

**Reassessing foreign language classroom anxiety**

**Employing poststructuralist theories in a qualitative meta-analysis**

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will generate new insight into the study of classroom language anxiety and its method of analysis in current SLA discourse. Drawing heavily from Horcoff, Horcoff and Cope's seminal paper "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety" (1986), the conceptualization of analysis proposed and its accompanying instrument of analysis, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), will be reevaluated.

The conceptualization of anxiety presented by Horwitz et al. defines foreign language (FL) anxiety as being unique to the FL learning classroom and being distinct in its emphasis on the self-perceptions and beliefs associated with this setting. Furthermore, the learners who experience anxiety are argued to be identifiable through their degree of anxiety and share similar characteristics. This conceptualization has been well received in SLA and has been widely employed in much of the FL learning research in the past two decades. Due to identity theory advancements in SLA however, this conceptualization of FL anxiety deserves to be reexamined.

Employing poststructuralist identity theories (see Norton, 2000; Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Block, 2007), FL learning anxiety will be reconceptualized to consider the dynamic nature of the learner's unique identity and views of other languages. A paradigm will be proposed, linking FL anxiety, identity and language belief together in a mutually constitutive relationship. A qualitative meta-analysis (Schmenk, 2002) will be conducted, examining current FL anxiety research in an effort to determine the assumptions, both implicit and explicit, made concerning notions of FL learning anxiety and identity.

Implications of the proposed paradigm for the learner and instructor will finally be presented in an effort to introduce a discussion of the benefits of reconceptualizing FL learning.

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
1 Literature review .....	8
1.1 1950 to 1960 – Initial instances of anxiety in learning .....	8
1.2 1960 to 1978 – Initial instances of anxiety in language learning .....	11
1.3 1978 - Reexamining theories of anxiety.....	14
1.4 1986 - Reconceptualizing anxiety .....	16
1.5 1986 to present - Foreign language learning anxiety after the FLCAS.....	18
1.5.1 Support for the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety .....	19
1.5.2 Arguments against the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety .....	22
1.5.3 Current research.....	23
2 Reconceptualizing foreign language learning anxiety.....	25
2.1 Establishing Horwitz et al.'s (1986) definition of foreign language anxiety.....	26
2.2 A revised conceptual framework.....	27
2.2.1 Parallels to performance anxiety.....	28
2.2.2 Aspects unique to foreign language learning anxiety .....	29
2.2.3 Identity construction in the FLCAS.....	30
2.3 The FLCAS framework.....	31
2.3.1 Results and implications of pilot study .....	33
2.4 A need for further reconceptualization.....	34
2.4.1 Communication apprehension.....	35
2.4.2 Test anxiety.....	36
2.4.3 Fear of negative evaluation.....	37
2.4.4 The social context.....	38
2.5 Re-envisioning the FLCAS.....	39
2.5.1 The role of identity .....	42
3 Poststructuralist theories of identity .....	44
3.1 Early poststructuralist theory .....	45
3.2 Poststructuralist approaches to language.....	47

3.3	Negotiation of identity .....	49
3.4	Identity, language, and FL learning anxiety .....	52
3.4.1	FLCAS and its relation to poststructuralist approaches .....	52
3.5	A revised paradigm .....	54
4	Applying the paradigm .....	57
4.1	Methodology .....	58
4.2	Qualitative meta-analysis criteria .....	61
4.2.1	Qualitative meta-analysis 1 – Chen and Chang (2004) .....	62
4.2.2	Qualitative meta-analysis 2 – Frantzen and Magnan (2005) .....	66
4.2.3	Qualitative meta-analysis 3 – Sparks and Ganschow (2007) .....	69
4.2.4	Qualitative meta-analysis 4 – Horwitz and Yan (2008) .....	75
4.3	Concluding remarks .....	81
5	Discussion and implications .....	83
5.1	Implications in the classroom .....	86
5.1.1	Identity .....	87
5.1.2	Language .....	88
5.1.3	Foreign language learning anxiety .....	89
5.1.4	Pedagogical implications .....	91
5.2	Complications .....	93
5.3	Conclusion .....	94
	References .....	97

## Introduction

During the process of learning a second language, many learners find themselves in a familiar place: the classroom. The foreign language learning classroom is suitably equipped with the resources to aid a learner in acquiring a new language. A variety of input sources, ranging from the teacher, fellow students, texts and media all impact *how* the learner acquires the language. Yet while each learner may receive the same input in a given classroom, what the learner *actually* understands and processes, the intake, and more importantly, what is produced, the output, may differ. A critical impediment in the level of output produced by a student comes in the form of an anxiety which affects learners of a second language. Regardless of the desired output or intake, whether oral, written or read, anxiety can dramatically affect the language learner and the language learning process. Even with ample preparation, it can be overwhelming and cause the learner to panic, momentarily forgetting facets of the language.

Although often perceived in the language classroom as occurring when communicating orally, anxiety can also pervade other aspects of language learning. The anxiety associated with test taking can certainly be a factor for a language learner - as confidence falters, crucial knowledge may be forgotten and inhibit the ability of the learner. The act of reading too, although not usually associated with language anxiety, can induce feelings of anxiety too.

Foreign language (FL) anxiety has been a source of ample discussion in the past half century. Some of the earliest instances of anxiety in education date back to 1960 with preliminary research conducted by Alpert and Haber (1960). Their research proposed an instrument called the Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT), intended to detect instances of anxiety in a learner. Although this test does not focus specifically on the second language learner, its

method of analysis and accessibility to other researchers provided a rudimentary technique to begin developing tests and scales in order to better comprehend anxiety.

In the context of second language learning, anxiety is a *multifaceted* term. It can occur while speaking with members of the target language group, studying abroad, or communicating with peers who are also studying the language. If performing a research study exploring these diverse manifestations of anxiety, the potential exists for it to be *too* broad and not concentrate on the specificities of this complex emotion. To avoid any such complications, I would like to address the anxiety specifically encountered within the language learning classroom. Although anxiety may be manifested as both facilitating and debilitating, the majority of research in SLA has focused specifically on the debilitating aspect of this term, and as such, the anxiety spoken of in this thesis will do so as well.

To conceptualize and understand the effect of anxiety in this setting, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) theorized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), in their seminal paper “Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety.” Their paper has proven to be instrumental in the field of anxiety and language learning for a multitude of reasons. The initial aim of their research was to define foreign language anxiety *specifically* and examine its potential effects on a learner “by identifying foreign language anxiety as a conceptually distinct variable in foreign language learning and interpreting it within the context of existing theoretical and empirical work on specific anxiety reactions” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). By establishing the FLCAS, a scale consisting of thirty-three Likert items aimed at targeting select instances of anxiety in the classroom, the researchers discerned that anxiety was a detectable phenomenon in the language learning process, and one which exhibits itself in specific, contextual means. If a

high test score is obtained on the scale, it indicates that the individual is an **anxious foreign language learner**.

This research and the scale constructed by Horwitz et al. (1986) were met with critical acclaim. Often cited as proving to be a reliable and satisfactory indicator of anxiety (see Cebreros, 2003; von Wörde, 2003; Frantzen & Magnan, 2005), the FLCAS and its conceptualization of anxiety are consistently referenced and applied to research; almost a quarter of a century after its inception, its application is still documented and preferred in many of the research studies conducted on foreign language classroom anxiety to this day.

Anxiety is conceptualized in the FLCAS as a trait that is specific to foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). Furthermore, it is stated that it is “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). This conception of anxiety considers the emotions of the learner in a specific situation: language learning in the classroom. The learner, I would argue, is not fully taken into consideration in this conceptualization however.

Horwitz et al.’s anxiety characteristics are well constructed in their argument and reflected in the FLCAS in the form of statements; the thirty-three statements are intended to define and determine the anxious language learner. These features are theorized however as being specific to the language learning process, while the learner is given minor consideration. The FLCAS asserts that if the learner attempts a language learning endeavor, he or she will naturally generate self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors that may influence anxiety specific to the second language learning context. This assumption, I contend, does not take into consideration other **theories of identity**, which may help to understand other sources of anxiety

in the foreign language classroom. Every student does not experience anxiety identically as the FLCAS' conception of anxiety would have one believe. Whereas one learner may perceive certain activities in the classroom as anxiety-inducing, others may find these *identical* activities to be motivating factors, encouraging the learner to improve further. Moreover, select learners may even identify such a task as inconsequential, neither facilitating nor debilitating anxiety.

The FLCAS and the conception of anxiety associated with it arguably construct the learner using **structuralist theories of identity**. Formulated primarily by Saussure (1959), he viewed identity as **synchronic** in nature - a given object's identity is based upon static features that do not vary, and thus distinguish it from other objects (Saussure, 1959, p. 108-109). Posited on an individual, he or she has an established identity that may consist of any number of aspects (such as nationality, gender, etc.), but these aspects remain static, constructing the individual's identity.

Such theories of identity do not consider the actual *fluidity* of the individual, more appropriately conceptualized by poststructuralist theories of identity. Research by Norton (1995, 2000), Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001), Block (2007) and Tabouret-Keller (1997) has been fundamental in its explanation of poststructuralist identity theories. Norton (2000) describes poststructuralist identity theory as "linking individual experience and social power in a theory of subjectivity" (Norton, 2000, p. 124). The individual does not have a static identity as previously presumed; rather, identity is very fluid and dependent upon the social circumstances of the individual and experiences gained throughout life. These factors construct the identity of an individual, but as they are fluid, they may and often do change.

As one of the primary means of determining whether the language learner exhibits anxiety, the FLCAS is intended to be administered only once; if poststructuralist theories of

identity are considered, a learner could potentially score high enough on the day of administration, but this anxiety may be entirely contingent upon his or her current relation to various social groups and language beliefs. The questions posed on the scale therefore represent a limited conception of anxiety that has the potential to be expanded upon.

This study aims to propose a reconceptualization of anxiety in the foreign language classroom by thoroughly examining the FLCAS and its conceptualization of anxiety in light of recent research. Anxiety must first be analyzed to determine how it has progressed and evolved through discourse. The first chapter, comprised of a literature review, explores the influential literature which conceptualizes anxiety and, specifically, foreign language classroom anxiety, to establish the proper background knowledge in this field.

The second chapter begins with a description and analysis of the FLCAS. An in-depth analysis of the scale will aid in fully understanding how anxiety is conceptualized, and furthermore, how the learner is understood in the context of the scale. The questions which problematize identity and anxiety are deconstructed and considered by analyzing how identity is conceptualized in the specific framework of the FLCAS. I introduce traditional, structuralist theories of identity to argue that the scale applies a structuralist theory of identity to its conception of the learner and anxiety. The difficulties which arise with such an approach are discussed, and a reconceptualization of anxiety is proposed.

In the third chapter, I argue that the shortcomings of the FLCAS are a result of the aforementioned traditionalist view of identity and its influence on the conceptualization of anxiety inherent to this scale. Poststructuralist identity theories and their importance in the context of language learning will therefore be discussed, as will the significance of the learner's view of language. A fluid concept of identity should be assumed when describing a language

learner, reflecting the fluid embodiment of the learner's anxious feelings. Anxiety will therefore be reconceptualized in light of poststructuralist identity theories and language belief as a feeling that is not specific to certain behaviors in the classroom, but rather is contingent upon the learner and his or her fluid identity and language beliefs. A paradigm will also be presented to demonstrate the effectiveness of establishing FL learning anxiety, identity and views of language as mutually constitutive.

The fourth chapter employs a qualitative meta-analysis, theorized by Schmenk (2002), to examine case studies performed since the inception of the FLCAS, with an emphasis on those conducted within the past decade. The insight gained by thoroughly examining the scale and reconceptualizing anxiety will aid in analyzing how the FLCAS has been employed in research, and how researchers both implicitly and explicitly understand anxiety, identity and language belief. I suggest that the current state of discourse could benefit from implementing a reconceptualization of anxiety, contingent on the aforementioned paradigm, aiding in improving the insight gathered from the FLCAS' sole administration.

Finally, I conclude by recommending that rather than modifying the FLCAS to accommodate the poststructuralist learner, language learning classroom anxiety should be understood through education and discussion with the learner. A scale cannot accurately account for the various factors which may lead to classroom language learning anxiety, and should therefore be administered to guide the learner in the understanding of anxiety, not as a means to detect it.

The FLCAS has had a fundamental impact on the research concerning foreign language classroom anxiety. It has prompted varied and influential studies that have improved the discourse in the field of foreign language anxiety, and created an easily administrable scale that

has led to increased research in this field. Yet a quarter of a century later, it deserves to be reexamined in light of the new research that has been conducted with identity and the language learner; the learner is not a singular entity that retains a static identity, but rather is a *fluid* construct with varying emotions, contingent upon social groups and individual experiences. For this reason, I would like to progress the research that has been conducted and open a discussion to consider the value of a reconceptualized anxiety and a re-envisioned usage of the FLCAS.

# 1 Literature review

The following literature review serves two intentions. Firstly, I wish to summarize the research that has constructed the foundation for discourse in foreign language classroom anxiety in order to reach a definition specific to this field. For the purposes of this study, discourse will be understood as, according to Mills, “something which produces something else (an utterance, a concept, an effect), rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation” (Mills, 2004, p. 15). Taken from work by Foucault (1972), discourse is a fluid concept, growing and altering itself as more ideas are conceived and amalgamated. Many studies have played a significant role in formulating this discourse, and I hope to elucidate the most influential aspects of these studies. Secondly, while many literature reviews have detailed the foundations of foreign language anxiety research and discourse, none have traced it to the fundamentals of anxiety in educational settings. It is upon this fundamental research that the initial inspiration for much of the foreign language classroom anxiety research that dominates the discourse can be found.

## 1.1 1950 to 1960 – Initial instances of anxiety in learning

The initial steps towards the understanding of anxiety in the classroom were taken in the mid-1950s as the implementation of anxiety-detecting instruments began to be discussed, aiding in the eventual development of similar instruments in the field of foreign language classroom anxiety. Considered one of first studies to address anxiety in an educational setting, Castaneda, McCandless and Palermo (1956) established a scale intending to aid in conceptualizing and situating anxiety in an educational setting. The **Child’s Manifest Anxiety Scale (CMAS)**

consists of 42 items relating directly to feelings of anxiety, eliciting either a 'yes' or 'no' response. It attempts to determine the situations in which anxiety may occur and the feelings regarding aspects of anxiety, such as nervousness and fear (Castaneda et al., 1956, p. 318-319). The scale does not reflect upon feelings of anxiety solely found within the classroom; rather, it assumes a broader definition of anxiety - statements such as "I worry most of the time" and "My hands feel sweaty" can function in a variety of contexts (p. 318). It was through the adaptation of this scale, however, that the scholarly discourse began to progress beyond this initial conception and formulation of anxiety and towards one which bridges anxiety to the foreign language learning classroom.

Alpert and Haber (1960) continued by forging a fundamental step through reconceptualizing anxiety and constructing a new instrument of analysis. The **Anxiety Achievement Test** (AAT), a basic test designed to measure specific sources of anxiety in a learner, was a significant contribution to the field. They proposed a "new achievement anxiety scale which has been devised to indicate not only the presence or absence of anxiety, but also whether the anxiety facilitates or debilitates test performance" (Alpert & Haber, 1960, p. 207). Rather than just stating that a learner experiences anxiety, Alpert and Haber suggested both a facilitating and debilitating conceptualization of anxiety; anxiety is not necessarily an inherently negative emotional trait, and the positive, facilitating aspects of anxiety should be considered when performing research. As later clarified and explained by Scovel (1978), facilitating anxiety: motivates the learner to 'fight' the new learning task; it gears the learner emotionally for approach behavior. Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, motivates the learner to "flee" the new learning task; it stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behavior (Scovel, 1978, p. 139).

Recognizing anxiety as having both positive and negative associations proved to have an influential role in the subsequent literature in this field.

This was not the only instrument hypothesized at this time, as during the AAT's implementation, Sarason et al. (1960) constructed two additional scales intended to detect anxiety in a learner: the **General Anxiety Scale** and **Test Anxiety Scale**. The data used by Sarason to construct these scales had no second language acquisition (SLA) basis; rather, focused on pre-established psychological data, the "hypotheses concerning the self-attitudes of the test anxious child, as well as those concerning his relationships with his parents, could be tested by the wealth of relevant data produced in the therapeutic situation" (Sarason et al., 1960, p. 84). Anxiety was *not* theorized within the context of language learning in the construction of Sarason's scales, as furthermore, he notes that "the analytic situation produces a wealth of data which are obviously of significance for the kinds of hypotheses we have presented" (p. 85). A specific educational situation was deemed unnecessary, according to Sarason et al., as the realms of educational and analytical research have enough similarities to be applicable to discourses specific to education.

