

Research Paper

# The Relations between Student Foreign Language Anxiety and Social Variables

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## Abstract

Due to the labour market expectations, universities are responsible for preparing their students for competitive employment in Hungary or abroad. However, language anxiety is an insurmountable problem for many people, making it difficult to learn foreign languages, even though a confident command of them is a key factor in any job interview and essential in the world of work. This complex is one of the main factors hindering language learning, affecting all people to either a greater or lesser extent. In 2023, the University of Debrecen's researchers studied the impact of language anxiety on foreign language learning, surveying approximately 400 students of the university's commerce, marketing, and business management courses. After having a questionnaire filled in, descriptive statistical and cross-tabulation analyses were conducted, and the focus was on analysing the impact of social variables on language anxiety. Our research shows that women are significantly more anxious than men. Students who work while studying and use their foreign language skills at work experience significantly more anxiety than students who do not use a foreign language. Parents' language skills significantly affect their children's language anxiety. The research topic is relevant, as it highlights the importance of teaching strategies to reduce language anxiety in university foreign language teaching. The present study facilitates the teaching of those students who would not be able to overcome the anxiety barrier.

*Keywords:* language anxiety; social variables; language teaching strategies; descriptive statistics

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## Introduction

The present study aims to explore the role of language anxiety in language learning and the use of a foreign language in different communication situations. Foreign language anxiety is situation-based worry that can be linked to the context of language learning. It is usually accompanied by an excited state of the vegetative nervous system. While conversing in a foreign language, anxious language learners often feel physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, rapid breathing, and a higher heart rate. This condition has a negative effect on cognitive functions and thus inhibits the language learning process. In their 1986 study, Horwitz and his co-authors point out that language anxiety can be distinguished from the feeling of fear before general exams. Thus, language anxiety should be looked at as an independent phenomenon (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Language learners often face language anxiety as an obstacle to language learning. In the case of certain language learners, this inhibition can stop the language-learning process, and the experience of failure can permanently eliminate the desire to learn a foreign language. Undoubtedly, this proves to be a drawback to success for most language learners. Language teachers have a challenging task when they try to encourage

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students to get rid of this feeling of fear by crossing their boundaries. To provide tutor support for language learners, we need to learn as much as possible about the nature, causes, and characteristics of language anxiety. By exploring these questions, we can get closer to the root of the predicament and find answers to how language teachers can support apprehensive learners throughout the language learning process. By understanding this hindrance, we are motivated to create an open and supportive atmosphere in the group, which can remove inhibitions and enhance the success of foreign language acquisition. These goals motivated us when completing the questionnaire research presented in this study and evaluating the results. Several language teaching-methodological studies have dealt with this issue; the more empirical research we do, the more knowledge we gain about this highly complex psychological phenomenon, and the more effective methods we can develop to increase the success of language teaching for anxious language learners. Our research topic is relevant because it sensitises the readers to anxiety in language learning and draws attention to the importance of learning and teaching strategies to be applied in university foreign language education that relieve it.

In 2023, researchers of the University of Debrecen investigated the impact of language anxiety on the language learning process of economics students by conducting a questionnaire survey of 400 commerce-marketing and economics-management undergraduate students at the Faculty of Economics and Business.

By analysing the empirical research data and drawing conclusions, the study aims to come up with ideas and options regarding what aspects university language teachers should take into account to make language teaching at university as stress-free as possible.

### Literature Review

Anxiety can paralyse a language learner to the extent that the learner can almost completely block the learning process or even give up on it; however, anxiety can also encourage increased effort, which can lead to an improvement in performance compared to other language learners, thus becoming more successful. Several international studies have been carried out to gain a comprehensive picture of the main factors that are influencing anxiety and the effects of foreign language anxiety. One branch of studies focused on the impact of personality on language anxiety. According to Bailey (1983), foreign language anxiety can be traced back to differences in the self-image of language learners. Thus, Bailey defines the difference between competitive and non-competitive language learners based on successful and unsuccessful self-concepts. Unsuccessful language learners have a negative self-image associated with anxiety. Paralysing anxiety can lead to giving up language learning, while improved performance can strengthen the success of the learning process. The competitive language learner who sees himself as successful rewards himself, giving him further impetus. This is also due to the fact that he is not hampered by inhibitory or reticent anxiety, allowing him to enjoy learning in an atmosphere of success. A study in England presented that student engagement determines the relationship between foreign language anxiety and English language performance. It is concluded that reducing anxiety and increasing student engagement can improve English language performance. However, student engagement alone cannot fully counteract the effects of foreign language anxiety, suggesting that other potential mediating factors should be examined in this context (Oruç & Demirci, 2020).

