' performance.

As previously stated, test-anxiety is a component of FLA which can derive from, for example, students' perfectionism which often includes impossibly high performance standards, fear of failure, and all-or-nothing evaluations. For example, Reza Pishghadam, and Akhondpoo (2011) examined the relationship between perfectionism and its effects on foreign language learning in an educational context. They observed the extent to which learners' perfectionism plays a role in reading, listening, speaking, writing, academic achievement, and learner anxiety. After analysing data, they found that the present features of perfectionism impede the performance of students in all of the listed skills and enhance the level of anxiety.

Trang, Moni, and Baldauf (2012) also examined how FLA affects students' determination and sought a link between motivation to study English and ways of coping with FLA through volition theory. Volition theory perceives motivation as how students are willing to participate in tasks and how they achieve their goals in their FL and it was found that volition plays a huge role in maintaining motivation. The authors observed that students with higher volitional control could overcome their FLA more easily than those who were reluctant to study English harder or who showed the least volitional control. This study shows that lack of volition and perseverance hinders students' performance and motivation to engage in tasks and improve their language proficiency.

Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) examined the individual and social variables which can influence how FL learners are willing to communicate and engage in different oral tasks. They found that motivation has a huge impact on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and on their engagement in tasks. The results also showed that self-confidence in the L2, WTC, and social status are also significant variables during oral tasks. The researchers emphasised the importance of choosing the task because if the learners have a negative attitude to a given task, there will be a negative change in most of these variables.

The manifold manifestations of FLA have been supported by von Wörde (2003), in which the phenomenon was examined solely from the perspective of language learners with a high level of anxiety, thus providing a substantial insight into these learners' personal feelings, beliefs, and experiences. The participants answered questions about what they considered the most anxiety-provoking situations, how the effects of these situations could be mitigated, and how they felt during their foreign language classes.

The students reported extremely negative feelings and experiences concerning their classes. They noted various sources which contributed to their anxiety, including speaking activities due

to limited vocabulary and incomplete knowledge of the grammar, negative classroom experiences from their previous studies, or the teachers themselves. They reported both physical and psychological manifestations of their anxiety, thus also indicating the complexity of FLA. However, these participants already felt better when they understood they were not alone with this problem and in answering the questions, they became more aware of this phenomenon and of some possible solutions to cope with their FLA more efficiently. This can indicate that the recognition of FLA is key to coping with its effects on language learners.

The previously listed anxiety-provoking situations and the possible reductions of their effects were acknowledged by Williams and Andrade (2008), which proposed that although there is no solution which is applicable to all anxious students, such activities which are connected to students' previous knowledge or related to them on a personal level could be a good start to enhance their confidence and their willingness to participate in classroom activities.

So far, this paper has focused on the manifold manifestations of FLA and the possible solutions to mitigating its adverse impacts on foreign language learners at the beginning stages of learning or on those who studied English in tertiary education but whose major was not English. The following section will discuss how advanced language learners, specifically Hungarian L1 English majors are liable to experience FLA and how the possible solutions noted above may apply to them.

Nagy and Nikolov (2007), proposed the idea that it is not only low-proficient EFL learners who are affected by FLA. They examined willingness to communicate (WTC) among English majors at the University of Pécs through a written assignment. The participants were asked to write about the situations in which they felt most willing to communicate and those in which they felt the least WTC. Most of them felt most willing to use the language outside the classroom environment or in informal contexts. Further situations were private lessons and language classes abroad. The majority of the participants reported unfavourable experiences during their English courses at the university. They noted that they perceived their peers as more proficient speakers of English, thus contributing to their avoidance of speaking in front of their classmates. Other examples when they felt least willing to communicate were the topic of the conversation, fear of imperfection, and communication apprehension.

The presence of FLA among advanced EFL learners was examined in Tóth (2010), in which data was collected from first-year English majors at Pázmány Péter Catholic University through an anxiety survey, an open-ended anxiety questionnaire, and interviews with five students who proved to be the most anxious from among the participants. Tóth found that although a minority of the participants showed a strong degree of FLA, they reported similar responses and pointed to factors which were identified in previous studies which were carried out with non-English majors. Fear of making mistakes and not meeting the requirements, competition with peers, and fear of negative evaluation all seem to play a major role in creating FLA among English majors.