In terms of administration, the two scales were intended to be administered "in one sitting and interspersed between them is the instruction to draw a man, a woman, and a child of the same sex as the subject" (p. 93). Administered first, the General Anxiety Scale consists of forty-five questions with two possible answers: yes or no (p. 92-93). Focus is not applied to the classroom with this instrument, but like Castaneda et al.'s previous study, general psychological effects are considered, targeting traditional areas of anxiety such as fear of thunderstorms, spiders, heights, etc. Following the initial administration of this scale is the Test Anxiety Scale, consisting of thirty questions in an identical format as the accompanying General Anxiety Scale

(p. 86-87). These questions consider the situations which induce anxiety in elementary students, the majority of which pertain to test taking anxiety. They do not focus however on the language learning classroom specifically, but rather, a general classroom setting.

At the time of their implementation, these instruments provided a great wealth of data for this relatively new field, yet they did not conceptualize anxiety as being specific to an educational or classroom setting. Instead, a reflection of psychological anxiety had been adapted, defined to be a state of apprehension or a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object (Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson, 1971). The objects analyzed by these instruments vary, but the resulting anxious feelings could be classified as typically fear-evoking notions spanning a wide breadth of emotional and cognitive fields. It should be understood that although these instruments did not specifically target foreign language learning anxiety, their implementation served as the basis for the substantial research that followed, contributing to the conceptualization of foreign language learning anxiety.

## **1.2 1960 to 1978 – Initial instances of anxiety in language learning**

As research developed in the 1960s, so too did interest in a specific anxiety found *within* the classroom. Pimsleur et al. (1964) began fusing the early influential research done by these aforementioned scholars, referencing one of the previously mentioned instruments of anxiety analysis as he studied the under-achievement of high school students in the language classroom. Although his study did not utilize any specific anxiety instruments, aside from referencing the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (CMAS), he noted that "an under-achiever might be especially low in anxiety, reflecting a 'who cares' attitude of indifference and uninvolvedness. Or he might be so high in anxiety that he develops a 'block,' becoming too tense to perform well in

the foreign language” (Pimsleur et al., 1964, p. 132). He applied Alpert and Haber’s fundamental anxiety dichotomy to his research, further stressing that anxiety can have both facilitating *and* debilitating effects. Anxiety in this instance had been conceptualized through the application of Castaneda et al.’s CMAS. Yet anxiety was still being conceptualized as a psychological trait that could be applied to SLA environments, rather than one specific to language learning situations.

Approaching language learning research in a divergent manner, Lambert, Gardner, Olton and Tunstall (1968) chose to examine the language learning process through a social-psychological perspective, analyzing how attitudes and motivation affect the process. It was theorized that “an individual successfully acquiring a second language gradually adopts various aspects of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic-cultural group,” yet the motivation to do so is “determined by his attitudes and by his orientation toward learning a second language” (Lambert et al., 1968, p. 473). The researchers distinguished between the role of intelligence and aptitude in relation to the role of attitudes and motivations, creating a tangible divide between the two. Whereas in the past researchers had attempted to find correlations between anxiety and intelligence, Lambert et al. examined where the motivation exists that helps obtain good grades or produce the negative feelings leading to debilitating anxiety. Furthermore, differences between societies, those being American and Franco-American, were also considered; all learners are *not* alike, and their attitudes may be partially affected by the social groups and attitudes towards other social groups. This approach was rather revolutionary, yet its significance in the discourse has never gained critical support as most researchers opted to employ the FLCAS which would appear a decade later.

As the discourse on anxiety in foreign language learning expanded, Chastain (1975) argued that although little positive correlation between motivation and achievement in second

language classes existed, teacher experience would dictate that motivation *certainly* affects the achievement of learners. He contended that one of the most influential motivational factors is that of anxiety, stating that “some students arrive at their second-language class in a near panic state before the course even begins” (Chastain, 1975, p. 154). Chastain attached a significantly pessimistic definition to anxiety, approaching it as a learner variable perceived as inherently negative, and in this case, affecting the student before he or she even enters the classroom. A variety of instruments were used to support his claim, referring to past scales such as Sarason’s Test Anxiety Scale (p. 154).

The intent of Chastain’s analysis was to “determine the correlations between the academic and affective characteristics collected and the final grade, or lack of credit, in a beginning language course” (p. 155). Test anxiety was found to be an important variable in this study for all languages studied (French, German and Spanish), yet the results rendered no conclusive evidence of anxiety’s effect; both positive and negative correlations between anxiety and second language learning were noted (p. 159). Chastain concluded that “perhaps some concern about a test is a plus while too much anxiety can produce negative results” (p. 160), a claim which in fact reflected the initial hypothesizing of the facilitating and debilitating effects of anxiety by Alpert and Haber.

Throughout these various studies, anxiety had generated a rather uniform conceptualization as a psychological trait that affects the emotions of a learner, causing feelings of fear, or in facilitating cases, the drive to perform better. Anxiety had not however been considered as a notion specific to the language learning process or classroom, and would not until the late 1970s.

Kleinmann (1977) conducted an in-depth study, discussing the effects of avoidance when learning specific constructs in a foreign language and considering how anxiety may affect a learner using avoidance strategies. Alpert and Haber's AAT gained attention once again as it was adapted to establish the role of context in the questions concerning test anxiety. Moreover, it focused on the kinds of performance that the language learner knew he or she would be evaluated on (Kleinmann, 1977, p. 98). This proved to be a crucial advancement in the progression of conceptualizing anxiety in second language acquisition. Kleinmann argued that avoidance in language learning is a group phenomenon, yet within the group, facilitating anxiety affects each learner's use of the avoided structure (p. 105). In the overarching framework of anxiety in foreign language learning, *context* and *learner perception* were now being applied, rather than just the effects of anxiety that could affect a learner as the original AAT and other instruments had focused upon.

Although Kleinmann's research proved to be a necessary advancement in the discourse, a literature review by Scovel (1978) took an even greater step towards revolutionizing anxiety in second language learning.

### **1.3 1978 - Reexamining theories of anxiety**

In 1978, Scovel presented a review on the literature pertaining to anxiety in language learning thus far. He wrote:

the research into the relationship of anxiety to foreign language learning has provided mixed and confusing results, immediately suggesting that anxiety itself is neither a simple nor well-understood psychological construct and that it is perhaps premature to attempt to relate it to the global and comprehensive task of language acquisition.

(Scovel, 1978, 132)

Studies performed by Swain and Burnaby (1976) and the previously discussed Chastain (1975), were argued to have conflicting results pertaining to the effects of anxiety in language learning. Scovel admitted that Kleinmann's (1977) study of avoidance was a necessary step in advancing the discourse, and reaffirmed that "it behooves us to examine other ways in which anxiety can be viewed, not as a simple, unitary construct, but as a cluster of affective states, influenced by factors which are intrinsic and extrinsic to the foreign language learner" (Scovel, 1978, p. 134).

Scovel continued by analyzing Alpert and Haber's AAT and their binary model of facilitating and debilitating anxiety, determining it to be a "sincere attempt" to conceptualize anxiety (Scovel, 1978, p. 138). It was necessary for the research on anxiety to progress further however and continue moving towards conceptualizing anxiety as a trait affected by numerous social aspects. Scovel reinforced this, writing that "we are able to isolate affective variables in our research into the psychology of language acquisition", yet "the deeper we delve into the phenomenon of language learning, the more complex the identification of particular variables becomes" (p. 140).

Up until this point, anxiety research had been rather tumultuous as the literature review demonstrates. A summary of the types of anxiety will be shared to guide the reader to understand how these advances have shaped the discourse (Table 1) – a discourse which will be altered by the seminal work of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in the next decade.

Scholar	Type of Anxiety	Contributions
Castaneda et al. (1956)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety is <i>psychological</i></li> <li>not specific to FL learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Child's Manifest Anxiety Scale:</b> determines feelings of anxiety that are most inhibiting</li> </ul>
Alpert & Haber (1960)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>facilitating</i> and <i>debilitating</i> features</li> <li>not specific to FL learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Anxiety Achievement Test:</b> measures specific sources of anxiety in learner</li> </ul>
Sarason et al. (1960)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety is <i>psychological</i></li> <li>anxiety data from studies in other fields is significant for FL learning anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>General Anxiety Scale:</b> psychological context</li> <li><b>Test Anxiety Scale:</b> educational context</li> </ul>
Pimsleur (1964)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high and low anxiety may promote underachievement in the classroom</li> <li>anxiety is <i>psychological</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reinforced the validity of the CMAS and Alpert &amp; Haber's <i>facilitating</i> and <i>debilitating</i> anxiety features</li> </ul>
Lambert et al. (1968)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety is social-psychological</li> <li>affected by <i>attitudes</i> and <i>motivation</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>distinguished between role of intelligence/aptitude and role of attitude/motivation in causing anxiety</li> <li>all learners are not alike and are affected by society</li> </ul>
Chastain (1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety is an influential <i>motivational</i> factor</li> <li><i>negative</i> trait</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>test anxiety determined to be an important variable in learner success</li> </ul>
Kleinmann (1977)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>anxiety is both <i>facilitating</i> and <i>debilitating</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>considered how anxiety affects avoidance strategies</li> <li><i>context</i> and <i>learner perception</i> now being applied</li> </ul>

Table 1. Summary of early anxiety research before Scovel's (1978) literature review.

#### 1.4 1986 - Reconceptualizing anxiety

It was not until 1986 that the foundations of foreign language learning anxiety would be fundamentally altered. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) wrote their seminal paper "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety", predating one of the most significant papers in the foreign language learning anxiety discourse. The argument provided was similar to that of Scovel's, maintaining that the past research had consistently produced mixed results (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 125). They further claimed that there existed a "dearth of conclusions concerning anxiety and second language achievement" (p. 126), reflecting the focus on anxiety in past

research that was not specific to second language acquisition. Moreover, they wrote that few research studies had considered the more subtle effects of anxiety on language learning, opting to study the broad facilitating and debilitating effects of anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that the subjective feelings of anxiety, those of fear and nervousness, among others, were similar in all forms of anxiety (p. 126); this did not mean, however, that the conditions and situations which evoke these feelings of anxiety should be identical. Situations specific to the language learning classroom, such as the inability to speak when called upon, forgetting aspects of grammar during a test, over-studying, and even being absent from class due to anxiety were referenced, and three primary sources were asserted as influencing anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by others, and test anxiety (p. 126-127). It is the situations arising from sources such as these which may “represent serious impediments to the development of second language fluency as well as to performance” (p. 127).

Taking these realizations into consideration, Horwitz et al. reconceptualized anxiety as being specific to foreign language learning; it was “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). This is primarily a result of the self-perceptions learners possess; human beings are accustomed to specific ways of conversation and interaction that is natural in the native language, and helps construct facets of their identity, consisting of their self-perceptions, individual experiences, social situations and organizations. Yet when asked to communicate in a classroom and be evaluated, it is difficult to rely on the same self-perception that is normally held - risks must be taken. They clarified by writing that, “in sum, the language learner’s self-esteem is vulnerable to the awareness that the range of

communicative choices and authenticity is restricted” (p. 128). This conceptualization of anxiety, and its implications, will be the focus of the second chapter in this thesis.

Due to the dearth of research specifically targeting anxiety in second language learning contexts, the researchers proposed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The FLCAS, a scale consisting of 33 Likert items designed to focus on the situations which are specific to the language learning classroom, was constructed as an “opportunity to examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety” (p. 129). Perhaps most defining of the paper and scale’s intention was that it claimed to “demonstrate that students with debilitating anxiety in the foreign language classroom setting can be identified and that they share a number of characteristics in common” (p. 129). The scale has demonstrated respectable internal reliability and significant item-total scale correlations (p. 129), and for this reason, has become the *default* scale for analyzing foreign language classroom anxiety. The studies which have emerged as a result of this paradigm of research almost exclusively use the FLCAS, and have continued to do so up until the time of writing. This instrument will be expanded upon in detail in the following chapter, as an in-depth analysis of its intentions will aid in better understanding the conceptualization of anxiety which it promotes.

## **1.5 1986 to present - Foreign language learning anxiety after the FLCAS**

After the inception of the FLCAS, and as research progressed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two distinguishable sides had developed in a discussion centered on the source and conceptualization of foreign language classroom anxiety. Sparks and Ganschow (1991) led the discussion intending to theorize a new conceptualization of anxiety; one which is not a trait resulting from poor learning ability, but rather, the learner’s L1 (native language) ability and experience

learning that language may be the cause of FL learning anxiety, as the skills used in learning both the L1 and L2 are similar (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). Researchers like Horwitz (2000) and MacIntyre (1995) however have argued that anxiety is indeed a *learner variable* which affects the language learning process in conjunction with other learner variables, and as a result of its pervasiveness in this context, signified that anxiety cannot simply stem from L1 learning disabilities (MacIntyre, 1995). These two conceptualizations of anxiety will be discussed in detail, demonstrating the current disagreement and possible benefit of reconceptualizing FL learning anxiety once more.

### **1.5.1 Support for the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety**

In the years following the introduction of the FLCAS, anxiety was understood and studied as a learner variable in second language learning, a trend that gained an increasing amount of significance by many researchers. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), two researchers who have actively researched and applied Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of anxiety, presented an initial theoretical clarification of anxiety in light of the ambiguity that had arisen in the past research, hoping to expand upon the recent study performed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). They stated that "it was predicted that anxiety based in the language environment would be associated with language learning whereas other types of anxiety would not show consistent relationships to performance" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p. 251). While Scovel's review of anxiety too questioned the ambiguity of anxiety research in this field, it did not attempt to clarify it as MacIntyre and Gardner did. By factor analyzing a number of instruments, such as *state anxiety*, *test anxiety*, *computer anxiety*, etc. (p. 257-258), the researchers theorized two varying forms of anxiety: **communicative** and **general**. Communicative anxiety was determined

to be prevalent in the instruments which focused on language use and communication situations, whereas general anxiety was distinguishable in those which had less of an emphasis on communication (p. 261). Both types of anxiety were observed to be independent of one another, and considered two separate traits, where communicative anxiety was specific to FL learning (p. 268). Furthermore, the test anxiety which was the focus of much research was found to be a general anxiety trait; it was therefore difficult to apply directly to the language learning setting, especially as it had produced both positive and negative effects on the work produced by students, as demonstrated in Chastain's (1975) previous research (p. 269).

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) expanded their research by writing a review on the literature concerning anxiety in FL learning, improving their clarification of anxiety. Once again they posited anxiety as specific to the situation, claiming that this approach is "clearly delineating the situation of interest for the respondent. By doing so, the assumptions about the source of the anxiety reaction can be avoided" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 91). The limitations of this approach were admitted, as "the *situation* under consideration can be defined broadly (e.g., shyness), more narrowly (e.g., communication apprehension), or quite specifically (e.g., stagefright)" (p. 91). Researchers must therefore be careful not to use situation specific anxiety to his or her advantage, as the results which are sought after can be specifically targeted if the researcher so chooses, resulting in a potential observer's paradox.

MacIntyre and Gardner clarified that "the intimate relationship between self-concept and self-expression makes foreign language anxiety distinct from other academic anxieties" (p. 105). Anxiety in this context was explained as being *dynamic*; during the initial experiences in a language classroom, anxiety is fairly negligible. What is experienced at this early level is a result of general anxiety, inhibiting the learner due to state and trait forms of anxiety, as was often

researched in the earlier discourse. However, after being exposed to the language for an extended time, the student begins to construct attitudes towards it and the language learning process – the possible negative feelings were argued to breed foreign language classroom anxiety in the learner (p. 110). The results of this research and others by MacIntyre and Gardner proved to be a key contribution to the ratification of the FLCAS.

Following the recommendation by Horwitz et al. to analyze the more subtle effects of language anxiety, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) continued their research of FL learning anxiety by writing that “a more complete analysis of the subtle effects of language anxiety would include specific task performance and the cognitive activity preceding that performance” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 286). Their study examined specific tasks in the classroom requiring various input and output forms of language processing (such as reading, writing, listening, etc.) (p. 288), and employed a variety of anxiety instruments, including the FLCAS. The results demonstrated that perhaps students initially perform poorly, which then affects and reinforces performance later in the course, developing a self-fulfilling prophecy (p. 294).