Some researchers specifically studied language anxiety in the classroom. A study by Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022) investigated the challenges of foreign language anxiety among learners of English as a foreign language. They concluded that many personal factors might contribute to anxiety during speaking. To help alleviate anxiety, teachers can use strategies such as more giving preparation time, avoiding random prompts and providing constructive feedback. Moreover, it is worthwhile dealing with students' problems directly, for it aids in the reduction of anxiety and improves performance in classes where they have to speak.

Jin, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2021) investigated how recalling language achievements can decrease foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) through a positive psychology approach. Their research involved 88 Chinese university students studying English, who were divided into an experimental and a control group. During a 30-day period, the experimental group performed guided recall tasks on their language development, while the control group did not. Anxiety levels were measured before and after intervention. The results showed that the experimental group showed a significant drop in anxiety, particularly in two dimensions: fear of English language learning and anxiety about negative evaluation.

In contrast, anxiety levels in the control group remained unchanged. Text analysis of the experimental group's reflections revealed that they frequently called to mind the development in the four skills, vocabulary and grammar. They also reported non-linguistic developments such as increased self-confidence, intercultural

knowledge and examination skills. The study confirms that positive psychological interventions, such as recollection can improve learner emotional well-being and lessen FLCA.

Jakub Bielak (2022) investigated the relationship between the anxiety and enjoyment that comes from language learning, through oral, social English tasks. His examination paid particular attention to the effect of these two emotions on learning a second language. The study concluded that anxiety harmed speech fluency. In contrast, enjoyment had a positive, albeit less significant impact than the effect of anxiety. In conclusion, dealing with these emotional factors in language learning processes is important as it can enhance performance. The research findings of Dewaele, Botes and Meftah (2023) provided similar results. They explored the effects of foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, and foreign language boredom on the academic achievement of Moroccan English learners. The results revealed that anxiety had the greatest adverse effect on English test scores. This was followed by a slightly milder negative effect of boredom on scores, and enjoyment, conversely, having a positive, lesser effect on performance.

Toyama and Yamazaki (2022) inspected the relationship between foreign language anxiety in the classroom and the cultural dimensions of individualism versus collectivism. In their research, they found that higher education institutions with strong collectivism also had higher levels of anxiety, while the same relationship was not significant for primary and secondary schools. These findings underline the importance of taking into account cultural dimensions when examining students' foreign language anxiety. In 1999, Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley found that students who had previously travelled abroad had lower levels of foreign language anxiety. Those who had previously studied a foreign language also had lower levels of anxiety. Jiang and Dewaele (2020) investigated foreign language anxiety among Chinese university students, focusing specifically on their experiences outside the classroom. They found that the geographical background and short-term experiences spent abroad do not have a profound impact on anxiety; gender and ethnicity provided the same result. Participants who started learning English at a young age had lower levels of anxiety. They established that students should be offered more opportunities for independent language practice outside the classroom to build adequate self-confidence.

The gender of students has also been examined. Based on Geçkin's (2020) research in Turkey, some important differences can be observed between women and men in terms of language anxiety. Women have higher levels of anxiety, prefer evaluation at a later time, and consider repetition as the most effective way to correct errors. On the other hand, men consider elicitation a useful method of correction, and they consider it important to have time to correct their mistakes. However, both genders consider feedback a necessary element of the learning process, so they have a positive attitude towards teacher feedback. Thus, gender differences affect language anxiety and the preference for corrective feedback in oral communication. The main reason behind the difference in language anxiety is that women are more afraid of negative evaluations or poor performance in class. Men would probably not feel uncomfortable conversing with a native speaker, while women would become nervous and confused. Similarly to Geçkin, Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (1999) also established that female language learners have a higher level of anxiety.

To get a more comprehensive picture of language anxiety, one cannot ignore the results of Hungarian researchers. It is essential to look at Tar's (2007) investigation among students of Debrecen University. In her thesis, she emphasises the role of teachers, group dynamics and classroom atmosphere as key factors in successful language teaching. Also, she shows that psychological methods can be used to support the effective management of anxiety. In examining the influence of anxiety, the results show that the past negative experiences of learners often hinder progress. Meanwhile, a supportive and motivating environment reduces anxiety levels. The findings suggest that gender, parental education, learner motivation and the learning environment all play a significant role in language learning success. The study found that the confidence and support teachers provide help increase learner self-confidence, and achievement. This is especially pertinent in lessons that focus on creativity and interactive learning methods.