Tóth (2011) also carried out a study in which she interviewed five English majors at Pázmány Péter Catholic University to reinforce her findings that FLA is present among advanced learners of English as well. This study has demonstrated again that some English majors show similar behavioural, emotional, and physical reactions than less proficient EFL learners. The participants felt insecure in their classes, particularly, during speaking activities, where they found themselves unable to express their thoughts as they wanted. The possible reasons they reported were the fear of making mistakes in front of teachers and peers, the constant feeling that they cannot achieve the perceived standard which they had established by monitoring others or the lacking sense of competence compared to their classmates. Consequently, a general avoidance of speaking has evolved in them to minimise the anxiety-provoking situations in their

English classes. The evidence provided by the participants points out that a higher level of proficiency does not necessarily coincide with lower FLA. The author suggests that the explanation for the presence of FLA in the case of advanced language learners could be the fact that the importance and the situation of using English have altered, thus possibly contributing to the participants' responses to certain situations. These alterations can entail other changes, for example the change of status as a language learner: before they went to university, they might have been one of the best students in their classes but at university, advanced EFL learners might feel or observe a constant competition with their peers.

The previous sections have attempted to provide greater insight into the various factors which can cause FLA and some possible solutions both teachers and students can apply to reduce the debilitating effects of FLA.

The following section discusses studies that offer techniques which can help those foreign language learners with a moderate or high level of FLA. These studies mainly focus on speaking activities, as noted earlier, speaking has been found to be one of the most anxiety-provoking situations which needs reinforcement to mitigate FLA.

Nipa Bhattacharjee's (2008) study confirms that despite having a great many class hours in language learning and teaching methodology, Bangladeshi learners face many problems as regards their speaking skills. Although this study describes the situation in Bangladesh, the problems are present in other countries and the possible solutions apply to all language learners who are in the same situation worldwide. Bhattacharjee claims that speaking activities inside the classroom are not sufficient to acquire good speaking skills because of the limitations in the classroom environment. Apart from discussing responses noted in the previous section in connection with creating a high level of FLA, it is emphasised that personality factors such as introversion or extroversion, can also play a role in the oral production of EFL learners. Bhattacharjee suggests that teachers should create more real life activities for EFL learners to increase their confidence in speaking.

This view was also illustrated by Jack C. Richards (2006) who supports the idea that speaking skills are the most important indicators of proficiency for foreign language learners. He points out that language learners often evaluate their improvement in a foreign language on the basis of how their proficiency in speaking developed, neglecting other areas such as writing or listening; therefore, developing classroom speaking activities is advisable to enhance students' confidence. He discusses the different functions of speaking using Brown and Yule's (1983) framework, but he also introduces a third component of the interactional functions of speaking: talk as performance. The distinction between the functions of speaking (talk as interaction, talk as transaction, and talk as performance) is essential, since all three functions require different teaching methods and planning to achieve improvement in speaking. The correct use of the functions of speaking can differ widely among foreign language learners. If there is a problem using one function correctly, students might feel that they are not proficient enough in the given foreign language and, therefore, there is a possibility that they will avoid communication in the TL, no matter how proficient they are in other functions of speaking or in other language skills.

In a later study, Richards (2014) demonstrated that with the advance of technology, FL learners have more opportunities to improve their language skills, particularly their speaking skills outside the classroom, despite the limitations of their foreign language classes. The internet, the media, and technology in general provide such meaningful opportunities with which interactive and self-educated language learning is possible. In chat rooms, students can engage in real-time communication with people who have similar interests or experiences from all over the world which creates a calmer and safer situation to practice English. Moreover, chat rooms

which are specialised in practising foreign languages on different proficiency levels provide an environment in which foreign language learners with limited language proficiency do not feel the same pressure as they do inside the classroom. Self-access centres which provide various learning resources would also be a good option for improving language skills. The author further points to digital games, listening logs, online resources, and television which can facilitate the acquisition of better speaking skills and all of the strategies can be applied inside the classroom later.

Chie Ogawa (2016) examined effects of different kind of pretask plannings (no planning, teacher-led planning, solo-written brainstorming, and paired-interactive planning) on oral performance among Japanese university students. Pretask planning proved to be useful to students focusing on a task, increasing their motivation, competence, and improved their fluency, accuracy, and the complexity of their utterances. The data supported the fact that accomplishing a task without planning has the worst results on students' performance. Teacher-led planning was the most successful in terms of accuracy, the complexity and length of the units of speech; thus, before an oral task, it is beneficial to use techniques which can help FL learners focus on the fact that for the following minutes they are to accomplish a task in English.

Although a great deal of research has presented effective techniques and devices to help students improve their skills in foreign languages, some available instruments are rather neglected and one of them is the reading aloud technique.