Saito and Samimy (1996) studied the effect of FL learning anxiety in the Japanese classroom, reinforcing the argument that anxiety negatively affects the performance of language learners (Saito & Samimy, 1996, p. 241). They determined that the level of course (beginner, intermediate, or advanced) was a reliable predictor of how students’ performance is affected by anxiety (p. 247). Moreover, the severity of anxiety was found to differ too as a result of the same factors, with advanced students scoring highest in anxiety (p. 247).

Many other researchers too have supported the conceptualization of FL learning anxiety constructed by Horwitz et al. (see Aida, 1994; Clément, Dörnyei and Noels, 1994 for example), however, not all research agreed with its argument. A contrasting position was formulated to

demonstrate that perhaps FL learning anxiety could be conceptualized and understood differently.

### **1.5.2 Arguments against the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety**

Sparks and Ganschow (1991) presented a contradictory understanding of FL learning anxiety to that developed primarily by Horwitz et al. (1986), arguing that language learning difficulties may stem from struggles in the native language of the learner (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, p. 4). They perceived difficulties with L1 abilities as being associated with and connected to those experienced in FL learning, prompting the question: “Which came first?”; do students develop affective learning disabilities, such as anxiety, or do the native language problems inherently cause difficulties (p. 5)?

The FLCAS must be approached cautiously, according to Sparks and Ganschow (p. 6). Research has shown that as children begin to learn to speak their native language, difficulty occurs naturally as part of biology; Sparks and Ganschow argued that this difficulty could persist in the learner and affect any future foreign language learning endeavors (p. 8).

With their colleagues, Sparks and Ganschow et al. (1994) further postulated a countering conceptualization to that established by Horwitz et al. (1986). FL learning anxiety is argued to be a “*consequence* of FL learning problems, which themselves bear a strong relationship to a student’s problems in his/her *native* language” (Sparks & Ganschow et al., 1994, p.43). They studied differences in foreign language anxiety in connection with native language skills, examining students who had been identified as having varying degrees of anxiety. The study supported their initial hypothesis: students with low language learning anxiety also had excellent native language skills, whereas high anxious students, while not demonstrating necessarily bad

native language skills, were not as advanced as the other students with superior native language ability (p. 49). It is upon such research that their opposing argument was presented, and although it has not gained as much critical attention as Horwitz et al.'s, it remains perhaps the most prolific counter argument.

### **1.5.3 Current research**

Throughout the last decade, the discussion concerning anxiety's foundation and conceptualization in the second language classroom has continued to flourish. Sparks, Ganschow and colleagues maintain their position that anxiety is a result of native language aptitude and difficulties (see Sparks & Ganschow et al. 2000; 2001; 2004; 2007). They present compelling evidence and empirical studies to argue their theory, yet few researchers have argued in agreement; rather, the vast majority of research has adopted the original conceptualization of anxiety presented by Horwitz et al. (1986). Horwitz (2000) argues too that researchers *must* begin considering the anxiety specific to second language contexts, a movement which has become well accepted in the discourse.

MacIntyre (2007) asserts that "it would appear that SLA researchers have settled on the idea that language anxiety is an emotional experience uniquely provoked by L2 situations" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 565). The counter arguments established by Sparks and Ganschow are given little credence in MacIntyre's statement, and the FLCAS is further reified as a valuable, reliable instrument to measure anxiety in the foreign language classroom (p. 565). A broad collection of contemporary studies (see Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Horwitz & Gregersen, 2002; Cebrenros, 2003; von Wörde, 2002; Horwitz & Yan, 2008; Pichette, 2009; Chen & Chang, 2004) adopt both the conceptualization of anxiety and the FLCAS presented in Horwitz et al.'s seminal

paper to conduct their individual studies, many of which will be examined in detail in the analysis found in the fourth chapter.

FL learning anxiety continues to be a term regulated by conflicting approaches to its identification and definition; a conclusive conceptualization has yet to be agreed upon.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) goes so far as to say that “a clear picture of how anxiety actually affects L2 [second language] processes is yet to emerge” (p. 34). What is clear, however, is that the research conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986) has remained fundamental to the study of anxiety in the second language classroom. Furthermore, the FLCAS has been recognized as a nominal tradition in the field when anxiety in the second language classroom is to be studied.

The following chapter will examine this conceptualization and the FLCAS in depth, in an effort to determine how it depicts the language learner and the reasons for its almost universal acceptance. While it certainly has been influential in constructing the discourse in the past quarter century, it is my contention that the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety needs to be reanalyzed in light of recent research into the construction of a learner’s identity - to do so, however, will require a complete understanding of the FLCAS, its aim, and its conceptualization of foreign language classroom anxiety.

## **2      Reconceptualizing foreign language learning anxiety**

When evaluating the degree of research that has comprised the field of foreign language learning anxiety over the past quarter century, one factor is frequently identified: Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLCAS has become the preeminent instrument of implementation and a focal point in FL learning anxiety research. I feel it is necessary to fully analyze this scale, in order to determine why it holds such a prominent position in the FL learning discourse. To do so, the brief introduction to the scale which was presented in the literature review will be expanded to provide a thorough analysis.

Due to the insufficiency of past anxiety detecting instruments and FL learning anxiety research approaches (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125), Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced a substantial advancement in terms of how anxiety should be approached in this context. The researchers argued that the previous research presented two inadequacies: firstly, it produced far too many inconsistent results, due to its inability to identify the specific nature of anxiety in FL learning (see Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977 for example); secondly, few studies have examined the subtle effects of FL learning anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). To clarify their intentions, they noted that the research in the second language learning discourse had failed to accurately define foreign language anxiety, and moreover, had not taken into consideration the unique specificities of anxiety in this context (p. 125). An improved conceptualization of anxiety was therefore produced in an effort to more appropriately identify the specific characteristics of an anxious second language learner; Horwitz et al. argued that “the symptoms and consequences of foreign language anxiety should thus become readily identifiable to those concerned with language learning and teaching” (p. 125). The conceptualization that follows adheres to these

specifications, intending to diagnose the anxious language learner by identifying key features specific to the learner in this context.

Identifying the research which preceded it, Horwitz et al. (1986) reflected on Scovel's (1978) valuable input, which argued that the relationship between anxiety and FL learning had yet to be clearly postulated in research (Scovel, 1978, p. 132), and studies by researchers such as Kleinmann (1977) and Gardner (1985), the latter of which proposed the first instrument to measure anxiety in foreign language learning. This instrument, the French Class Anxiety Scale, never received the critical attention that the FLCAS has been able to garner however, and has as a result been largely disregarded by researchers.

As influential as the aforementioned research was to Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of FL learning anxiety, the final result was a drastic shift from the previously established discourse, and as a result, should be explored in detail.

## **2.1 Establishing Horwitz et al.'s (1986) definition of foreign language anxiety**

Foreign language learning anxiety requires a concise definition to understand how it relates to the conceptualization of anxiety presented by Horwitz et al. (1986). As the literature review detailed, anxiety's definition had altered throughout the initial emergence of its research, and it was not until Horwitz et al.'s reconceptualization that FL learning anxiety received a unique and specific definition. The researchers argued that this particular anxiety had similar characteristics as any other form of anxiety; "subjective feelings, psycho-physiological symptoms, and behavioral responses" were stated to be found not only in anxious foreign language students, but in all individuals who experience anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). Yet while the effects may be similar, the situations which induce anxiety differ according to the

field of study, as the researchers postulated (p. 125). Difficulty with speaking in class was consistently proven to be the most frequently cited concern of students with anxiety, with listening also having notable implications in the development of FL learner anxiety (p. 126). Testing situations were noted as being decidedly anxiety provoking too, causing learners to make errors, even when they insist that they know the language.

Besides situational sources of anxiety, personal beliefs about language learning were argued to possibly instigate anxiety through means solely unique to language learning too. Horwitz et al. described those who believe the language should only be spoken when it is firmly understood and comprehended, as well as those who may believe that fluency is required for accurate, never fortuitous, language use (p. 127). These beliefs contradict the purpose of the language learning classroom, where students should be able to practice their language skills, yet they certainly do exist and may further restrict the confidence of the FL learner and induce anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) consider these theoretical foundations when presenting the conceptual framework which substantiated their analysis and proceeded to influence a great majority of the FL learning anxiety discourse

## **2.2 A revised conceptual frame work**

Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of anxiety is formulated with three specific categories, each related to the field of performance anxiety: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation (p. 127). Instances from each category may instigate feelings of anxiety in the learner, and although the categories are primarily adapted from performance anxiety, they specifically impact the particularities of anxiety in the field of FL. Each category will be expanded upon to discuss its relation to FL anxiety.

### 2.2.1 Parallels to performance anxiety

The first category, **communication apprehension**, relates to all aspects of FL learning which require communication between individuals, whether it be oral, written, auditory, or even read (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Horwitz et al. argue that these skills, which come naturally and without effort in the L1, are intended to be used similarly in the L2. Furthermore, if communication apprehension already exists in the L1, this could additionally affect the communication potential of a learner in his or her L2 (p. 127; see Ganschow & Sparks, 1991). Yet even more severe is the assumption that, specific to the FL learning endeavor, learners understand that difficulties will arise and that communication apprehension will occur (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127); the researchers attest that it is not a factor of *if* a learner will experience anxiety, but rather, *when* will he or she experience it. This could however produce a positive, facilitating anxiety, as the learner who is normally self-conscious when engaging with their L1 may conceive a new identity, unique to the language learning process and gain inspired confidence.

Secondly, **test-anxiety** is a notable facet of FL learning anxiety. Horwitz et al. argue that learners generally strive for perfection and good grades, yet negative results and failures only serve to emphasize the adverse feelings which may formulate concerning the foreign language and the classroom - Horwitz and Gregersen (2002), using the FLCAS and its conceptualization of anxiety, have discussed the desire by students for perfection in the classroom – a difficult goal to ascertain by many standards, leading to possible FL learning anxiety.

Finally, Horwitz et al. claim that **fear of negative evaluation** works in conjugation with test-anxiety, as evaluation is a natural aspect of the test results. Assessment pertinent to this

category, however, is more extensive in that it takes into account situations *outside* of the classroom, such as exchange opportunities in a foreign country (p. 128). One of the most vital aspects of this section is the notion that learners may be acutely aware of their social setting and peers, potentially increasing the fear of being evaluated; the social context of an individual may therefore have great influence on the perception of anxiety (p. 128).

Although these categories are adopted from performance anxiety, Horwitz et al. recognize their adaptability to the specifications of FL learning anxiety, and integrate them seamlessly to their conceptualization of anxiety. This conceptualization of anxiety is however more complex than an application of previously established categories, as the researchers specify a number of facets that are entirely unique to FL learning.

### **2.2.2 Aspects unique to foreign language learning anxiety**

Conceptually, Horwitz et al. do not limit themselves to these categories of FL learning anxiety, theorized due to their relevance to performance anxiety. They instead:

conceive foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128)

This distinction is the foundation for their conceptualization of FL learning anxiety. The self-perceptions and beliefs of a learner when speaking a second language, Horwitz et al. maintain, differ greatly from those held by an individual when speaking his or her native language. This argument is not universally acknowledged, however, as Sparks and Ganschow (1991) would indicate that FL learning anxiety is actually a result of similar adversity with the individual's L1 and experience learning the language (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, p. 4). Yet Horwitz et al.

contend that reflecting on the language acquisition process is unique to the L2, as the individual is typically confident in his or her native language knowledge and fluency, fostering no need for self-reflection (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). This self-reflection is vital however in the FL learning classroom, where a learner often attempts to personify him or herself with regards to the new language.

Confounding this construction of a different identity is the element of risk-taking, Horwitz et al. argue, posing problematic situations which are only further impacted by anxious feelings (p. 128). Basic actions such as speaking during a language exercise require a certain level of risk that is non-existent in the L1, and these risks could then inhibit some of the necessary elements of FL learning, such as further oral communication. Horwitz et al. emphasize this issue, arguing “any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual’s self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

In conjunction with the previously established performance anxiety categories, these aspects specific to FL learning construct an improved understanding of how Horwitz et al. conceptualize FL learning anxiety. There exists, however, one final element to this conceptualization, integral to determining how the learner is affected by this feeling: the notion of identity.

### **2.2.3 Identity construction in the FLCAS**

The construction of identity in the FLCAS is the final element intended to classify and conceptualize anxiety as unique to FL learning. As was previously observed by Horwitz et al. (1986), learner self-perception and feelings associated with the language classroom impact the

construction of FL learning anxiety, but furthermore, they aid in constructing the identity of an anxious language learner. There is a clear distinction between the *'true' self*, the researchers suggest, and the *self* associated with language learning (p. 128). They readily admit that “no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does” (p. 128). Such an important concept then, I maintain, should be the focal point of this conceptualization; yet to what extent does the FLCAS reflect this conceptualization of anxiety, specifically in relation to the construction of learner identity?

### **2.3 The FLCAS framework**

To understand how the FLCAS implements and reinforces elements of Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of anxiety, the instrument will be thoroughly examined and reviewed. Originating from a support group at the University of Texas in 1983 for students learning a second language, students discussed feelings of anxiety, difficulties in language learning, and strategies to cope with these conditions. The insight gained from this preliminary study contributed greatly to the construction of the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129).

A primary purpose of the FLCAS is to “examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety” (p. 129). It does so by presenting the learner with a set of thirty-three statements in a Likert format, garnering responses ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’. At the time of publication, the scale had been determined to accurately portray students as sharing *common* characteristics if they suffer from anxiety in the FL learning classroom setting. The results associated with the FLCAS, presented in their seminal paper (1986), represent the responses of seventy-five university students from four introductory

Spanish classes, administered in the third week of the semester (p. 129). The FLCAS in its entirety can be seen in the following table (Table 2).

*Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.				18.	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	
2.	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.				19.	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	
3.	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.				20.	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	
4.	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.				21.	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	
5.	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.				22.	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	
6.	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.				23.	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	
7.	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.				24.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	
8.	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.				25.	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	
9.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.				26.	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	
10.	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.				27.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	
11.	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language class.				28.	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	
12.	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.				29.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	
13.	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.				30.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	
14.	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.				31.	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	
15.	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.				32.	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	
16.	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.				33.	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	
17.	I often feel like not going to my language class.						

Table 2 (see Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129-130)

The Likert items which comprise this scale are designed to target the three anxiety inducing categories which help conceptualize anxiety: communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (p. 130). What follows in Horwitz et al.'s paper are the

results of the study conducted with the FLCAS, showcasing its ability, as the researchers argue, to translate scale results into a classification of an individual's anxiety.

### **2.3.1 Results and implications of pilot study**

Following the administration of the FLCAS, certain key characteristics of the participants were discovered by the researchers, supporting their conceptualization of anxiety as being unique to the language learner. Anxious students are distinguished as being rather self-conscious when asked to interact with others in the FL (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129) and when being compared with others in terms of competence and evaluation (p. 130). Students relate to such statements as: "I keep thinking that other students are better at languages than I am" and "language class moves so quickly, I worry about getting left behind" (p. 130), demonstrating the potency of the social setting in constructing anxious feelings.

Foreign language anxiety is argued to be a characteristic that many learners experience in relation to some of the categories targeted by the FLCAS. Horwitz et al. note that "a majority of the statements reflective of foreign language anxiety (nineteen of thirty-three items) were supported by a third or more of the students surveyed, and seven statements were supported by over half the students" (p. 130). Yet although the results of their research appeared to conclusively affirm the scale's objectives, the researchers freely admitted that the research concerning anxiety in second language learning had only just begun. A call for additional research was announced to further examine the ubiquitous nature and potential impact of anxiety in the FL learning classroom (p. 131). Since the paper's publication, this call has been certainly answered, as the research presented in the literature review has shown, and which will be expanded upon in the fifth chapter where it will be critically analyzed.

The results of Horwitz et al.'s study was presented as a recommendation, intending to educate pedagogues as to how best to aid learners in dealing with anxiety, either through imparting knowledge of how this feeling can be coped with, or simply by abating them (p. 131). These measures were not suggested to be *the* solution; they were, however, presented as tactics to cope with an anxiety that is conceptualized as being unique to the FL learner.

It is upon these recommendations that I contend that the aims of the FLCAS and the very conceptualization of anxiety presented in the accompanying research have not been fully explored.