Correlations between motivation and anxiety were revealed in a 2016 research study by Csizér and Piniel, who analysed the responses of 236 students in Budapest. They concluded that facilitating anxiety could stimulate student achievement while debilitating anxiety hinders it. The results suggest that language teachers may benefit from encouraging positive emotions, as this can increase learner motivation and reduce inhibitory anxiety. The research also suggests that learner experiences and classroom environments heavily influence the dynamics of motivation and anxiety. They highlight that language-learning anxiety indirectly shapes motivation and that classroom experiences, self-concept and international orientation promote motivated behaviour.

In addition to the capital, it is also worth focusing on other regions of Hungary, for which Bajzát (2022) provides an excellent basis, examining the attitudes and anxiety related to foreign language learning of

secondary school students in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county. Four hundred fifty-three students from 16 schools studying English and German participated in the study. The findings demonstrate that language-learning anxiety is generally low, but speaking in front of the class and being compared with classmates can cause tension. These factors trigger more substantial anxiety among English learners than among German learners. The study suggests using experiential pedagogical methods and playful exercises to enhance positive classroom experiences, helping to increase motivation and reduce debilitating anxiety.

Bánhegyi, Nagy and Fajt (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of Korean and Hungarian university student motivation and anxiety when learning English as a foreign language (EFL). They primarily investigated the interaction between motivation and anxiety. The research used questionnaires applied to a small sample of both groups. The results point to differences in motivation and anxiety between the two groups. Korean students showed higher intrinsic motivation and placed a high emphasis on learning EFL for their future career goals. In contrast, Hungarian students showed moderate motivation, driven mainly by academic requirements. Levels of anxiety also differed, with Korean students reporting higher FLCA, which could be attributed to their intense achievement and result orientation. They established that teaching strategies should be adapted to the specific needs of different student groups. Having reviewed the relevant literature we have worded the following research question: Do different social background variables influence the foreign language anxiety of economics students?

### Data and Methods

A special questionnaire was compiled and applied for the purpose of study, and 396 economics and business students completed it anonymously. The gender breakdown of the respondents was as follows: 38.5% male (154), 59.3% female (237) and 1.3% of students (5) refused to reveal their gender. Due to the low number, the latter group of students was excluded from the analysis. The questionnaire included attitude enquiries with potential responses on a 5-point Likert scale. At the beginning of the questionnaire, students had to answer some social-variable-related questions and give their major, gender, and age.

Also, the respondents were asked to mark how much they agreed with language-anxiety attitude statements on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Eleven statements were employed focusing on the instruments utilised to evaluate language anxiety. These statements encompassed both the mindset and the aspects that could be considered when assessing this particular sense of nervousness. The attitude statements were as follows: 'I often worry that my performance in a foreign language does not match my expectations in my language classes/life situations.' 'I feel anxious about foreign language use in my courses.' 'I am concerned about what my classmates think about my language abilities.' 'I often feel embarrassed when I need to work on a significant project in a foreign language.' 'I am worried that my second language will sound awkward.' 'I am afraid of misunderstanding native users of foreign languages in real-life situations.' 'I feel nervous about completing activities requiring a foreign language.' 'I feel embarrassed when my foreign language mistakes are corrected.' 'I feel stressed when talking to a native user of a foreign language.' 'I feel stressed when talking to a non-native user of a foreign language,' 'I worry about my future job interview in a foreign language.'

We employed SPSS for Windows version 23.0 as our statistical software for data analysis. We used descriptive statistics, and the crosstab analysis resulted in several significant differences between the variables. Data collection occurred between September and December 2023 through a guided process. Respondents were allowed to anonymously complete questionnaires at the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Debrecen. Students received oral instructions and information about why they were asked to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, they could ask for clarification and fill out the questionnaire. Our questionnaire included the methodological aspects indicated by Hunyadi et al. (2000). After examining the answers, we drew conclusions about the relationship between language anxiety and different social variables.

Babbie's (2000) method served as the guiding principle of the investigation. Its pivotal point is offering an accurately defined attitude statement in a short declarative sentence, and then the respondents decide how true the statement is for them (Babbie, 2000). They had to indicate this on a five-point Likert scale, where the degrees were as follows: 1 = not typical at all, 2 = barely typical, 3 = moderately typical, 4 = very typical, 5 = fully typical. There were 11 statements in the questionnaire. Because of the level of measurement and the distribution of the variables analysed, we opted for one of the most commonly used non-parametric statistical procedures, Pearson's chi-square test, to examine the correlation between two variables. This method is a non-parametric statistical procedure that examines the existence of a significant difference between an empirical and a

theoretical/conditional frequency table. The latter represents the independence of the investigated variables (at most ordinal measurement level variables). If the null hypothesis is rejected, we can establish that the examined variables are not independent of each other.