The application and utility of reading aloud in language learning is a controversial issue among academics. For example, Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out that RA can impede the comprehension of texts because readers concentrate on individual words and not the meaning of the text. Furthermore, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) contend that RA cannot be a useful learning aid because edited and unnatural texts does not really help FL learners to improve their language skills.

However, Sally Gibson (2008) argues that reading aloud can be a useful learning tool in various areas, from reinforcing grapheme-phoneme correspondences through improving pronunciation to reducing FLA, or it can help students to reduce speaking-related stress. However, the author emphasises factors which should be considered during the application of this technique to avoid its adverse impacts on the performance of language learners. For instance, reading aloud must be used with a clear objective; the teacher or the language learner needs to decide which skills they wish to improve. Learner language proficiency and motivation must also be considered because selecting the wrong text can cause boredom or a higher level of FLA. Therefore, the users of this technique need to be aware of text length as well as the complexity and content of the text. However, after choosing the aim clearly and selecting the appropriate text, reading aloud can indeed be a useful learning tool in classrooms or in individual learning.

It is important to note, however, that some characteristics of speaking must be considered while using the reading aloud technique to produce more valid results. Hayashi, Raymond, and Sidnell (2013) point out the fact that real-time interaction with other people has its unique characteristics which include such hesitation phenomena as false starts, silent and filled pauses, lengthening, and self-corrections, seeing that these interactions are not planned.

False starts encompass the phenomenon in which a speaker begins an utterance but does not finish it; instead, they start another utterance whose wording and syntactic structure may be completely different from the original, unfinished utterance. The difference between silent and filled pauses is that applying the latter, the speaker uses fillers which can be otherwise meaningless units, for example 'eh, ehm', or meaningful words like 'well'. In the case of lengthening, one or more syllables are prolonged. Self-corrections include, for example when a speaker uses the wrong word or tense and they repair that unit where the correction is needed.

People use these tools to maintain interaction and intersubjectivity and to develop the action(s) in a given interaction. Therefore, these phenomena should not be considered as by-products of the interactions but rather as a system, through which the participants handle those emerging problems which could halt the action that they wish to accomplish. In this way, real-time interactions could be defined more effectively and it can provide a better understanding of why people behave the way they do in oral interactions.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were twelve university students in their first or second year in the English Studies or, American Studies BA programme, or in the five-year teacher education MA-equivalent programme. Two of the students had already known me before their participation, which is a potential factor in influencing their performance during the recordings.

Three of them were males and nine of them were females, between the ages of 18 and 21, who had been learning English for five to seventeen years at the time of the study. None of them had attended a language school or worked in an English-speaking country, so they can be considered as typical EFL learners in Hungary.

They were chosen based on their results on their placement and vocabulary tests, which all students take at the beginning of the academic year. I selected volunteers who had achieved approximately the same scores, seeing that a similar level of proficiency was important to provide comparable results in this study. Since everyone completed the same tasks and read aloud the same texts, much lower or higher proficiency levels compared to the average could have been disadvantageous both for the participants and the results of this study. This was thus an important controlled variable.

#### 3.2. Procedures

At the beginning, the participants were asked to complete a three-part questionnaire in English, which was sent to them via e-mail and they completed it at home (see Appendix C). In the first part I enquired about their motivations and goals as regards the English language. In the second part I measured their anxiety level and their attitude toward their classes with a mixture of previously written questionnaires (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; Dörnyei, 2010) because I wanted to collect questionnaire items which were relevant for this study. In the third part, I was curious about their educational background and habits in connection with English.

They were separated into two groups based on their answers in the second part of the questionnaire which contained statements about how they felt during their classes and in situations where they needed to use English, anxious and confident students. This was done to observe the impacts of the reading aloud technique on their performance more efficiently.

I also compiled a Hungarian questionnaire (see Appendix A) for those who had learnt or were still learning English at the university or in other ways (language schools, private teachers, or other ways) and I wanted to compare their results with the responses from my participants and ascertain whether the respondents to the Hungarian questionnaire exhibited a higher, approximately the same, or a lower anxiety level, and whether these respondents had different motivations and goals for learning English than the twelve participants of my study who were all studying English at the university as their major or minor.

Before the Hungarian questionnaire was given to the respondents, I asked ten testers to read them and provide some recommendations or suggestions for improvement. I chose those volun-



teers who had no knowledge about the topic and had only studied English until they finished secondary school.

The Hungarian questionnaire was completed online. In the case of this questionnaire, the second part was composed of statements which were connected to common and everyday situations rather than the classroom environment, since I was aware that the majority of those who completed the Hungarian questionnaire were probably no longer learning English in classrooms.