#### **2.4 A need for further reconceptualization**

Although the current state of research would suggest otherwise, with the copious amount of studies utilizing the FLCAS, I would argue that its conceptualization may be improved by reexamining some of its assertion. The conceptualization of anxiety formulated by Horwitz et al. (1986) should certainly be commended for its primary goal: constructing a conceptualization of anxiety that is unique to FL learning. Following Scovel's (1978) recommendations to refrain from analyzing FL learning anxiety using general theories of anxiety, the researchers have credibly conceptualized anxiety in light of its *academic* and *social* context. Anxiety is maintained to be a trait with specific classroom learning implications, unique to second language learning situations. Self-perceptions and beliefs about learning a language, as previously referenced, are vital to this conceptualization, and in the context of the FL learning classroom, clearly establish an academic context. I would suggest that the social context of which Horwitz et al. speak, however, may benefit from a further and comprehensive examination.

The social setting theorized in the FLCAS is limited to the classroom in regards to how learners may be affected by anxiety. The study and the instrument's intentions are indeed intended to be situated within the classroom. The purpose of the FLCAS is to examine how students react to potentially anxious situations while learning a language - the examples given throughout the article reinforce this. When the learners are spoken of, they are referenced as *anxious students* and, according to Horwitz et al., should be analyzed specifically in terms of their role in the FL learning classroom (p. 129). The intention is to study how anxiety affects students in the classroom, forgoing any subsequent sources of potential anxiety. The FLCAS reverts back to the three aforementioned categories – communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation – each of which should be examined in detail to determine to what length the social context is applied in the foundations of its anxiety's conceptualization.

#### **2.4.1 Communication apprehension**

Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasize the importance of interpersonal interactions which may prompt introversion by the learner when communicating. They note that it is a dominant factor in FL anxiety, and indeed it is; research by Aida (1994), Brown (1991), and Frantzen and Magnan (2005), for example, reflect on the communicative difficulties learners experience in their second language endeavors. The general perceptions of communication apprehension, drawn from performance anxiety, are specifically applied to reflect language anxiety. Individuals who suffer from communication apprehension have difficulty speaking in the FL learning classroom, since the learner cannot typically control when he or she will have to speak. Furthermore, Horwitz et al. assume that the learner *knows* that he or she will “almost certainly have difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Aida (1994)

reveals that “it is very likely that people experience anxiety and reluctance in communicating with other people or in expressing themselves in a foreign language in which they do not have full experience” (Aida, 1994, p. 157). Yet although the negative effects of communication anxiety are being emphasized, Horwitz et al. disclose that while such results are commonly seen in the FL classroom, the exact opposite may also be noticed, whereby the ability to speak another language may inspire the learner to embody a new identity, one specific to the second language.

This embodiment of a new identity is crucial to a complete understanding of FL anxiety; if it is assumed that learners have the ability to assume a new identity, then we should consider *how* a learner adopts a fluid identity. This fluidity may be a result of the social context of the learner, yet unlike Horwitz et al., I contend that this social framework should be examined outside of the classroom as well, for it is a result of the learner’s many social groups and individual experiences which impact the complex experience of identifying oneself, as will be explored thoroughly in the third chapter.

#### **2.4.2 Test anxiety**

Test anxiety’s impact is another characteristic of FL anxiety which has been documented and supported by other researchers in the discourse (see Madsen, Brown & Jones, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Teemant, 1997). The researchers describe test anxiety as “stemming from a fear of failure” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127), and argue that perfection is strived towards in the classroom, and when unsuccessful, learners experience failure. As the FL classroom typically employs rather frequent tests (p. 127), the learner must demonstrate his or her knowledge quite often and be evaluated. Mistakes will occur naturally for most learners in any setting, yet the rate at which they occur in the FL classroom is typically much higher, causing increased anxiety, due to this

testing frequency. Learners may be preoccupied too by attempting to manage their fears while also trying to focus on the task at hand (Aida, 1994, p. 157). This aspect of the conceptualization does not require additional research as it has been heavily studied in the past, and as MacIntyre and Gardner contend, “test anxiety is a general problem and not one that is specific to the language classroom” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p. 268). While it certainly impacts a learner, its further analysis does not necessarily contribute to a more complete understanding of FL learning anxiety; the social evaluative and communicative aspects of this conceptualization have been found to have been favorably received, whereas test anxiety may be considered less important overall (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 106).

### **2.4.3 Fear of negative evaluation**

The final aspect of Horwitz et al.’s conceptualization of anxiety, drawn from theories of performance evaluation, is the fear of being evaluated negatively. They explain that this fear concerns the apprehension of being assessed and expecting others to judge oneself inherently negatively, while avoiding such situations altogether when possible. This is interpreted as being different than test-anxiety; although they both contain aspects of evaluation, the fear of negative evaluation is more invasive in the learner than test-anxiety. Horwitz et al. clarify that “it may occur in any social, evaluative situation such as interviewing for a job or speaking in a foreign language class” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Where this type of apprehension differs from that which is found in FL learning anxiety is that the academic setting imposes frequent evaluation on the student, as was seen in the account of test anxiety. Aida notes that “research shows that people who are highly concerned about the impressions others are forming of them tend to behave in ways that minimize the possibility of unfavorable evaluations” (Aida, 1994, p. 157).

Yet again, the social aspect of this category may benefit from being considered in light of the complex social identity a learner embodies.

Understanding these categories and their relation to the social context is crucial to realizing how the learner may be affected by situations found within each category. Horwitz et al. notably consider this social context too, and a clarification of the social framework they have adopted in this conceptualization follows - a social framework which could arguably benefit from a redefinition.

#### **2.4.4 The social context**

The final clarification which the researchers elucidate further emphasizes the necessity of a social framework. Horwitz et al. contend that “students may also be acutely sensitive to the evaluations – real or imagined – of their peers” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). This statement reflects the social context which was referred to at the beginning of their conceptualization of anxiety, theorized as a vital aspect of it. Yet just as the aspect of identity in communication apprehension is not fully explored, the social context can be better understood if all possible facets of a learner’s social world are taken into consideration.

Although the authors do not specify to what extent the social context of a learner can be applied, it would appear that it is considered solely within the realm of the classroom, as they clarify that their conceptualization should consider the self-perceptions and beliefs which are related to the second language learning classroom, and which are unique to the language learning process. They further state that “any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual’s self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic” (p. 128). Yet is the learner’s self-concept limited to that which is affected by the

language classroom? Could it not be by more than just this rather limited social setting? I maintain that their social framework could be expanded to include the social groups which impact the learner daily – those which exist *external* to the classroom. Doing so would introduce a vital aspect aiding in the construction of an individual’s identity - an aspect which cannot be constructed in the classroom, yet nevertheless, may greatly impact the learner.

The statements which are currently presented to the individual in the FLCAS may produce conflicting results if the learner and his or her identity are only considered in this limited context. The FLCAS itself and the study of FL learning anxiety may therefore benefit from a reconceptualization of anxiety, in which anxiety is not merely a result of the classroom and learning context, but rather, aspects of the learner’s social life outside of the classroom also aid in this construction.

## **2.5 Re-envisioning the FLCAS**

In order to understand the social implications and notions of identity which comprise the FLCAS, the items which this instrument poses to the learner will be organized into discernible categories. These will be similar to the initial categories proposed, as the authors write that the items “are reflective of communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in the foreign language classroom” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129). I have however included a fourth category, Academic Issues, for those statements which do not specifically target anxiety, but rather, focus upon general academic notions which often present a social context *outside* of the language classroom (Table 3). Although the Likert items do not specifically address identity construction, many of the items focus on the self-perceptions of the

individual which may be called into contention when learning a language, thereby impacting the learner's identity.

Communication Apprehension	Test Anxiety	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Academic Issues
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
2. I <i>don't</i> worry about making mistakes in language class.*	21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.*	15. I get upset when I don't understand why the teacher is correcting.*	11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.		19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.		24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.*	17. I often feel like not going to my language class.
12. In language class, I get so nervous I forget things I know.*		31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.*		32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.*	26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.
14. I would <i>not</i> be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.		33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.*	28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.			29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.			30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.			
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.			

Table 3 (Those marked with asterisks could be included in more than one category, but are placed in the category which I find most suitable)

A general trend becomes very noticeable after a preliminary view. The FLCAS' statements focus heavily upon situations concerning communication and fear of evaluation while communicating; little attention is paid towards test-taking anxiety. This approach has logical implications: although testing may occur more frequently in the FL classroom, communication and other forms of evaluation are more prevalent and would understandably have a more prominent effect on the learner. For these reasons, and because test taking anxiety is contextually limited to the learner and the physical test in most instances, the statements posed certainly serve their purpose: they intend to focus on the situations which occur frequently and are impacted by a social classroom setting.

The majority of statements focus specifically on this social setting and the communication which occurs as a result. Statements such as: "I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students" and "I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language" reflect the nature of foreign language anxiety as the learner's peers aid in constructing the social context for the learner. If a negative social context exists – one in which the individual's social groups are currently positioned detrimentally – the learner's attitude and motivation may be similarly affected. Communication apprehension too imposes elements of social context into the learner's anxious feelings. The FLCAS considers statements such as: "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class" and "I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do" as examples of means by which the social aspect of the classroom may impose itself on the learner's own self-perceptions. Simply by having a student's peers in the classroom, anxiety may inhibit performance. Many other instances of anxiety, although not specifically referenced as being impacted by the social context, could indeed be understood through a social framework.

Learners who respond positively towards statements such as: “I can feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in language class” and “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class” have the *potential* to be affected by the learner’s peers and other social items; the FLCAS is not specific in the causes of such perceptions. They are certainly an aspect of FL learning anxiety, but is this a result of the academic setting or could the social context play a more crucial role? If we intend to examine the social context in greater detail and expand upon it, the identity of the individual must in turn have a greater focus than it does currently.

### **2.5.1 The role of identity**

Identity in relation to the FLCAS and the conceptualization of identity which it postulates may also benefit from a thorough review. The learner’s identity may be disputed as early as the initial administration of this instrument. The FLCAS is designed to be administered to the learner once; in the pilot study, students in a university Spanish class completed the scale in the third week of the semester (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129). Many other studies following this pilot study, and using the FLCAS, opt to administer the scale only once as well (see Aida, 1994; Horwitz & Gregersen, 2002; Cebrenros, 2003; von Wörde, 2002 for examples). If we assume, however, that social groups may affect the learner’s anxious feelings, then we cannot assume that each learner experiences an identical feeling of anxiety regularly; rather, anxious feelings may heighten and subside, depending on the social context of the individual learner. The FLCAS would benefit from being able to account for such differences, yet this remains onerous unless the researcher applies other instruments of analysis.

This should be considered too when examining the conceptualization of anxiety Horwitz et al. (1986) present, as not all anxious learners are alike; it is problematic to identify every learner who experiences anxiety in the FL classroom as embodying an *identical* category of learner. Stroud and Wee (2006) too believe that identity has a more prominent role in FL learning anxiety than the FLCAS may accredit it as having (Stroud & Wee, 2006, p. 300) – an argument which will be expanded upon in the upcoming chapter. As social context is evidently crucial in understanding why anxiety occurs in the classroom, the individualized social groups of each learner demand further examination. To better understand and conceptualize anxiety as a term not only specific to the FL learning classroom, but also one which is reflective of the learner's social context, a current and improved theory of identity may prove useful in reconceptualizing FL learning anxiety. To do so, I propose theories of poststructuralist identity may be a critical and as of yet missing component to a complete understanding of FL learning anxiety.

### 3 Poststructuralist theories of identity

Recently, and perhaps most applicable and relevant to SLA discourse, researchers such as Norton (2000), Blackledge & Pavlenko (2001), and Tabouret-Keller (1997) have all contributed to theorizing poststructuralist theories of identity and their relevance to second language learning, and in some cases, have touched upon its relation to FL learning anxiety. For the purposes of this thesis, the term identity shall be considered as synonymous with notions of self and subjectivity, able to be at least in some part influenced solely by the individual; as will be seen, societal implications too share a primary role in identity construction.

It is helpful at this point, considering the current state of identity conceptions in SLA research, to apply these theories to the study of FL learning anxiety in an effort to facilitate the relationship between it and learner identity. Norton (2000) cites that poststructuralism “depicts the individual – the subject – as diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space” (Norton, 2000, p. 125). Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) indicate too that “interactions are always subject to societal power relations, which include, *inter alia*, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 243). When attempting to learn a second language, any of these factors may influence the success and ability of the endeavor. It is not a matter of entering the FL learning classroom and learning the language; rather, the individual is perpetually redefining what aspects of his or her identity are meaningful to this process.

Traditionally, identity could be understood as being constructed within **sociopsychological** or **variationist sociolinguistic** paradigms. Sociopsychological paradigms suggest that individuals can change their social identity when not satisfied, thereby *negotiating* it

and reflecting an image that they desire (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 244). Variationist sociolinguistics do not even consider the negotiation of identity, and rather assume identity as being expressed, determined by the culture, gender, and myriad other characteristics of an individual (p. 244). Poststructuralist identity paradigms however understand language users as being influenced by “social, cultural, gender-based, economic, and generational stratification which is an important feature of all societies” (p. 245). It is consequently extremely difficult to find a group of second language users who can attest to having indistinguishable identity-constructing characteristics. For this reason, to consider these learners as having an identical disposition, even within the confines of the classroom, is problematic. A poststructuralist identity paradigm ensures that each individual is constructed in accordance to the many intricate characteristics which comprise an identity. According to Blackledge & Pavlenko (2001), it “emphasizes that at all times identities are embedded within larger ideological structures and discursive practices” (p. 245), referring to the impact that macro-social factors have on the construction and maintenance of an individual’s identity.

Poststructuralist theories of identity are not without their own theoretical foundations, which should be taken into consideration and examined briefly, as they are the principles upon which these theories are based.

### **3.1 Early poststructuralist theory**

Bourdieu’s (1991) eminent research has proven to be an integral aspect leading to the origin of poststructuralist theory. Bourdieu reexamined Saussure’s (1959) previous research in which he constructed a structuralist theory of identity; this theory assumed that objects had latent features which embody a static identity, distinguishing them from other objects (Saussure, 1959,

p. 108-109). Bourdieu intended to accentuate the importance of “relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37), arguing that perhaps identities are more than just a fixed disposition. Rather than acknowledging only the inherent characteristics of any object, Bourdieu argues that social powers are instead paramount to the construction of identity. As social power routinely changes and is by nature fluid, the very notion of identity must reflect this fluidity. Language too is affected by social power, as according to Bourdieu, “social science has to take account of the autonomy of language, its specific logic, and its particular rules of operation” (p. 41). Bourdieu’s clarification of social power’s significance in comprehending language and identity was a vital advancement in poststructuralist theory, and his work would be expanded upon further.

Weedon (1997), whose research is situated within a feminist discourse, provides meaningful input in the discussion of poststructuralist theories of identity too. She notes the necessity of a “theory of the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power” (Weedon, 1997, p. 12). She explains that poststructuralist theory is situated *in* language, as it is “the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness” (p. 21). Language defines the social context which every individual finds him or herself in, through which the individual’s identity is constructed. Language itself, however, does not construct identity; rather, “it constructs the individual’s subjectivity in ways which are socially specific” (p. 21). Subjectivity and identity are therefore fundamentally affiliated with the social dimension when considering poststructuralist theories, as the individual and society both impact the learner’s own perception of his or her identity through various power relations. Subjectivity is theorized by Weedon “as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the processes of political change and to preserving the status quo” (p. 21). Her theorization may be

rooted in feminist discourse, serving to strengthen her own political goals, but the groundwork upon which she establishes her theory, like Bourdieu's, has proven to be influential for poststructuralist theories of identity beyond feminist studies.

These theories all emphasize the decisive role of language. They should therefore be examined regarding their potential usefulness within the field of SLA.

### **3.2 Poststructuralist approaches to language**

In order to understand how poststructuralist theories of identity impact the language learner, the definition of language that underlies poststructuralist arguments should be explored further. According to such approaches, language ought to be understood beyond its function as a means of communication between individuals, as its use and implications are far broader. Norton contends that “language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). The social meaning she refers to is a product of, and reinforced by, views of language which exist in each society. Woolard (1998) suggests that these views of language “are not about language alone”; instead, “they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology” (Woolard, 1998, p. 3). They are “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (p. 3). Varying conceptions of language construct a set of beliefs concerning language use, common amongst individuals who form a social group (Martinez-Roldàn & Malavé, 2004, p. 161) – for our purposes, learners in a foreign language classroom. Of course, one must be cautious when grouping individuals as sharing similar language views; there always exists those who will assume different viewpoints, aside from those considered dominant and shared by individuals in

the group (p. 162), yet as previously stated, when applying poststructuralist theories of identity, we can assume that each individual will perceive language uniquely and brings personal experiences with language(s) to the classroom; it is *impossible* to identify each individual in the group as sharing the same language conception.