The parameters are the social background variables (gender, type of settlement, studies abroad, working alongside studies, use of a foreign language at work, parents' education and language skills) and the 11 different language anxiety variables mentioned earlier. Among the categories of the five-point Likert scale included in the questionnaire, we combined the first and last two levels, so we worked with the following categories during the analyses: 1 = not true, 2 = moderately true, 3 = true. In the cross-tabulation analyses, we also examined the corrected residuals, i.e. whether an overrepresented value was found in a cell compared to the expected distribution. If the value of the corrected residuals was higher than  $|2|$ , then the value in the given cell was highlighted. For, according to Lázár (2009), if the value of the corrected residual is higher than  $|2|$ , then there is a significant relationship between the two categories. We also took the value of the Cramer's V coefficient into account. It provides information on the strength of the relationship between the variables as follows:  $<0.3$ : weak relationship;  $0.3-0.5$ : moderate relationship;  $>0.5$ : strong relationship (Crewson, 2006).

## Results

We managed to uncover significant differences between many empirical and theoretical/conditional frequency tables, i.e. we successfully identified several connections between language anxiety and various social background variables.

In the first stage of our analysis, we examined whether there is a significant relationship between student gender and the various language anxiety variables (*Table 1*). We found that all eleven anxiety variables showed a significant correlation with the gender of those filling out the questionnaire. However, we must know that the differences between women and men in terms of anxiety depend on the individual and not all women or men feel anxiety in the same way when communicating in a foreign language. The first significant correlation concerned the variable "I often worry that my foreign language performance does not meet the expectations set in the language class/in various life situations" ( $\chi^2=22.37$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.23$ ). Women are significantly more worried than men when meeting the expectations set in the language class or in foreign language-related real-life situations. We established the same with the variable "I have a feeling of fear when I use a foreign language". When using a foreign language, women are significantly more afraid than men ( $\chi^2=25.86$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.25$ ). Women are significantly more concerned about what others think of their foreign language capabilities ( $\chi^2=24.83$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.25$ ) and feel more uncomfortable when they have to work on a significant project in a foreign language ( $\chi^2=32.66$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.28$ ). Female students are also significantly more worried than male students that they do not speak the foreign language adequately ( $\chi^2=25.30$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.25$ ). Women are much more afraid than men of not understanding native speakers in real-life situations ( $\chi^2=23.55$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.24$ ). Furthermore, we found that women are significantly more anxious when doing activities requiring a foreign language than men ( $\chi^2=27.82$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.26$ ). They feel significantly more embarrassed than male students when correcting their mistakes in a foreign language ( $\chi^2=12.25$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.17$ ), and they are also much more tense when they have to speak with a native speaker ( $\chi^2=25.18$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.25$ ) or with a non-native speaker ( $\chi^2=19.58$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.22$ ). Finally, we found that women are much more worried about future foreign language job interviews than male students ( $\chi^2=11.98$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.22$ ).

In summary, we can state that the gender of students learning a foreign language and language anxiety are closely related to each other and that gender as a social background variable significantly affects language anxiety. This finding coincides with Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley's (1999) and Geçkin's (2020) research results stating that women have a higher level of anxiety when using a foreign language. They declare that female language learners are more afraid of negative feedback and poor performance in class. Women's increased anxiety can be attributed to psychological, social and cultural reasons. Society puts constant pressure on women in terms of social expectations, and these requirements may be transformed into inner demands in several areas of life including performing well in foreign language competencies. Sadly, the possibility of failures and making mistakes in foreign languages generates fear and anxiety.

Another reason is that women often tend to underestimate their abilities and self-confidence. Looking at the communication style of the genders, women strive more for accuracy. The pursuit of this kind of perfection

increases the feeling of language anxiety. We can conclude that the fact that women are more anxious than men regarding language stems from complex and multifaceted reasons.