After completing the questionnaire, the first task of the twelve participants of my study was to discuss a book or a film they liked for approximately three minutes. This could be a familiar task for them as they have a similar task on the speaking part of their Academic English exam at the end of the first phase of their studies.

Then, we had two occasions when they read aloud excerpts from the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2017) (see Appendix D) and after that we discussed a topic which they did not know about in advance. I found choosing a play script advantageous to minimise monotony, considering the fact that reading these kinds of dialogues are closer to natural speech than reading excerpts from another genre because the excerpts were interactive, like in our everyday life. These conversations lasted between six and eleven minutes and they read aloud nearly one page long excerpts before the conversations.

During the last meeting they talked for three minutes again, but this time everybody talked about one film I had asked them to watch, an adaptation of Neil Gaiman's book, *Stardust* (2007).

All the conversations were recorded for further analysis to differentiate those notions which could indicate a higher anxiety level from those which are part of natural spoken language. The recorded data was analysed with VOICE mark-up conventions 2.1 (2007) (see Appendix E–P). I used the reading aloud technique to observe whether my participants had become more fluent and relaxed during the conversations. Other aspects like accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension were not measured due to the limited recordings and scale of this study.

Not all students' speech was recorded in the same environment; most of the first three-minute talks were recorded at the university library; in the case of one student it was recorded in her sublet.

The two discussions when they read aloud excerpts before discussing the topics and the second three-minute talks were recorded in a classroom or a corridor in the university building except for three students, in the case of whom the recordings were made at the dormitory where we lived.

Only one participant did not complete the tasks; in the case of this participant, I achieved higher anxiety during our first discussion when he needed to read aloud before discussing the given topic. After this first reading aloud discussion, he did not wish to continue the remaining tasks.

When the participants were finished with the three-minute talks and the two discussions, their final task was to give an evaluation of the whole process and their personal opinion about the reading aloud technique because I wanted to see their perceptions to obtain a more valid picture of the results.

Seeing that with the reading aloud technique it is easy to create anxiety-provoking situations, such as far more errors in pronunciation because the individual can even make errors reading aloud words which they know how to pronounce properly when engaged in an everyday conversation, or the given text is not appropriate for their level of proficiency in terms of its grammar, vocabulary, or length. Therefore, I also asked them about whether the texts were difficult to read, whether they found the lengths of the texts appropriate, and whether they would use this technique in the future, for example, before giving presentations or preparing for oral exams. Only eight participants sent the evaluation back to me.



### 3.3. Results and Discussion

Although this study was small-scale and had more limitations (participants, time, and data), it has still managed to provide comparable results to those studies I discussed in the literature review. It also acknowledged some points which might affirm that more studies could be conducted in the area of how advanced learners of English are affected by FLA and what techniques might be able to help them to mitigate its adverse impacts on their performance on tests and oral tasks.

The first part of the questionnaire my participants completed contained 15 statements about their motivations and goals in connection with English. All statements started with "Studying English is important to me...". They completed a Likert scale, where they could choose from five possibilities where 1 meant "not important to me" and 5 meant "very important to me". In this part, I looked at the mean of their answers to determine which aspects they found very important and which ones were the least important to them for learning English as advanced language learners. The standard deviation (SD) was 1.25.

Table 1 Least important aspects of learning English

Statement	Mean
"because I would like to think and behave like the English/Americans do"	1.83
"because it offers a new challenge in my life"	2.83
"because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English"	3.5

Table 2 Most important aspects of learning English

Statements	Mean
"because I would like to travel to countries where English is used"	4.25
"because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job and/or making money"	4.25
"so that I can read English books, newspapers or magazines"	4.33
"because I would like to make friends with foreigners"	4.33
"because I would like to spend some time abroad"	4.58
"because with English I can work globally"	4.58

In the second part of the questionnaire, which contained 21 statements, I also measured their anxiety level with a Likert scale, but in this part, they could choose from six options, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 6 meant "strongly agree". Based on their answers, I separated them into "confident" and "anxious" students because I expected that there would be some differences between the performance of participants who reported no problem in connection with talking in front of others and those who had experienced difficulty in speaking inside or outside the classroom in English.

After analysing their answers, I divided them into six confident and six anxious students. Determining the anxious students, I needed to examine different aspects of anxiety-provoking situations because some of them only answered with "agree" or "strongly agree" in connection with speaking activities or speaking in general with foreigners or classmates, while others showed a high anxiety level considering almost every statement connected to their language classes, not only speaking inside or outside the classroom.