The language view which an individual adopts elucidates how the learner perceives language learning and acceptable language use. This is not a general view of language however, but one which reflects the differences between the **native** and **other** languages. Each language inherently comes with certain cultural implications, classroom procedures and stigmas, amongst other characteristics which embody the learner's perception of the language. When beginning to learn a second language, the learner will at least to some degree formulate a new identity based in part on the assumptions that he or she develops of the language. In a study on learners of Spanish, Valdés et al. (2003) determined themes detailing views on how these learners perceive the language and language learning process. Themes such as the language being the language of its country of origin; good forms of the language as being error-free and pure; the native speaker being the ideal speaker; limitations of FL learners; and, the role of the department in teaching the language (Valdés et al., 2003, p. 14) are some of the main perceptions learners had of foreign languages, and in this case, the Spanish language specifically. Yet ultimately these themes are apparent in any FL learning venture, and represent key language beliefs which may be present in FL learners.

In order to learn a second language according to an applicable language conception, the learner may have to adjust and negotiate his or her identity accordingly. If a learner believes that native speakers are *ideal* speakers of a language, the individual may attempt to imitate the native speaker through a variety of means: adopting a native speaker accent; participating in an

exchange; speaking with native speakers more often, etc. Likewise, a learner who perceives language as only being acceptable when spoken error-free may instead choose to focus on grammar and be more inclined to only speak in class when the language structures used are flawless.

An individual therefore adopts a personal view of the second language through which he or she defines language learning. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) too envision language not as an all-inclusive term shared by all members of a society, but as a notion which is reflective upon the societal context. They note that “languages are not self-evident, natural facts, and contestation occurs around definitions of languages as much as around communities” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 252). Once an individual has a clear perception of the specific second language, he or she may have to adopt a different aspect of his or her fluid identity, in order to pursue the individual’s language learning goals. This action requires a negotiation of identity, a crucial element of poststructuralist theories of identity.

### **3.3 Negotiation of identity**

Instrumental to the understanding of poststructuralist theories of identity, an individual may often find him or herself negotiating identity according to the social powers and ideologies which exist. Negotiation of identities may be best understood as “the interplay between reflective positioning, that is, self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby others attempt to reposition particular individuals or groups” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 249).

Identities are not homogenous and static. Rather, as Tabouret-Keller (1997) explains “at any given time a person’s identity is a heterogeneous set made up of all the names or identities, given to and taken up by her” (Tabouret-Keller, 1997, p. 316). As social conditions vary, so too

may identities, being positioned to adopt certain frames of mind, beliefs and attitudes. This is especially true in the case of learning a new second language. Blackledge and Pavlenko suggest that “once an individual has taken up particular subject positions as one’s own, he or she inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of these positions” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 249). The researchers continue by listing some possible positions: race, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale and institutional affiliation (p. 249). These positions vary for each individual and are fluid - each individual has the power and ability to produce positions and subjectivity for not only themselves, but others too (p. 249). Such consideration is important, as Norton advises:

power does not operate only at the macro level of powerful institutions such as the legal system, the education system and the social welfare system, but also as the micro level of everyday social encounters between people with differential access to symbolic and material resources – encounters that are inevitably produced within language.

(Norton, 2000, p. 7)

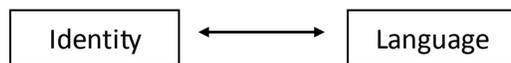
Both society and individuals have the ability to exercise power and influence identity construction. Therefore, as individuals negotiate their identities according to not only diverse language perceptions, but also to the various positions within society they belong to, so too does the individual’s response to the language learning process differ.

Two potential transformations are occurring in this situation. Initially, an individual may assume a certain view of the second language, for example: understanding the second language as best performed by native speakers of it. With this belief in mind, he or she will then negotiate his or her identity to best reflect the specifications which construct this ideal language. An identity as a second language learner is constructed, one which perhaps strives for authentic

pronunciation and places value on oral production more so than written. Conversely, assuming this view of the second language, the learner may feel his or her efforts futile, as the second language competency may never reach that of a native speaker. In either case, language and the learner's beliefs of the second language are directly affecting the fluid identity of the learner. Yet this process may occur disparately as well.

Consider a learner who is on an exchange in a foreign country, trying to learn the language, and does not know anyone. He or she may want to make friends, yet is having difficulty doing so. For this reason, the individual is already having difficulty negotiating an identity and adjusting to these new social groups - the learner's identity is therefore already compromised and may inherently assume a negative view of the second language, perhaps assuming it to be primarily a tool to communicate with peers. As the learner is having difficulty making connections with those peers, the identity negotiation affects the notion of language and the learner's view of this other language.

Identity and second language beliefs can be therefore understood in this context as having a reciprocal relationship, as each notion has the ability to influence the other (Figure 1). Norton too reveals that the role of language can be understood "as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's identity" (Norton, 2000, p. 5).



*Figure 1.* Reciprocal relationship between poststructuralist theories of identity and language.

This paradigm, linking identity to attitudes towards other languages, has been well documented by these researchers, and I would argue that it could be expanded to incorporate FL

learning anxiety too, as both language and identity directly affect, and may be affected by, anxiety experienced while learning a second language.

### **3.4 Identity, language, and FL learning anxiety**

Having outlined the unique relationship between poststructuralist theories of identity and language, I contend that FL learning anxiety's position within this paradigm needs to be appropriately represented. To date, little research has been conducted that specifically aims to associate FL learning anxiety with poststructuralist theories of identity. However, there exists a strong connection which may deepen our understanding of the two notions, and which can furthermore be directly tied to language and beliefs about language.

#### **3.4.1 FLCAS and its relation to poststructuralist approaches**

As the FLCAS has demonstrated, the social element of FL learning anxiety is instrumental in determining what situations may impede language learning and cause anxiety. Instances of self-confidence, self and peer evaluation, embarrassment, preparation, fright and nervousness are just some of the feelings and characteristics which prompt anxiety in the FL learning classroom, according to Horwitz et al.'s scale (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129-130). While each of these feelings and attitudes certainly is a reflection of the self and feelings inside the FL learning classroom, they may also be greatly influenced by *social power* and *individual experience*, elements which are crucial in poststructuralist theories of identity. Norton claims that “anxiety is not an inherent trait of a language learner, but one that is socially constructed within and by the lived experiences of language learners” (Norton, 2000, p. 123). Poststructuralist

theories of identity may aid in understanding how FL anxiety and an individual's socially constructed identity are relevant to one another.

As Horwitz et al. (1986) note, identity is a critical aspect of their conceptualization of anxiety. They suggest that "any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). The notion of challenging the individual's identity is likely a result of the negotiation of identity, vital to poststructuralist theories of identity. As the learner struggles to position him or herself in the FL learning classroom according to his or her own second language beliefs, identity remains fluid. It explores social contexts and individual experience, ultimately constructing an identity with elements unique to the second language learning situation. Norton (2000) suggests in reference to her research on identity construction in adult immigrant language learners that "anxiety was differently constructed in diverse encounters with target language speakers and must be understood with reference to their investment in particular kinds of social relationships" (Norton, 2000, p. 137). While each individual is an immigrant language learner, their anxious feelings regarding language learning are constructed very differently due to varying social contexts.

A learner whose family speaks the foreign language and who aspires to be able to speak like them may be heavily influenced by such family bonds. Norton (2000) researched learners who, due to a high level of stress at the learner's job, reported increased levels of distraction in the FL learning classroom (p. 124). This influence constructs an aspect of the learner's sense of identity, which is subsequently brought into the classroom where other aspects of society, such as family, friends, elements of social power and organization, further help construct it. Anxiety, while certainly occurring in the FL classroom, is not *necessarily* a direct result of interactions

within the classroom. It may be influenced by both the prior beliefs the learner holds, as well as the construction of identity that the learner has developed in other classrooms and outside of institutional learning environments.

Instances of anxiety experienced in the classroom have the potential to alter the learner's perception of the second language too. Whereas the learner with native speakers in the family may desire to speak like them, instances of FL learning anxiety can inhibit the learner, making he or she believe that second languages are best spoken by native speakers; believing this, the learner may assume that FL learners simply cannot speak the language as well as native speakers do. Students taking part in a study by Horwitz and Yan (2008), and which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, too make conclusions regarding who can speak a language better, an important aspect of **achievement** in the language classroom (Horwitz & Yan, 2008, p. 167). If applied to poststructuralist constructions of identity, whereas initially feeling confident about learning the language, the learner may now feel demoralized and begin to self-inflict doubt. The fluidity of identity is well represented and therefore integral to formulating a new paradigm to aid in reconceptualizing FL learning anxiety.

### **3.5 A revised paradigm**

In attempting to construct a paradigm to explain the unique relationship between FL learning anxiety, poststructuralist theories of identity, and second language beliefs, it should first be understood what problematic aspects of the current conceptualization are being discussed. The fluidity of identity is vital to the understanding of this paradigm and its relation to the FLCAS. Horwitz and Yan (2008) consider the problematic nature of relying on questionnaires, the FLCAS included, to ascertain all data in FL learning anxiety studies (Horwitz & Yan, 2008,

p. 153). Their claims and arguments emphasize the benefits of implementing qualitative study into FL learning anxiety research. Yet the FLCAS is still used as an anxiety predictor – it is entrusted to obtain the initial classification of each individual, whether they are anxious or non-anxious language learners, relying upon an arguably limited conceptualization of anxiety.

Learners will not *always* be anxious language learners. Their identities are interrelated with aspects of their language(s) beliefs, experiences, and FL anxiety. As each aspect changes and varies, so too do the others. A paradigm is thus created in which each element has equal influence on the others (Figure 2). As anxious feelings intensify and subside, so too will the individuals identity construction and view of other languages. This reaction is reciprocal, and may occur with any of the three facets being reactionary, causing the other two to be altered as well.

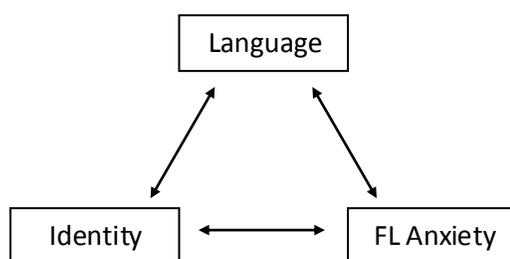


Figure 2. Language, Identity, FL Anxiety Paradigm

If this revised paradigm is considered, then the conceptualization of anxiety which was initially presented in conjunction with the FLCAS cannot appropriately account for language learners' actual experiences with FL learning anxiety, as it is much more complex than was originally hypothesized. Only by examining FL learning anxiety in relation to poststructuralist theories of identity and the learner's own view of the second and other language(s) can the anxiety experienced in the FL classroom be better understood.

This paradigm will be the basis of the reconceptualization of anxiety that I propose, and in the following chapter, will be examined in relation to previously completed studies to gain insight into how it could be applied and aid in strengthening the research that has been completed.

## **4 Applying the paradigm**

As the opening literature review revealed, there exists a wealth of research of foreign language learning anxiety in the classroom. It is an experience that many FL learners have coped with at one time or another, yet to be successful in the FL learning endeavor, the learner must reconcile with these anxious feelings. The research that has been conducted often adheres to two fundamental guidelines: firstly, most studies utilize the FLCAS as the primary instrument of analysis, and secondly, the studies, by virtue of their results, attempt to discern the means to deal with and overcome FL learning anxiety.

These two research ventures may prove to be rather precarious. While each has understandable and relevant intentions, designed to progress the discourse of FL learning anxiety and identify what can be done to prevent it, I would contend that these very means are themselves problematic and may not accurately target the genuine issue: FL learning anxiety is a multifaceted term, difficult to be classified by means of a single instrument. To attempt to then recognize causes and coping strategies for anxiety is a challenging endeavor; complicating it further is the difficulty in capturing the constantly changing nature of anxiety, not as a trait, but as a feeling – fluid, never consistent.

As was stated in the previous chapter, FL learning anxiety may be established within the paradigm linking it to poststructuralist theories of identity and the learner's view of language. Notions of a fluid identity and beliefs concerning language may then purport themselves on the construction of this specific form of anxiety. As it currently stands, the FLCAS does not take into consideration such aspects. Separate to this issue, yet occasionally compounded by the FLCAS, FL learning anxiety is often prescribed a remedy or means to specifically target feelings of

anxiety in the classroom. As will be seen, many of these endeavors are well-documented and given appropriate consideration as to their implications in the classroom. They are however often formulated with the conceptualization of anxiety initially provided by Horwitz et al. (1986), which as previously indicated, does not take into account the necessary aspects of the learner's identity and language beliefs.

This chapter will therefore examine contemporary discourse concerning FL learning anxiety in the classroom, in order to determine to what extent both the FLCAS and its associated conceptualization of FL anxiety are being addressed and implemented in the research. The implications of such research and the recommendations as to how best cope with this form of anxiety will also be analyzed, as will how research today is either progressing away from the initial theorization of Horwitz et al. (1986), or remaining loyal to it. The methodology to accomplish this task is vital to a complete understanding of the current discourse representing the field of FL learning anxiety, and which will be subsequently outlined.

#### **4.1 Methodology**

In order to examine how contemporary research is approaching FL learning anxiety, a methodology which can study individual cases and pay careful attention to the specific contexts of each case is critical; although each study may analyze FL anxiety in the classroom, the means by which they do so will vary drastically. This is entirely dependent upon the context of a variety of factors: the classroom, the students, the conceptualization of FL anxiety used, etc. Therefore, a **qualitative meta-analysis** will be employed as the methodology guiding this analysis.

Theorized by Schmenk (2002) and initially conceptualized within gender discourse, a qualitative meta-analysis allows the researcher to analyze quantitative, empirical studies as having relevance which extends beyond the statistics and examines the learners themselves with their own perceptions and statements. This methodology is not to be mistaken with that of the same name, constructed by Schreiber, Crooks and Stern (1997), who focus exclusively on purely qualitative studies. Established on the basis of the **quantitative meta-analysis** (Hyde & McKinley, 1997), the researchers clarify meta-analysis as a “systematic, quantitative technique for aggregating results across different studies, thus reducing some of the subjectivity involved in narrative review” (Hyde & McKinley, 1997, p. 31). Furthermore, it “converts the results of a wide range of studies to standard units to allow meaningful comparison” (p. 32). This conversion, although intended for quantitative purposes, may be useful if applied to qualitative studies, as Schmenk suggests. She argues that it is important to look at studies not only with respect to their results, but also to the specific argumentative structures and assumptions that underlie each study and that play an important part when one wants to understand the interplay of research design and the respective research results. She explains that:

nur wenn man von der Existenz wirklicher lernender Menschen ausgeht, über die zahlreiche Stereotype und widersprüchliche Aussagen gemacht werden, kann man auf die Notwendigkeit verweisen, diese Aussagen einmal genauer zu untersuchen, weil sie den Anschein erwecken, daß lernende Menschen in der Forschung nicht angemessen erfaßt werden. (Schmenk, 2002, p. 132-133)

Schmenk recommends that research progresses beyond stereotypical formulations and analyses and instead take into consideration the individuals themselves in order to ascertain how they

perceive themselves in accordance with the research being performed, facets which statistical instruments cannot accurately portray. A qualitative meta-analysis can incorporate these perceptions which the learner's themselves formulate from a variety of studies and examine the similarities and differences in each, discovering where difficulties may lay (p. 133). The qualitative studies being examined may have varying aims, albeit examining the same research phenomena; a qualitative meta-analysis, however, is able to focus on a specific area of interest and compare how each individual study perceives this common facet. This is crucial, as Schmenk further argues:

Da jede Einzelaussage im Kontext bestimmter kultureller und institutioneller Bedingungen,... bestimmter Forschungstraditionen, etc. gemacht wird, ist es auch notwendig, die jeweiligen Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede von Aussagen hinsichtlich ihrer Bedingungen in diesen spezifischen Kontexten zu betrachten. (p. 134)

Therefore, each study should be examined not only for what the participants themselves assert, but the participants and the research should be further considered with regards to the specific cultural and institutional context that the study is performed in, as well as the research traditions that exist (in this case, the administration of the FLCAS). The variations in these studies can provide great insight into the discourse of the research and elucidate how the studies are situated within the discourse itself. Careful attention should therefore be paid to both the individual learner's understanding of the specific phenomena, but also the contextual basis for each study. The comparisons drawn between each study – for our purposes, those being made between the construction, conception and perception of identity and anxiety - can accordingly provide a wealth of qualitative data and further clarification of the research.