**Table 1.** Relations between gender and language anxiety variables.

			Female N:239	Male N:156				Female N:239	Male N:156
I often worry that my performance in a foreign language does not match my expectations in my language classes/life situations. ( $\chi^2=22.37$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.23$ )	Not true	Count	62	71	I feel nervous about completing activities requiring a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=27.82$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.26$ )	Not true	Count	62	71
		Adj. Res.	-4	4			Adj. Res.	-4	4
	Slightly true	Count	58	42		Slightly true	Count	58	42
		Adj. Res.	-0,6	0,6			Adj. Res.	-0,6	0,6
	True	Count	119	43		True	Count	119	43
		Adj. Res.	4,4	-4,4			Adj. Res.	4,4	-4,4
I feel anxious about foreign language use in my courses. ( $\chi^2=25.86$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.25$ )	Not true	Count	86	89	I feel embarrassed when my foreign language mistakes are corrected. ( $\chi^2=12.25$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0,17$ )	Not true	Count	103	89
		Adj. Res.	-4,1	4,1			Adj. Res.	-2,7	2,7
	Slightly true	Count	65	44		Slightly true	Count	50	36
		Adj. Res.	-0,2	0,2			Adj. Res.	-0,5	0,5
	True	Count	88	23		True	Count	86	31
		Adj. Res.	4,8	-4,8			Adj. Res.	3,4	-3,4
I am concerned about what my classmates think about my language abilities. ( $\chi^2=24.83$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.25$ )	Not true	Count	72	85	I feel stressed when talking to a native user of a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=25.18$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.25$ )	Not true	Count	83	91
		Adj. Res.	-4,8	4,8			Adj. Res.	-4,6	4,6
	Slightly true	Count	65	34		Slightly true	Count	51	31
		Adj. Res.	1,2	-1,2			Adj. Res.	0,4	-0,4
	True	Count	102	37		True	Count	105	34
		Adj. Res.	3,9	-3,9			Adj. Res.	4,5	-4,5
I often feel embarrassed when I need to work on a significant project in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=32.66$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.28$ )	Not true	Count	82	90	I feel stressed when talking to a non-native user of a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=19.58$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.22$ )	Not true	Count	109	106
		Adj. Res.	-4,6	4,6			Adj. Res.	-4,4	4,4
	Slightly true	Count	58	42		Slightly true	Count	56	25
		Adj. Res.	-0,6	0,6			Adj. Res.	1,8	-1,8
	True	Count	99	24		True	Count	74	25
		Adj. Res.	5,5	-5,5			Adj. Res.	3,3	-3,3
I am worried that my second language will sound awkward. ( $\chi^2=25.30$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.25$ )	Not true	Count	79	80	I worry about my future job interview in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=11.98$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.22$ )	Not true	Count	76	83
		Adj. Res.	-3,6	3,6			Adj. Res.	-4,2	4,2
	Slightly true	Count	45	40		Slightly true	Count	57	33
		Adj. Res.	-1,6	1,6			Adj. Res.	0,6	-0,6
	True	Count	115	36		True	Count	106	40
		Adj. Res.	5	-5			Adj. Res.	3,8	-3,8
I am afraid of misunderstanding native users of foreign languages in real-life situations. ( $\chi^2=23.55$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.24$ )	Not true	Count	97	98					
		Adj. Res.	-4,3	4,3					
	Slightly true	Count	57	34					
		Adj. Res.	0,5	-0,5					
	True	Count	85	24					
		Adj. Res.	4,4	-4,4					

Source: Authors' own contribution, 2024.

In the second phase of our research, we investigated whether there is a significant correlation between the type of settlement where a student is from (village, small town, big city, county seat, capital city) and the language anxiety variables, assuming that people living in a big city and in the countryside show significant differences. Confirming Jiang and Dewaele's (2020) findings, our cross-tabulation analysis did not show significant results between the settlement type and the language anxiety variables.

Recent investigations by Jiang and Dewaele's (202) revealed that spending a short time in a foreign country did not affect language anxiety. In the third stage of our research, we intended to examine whether spending a longer period abroad, i.e. studying abroad had any influence on language anxiety variables (Table 2). In this phase, we only established a significant correlation in two cases. The first significance was found between the variable "I worry about what other people think about my foreign language skills" and language anxiety. Students who previously attended school abroad are significantly more concerned about what others think of their language skills than those who did not ( $\chi^2=6.63$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.12$ ). Our analysis also revealed that those students who had attended school abroad felt significantly more stressed when speaking in a foreign language with a non-native speaker than those who had not attended school abroad before ( $\chi^2=6.83$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.13$ ). Surprisingly, the variable "I feel stressed when I have to speak a foreign language with a native speaker" did not show any significant result.

The above analysis can be traced back to several reasons. Students who went to school abroad probably faced higher expectations and pressure regarding their language competence, and these experiences created a stronger feeling of anxiety in them compared to those who did not go to school abroad. As an additional reason, we can also mention that going to school abroad provides a basis for comparison, and meeting with native speakers and people with a higher level of language skills leads language users to compare their language skills to the more proficient. This can then cause language anxiety. In addition, when studying abroad, language learners may be confronted with unfamiliar dialects, accents, nuances and connotations making them aware of language challenges, which can cause insecurity.