Based on the answers from anxious students, the most anxiety-provoking situations proved to be making mistakes in language class and feeling pressure to prepare well for their classes; furthermore, they usually did not feel confident when they spoke in their L2, and they reported strong worry about failing their university classes. For four participants, the fear of being laughed at when they spoke in their L2 was also a great anxiety-provoking factor.

The attitude to native speakers was diverse; some anxious participants reported that they would rather talk to a native speaker because in that case, they do not need to concentrate so much on accuracy and they would feel more free to speak, while others would not feel more confident among native speakers and they would not like talking to them either.

I would like to note that, although there were students who otherwise proved to be confident based on their answers in connection with speaking, they were worried about some aspects of their studies. For example, Participant 1 responded with a 2 (disagree) and Participant 5 answered with a 3 (slightly disagree) to the statement "I am usually at ease during tests in my language class"; furthermore, Participant 5 and Participant 12 gave a 5 and a 6 respectively to "I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class". This indicates that although they reported no problem with speaking, other factors could create a higher level of FLA in the case of these students as well.

The responses on the questionnaire showed that although there are students who have no difficulties in speaking, there are also students among English majors who feel anxious and have negative feelings not only in a testing situation but also in speaking inside and outside the classroom. The participants of my study who were in the anxious group reported test anxiety, fear of making mistakes in classes where they had to speak up, uncertainty and anxiety during their language classes, or stress even if they prepared for a speaking activity before a class. These kind of feelings and reactions are also reported by participants in von Wörde's interview study (2003).

On the last part of the questionnaire where I asked them about their educational background and habits in connection with English, there were no significant differences between the confident and anxious students. This part was necessary to provide answers as to whether the number of years of learning English, the number of teachers, or other educational aspects contributed to the differences in students' FLA level.

The mean of years of studying English in the case of confident students was 10.3 years, (MIN = 5; MAX = 14; SD = 2.92), while in the case of anxious students it was 12.3 (MIN = 9; MAX = 17; SD = 3.08); the number of teachers who taught the confident students was 4.8 (MIN = 2; MAX = 11; SD = 3.13), whereas the anxious students had 4.6 teachers in average (MIN = 3; MAX = 6; SD = 1.21). Although the means did not show notable differences, the standard deviations, minimum and maximum show that the participants in the anxious students group had less teachers but they learnt English for more years than the participants in the confident students group, whereas participants from the confident students group had more teachers but they learnt English for fewer years. Two of the confident students had had a pre-year in secondary school with intensive English classes, while in the group of anxious students, there was only one. Three of the confident students reported that they did reading aloud before presentations and exams; from the anxious students group there were only two students who answered yes to this question. No one from the confident or from the anxious students' group had spent time in an English-speaking country, in a language school or working in these countries.

It could be concluded that in the case of the participants of this study, these data did not show a clear correlation between FLA and those educational aspects which I asked them about.

The Hungarian questionnaire, which was completed by those respondents who were still learning English at the university or any other ways, for example in language schools, could provide a useful comparison in connection with motivations, goals and what situations could be anxiety-provoking for these respondents compared to the participants of my study. This online questionnaire was originally completed by 134 respondents of whom 33 were males and 101 were females, between the age of 18 and 49 ( $M = 22.67$ ;  $SD = 4.51$ ). The vast majority of respondents were aged between 20 and 22. Four respondents were excluded because of their inappropriate answers. For example, two respondents used dirty words on the last part of the questionnaire.

The mean of the years the respondents studied English was 9.6, although there was one person who only studied English for a few weeks at the time of the study (MIN = 1; MAX = 19; SD = 4.19). The standard deviation reinforces that there is not a solid correlation between the number of years and level of anxiety in the case of the respondents which will be visible from their answers I present in the following paragraphs.

There were 27 respondents who had a year in secondary school when they studied English intensively, 21 respondents studied in a school in which they learnt some of their subjects in English, only 28 respondents said that they went to a language school in the summer or during the school year. In this regard, they can be considered as typical EFL learners.

Before analysing the first and second part of this questionnaire, I created two groups: those respondents who were learning or had learned English at a university at the time of the study (35 respondents) (Group 1), and those ones who either finished learning English when they left school or continued learning English in language schools or other ways (95 respondents) (Group 2). This distinction could provide evidence that there were respondents in the first group who showed some signs of FLA despite the fact that they were advanced language learners. Although the number of respondents in the second group was almost three-times higher than the first, I could not accomplish any extensive quantitative analysis; however, with the separation of the two groups I was able to examine some similarities and differences between their answers.