## 4.2 Qualitative meta-analysis criteria

The qualitative meta-analysis to follow will analyze conceptualizations and perceptions, both *implicit* and *explicit*, of FL learning anxiety and identity construction found within current research. The learner and his or her relation to anxiety and identity in the context of the FL learning classroom is a locus of contention in the following research. The studies which have been chosen have been so for their diverse conceptualizations of the learner and their varying means of analysis. Quantitative *and* qualitative research is often employed in these studies, but the means in which they are varies greatly. For this reason, the qualitative meta-analysis' emphasis on comparing diverse studies to find common intentions of analysis proves beneficial for our purposes. The relevance in the current discourse of FL learning anxiety for each study is also respectable, as each study does not rely solely on the FLCAS, and demonstrates signs of progression towards new methods for understanding FL learning anxiety. These four research studies will be given an overview and be critically examined, considering the context and individuals themselves, in an effort to acquire a greater understanding of FL learning anxiety and its relation to the previously proposed paradigm. The qualitative meta-analysis aims at investigating how the learner's identity and the concept of FL learning anxiety is understood and adapted in each study. This in turn will be fundamental to comprehending the current state of FL learning anxiety discourse. I will discuss the problems and shortcomings of each study too, and finish by suggesting how my proposed paradigm could be implemented to gain another perspective in FL learning anxiety. These criteria will ensure that each study is given equal recognition and that a comparison can be drawn using the proposed methodology.

#### **4.2.1 Qualitative meta-analysis 1 – Chen and Chang (2004)**

The first approach to FL learning anxiety research which will be examined considers the possibility of combining aspects of the two most prominent and current conceptualizations of FL anxiety. Chen and Chang (2004) contemplate the relationship between FL learning anxiety and difficulties in learning a second language by classifying the characteristics that anxious language learning students share. Furthermore, they aim to discover whether learning difficulties affect anxiety, and if students with anxious feelings have inherent linguistic coding difficulties (Chen & Chang, 2004, p. 281). To do so, students learning English in Taiwan were chosen to participate. Positioning their argument within the theories of both Horwitz and colleagues (1986, 2000), and Sparks, Ganschow and colleagues (1991, 1994), Chen and Chang discern whether anxiety is the cause *or* effect of learning difficulties.

Both the FLCAS and the FLSI-C (Foreign Language Screening Instrument for Colleges, developed by Sparks and Ganschow (1991)) were administered to 1,187 students from 10 universities and colleges in Taiwan (Chen & Chang, 2004, p. 281). Whereas the FLCAS measures anxiety in the foreign language classroom, the FLSI-C measures foreign language learning difficulty (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). By performing a stepwise multiple regression analysis on the data collected from the results of the FLCAS and FLSI-C, Chen and Chang have identified a number of acute insights; most significantly, difficulties in FL learning history demonstrate the highest correlation with FL anxiety, and that the three best predictors of anxiety, according to their analysis, are: “English learning history, classroom learning characteristics, and developmental learning difficulties” (Chen & Chang, 2004, p. 284). They further state that “37% of anxious students can be described as those whose experience with learning a foreign language

is negative; ...difficult; ...have difficulties with classroom learning; ... have a history of slow development” (p. 284). It may prove to be problematic, however, to assert that 37% of *all* anxious language learners have difficulties with learning a second language and have this developmental history. In this specific case, this may be so, but these statistics do not apply to every group of language learners, as each individual learner has his or her own social and individual experiences; context must be considered critically in regards to the qualitative meta-analysis and it should be understood that societies can differ vastly. To issue a comprehensive statement such as this is a rather precarious issue that the FLCAS inadvertently promotes: it classifies a large group of anxious language learners as being alike and belonging to the same group, sharing similar views of language and common identities (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129). Yet as the reconceptualization of anxiety that I propose maintains, FL learning anxiety should be considered with particular attention to notions of fluid identity and second and other language(s) beliefs.

As will be identified, Chen and Chang explicitly conceptualize FL learning anxiety as being a combination of two major anxiety concepts, both of which assist in understanding FL learning anxiety. Implicitly, FL learning anxiety is still considered a trait, affecting some students, and others not. Learners are referenced as *anxious students* and analyzed on the basis of their FL learning anxiety, rather than as a learner who may occasionally have anxious feelings. In terms of how learner identity is perceived, Chen and Chang do not substantiate the identity of learner, aside from labeling him or her as anxious, in effect not giving sufficient credence to the role of identity. The learner is implicitly rendered as embodying a static identity, one which has been constructed through childhood and language learning practices, and which may fundamentally alter the language learning process at a later stage in life – the fluid aspect of

these early influences are again not considered. When the identity of the learner is considered static, the instructor may feel that he or she must adapt to these perceived learning deficits. Ultimately, Chen and Chang continue to analyze and conceptualize FL learning anxiety similar to that preliminarily found in Horwitz et al.'s (1986) research. Advancements in the discourse, however, are still undoubtedly made in the performed study.

The researchers construct a theoretical framework integrating both aspects of Horwitz et al.'s *and* Sparks and Ganschow's conceptualizations of anxiety. The conceptualization conceived by Sparks and Ganschow argues that linguistic coding difficulties and inherent language problems are the primary cause of anxiety, as the researchers see a positive correlation between the two (Sparks & Ganschow 1991). Both conceptualizations have demonstrated validity in the FL learning anxiety discourse, however by combining the two, an insightful advancement in theorizing FL learning anxiety is gained: Chen and Chang have implemented variables *external* to the FL learning classroom, as suggested by Sparks and Ganschow, as possible, but not sole, contributors to FL anxiety. Yet the difficulties experienced when learning other languages and other individual experiences may indeed be fundamental to comprehending what aspects of the classroom invoke feelings of anxiousness, and by examining both conceptualizations equally, a progressive and arguably necessary step in improving understanding of FL learning anxiety is reached.

In order to perform their analysis, the researchers choose to implement a comprehensive means to discover and treat FL learning anxiety; contingent upon the results of the two instruments, Chen and Chang suggest to either institute instructional accommodations (such as improving self-perception and adopting teaching-learning approaches to mitigate anxious

feelings) or create a low-anxiety learning facility, through which students receive support intended to directly lower anxiety and fit the needs of the learner (p. 285). I do not contend that such implementations may indeed alleviate anxious feelings, yet they are based upon the assumptions of an instrument and conceptualization of anxiety that intends to label and categorize anxious language learners as members of exclusive groups with similar problems. Again, the context in this study may substantiate such results, but they cannot be as easily applied to other contexts. I would therefore contend that the proposed reconceptualization of anxiety and its paradigm could be more appropriately applied to this study, in order to better understand the individual students before establishing them as anxious learners.

If the learners are able to first understand how FL learning anxiety affects, and is affected by, fluid identity and the beliefs associated with the second language, then he or she may understand that anxiety is not a permanent condition and each individual's anxiety is constitutive of many various social and individual elements. This will allow the individual to accept anxious feelings and not allow them to dictate the success of the learning endeavor. In the classroom, the learner should not assume that the instructor is responsible for alleviating all anxious feelings - the instructor should not have to adopt mitigating practices, as these anxious feelings, when associated with fluid identity, may disrupt previously established teaching practices and cause more detriment than good. But as Chen and Chang do suggest, improving self-perception is certainly vital to succeeding in not only reducing FL learning anxiety but in the language learning process too.

#### **4.2.2 Qualitative meta-analysis 2 – Frantzen and Magnan (2005)**

Frantzen and Magnan (2005) approach their study of FL learning anxiety differently, as they examine true and false beginners in French and Spanish language courses at the University of Madison-Wisconsin and consider FL learning anxiety in this specific context (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005, p. 172). False beginners are those who have had some form of instruction in the target language at one point in their lives, yet have largely forgotten it, whereas true beginners are learning the language for the first time. The dynamic between the two in the FL learning classroom poses a legitimate problem if it is assumed that false beginners, having already had instruction in the language, will not display a similar level of anxiety as the true beginners may, resulting in a rather unstable environment for all learners (p. 172). However, this is not unquestionably the case in the FL learning classroom, as false beginners could too “be bored and feel an apathy that leads to anxiety or they could fear repeating past failures” (p. 172). The researchers intend to further examine this unique dynamic and determine the effect of FL learning anxiety.

To conduct their study with 490 students, Frantzen and Magnan chose to present each learner with the FLCAS, selecting this instrument as their pilot study demonstrated the usefulness of it (p. 173). Furthermore, interviews were conducted at random to help substantiate and add refinement to the results of the FLCAS – a sign of progression in terms of understanding the learner’s own experiences with FL learning anxiety. Following the administration of the FLCAS, the researchers initially arrive at the conclusion that true beginners are indeed more anxious than false beginners (p. 175). The items invoking the greatest level of anxiety are presented, and it follows that many of the responses are situated within the social setting, such as

communication with peers, displaying its prominence in FL learning anxiety. The two items which ranked highest are even more convincing in terms of their social relevance: “I would be nervous speaking French [Spanish] with native speakers” and “I would probably not feel comfortable around native speakers of French [Spanish]” (p. 177). Learners are clearly responding to the statements which focus on social interaction outside of the classroom, an element which Horwitz et al.’s conceptualization of anxiety has difficulty taking into account if anxious language learners are categorized by their classroom interactions amongst peers.

The initial administration of FLCAS is followed by interviews with the randomly chosen students. Each student discussed both aspects of the language learning process that were anxiety provoking, and also those that were more calming, as the latter is not a facet of the FLCAS (p. 179). I find this approach rather insightful; again, a qualitative, discussion-prompting inquiry is being performed, and by considering the situations which inhibit anxiety, the learner is able to reflect upon instances in his or her language learning endeavors which were successful, perhaps leading to an understanding that anxiety will not perpetually be an aspect of language learning.

The explicit notions of FL learning anxiety are, unlike in Chen and Chang’s (2004) study, conceptualized according to a large body of previous FL learning anxiety research, detailing it as a primarily negative trait, constituted in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and being related to a variety of personality traits (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005, p. 172). FL learning anxiety is implicitly, however, a very similar construct to that by Horwitz et al. (1986), as being a specific trait of the language learning process; if a learner is anxious while learning a language, he or she can be remedied with various anxiety inhibiting measures. This belief translates into the perception of identity in the study too, as the learner is only considered through the binary of

true/false beginner. The tacit understanding is however present that these learners do not vary aside from their level of anxiety. Experiences in life, aside from having previous language learning knowledge, are not reflected upon as having potential impact on FL learning anxiety either, yet just in Chen and Chang's study, progression is made in garnering an improved understanding of the intricacies of these anxious feelings.

On the list of comforting classroom elements, a sense of community and a good teacher ranked highest, followed by a background in the language, having the ability to speak with peers and perform group work, and having had previously studied the language (p. 180). The social aspects of the language learning process are being emphasized, and yet these social facets, although concentrated on the classroom environment, are far more pervasive - they may be impacted by the learner's fluid identity and second language beliefs which in turn are affected by the social context of the individual.

When discussing the results of their research, Frantzen and Magnan divulge that "the FLCAS survey did not indicate a high level of anxiety for either true or false beginners, even though the difference between these two groups was significant" (p. 183). This statement is intriguing for two reasons: firstly, it demonstrates the potential difficulty for the FLCAS to accurately portray distinct forms of anxiety in FL learners, as some true beginners expressed in their interviews that although they may be learning the language for the first time, false beginners have the ability to "help them, motivate them, and offer them models" (p. 182); secondly, it also perhaps demonstrates that it is problematic to associate certain characteristics with the groups of true and false beginners. As poststructuralist theories of identity assert, although members of a group, stratification occurs within the group and each individual will

embody a different, fluid identity (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 245). Yet if we consider the reconceptualization of FL learning anxiety that I have presented in this thesis, then this discrepancy in results can feasibly be interpreted. It is conceivably true, as the researchers state, that true beginners will typically experience more anxiety in the FL learning classroom (p. 183), but this is not undeniably so, as the FLCAS and its conceptualization of anxiety would have one believe; rather, because each individual is impacted by various external social means, the justification that because he or she is a true or false learner does not inherently bestow persistent characteristics and detail anxiety invoking situations. Categories certainly have their purposes but should not be assumed to typify every member equally.

As in the last study, Frantzen and Magnan adopt the FLCAS and its conceptualization of anxiety, yet approach its function ultimately differently; their application of qualitative interviews which focus on anxiety repressing situations is quite valuable. It views another facet of FL learning anxiety that the FLCAS does not focus on, and which could be imperative in the understanding of FL learning anxiety for each individual language learner. Therefore by implementing these qualitative measures and educating the learner on the fluidity of identity and learner beliefs, the learner may ultimately find an improved reasoning and awareness of these feelings of anxiety.

#### **4.2.3 Qualitative meta-analysis 3 – Sparks and Ganschow (2007)**

Although much of the discourse written concerning foreign language classroom anxiety supports the usage of the FLCAS and Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of anxiety, there exists a vocal minority attempting to reconceptualize FL learning anxiety to better reflect how this feeling affects learners. Led by Sparks and Ganschow (1991, 1995, 2007), FL learning anxiety

has been theorized to be a result of language learning difficulties caused by native language learning difficulties (Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, p. 4). A sufficient amount of research establishing this conceptualization has been written, and while it has gained certain credence, its support is minor in comparison to the oft-cited conceptualization proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986). Not only do they contend the proposed conceptualization of FL learning anxiety, so too is the FLCAS itself the subject of analysis, arguing that it is a problematic indicator of anxiety in FL learning.

Sparks and Ganschow's most vocal criticism may be found in their paper "Is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale Measuring Anxiety or Language Skills?" (2007), arguing that perhaps the FLCAS is not measuring FL learning anxiety, but rather the learner's own perception of his or her language learning skills (Sparks & Ganschow, 2007, p. 260). They claim that "many of the items appear to be tapping students' perceptions and attitudes about language as well as their feelings about anxiety" (p. 261). Sparks and Ganschow however question whether FL learning anxiety can be considered a *cause* or *consequence* of language learning skills, specifically those skills associated with native language learning development and skills (p. 262). After having performed several studies testing the validity of the FLCAS and its possible relation to native language proficiency (see Sparks & Ganschow 1991, 1995), their most recent study follows a proposed line of reasoning suggesting that researchers should "conduct longitudinal studies to determine the impact of students' native language skill development in elementary school on their anxiety about... foreign language learning" (p. 263). The researchers claim that these native language skills may be intrinsically related to FL learning perception and development at a later age, and through their study, aim to see whether students with high levels of anxiety in high school reveal lower levels of language proficiency at a younger age (p. 263).

Sparks and Ganschow (2007) make no dispute concerning their understanding of FL learning anxiety - they explicitly refer to their own conceptualization of anxiety (Sparks & Ganschow 1991), arguing that it is a result of the experience learning the intricacies of the L1 and the potential difficulties which may have arisen, lending themselves to further difficulty in the L2 learning process. Implicitly, however, this form of anxiety is still being treated as a trait which is a static feature of the learner; in this case, it is constructed at an even earlier point of life than was once hypothesized. This has further implications for the understanding of identity. Although they refute Horwitz et al.'s (1986) research, they tacitly construct a learner whose identity is *so* static that experience in L1 learning can affect learning in the L2. While I do not refute such claims entirely, seeing as they have demonstrated convincing evidence proving otherwise, the implicit assumption still persists that defines learners as embodying a fixed identity throughout their life, as can be ascertained through the implications of their research.

To perform their study, Sparks and Ganschow administered the FLCAS to a group of fifty-four first-year language students, studying German, French, or Spanish in the ninth-grade. They examined the relationship between these results and the students' performance on various other measures, paying particular attention to native language development and ability throughout the learning process, over a ten year time-span (p. 263-264). Taking into account criteria such as native language skills, foreign language spelling, grades, proficiency, aptitude and word decoding (p. 266-267), the researchers construct a complex depiction of the FL language learners participating in their study. The results of the FLCAS were formulated as an independent variable, whereas the other previously mentioned measures were all established as dependent variables, and Sparks and Ganschow hypothesized whether any correlations existed between native language skills and FL learning anxiety.