**Table 2.** Relations between studying abroad and language anxiety variables.

			Did you go to school abroad?					Did you go to school abroad?	
			YES	NO				YES	NO
I am concerned about what my classmates think about my language abilities. ( $\chi^2=6.63$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.12$ )	Not true	Coun	13	147	I feel stressed when talking to a non-native user of a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=6.83$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.13$ )	Not true	Coun	16	203
		Adj. Res.	-,1	,1			Adj. Res.	-,8	,8
	Slightly true	Coun	3	98		Slightly true	Coun	3	78
		Adj. Res.	-2,2	2,2			Adj. Res.	-1,7	1,7
	True	Coun	17	122		True	Coun	14	86
		Adj. Res.	2,1	-2,1			Adj. Res.	2,4	-2,4

Source: Authors' own contribution, 2024.

We also found two significant correlations in the case of the variable of continuing studies while working (Table 3). Students who work in addition to their current studies significantly more often feel uncomfortable when they have to work on a significant project in a foreign language than students who do not work alongside their studies ( $\chi^2=8.47$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.14$ ). The correlation with the variable "I am worried about my future job interview in a foreign language" is also significant. Students who work in addition to their current studies are vastly more worried about a future foreign language job interview than those who do not work while studying ( $\chi^2=8.52$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.14$ ). We assume students who do not work have not yet directly faced the stress caused by a job interview or felt the anxiety thereof.



The reasons for the above correlations are probably the following: increased lack of time and energy due to parallel working and studying, greater responsibility and pressure (standing their ground and performing in two places at the same time), furthermore previous negative experiences due to the lack of language competencies, which all amplify fear, stress and anxiety during linguistic interactions.

**Table 3.** Relations between working alongside studies and language anxiety variables.

			Do you work alongside your current studies?					Do you work alongside your current studies?	
			YES	NO				YES	NO
I often feel embarrassed when I need to work on a significant project in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=8.47$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.14$ )	Not true	Count	82	94	I worry about my future job interview in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=8.52$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.14$ )	Not true	Count	77	86
		Adj. Res.	2,8	-2,8			Adj. Res.	2,8	-2,8
	Slightly true	Count	30	71	Slightly true	Count	33	57	
		Adj. Res.	-2,2	2,2		Adj. Res.	-,5	,5	
	True	Count	44	79	True	Count	46	101	
		Adj. Res.	-,9	,9		Adj. Res.	-2,4	2,4	

Source: Authors' own contribution, 2024.

In the fifth stage of our study, we looked for an answer to whether there is a significant correlation between students' working alongside their studies and using their language skills and different language anxiety variables (Table 4). The first significant correlation was identified with the variable "I often feel uncomfortable when I have to work on a significant project in a foreign language". Students who work next to their studies feel significantly more uncomfortable when they have to work on a significant project in a foreign language than students who do not have a job ( $\chi^2=7.00$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.18$ ). Those who have never used their language skills at work could not have encountered stress generated by language use. We also established a significant correlation between the variables "Anxiety while performing activities requiring a foreign language" and foreign language use at work alongside studies ( $\chi^2=6.34$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.17$ ). Students who work besides their studies and use foreign languages at work are significantly more anxious during foreign language activities than those who do not use their foreign language knowledge. One reason for this may be that those who do not use their language skills have not yet experienced the kind of anxiety-related challenges that an activity needing foreign language skills generates. The following significant correlation was observed about the variable "I feel stressed when I have to speak a foreign language with a non-native speaker". Students who work alongside their studies and use foreign languages feel significantly more stressed when they have to speak to a non-native speaker in a foreign language than those who do not use their foreign language skills ( $\chi^2=10.92$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.22$ ). There is a significant correlation with the variable "I am afraid of not understanding native speakers in real-life situations" ( $\chi^2=10.97$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.22$ ). Students who work alongside their studies and use a foreign language at work are significantly more afraid of not being understood by native speakers in real-life situations than those who do not use foreign language skills at work. Those who do not use their foreign language skills could not have encountered fear arising from language use.

The following significant correlation concerns the variables "I worry about not speaking adequately in a foreign language" and language use at work while studying ( $\chi^2=6.00$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.16$ ). Students who use their foreign language skills at work are significantly more anxious about not speaking the foreign language properly than those who do not use their language skills at work, and the working students

also feel significantly more stressed when having to talk to a native speaker ( $\chi^2 = 6.51$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.17$ ).

The last significant correlation in this phase of our investigation is related to the variables "I am worried about my future foreign language job interview" and studying and working while using foreign languages ( $\chi^2=6.89$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.18$ ). Students who work and use their language skills at work are significantly more worried about their future job interview in a foreign language than those who do not use a foreign language.

Overall, in this phase of the examination, we discovered significant correlations in seven cases, from which we can conclude that using foreign languages at work significantly affects student language anxiety.