The first part of this questionnaire was similar to the one that my participants completed. It contained 15 statements about the respondents' motivations and goals in connection with learning English. They could choose from five possibilities on a Likert scale from "1-egyáltalán nem tartom fontosnak" to "5-nagyon fontosnak tartom". I determined the least and most important reasons with the sum of the respondents who chose 4 or 5 to a given statement.

Table 3 Least important reasons for learning English

Statements	Number of respondents
"mert szeretnék külföldön tanulni"	47
"mert új kihívásokat állít elé"	55
"mert a felsőoktatásba kerüléshez/diploma megszerzéséhez szükségem van nyelvvizsgára"	75

Table 4 Most important reasons for learning English

Statements	Number of respondents
"mert lehetővé teszi számomra, hogy többet tudjak meg a világ történéseiről", "mert szeretnék olyan országokba utazni, ahol az angol nyelvet használják"	108
"mert úgy vélem, a későbbiekben hasznos lesz, ha megakarok kapni egy jófizető állást"	112
"mert úgy vélem, manapság elengedhetetlen az angoltudás"	123

Travelling/working abroad and financial reasons were also at the top of my participants' list (Table 1), thus showing that there are shared reasons and preferences for learning English between advanced language learners and their less proficient EFL counterparts.

The second part of the questionnaire in which I asked them about their English language use in different situations provided rather unexpected answers. Although both groups reported that they would rather use English in written situations and according to their own perceptions they are better in writing than in speaking, they do not avoid situations when written communication is not possible. The majority are not afraid of talking either because of the limited grammar or the

limited vocabulary they might have. They found fluency the most important factor in speaking (94%), proper pronunciation (81%) and grammatical correctness (69%) came only after that. However, more than a half of the respondents would like to be as confident as their friends or peers.

Their attitude to native speakers of English was also similar: the answers showed that although the respondents consider good grammar and correct pronunciation important, they would not be anxious to talk to a native speaker despite a lack of vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, or proper pronunciation.

What I consider important to note in connection with the answers from Group 1 is that despite not having difficulties in written and oral communication, a little more than half of the respondents (51%) chose “4-egyetértek” and “5-teljes mértékben egyetértek” to this statement: “Szeretnék olyan magabiztos lenni, mint társaim.”, which could indicate that although they might have the necessary qualifications and abilities in English, they could feel anxious or stressed in some situations when English is required.

Furthermore, despite the small number of respondents who studied or were studying English at the time of the study, the Hungarian questionnaire also strengthened the fact that there are anxious language learners among English majors. Seeing that there were no significant differences between the answers from Group 1 and Group 2 because Group 1 respondents also preferred written language and 51% of them wanted to be as good as their peers, it is worth examining the extent to which advanced learners of English are liable to experience FLA with speaking inside or outside classroom environment, where data is not as small as in this study.

This data supports Tóth's (2011) observations in the case of five anxious English majors when the participants reported various physical and psychological anxiety reactions in connection with their classes and speaking and her conclusion that higher levels of proficiency in English do not necessarily mean that advanced language learners are not affected by FLA and the level of proficiency cannot be a solid and reliable measurement of FLA.

After analysing the recordings, I chose four participants whose recordings were notable for the study: one participant from the anxious students group (Participant 8); Participant 9, who did not wish to continue the tasks after our first discussion; and those two participants who had already known me before the recordings (Participants 4 and 5).

During the analyses, I did not pay attention to grammatical accuracy or appropriate pronunciation; I only examined the recordings from the perspective of fluency and the possible changes in the number of self-corrections and pauses, which may also be indicators of a lower level of FLA. The changes in the case of confident students will be demonstrated through three examples (Participants 3, 6, and 12).

The different environments where the talks were recorded are very important to note since they showed opposite effects compared to what I expected. For example, despite the fact that the first three-minute talk by Participant 8 was recorded in her sublet, her performance was the worst. The two discussions when she read aloud were recorded in a university classroom, which provided her a more relaxed environment, although I thought that being in a classroom environment would intensify her FLA. The last recording was made in a corridor but she did not feel intimidated when other people were walking around us; she could still concentrate on the task.

The familiar environment did not help for the three participants with whom I did the recordings at our dormitory either. Two of them were people who had already known me before the study; this may be the reason why they were unable to relax enough despite the location. I would like to note here that another reason for their anxiety could be that they had heard me speaking in English before the recordings and both of them admitted that they were worried about making any kinds of mistakes in front of me.