After having split the participants into groups composed on the basis of degree of anxiety, Sparks and Ganschow determined that the groups indeed demonstrated varying levels of native language skill; those who were found to test differently on the FLCAS also had varying success in native language development. Due to their longitudinal study, the native language skill development of students in the second grade and the language differences that were perceived related to the varying levels of anxiety felt when learning a second language (p. 277). Students determined to have low anxiety on the FLCAS scored higher on native language testing measures earlier in their education, while those with higher anxiety did not test as highly (p. 277). This is not to say that these students performed poorly; rather, they tested average while low-anxiety students tested above average, signaling that the students were not deficient language learners by any means (p. 277). Sparks and Ganschow's findings, indicating that students with low results on the FLCAS also frequently test highly on all indicators of native and second language skill, suggest that native language ability is related to success in second language acquisition (p. 278). The argument is then reached that the FLCAS may not be actually detecting FL learning anxiety, but rather indicating the learner's own perceptions and knowledge of language learning and his or her ability to succeed in this endeavor (p. 279). The FLCAS was ostensibly:

negatively correlated *not only* with the measures of foreign language aptitude, proficiency, word decoding, spelling, and achievement (grades) that were administered at the time students were enrolled in foreign language classes, *but also* with measures of oral and written native language skills administered as early as first grade. (p. 279)

According to Sparks and Ganschow, although one could expect to see negative correlation with foreign language aptitude tests, the negative correlation with native language skills too suggests that the FLCAS is “likely to be measuring a broad construct that includes students’ self-knowledge about their language learning skills generally” (p. 279). The previous recommendation I have proposed to utilize the FLCAS as an education tool supports such an argument. The scale is rather broad in its focus, and its statements target a much larger language learning construct than one which exists merely in the classroom, as Horwitz et al. propose. As an indicator for FL learning anxiety, the scale does not fully examine the elements which truly incorporate FL learning anxiety, those being fluid identity and views of the second language. Yet if used as Sparks and Ganschow understand it, the FLCAS can be extremely practical.

Sparks and Ganschow finally assert the following claims: FL learning anxiety is likely related to and is the consequence of native language learning skills; early native language learning skills serve as an important foundation for later second language education; and, language learning skills complicate notions which suggest that anxiety plays a prominent role in FL proficiency and achievement (p. 279). The assertion that native language skill is related to FL learning anxiety is certainly plausible, as are the others, with the exception, I would argue, of FL learning anxiety being the consequence of native language learning skills. This may be problematic, as there are certainly instances of learners who, although they excel at their native language, still have difficulties and experience anxiety when learning a second language. One must consider again what exactly FL learning anxiety is defined as, and if it is affected by elements of the previously proposed paradigm, then it is difficult to state that it may be a consequence of native language skills. Furthermore, the results of this study are once again based upon a categorization of language learners into groups of high, average, and low anxiety, at

which point they compared characteristics of the groups as a whole, examining whether “students with higher levels of anxiety would exhibit significantly lower scores on the measures of native language skill” (p. 271). The results and assertions therefore may be subject to complication, as the individuality of each learner is not being considered beyond the initial categorization. Certainly, and as the researchers rightfully state, FL anxiety *may* be related to native language skills, as could many other influences which comprise the individual experience which constructs a facet of poststructuralist theories of identity. To state however that FL learning anxiety may be a *direct* consequence does not take into consideration the fluidity of a learner’s identity, as even learners who have had native language learning difficulties have the ability to overcome such obstacles and exceed at second language learning endeavors. Such insight is typically most effectively gathered through qualitative interviews, however, as the previous studies demonstrate.

The conceptualization proposed by these researchers should by all means be analyzed further and in more depth. Sparks and Ganschow have led this charge, arguing for a different conceptualization of anxiety apart from that hypothesized by Horwitz et al.. However, at this time, research adopting this varied conceptualization of anxiety has not been fully undertaken, aside from that which has been performed by Sparks, Ganschow and colleagues (1994, 1997). A greater research initiative would perhaps strengthen their argument and conceptualization of anxiety; it is a valid position to assume and demonstrates that the FLCAS may not be analyzing what it intends to.

Sparks and Ganschow ultimately provide insightful criticism of the FLCAS and its conceptualization of FL learning anxiety. Implementing aspects of poststructuralist theories of

identity and the beliefs associated with other languages could help further construct a more thorough understanding of FL learning anxiety and its effect on language learners. By accepting that the FLCAS may be best suited to educate learners of their learning strategies and possible anxiety inducing situations, qualitative interviews, as suggested by Horwitz and Yan (2008), could be implemented. Combining the two procedures would arguably help the learner better understand anxiety's complex role in second language learning. I will provide possible means as to how to accomplish this in the concluding chapter.

#### **4.2.4 Qualitative meta-analysis 4 – Horwitz and Yan (2008)**

The concluding analysis is perhaps most intriguing in terms of advancement in the FL learning anxiety discourse and supporting a progression towards emphasizing qualitative study and reconceptualizing FL learning anxiety. Performed more than twenty years after her initial conceptualization of the FLCAS and the accompanying conceptualization of FL learning anxiety, Horwitz and Yan (2008) perform a thorough analysis of the specific sources and effects of language anxiety, primarily through learner responses. They examine the two opposing sides of anxiety-inducing factors – those theorized by Young and Sparks & Ganschow - as Chen and Chang (2004) did previously, noting the diverging opinions provided.

An integral addition to the study of FL learning anxiety, and one which Horwitz and Yan state has been largely missing in current research, is that of personal interviews to examine the learner's own feelings regarding language learning and anxiety (Horwitz & Yan, 2008, p. 153). Comparing oneself to others and having to perform in an unfamiliar language are examples of FL learning aspects which have been attributed to causing anxiety, yet which were made abundantly clear through interviews, not questionnaires (p. 153). As Horwitz and Yan elucidate -

a statement which I would suggest is the *most* progressive step towards distancing the methodology from the sole usage of questionnaires such as the FLCAS - the questionnaire alone is not sufficient;

although the findings of previous studies point to several potential sources and consequences of language anxiety, their reliance on questionnaires do not allow for an examination of how anxiety interacts with other learner or situational factors to influence language learning. (p. 153)

The situational factors of which they speak are of utmost importance; they correlate to the factors which are only discernable through examining the learner outside of the classroom context, taking into consideration all social elements of the learner's fluid identity. Horwitz and Yan further explain that "interviews or diary entries would seem to have the potential to yield a richer understanding of learners' perceptions of how anxiety functions in their language learning" (p. 153).

This approach is quite pragmatic in accurately depicting anxiety's effect on the learner and his or her identity construction and various language beliefs, yet just as in the other previous studies, the FLCAS' administration may be problematic. This instrument is adopted in the study and administered to 532 students in a Shanghai university. The students were categorized based on the results of the FLCAS into groups of high, moderate, and low anxiety learners (p. 155). Students were then taken at random from the large sample, and based on their test results twenty-one students comprised the final group of participants, thereby creating equal numbers of low, moderate, and high anxiety students.

As in Sparks and Ganschow's (2007) study, Horwitz and Yan work within the confines of a very specific conceptualization of FL learning anxiety – specifically, one which Horwitz aided in conceptualizing over two decades ago in her seminal paper (Horwitz et al., 1986). She expands upon it however, explicitly listing themes which the researchers assume to be most anxiety inducing, as will be explored shortly. These themes represent situations which are considered potentially anxiety provoking to the anxious language learner – a notion which then implicitly reinforces the conceptualization of identity that is apparent with Horwitz et al.'s research: all language learners share common characteristics (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Explicitly, Horwitz and Yan indeed see the benefit of considering each language learner as being a unique individual, administering qualitative research measures to focus on this conception, but it is the implicit notions which are also quite revealing.

The very act of administering the FLCAS and immediately establishing categories based upon the results of the questionnaire is potentially problematic and rather counter-intuitive to the exact issue that Horwitz and Yan are attempting to resolve. As the FLCAS does not monitor external sources of anxiety and is only administered once, the learners do not project an accurate and thorough depiction of themselves as language learners. The interviews which the researchers focus on and promote are intended to aid in constructing a better understanding of the FL learner, but if the FLCAS is the basis upon which the interviews are conducted, the learners and researchers may have pre-conceived notions about FL learning anxiety and the learner. Although the study does not state whether the participants were made aware of their classification as low, moderate or high anxious learners, the very act of taking the FLCAS gives the participant an idea of how their feelings may be perceived due to the statements on the scale; if the learner is consistently answering strongly to what can be only assumed to be anxious situations, the learner

will question whether he or she really does suffer from FL learning anxiety. This is an issue that deserves to be reexamined.

Initially, Horwitz and Yan constructed a set of themes based upon the factors which the students in their pilot study found to have the most influence on FL learning anxiety. These themes varied widely, ranging from genetic and personal characteristics, social and cultural elements, class arrangements, to motivation and interest, as well as regional differences, etc. (p. 156). The themes helped direct the interviews, but as a result of the ensuing discussions, a grounded-theory analysis (GTA) was implemented, intended to “identify factors that the learners associated with anxiety” (p. 154). The present learners demonstrated certain affinities (otherwise known as tendencies) towards specific elements of the classroom that affect the learning process, aside from those theorized by Horwitz and Yan (2008). Foreign language anxiety was an integral part of the learners' affinities, but also included were: regional differences, gender, language learning interest, language learning strategies, comparison with peers, etc. (p. 158-159). Of interest in these initial results is this *ubiquitous* focus on the social context and features of identity construction. As these affinities were constructed entirely on the basis of interview responses, they depict an accurate categorization of the varied aspects which aid in not only constructing FL learning anxiety, but the identity of the learner too. The learner is given time to discuss, clarify, and substantiate his or her claims during the interview process, an aspect which is lost in the administration of the FLCAS.

Still important are the results accumulated as a result of the interview process in this study. The GTA model, associating each affinity with other related affinities, speculates FL learning anxiety as being the result of other factors which impact language learning (p. 173). The

affinities of communicating with peers, learning strategies, and language learning interest and motivation were considered by the students to have the greatest anxiety inducing potential. Just as important is the acknowledgement that, as stated previously, “the specific variables and the interrelationships among them are strictly grounded in this contextual environment” (p. 174). While the Chinese students learning English may perceive these affinities as being particularly anxiety inducing, this does not necessarily mean that other students in other areas around the world develop the same affinities, reinforcing the ever important role of the social context and its dynamic nature. Taking this realization into consideration, it would be equivocal for the FLCAS to accurately account for feelings of anxiety for an individual if it does not consider that anxiety affinities differ so greatly amongst societies as a whole.

Another great development is achieved through the GTA model employed: identifying some of the key themes and affinities that cause anxiety in the FL learning classroom. These affinities are constructed on the basis of interviews and interaction with the learners themselves, who have detailed what elements of the language learning process generate and produce anxious feelings. When a learner is given the chance to discuss his or her feelings regarding the language learning process, connections are made through which the learner associates certain items to others, as the GTA model demonstrates, and it can begin to be seen where difficulties are focused. By constructing a framework, the learner can benefit by seeing reasons for why and how anxiety exists, information which a questionnaire is unable to provide. Interviews enable reflection by both the learner and the interviewer, and rather than being presented a scale and being asked to fill it out, the learner can understand that anxiety and identity are fluid constructs.

Therefore, as Horwitz and Yan have convincingly demonstrated, the effectiveness of qualitative analysis in this discourse is justifiable. They explain that:

the theoretical model described here has not only suggested how anxiety might work in combination with other language factors to influence L2 achievement, but it has also provided a new approach for research addressing language anxiety as well as other L2 learning problems. (p. 176)

This new approach should indeed be applied to FL learning anxiety research - it becomes precarious, however, when it is preceded by the FLCAS, as in this study. The FLCAS segregates language learners by examining them only once and without considering the fluidity of their identities. Again, this is not to say that the FLCAS cannot be effectively used; rather, one may consider whether it should follow or be placed throughout the qualitative analysis, so to not segregate learners prematurely. If the FLCAS' primary focus can be to educate learners about the various anxiety inducing situations in the classroom, then it can be an influential and effective secondary piece of information for learners. It can provide insight into specific areas of FL learning anxiety knowledge, while the interviews can establish the fact that anxiety exists beyond the boundaries of the classroom, and is manifested in a myriad of sources, many of which the FLCAS cannot, in its current state, take into consideration.

### 4.3 Concluding remarks

Having conducted an in-depth examination of four different studies researching FL learning anxiety, the virtues of each study deserve to be acknowledged, as they grapple with the complex feeling of FL learning anxiety through varying means. Although their studies are diverse, the qualitative meta-analysis allows for a comparison of the themes which are present in each individual study.

Conceptualizations of anxiety and identity are presented and discussed explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, each adopts a previously conceptualized theory of anxiety and expands upon it to further progress the discourse. Implicitly, however, each study has relegated FL learning anxiety as a trait which anxious learners embody, one which can only be remedied through specific anxiety-reducing means. Notions of identity are even more distinguishing; the majority of the studies do not even consider identity as being an aspect of FL learning anxiety, yet on a tacit level, it is apparent that the identity of the learner is being constructed as anything *but* fluid.

As the proposed paradigm attempts to elucidate, the identity of the language learner is every bit as important as FL learning anxiety itself. Furthermore, beliefs of languages, native and other, have the potential to play an integral role in both anxiety and identity construction. These notions should *not* be examined individually, but rather, they should be studied in *conjunction* with one another. Another integral aspect of these studies is the emergence of a qualitative focus, being supplemented with quantitative means – a movement which I consider necessary. I do not intend to argue that quantitative studies are not appropriate; rather, in terms of FL anxiety, they are perhaps best used as supplemental to qualitative studies. However, rather than just adopting

qualitative measures and the continual usage of the FLCAS, research should take a step further and critically examine the FLCAS and its intentions, specifically the conceptualization of FL learning anxiety which it promotes.

As demonstrated, each study could benefit from adopting a reconceptualization of anxiety which applies poststructuralist theories of identity and utilizes a new paradigm to examine the constitutive nature of the three primary aspects: FL learning anxiety, fluid identity and second language beliefs. In the final chapter, I will look at the implications of this paradigm and the reconceptualization of anxiety presented, in an effort to create a discussion concerning the future research goals and discourse of this unique field.

## 5 Discussion and implications

The task of reconceptualizing a theory which has been as prominently employed as the FLCAS throughout the past two decades is difficult to undertake. There is a reason it has been adopted in the myriad of studies in which it has - this instrument performs its intended purpose efficiently and thoroughly, detecting a very specific classification of anxiety in the participant. Furthermore, many researchers have attested to its validity and chosen to administer and rely upon the FLCAS in their studies based upon the testimonials of other researchers. This cycle reoccurs and has done so since the inception of the instrument. Research performed by Renée von Würde (2003), for example, cites the FCLAS' frequent application and reliability as being influential in her decision to select the instrument, while Cebreros (2003) justifies her utilization of the scale as it "had demonstrated satisfactory reliability coefficients with the first samples of population to which it had been administered" (Cebreros, 2003). The FLCAS has ostensibly gained a reputation as being *the* instrument of choice when performing FL learning anxiety research.

A complication arises however when the instrument is administered in part solely on the basis of its validity. Granted, there exist few alternative options for quantitative analysis in FL learning anxiety, yet it prompts the question: why hasn't the FLCAS been reexamined in more depth and to consider its conceptualization of anxiety? Apart from the conflicting argument posed by Sparks and Ganschow (2007), few studies have thoroughly reevaluated this conceptualization of anxiety which has existed for more than two decades.

This issue intensifies when the current state of identity research in SLA is considered, as there has been a dominant trend establishing the prominence of poststructuralist theories of

identity in this field. As discussed in the third chapter, these theories have garnered support by researchers such as Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001), Norton (2000), Tabouret-Keller (1997), Woolard (1998) and others. Block (2007) stresses the importance of this research too, writing that “before the 1990s, there was little to no research examining identity as a site of struggle, the negotiation of difference... or any other constructs associated with poststructuralist identity” (Block, 2007, p. 867). Yet he acknowledges Peirce’s (1995) early work to be influential in the emergence of this body of research and acceptance into SLA theory. This research has aptly demonstrated the effectiveness of examining SLA phenomena with poststructuralist theories of identity; as the language learning process is such a complex and intricate enterprise, consisting of views of other languages, motivations, attitudes and social implications, it can be quite beneficial to apply these poststructuralist theories of identity to each individual language learner. No single learner can articulate the exact same motivation and beliefs concerning languages as another, and therefore should not be identified and classified by the inclusive term ‘language learner’. The language learner should be rather embraced as being unique and having a complex reasoning for learning a language, notions which these poststructuralist theories of identity consider.