From the above analysis, we deduce that the experiences gained in practical language use can contribute to increasing anxiety, because, in real-life foreign language-related situations, where the student meets native speakers and people with different language skills, the student begins to compare his command of language with that of others and thus raises anxiety levels. At the same time, language competencies required by the workplace increase the pressure on the employee, also producing anxiety. Moreover, students who regularly use their linguistic capacities at work are more critical of themselves, this self-criticism making anxiety about incorrect language use grow.

**Table 4.** Relations between working alongside studies using languages and language anxiety variables

		If you work alongside your current studies, do you use your foreign language skills in your work?					If you work alongside your current studies, do you use your foreign language skills in your work?		
			YES	NO				YES	NO
I often feel embarrassed when I need to work on a significant project in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=7.00$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.18$ )	Not true	Count	53	47	I am worried that my second language will sound awkward. ( $\chi^2=6.00$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.16$ )	Not true	Count	47	42
		Adj. Res.	2,6	-2,6			Adj. Res.	2,3	-2,3
	Slightly true	Count	16	31		Slightly true	Count	17	24
		Adj. Res.	-1,5	1,5			Adj. Res.	-,3	,3
	True	Count	22	40		True	Count	27	52
		Adj. Res.	-1,5	1,5			Adj. Res.	-2,1	2,1
I feel nervous about completing activities requiring a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=6.34$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.17$ )	Not true	Count	56	52	I feel stressed when talking to a native user of a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=6.51$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.17$ )	Not true	Count	48	42
		Adj. Res.	2,5	-2,5			Adj. Res.	2,5	-2,5
	Slightly true	Count	19	34		Slightly true	Count	14	29
		Adj. Res.	-1,3	1,3			Adj. Res.	-1,6	1,6
	True	Count	16	32		True	Count	29	47
		Adj. Res.	-1,6	1,6			Adj. Res.	-1,2	1,2
I feel stressed when talking to a non-native user of a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=10.92$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.22$ )	Not true	Count	59	55	I worry about my future job interview in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=6.89$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.18$ )	Not true	Count	50	44
		Adj. Res.	2,6	-2,6			Adj. Res.	2,5	-2,5
	Slightly true	Count	9	32		Slightly true	Count	14	30
		Adj. Res.	-3,1	3,1			Adj. Res.	-1,8	1,8
	True	Count	23	31		True	Count	27	44
		Adj. Res.	-,2	,2			Adj. Res.	4,5	-4,5
I am afraid of misunderstanding native users of foreign languages in real-life situations. ( $\chi^2=10.97$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.22$ )	Not true	Count	55	47					
		Adj. Res.	3,0	-3,0					
	Slightly true	Count	12	35					
		Adj. Res.	-2,8	2,8					
	True	Count	24	36					
		Adj. Res.	-,7	,7					

Source: Authors' own contribution, 2024.

In the sixth stage of our research, we looked for an answer to the question of whether there is a significant relationship between the parental educational level and the language anxiety variables. Previous research in this

field shows that several factors of family background influence the language learning process, e.g. motivation to study a foreign language or the proficiency achieved (Gardner, Masgoret & Tremblay, 1999). A specific investigation on the impact of parents' educational attainment on preschool children's foreign language anxiety demonstrated that the two variables were not significantly associated to each other (Choi, Sheo & Kang, 2020). We were interested in whether adult-age student answers would lead us to similar conclusions. Likewise, our cross-tabulation analysis did not show a significant result between parental education and language anxiety variables (Table 5).

In the seventh and last stage of our research, we investigated whether there is a significant correlation between various language anxiety variables and parents' foreign language knowledge. Students whose father/guardian speaks a foreign language are significantly more embarrassed when their foreign language mistakes are corrected than students whose father/guardian does not speak a foreign language ( $\chi^2=7.02$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.13$ ). A significant correlation can be found between the variable "I am afraid of not understanding native speakers in real-life situations" and the father's foreign language proficiency. Those students whose father/guardian speaks a foreign language other than his mother tongue are significantly more afraid of not understanding native speakers in real-life situations, in contrast to those whose father does not speak a foreign language ( $\chi^2=6.53$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.12$ ). The last significant correlation was between the variable "I am worried about my future job interview in a foreign language" and the mother's/foster mother's knowledge of a foreign language ( $\chi^2=8.12$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's  $V=0.14$ ). Those students whose mother/foster mother speaks a foreign language other than her mother tongue are significantly more worried about their future job interview in a foreign language than those whose mother does not speak a foreign language.