The third person was the participant who did not wish to continue the tasks after our first discussion. His first talk was recorded at the university library, while other participants were waiting for their turn and were listening to him talking, but he seemed more confident and relaxed on that occasion which is also clear from his transcribed recording. When we were in the dormitory, he looked more anxious and even frustrated after he read aloud the first excerpt and there were more repetitions and hesitations in his speech.

Some participants reported in their evaluations that although the noises were a little bit distracting, they did not feel that a main problem during the recordings. Interestingly, those recordings which were made at the library or a noisy corridor were neither better nor worse than those which were recorded in a classroom. The explanation may be they felt calm in the classroom environment because they were recorded there individually but they did not feel more anxious in the library or in the corridor because they perceived that situation as if it were a discussion between friends between classes, where the only difference was we were talking in our L2.

Participant 8 displayed the most notable change between her first and last recordings. On our last occasion, she managed to talk more fluently and produced longer units where there were no pauses, compared to her first recording. There was no change in the number of filled pauses, which can be explained by the fact that filled pauses are considered as one of the best techniques to gain time to think about what we would like to say or if we do not want to give the turn to others in a conversation. Table 5 presents the silent pauses in seconds; other phenomena are indicated by the piece.

Table 5 Three-minute talks (Participant 8)

Phenomenon	First	Last
Silent pauses	44 s	5s
Filled pauses	45	46
Repetitions	2	5

In the case of Participant 9, I achieved a higher level of FLA on the first occasion when he read aloud. Because a three-minute talk cannot be compared to a discussion when RA was used quantitatively, I will not present numbers here.

What is interesting is that his three-minute talk was more fluent and his speech was clearer than during the RA occasion. While he read the excerpt aloud, he spoke haltingly; in some places, his speech were even unintelligible. This kind of speech continued when we discussed the topic, with many repetitions and corrections; his pronunciation also became worse compared to his three-minute talk. Furthermore, he used "I don't know" as a filler, seven times in total, almost in every turn he had.

Participants 4 and 5 had already known me before the tasks. What was a notable difference between them and those participants who had not known me beforehand was that they produced many more repetitions and word changes and far more lengthening; furthermore, they were more anxious about their pronunciation than their counterparts, which manifested in the fact that they pronounced some words differently when they repeated them or they used a rising intonation after the words and watched my reaction to see whether I would allow them to continue or correct them.

This "waiting for correction" behaviour was also noticeable in terms of using certain words or even giving the proper opinion although there were certainly no right or wrong answers or opinions about anything we discussed. They used 'I don't know' more often than the other participants who completed every task, which also indicates that they may have felt more as if they were in an exam situation and they could not give the "correct" answer to a question.

Table 6 Three-minute talks (Participant 4)

Phenomenon	First	Last
Silent pauses	25 s	10 s
Filled pauses	31	31
Repetitions	2	7

Table 7 Three-minute talks (Participant 5)

Phenomenon	First	Last
Silent pauses	32 s	26 s
Filled pauses	32	28
Repetitions	9	14

These examples suggest that if a participant knows us, and especially if they consider their skills inferior to ours, we should take into consideration whether it would be best not to have them participate in a study because it may have a substantial effect on the results.

The recordings of confident students also showed a decrease in the number of silent pauses despite the fact that the majority of them felt no difference during our discussions. They only noted that RA helped them to focus on English better because with RA they could prepare themselves to use their L2 for a few minutes.

Table 8 Silent pauses in three-minute talks (Participants 3, 6, and 12)

	First	Last
Participant 3	26 s	9 s
Participant 6	19 s	10 s
Participant 12	6 s	2 s

Sally Gibson (2008) emphasised that the RA technique could only be useful if it is “used sensitively and with clear aims” (p.30). My aim was to measure the change in the participants’ confidence and fluency through the complexity of their sentences and the number of self-corrections and pauses. I did not focus on grammatical or pronunciation accuracy and reading comprehension due to the limited occasions we had, since this time would not have been enough to take the factors into account.

Although my participants only had two discussions when they read aloud, this technique proved to be a good tool for measuring how confident and anxious students’ performance changed during the conversations. Although my participants only had two discussions when they read aloud, this technique proved to be a good tool for measuring how confident and anxious students’ performance changed during the conversations. As I expected, in the case of confident students, the number of pauses, self-repetitions and false starts did not show significant differences. Only the silent pauses showed a notable decrease among confident students as well.