It is intriguing that little research has been done to associate these poststructuralist theories of identity to this specific facet of SLA. Minor advancements have been made towards establishing an affiliation between the two, specifically those found in Norton’s (2000) study, as she explains that anxiety cannot be constructed as an *inherent* trait of an individual; rather, it is socially constructed and modified by the copious and various experiences of the language learner (Norton, 2000, p. 123). Her claims are substantiated by the case studies she performs on immigrant women in Canada, yet never truly expanded upon specifically in terms of FL learning anxiety.

This remains the position in the literature of this field, as no explicit unions between FL learning anxiety and poststructuralist theories of identity are referenced or researched. Implicitly, however, aspects of these theories have emerged in recent discourse. As demonstrated in the last chapter, qualitative measures have begun to materialize in many research studies concerning FL learning anxiety. The reasons for such a noticeable shift in the methodology, I would argue, can be traced to this theoretical shift in SLA literature, implementing aspects of poststructuralist theories of identity, however tacit they may be. The researchers claim these qualitative measures, largely consisting of interviews and diary entries, are employed to aggregate a more complete understanding of the individual and his or her perceptions of not only FL learning anxiety but those of language learning too. The goals of each study are seemingly met, as the learners provide clear insight into aspects of language learning that quantitative measures may have difficulty examining. As is often found in the revelations evoked by such interviews, the learners discuss at length the social aspects permeating language learning and their capability to perpetuate anxiety. The researchers rely on this information as being independent and more comprehensive than similar data that can be gathered entirely on the basis of quantitative measures. Yet although these studies are intended to promote comprehension of the complex nature of the language learner and his or her experiences with FL learning anxiety, they in fact emphasize the benefits of a reconceptualization of anxiety.

When the very basis of the quantitative instrument is constructed upon a conceptualization of FL learning anxiety that depicts all second language learners as sharing common identities, the potential exists to unjustly classify FL learners as anxious when they may in fact only demonstrate certain anxious feelings at various times. Classifying learners as being alike and sharing similar experiences is questionable considering the research that has been

conducted arguing the very opposite - that each individual, even assuming that they may be members of a similar group, still have very individualistic characteristics which make them unique. It is this very distinctiveness that poststructuralist theories of identity concentrate on and which should be expanded to incorporate FL learning anxiety too.

The paradigm introduced in the third chapter intends to incorporate the individuality of FL learning anxiety, reconceptualizing it to be more appropriate in terms of current SLA identity theories. As was previously stated, the movement towards implementing more qualitative measures in FL learning anxiety research already exists and is gaining prominence in the discourse. The paradigm I suggest proposes an examination of the learner through three different aspects, each reciprocally contingent upon one another. With it and its intended reconceptualization of FL learning anxiety in mind, the potential implementation into the classroom and its implications will be discussed.

## **5.1 Implications in the classroom**

As the intent of this thesis is to produce a theory-based argument and offer insight into new perspectives of FL learning anxiety's understanding, it does not yet offer its own qualitative study; rather, potential implications of a study being performed will be considered in an effort to promote discussion of this reconceptualization and provide a possible means of analysis when approaching FL learning anxiety.

Qualitative facets of FL learning anxiety are the central focus of this reconceptualization, enabling the learner to provide a detailed account of his or her own experiences. By examining each of the three facets of the language-identity-anxiety paradigm with specific learner experiences, the researcher does not have to postulate how any one of the three facets may affect

the other; rather, the learner can describe each facet in detail and with the assistance of the researcher, discuss how each aspect may play an integrated role with the others. The order in which these items are discussed is inconsequential; so long as each item is given consideration in the discussions, valuable input will be ascertained.

### **5.1.1 Identity**

The fluid identity of the learner deserves to be discussed with each participant, and each role that the individual assumes at various moments of his or her life should be referenced. An individual assumes many roles in life: a brother, sister, son, daughter, student, friend, team member, etc. There exist infinite identity possibilities an individual can assume; once the learner understands how each identity coexists and may be activated at any time, the individual may begin to comprehend how fluid identity can impact FL learning anxiety and language beliefs. As Block (2007) writes, “individuals do not carve out an identity from the inside out or outside in, as it were; rather, their environments impose constraints whilst they act on those environments, continuously altering and recreating them” (Block, 2007, p. 866). Therefore, as the learner assumes various identities at different times in his or her life, the situations which may cause anxiety or the beliefs concerning the target language may differ and modify. Just like the fluid identity, FL learning anxiety may be considered fluid too, intensifying and diminishing at various times throughout a language course. The mutually constitutive nature of these items ensures that they cannot and will not remain static for a learner – a critical discernment that each learner should be made aware of. By understanding that anxious feelings may reside when identity shifts, he or she may not think as critically or negatively about the language learning process.

### 5.1.2 Language

The role of language and beliefs are perhaps the most covert of the three paradigm facets, as they work primarily subconsciously and often are permutations of a more prominent view which many people share. This is the case in FL language learning too, as the members of a language class all believe that learning the FL is important for specific reasons. Yet as Blackledge & Pavlenko (2001) write, groups are typically thought of as homogenous and, as a result, classifiable, but they should take into consideration differences in culture and society which make each individual unique (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 245). Therefore, although each language learner is in the classroom to learn the language, their reasons for doing so vary dramatically. For some, learning a second language is a means to an end, looking to gain a final credit to graduate from university and never having to speak the language again. Others may have found a genuine interest in the language and want to learn it for general interest purposes. Culture and society too can provide a valid reason for individuals to study a language, hoping to one day travel to a country which speaks the language or better understand a nation's history. Koul and Roy et al. (2009) cite reasons for Thai college students to study English, and their motivations vary drastically too, ranging from requirement by the University, to the desire to communicate like a native speaker (Koul & Roy et al., 2009, p. 676). Of course, many learners fall within the boundaries of these categories and, if imagined along a continuum, can be represented as having varied and complex interests, each representing a different motivation for learning the language. Second language belief constructions are complex, and as Blackledge & Pavlenko reveal, they “link considerations of language use, attitudes and beliefs with considerations of power and social inequality” (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 253). These

notions constitute the learner's view and definition of not only his or her native language, but those of all languages, especially the second language currently being learnt, and varying for each individual.

It is therefore opportunistic for the learner to realize that just like his or her fluid identity, language beliefs will vary too and may indirectly affect notions of identity and FL learning anxiety. The reciprocal nature of these items should be stressed to the learner to demonstrate that the language learning process seldom remains stagnant. Intricate details of this process shift often and can be reflected in either the identity or adopted language learning beliefs of the individual. Furthermore, the learner's language view is often socially constructed, as the individual may desire to learn the language in order to communicate with friends, family, or possibly native speakers. As these social relationships strengthen or diminish, the learner's view of language too will alter, and in effect, the individual's identity and reaction towards FL learning anxiety. Once more, the learner should be made aware of such effects before being administered an instrument intended to detect anxiety on the basis of statements alone.

### **5.1.3 Foreign language learning anxiety**

As important as the other two facets of the proposed reconceptualization are, the role of FL learning anxiety will likely be of most interest to a participant in a study - it is the easiest identifiable variable amongst the three, as all learners can relate to it and have experienced it, and is the most explicit in terms of adversely affecting the language learning process. If examined immediately with the Likert items on the FLCAS and without providing the participant with the insight into the three mutual aspects, the individual may inaccurately perceive his or her anxious feelings regarding FL learning as more severe or permanent than they may be. Norton (2000)

expands upon the variability of FL learning anxiety's in her case study, claiming that some of the immigrant language learners felt uncomfortable at times, leading to anxiety while speaking the language, yet if feeling comfortable, had no trouble at all (Norton, 2000, p. 124). The learner should therefore firstly understand that like the other aspects of the paradigm, FL learning anxiety is not a static variable and can be impacted and influenced by other facets. Yet FL learning anxiety is not only acted upon, but can also be the agent of change. As situations in the language learning process incite anxiety, these feelings can pervade the individual's own identity; he or she may feel like a lesser student, as the language is being learnt ineffectively and performance is poor in school. This, depending on the social circumstances, can alter the learner's language beliefs too. If language is perceived as an ability only native speakers can master, then poor performance in the language classroom, reinforced by anxiety, will only further emphasize this problem.

The learner should therefore be made aware of FL learning anxiety's complex nature, just as is explained with the other two facets. It is rudimentary to think of this form of anxiety as being a disability, negatively impacting the performance of a learner and existing as a static trait that inflicts the learner permanently. The results of the FLCAS, if administered prematurely, could reinforce such feelings if the learner is intended to rely *exclusively* on the results of the instrument. Yet if the learner can discuss his or her anxious feelings, as has been done and recommended in some of the most recent research, then the learner may perceive FL learning anxiety as being not as debilitating as once imagined.

All three facets of this reconceptualization provide both the agency and receptiveness to transform a learner's perception of language learning. The reciprocal and intricate nature of each aspect is what makes the identification of FL learning anxiety on the basis of a scale's results

rather difficult to justify. Yet as previously implied, the FLCAS is far from ineffective - it still can succinctly summarize potential sources of anxiety in the classroom. If given to the learner after having already discussed his or her perceptions of identity, views of other languages and anxiety, it can educate the learner of other potential sources of FL learning anxiety. This can provoke awareness, realizing that many sources of anxiety are in fact not universally anxiety invoking. Furthermore, those that are can then be understood as only possible, not necessary, sources of anxiety.

#### **5.1.4 Pedagogical implications**

In the process of determining which situations or conditions provoke anxiety in the classroom, research typically offers solutions not only for the learner, but for the teacher as well. As the anxiety experienced by these learners is comprised of characteristics that each anxious language learner shares, according to the conceptualization of FL learning anxiety that is adhered to (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 129), studies typically offer solutions that the instructor can accommodate in an effort to reduce anxiety – a potentially precarious implementation.

Abu-Rabia (2004) recommends broad, effective measures for FL teaching to combat anxiety, stating that by being more receptive towards students and giving alternative assessment measures, anxiety in the classroom may be reduced (Abu-Rabia, 2004, p. 719). Chen and Chang (2004), whose study was examined in the previous chapter, urge teachers to improve the self-perception of their students with anxious feelings by focusing on positive experiences – these positive experiences can be the result of good grades by providing “mini-quizzes, alternative testing methods (such as self evaluation or individualized assessment), and pretest practice using similar test items” (Chen & Chang, 2004, p. 285). Horwitz and Yan (2008) too contend that the

instructor can be instrumental in relieving students of anxiety by grouping students together on the basis of their language skill, reducing comparison with peers (Horwitz & Yan, 2008, p. 175).

By implementing reforms into the classroom, specifically targeted to reduce anxiety, the instructor is reinforcing Horwitz et al.'s conceptualization of FL learning anxiety by suggesting that each language learner experiences anxiety similarly. Problems arise however when the proposed paradigm is brought into consideration. By attempting to administer a solution that will benefit every learner, the other students in the class will inevitably receive input that may not benefit their learning style and can even lead to debilitation in learning.

The instructor can only do so much for the classroom's atmosphere if attempting to reduce anxiety. There comes a point where the instructor has created a learning environment which is receptive to many learners; as Abu-Rabia writes, "successful teaching depends on the teacher's optimal involvement in the learning material and interest in the learner" (Abu-Rabia, 2004, p. 714). This optimal involvement should therefore not be disturbed by attempting to control levels of anxiety beyond establishing an exemplary learning environment. Lam (1973) reports that there are several characteristics which make an ideal teacher, namely: relaxation, openness and originality (Lam, 1973). The teacher need not accommodate every individual learner difference, especially in regards to possible anxiety invoking situations which in turn may be unique for each individual. By attempting to further modify the learning environment to adapt to select students who may exhibit increased signs of anxiety after an administration of the FLCAS may instead disrupt the atmosphere for other students. Aida (1994) argues too that "foreign language anxiety may not be alleviated simply through certain teaching methodologies" (Aida, 1994, p. 164), citing approaches such as the Natural Approach to not unconditionally inhibit anxiety. The responsibility of promoting change lies squarely in the hands of the student.

It is certainly more strenuous for the learner to take responsibility for his or her actions in the classroom, but it must be done to properly succeed when learning a second language. Frantzen and Magnan (2005) stress that the teacher can be a facilitator, by talking about anxiety in the class and promoting a community in the classroom, but do not suggest specific actions that the instructor should take to target anxious language learners (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005, p. 183). Yet by giving the learner the motivation and by using the qualitative measures suggested, focusing primarily on the usefulness of interviews and personal communication with each individual, he or she may be able to progress to a point where it is understood that to succeed, one must understand his or her own learning style, beliefs of languages and fluid identity.

These implications and the proposed framework are not without their complications, however, and although they present an alternative and contemporary means of examining FL learning anxiety, they still demand further research and analysis to test their validity.

## **5.2 Complications**

As can be expected with a reconceptualization of a framework that has existed and gained prominence over the past two decades, there are complications which need to be addressed.

Certainly, the proposed conceptualization and paradigm must be assessed with extensive implementation in future research. The ideas I have expressed are formulated in current theory and are intended as a call for other researchers to adopt this line of thinking rather than continuing to administer the FLCAS and use only its results for their studies. To convince others to endorse this conceptualization of anxiety is a demanding request requiring intensive testing of the paradigm, but I would argue that its verification will only reveal greater and more significant data on FL learning anxiety from the eyes of the learners themselves. The unique benefit in

implementing a qualitative methodology is that the researcher is not restricted to previously established data constructed within the confines of a scale or instrument, and the participants can elucidate the researcher with information that was perhaps not even considered.

With qualitative methodology, however, come restrictions as well. Participant quantity limitations are inherent with a methodology that relies on one-on-one interaction with the researcher and participant. Whereas a quantitative instrument can be administered to hundreds of participants at once, interviews may take longer and will have to be done either individually or in small groups. The results will be more specific for each participant, but the length of time required to procure these results is necessarily longer. Yet as Sparks and Ganschow (2007) have demonstrated, longitudinal studies offer a wealth of information that cannot be ascertained through short-term research projects. The potential growth of the participants, especially in language learning, can be quite revealing, but this temporal luxury is not available to all researchers, and often times quantitative studies are the most efficient means to perform an analysis.

With these complications in mind, the necessity of research being performed with this framework must be stressed. It is only through the trial of this framework and paradigm that their validity can be tested and hopefully improved upon.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The past two decades of innovation in the field of SLA has been tremendous. New insight detailing how the learner is constructed and perceived expresses the unique identity of each individual and this individuality should be celebrated. Yet although these advancements in

SLA have gained recognition in the field, their application in specific FL learning anxiety discourse has yet to be fully explored.

What I have proposed is an innovative means to discuss and examine FL learning anxiety, looking to reconsider the previously established norms. For too long have these norms been delegated as a necessity in FL learning research and been administered solely on their reputation as being satisfactory instruments of measurement.

Scholarship should be constantly reexamining and discussing theories which have had great influence; if these theories are not being explored and debated then we are not being critical enough as scholars. The framework I propose is meant as a basis upon which others can construct analyses and prompt discussion with the participants regarding feelings in FL learning anxiety.

FL learning anxiety remains a difficult feeling to research. Even if the learner's personal experiences are brought into consideration, the varying and intricate specificities of anxiety will only continue to complicate our understanding of FL learning anxiety. For this reason, FL learning anxiety's strategic focus should be firmly placed upon educating learners, rather than analyzing them. Education is integral for an improved understanding of learner's FL learning anxiety.

It is ultimately up to the learner to determine whether success can be had in the FL learning endeavor. Norton nicely writes that "when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (Norton, 2000, p. 10-11). The learner should understand his or her role and goals in language learning if success is to be had in the endeavor. While anxiety may create a seemingly impenetrable barrier leading to

success, learning a language does not need to be unfairly hampered by inhibiting preconceptions of anxiety's effect. Through educating the learner, he or she can develop the understanding that these FL learning anxiety instances are simply that: instances. They are just as fluid as the identity and second language beliefs that the learner also embodies, and together formulate the learner's complete understanding of FL learning anxiety.

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