To explain this, we can assert that having parents without foreign language knowledge results in children not encountering the stress, worry and anxiety associated with communication in a foreign language within the family, whereas those students whose parents speak a foreign language directly experience the language anxiety of foreign language communication. Furthermore, students whose parents speak foreign languages are likely to encounter higher expectations from both themselves and their parents. These expectations can lead to higher levels of self-criticism and anxiety, especially when students feel they are not meeting these expectations. Good foreign language skills of parents can serve as an example for children. Children try to reach the same language level as their parents, serving as extreme motivational power. Still, at the same time, it increases the fear of making mistakes and can lead to language anxiety, especially, if the language errors are associated with shame. It is worth highlighting the role of fear, which strengthens language anxiety, even in a family where parents speak a foreign language.

**Table 5.** Relations between parents' language knowledge and language anxiety variables

		Does your father/foster father speak a foreign language other than his native language?					Does your father/foster father speak a foreign language other than his native language?			
			YES	NO				YES	NO	
I feel embarrassed when my foreign language mistakes are corrected. ( $\chi^2=7.02$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.13$ )	Not true	Count	93	103	I am afraid of misunderstanding native users of foreign languages in real-life situations. ( $\chi^2=6.53$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.12$ )	Not true	Count	94	105	
		Adj. Res.	2,5	-2,5			Adj. Res.	2,4	-2,4	
	Slightly true	Count	27	59		Slightly true	Count	35	56	
		Adj. Res.	-2,1	2,1			Adj. Res.	-,6	,6	
	True	Count	45	73		True	Count	36	74	
		Adj. Res.	-,8	,8			Adj. Res.	-2,1	2,1	
Does your mother/foster mother speak a foreign language other than her native language?										
			YES	NO						
I worry about my future job interview in a foreign language. ( $\chi^2=8.12$ ; $df=2$ ; $p<0.05$ ; Cramer's $V=0.14$ )	Not true	Count	69	94						
		Adj. Res.	-,6	,6						
	Slightly true	Count	51	39			Slightly true	Count		
		Adj. Res.	2,7	-2,7				Adj. Res.		
	True	Count	56	91			True	Count		
		Adj. Res.	-1,8	1,8				Adj. Res.		

Source: Authors' own contribution, 2024.

## Conclusions

The research on the impact of social background variables on foreign language anxiety in economics students at the University of Debrecen yielded insightful findings. Several significant correlations have been identified between various social and language anxiety variables.

In summary, we can say that we have revealed twenty-five significant interrelationships with the cross-tabulation analyses of the social variables and language anxiety variables. However, not all social background variables in our research have a significant relationship with language anxiety. The highest number of significant relationships were measured in the case of the gender of the student respondents and the use of foreign languages at work.

We can establish that confirming previous research, women are much more anxious than men when using foreign languages. Besides gender, studying abroad previously and working while studying led to significant correlations in two cases each, language use at work next to studies in seven cases, parents' knowledge of a foreign language in three cases, and we can conclude that these variables have a significant influence on students' language anxiety.

The present research findings provide valuable insights for educators, employers, and policymakers to address language anxiety. However, we admit that the sample may not be representative of the entire population of business and economics students in Hungary. Another limitation is that we have not explored the potential psychological and personality factors that might also influence foreign language anxiety. One of the important conclusions we drew from the research results regarding university language teaching is that it is necessary to simulate and practice as many authentic workplace communication situations as possible. Thorough practice and deepening the language toolbox tied to typical professional situations can reduce students' language anxiety and enhance confidence at the same time. This conclusion is in line with new research results. In 2024 Xia, Wei and Tang found that employees' foreign language anxiety hampered their ability to provide and word creative ideas or collaborate effectively with colleagues. They determined that employers should improve workers' language skills to enhance their confidence and thus reduce language anxiety (Xia, Wei and Tang, 2024).

In the case of students at a higher language level, language learners should be given the opportunity to communicate with native speakers. Continuous and regular language practice with native language lecturers can help students overcome anxiety about conversations with foreign colleagues in their future careers. During professional internships or longer study trips abroad, students can also improve their language competence in a

native language environment, thereby reducing their fears of difficulties of such communication situations. As Jiang and Dewaele (2020) recommend, students should be offered more opportunities for independent language practice outside the classroom as this would enhance their self-confidence.

Experts recommend interactive learning methods, experiential pedagogical methods and playful gamification to provide entertaining classroom experiences to increase motivation and reduce debilitating anxiety (Tar, 2007; Bajzát, 2022). It can help to overcome women's language anxiety if female and male students work together in paired tasks in the language class. Also, the instructor should form mixed groups for project work, in which the different communication styles of the sexes can contribute to the successful solution of a project or task, thereby increasing the student's sense of success in language learning. These positive impulses can support the success of the language learning process and the suppression of language anxiety.

Our future aim is to complete further research in this area and explore additional factors influencing language anxiety; moreover, we plan to examine and compare the research results of language anxiety of international students studying at our university with those of our Hungarian students.

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