Based on my data my participants’ improvement in fluency can be measured most efficiently by the number of silent pauses and the lengths of the units, which the speakers could produce without any hesitations, repetitions, or pauses. The number of other phenomena like filled pauses, repetitions and false starts did not indicate any improvement in fluency or the complexity of sentences, owing to the few occasions we had. Therefore, silent pauses and the lengths of sentences without any hesitation phenomena may be good tools for measuring an EFL learner’s L2 proficiency in speaking even after a few occasions.

The participants reported that reading aloud before the conversations helped them to prepare for speaking English and they could better focus on the conversations. However, in the case of the most anxious students, the decrease in the number of pauses and repetitions showed that the RA technique can indeed be a useful tool to reduce FLA during speaking activities and the anxious students thought the RA technique was useful: “Yes, it helped me to relax” (Participant 9), “Yes, it helped because it made it easier to change to English” (Participant 5).

These results confirmed when it is properly used the RA technique can help anxious FL learners to feel more confident and relaxed during speaking activities and can enhance their WTC as well.

In the case of the one participant who did not wish to continue the tasks after the first RA discussion, he serves as a good example of what Williams and Andrade (2008) stated in connection with speaking activities, namely, that there is no universal solution which could mitigate the reactions of FLA, but everyone can find a technique to help them overcome or reduce their anxiety.

The participants’ answers to the evaluation questions were promising: they found the length and complexity of the text appropriate and they only had difficulties with some names from the texts. Only one participant wrote that she found the texts difficult and they were a little bit long for her. The majority of them had not read aloud before this study, or only occasionally, but they reported that they would use the RA technique to practice before presentations or speaking exams. Both the anxious and confident students felt that RA helped them to focus on English and in the case of anxious students it also reduced their anxiety and they felt that they could perform better after reading the excerpts. “I’m not an anxious person, so there was no difference. But it helped me to shake into the language” (Participant 1 – confident) “It definitely helped, I was able to get my mind to focus more on English” (Participant 2 – anxious)

#### 4. Conclusion

My aim was to examine in what ways advanced learners of English at the University of Szeged are liable to experience FLA and whether the RA technique could prove a useful tool to enhance my participants’ confidence and fluency during our discussions. I have chosen my participants from these students because although a number of studies have been conducted on how FL learners react during testing and various kinds of activities, little is known about whether English majors struggle with FLA and react the same way as their less proficient counterparts.

I measured the anxiety level of my L2 participants with a questionnaire which was a mixture of two previously written questionnaires (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986; Dörnyei, 2010) and I selected those items which I found relevant for this study. I also compiled a Hungarian questionnaire to observe differences and similarities between English majors and other EFL learners.

After analysing the data, my results showed a correspondence with previous studies in this area: advanced EFL learners can also experience the effects of FLA and it can influence their performance in speaking skills.

However, my study did not measure the participants’ general anxiety level, which could have provided more information about their attitude to their classes and could have explained their improvement in their oral performance more efficiently.

I would also like to note that their improvement in fluency cannot solely be attributed to the use of the RA technique, seeing that my participants were in an environment where they used English and were exposed to their L2 on a daily basis. This fact cannot be neglected when interpreting the results.



I applied the RA technique to measure the development of my participants with regard to fluency and the complexity of their sentences during the conversations. The data showed that the number of silent pauses proved to be the best indicator for my participants' improvement in fluency. Another aspect which also indicated the positive effects of FLA was that my participants managed to produce longer units without any hesitation phenomena.

Both groups (confident and anxious participants) reported in their evaluations that they found the RA technique useful either because it helped them to focus on English or because they felt less anxious and stressed during the conversations. Furthermore, they might use it in the future, for example when they prepare for a presentation or oral examination.

The results of this small-scale study suggest that advanced language learners' liability to experience FLA is not negligible despite the limitations of the study in terms of participants and occasions when they read aloud before a conversation.

The findings could imply that students and teachers in tertiary education should also pay attention to anxious FL learners and apply such techniques which might mitigate students' FLA in order to enhance these learners' achievements in an academic environment.

The success of the RA technique in this study illustrates its effectiveness despite critics' doubts because it could provide opportunities which can help FL learners to become more confident in their L2.

In the future, I would like to expand my study, paying attention the previously addressed limitations of this paper. I would measure the future participants general anxiety level, which would allow me to draw a clearer picture about to what extent a general anxiety in other areas of live contribute to foreign language anxiety and whether generally anxious students show higher level of FLA.

Furthermore, I would like to examine the long-term effects of the RA technique focusing on not only improvement in fluency and complexity of sentences but also in pronunciation and grammar.

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