

FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING ANXIETY AMONG PRESERVICE EFL TEACHERS

YARIMAX RODRÍGUEZ
VERÓNICA DELGADO
JOSÉ MANUEL COLÓN
Universidad de Oriente, Venezuela

In the present study, the existence of foreign language writing anxiety, related to but distinct from general foreign language anxiety and native language writing anxiety was examined. A total of 120 English majors from two Venezuelan universities participated in the study. Three scales were used to measure the language anxieties under study: The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure general foreign language anxiety; The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) to assess foreign language writing anxiety; and The Native Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (NLWAI) to measure native language writing anxiety. The results provided strong evidence suggesting the existence of foreign language writing anxiety. Furthermore, they indicated that while gender had a statistically significant effect on both foreign language anxieties, institution had a significant effect on all three language anxieties

KEY WORDS: general foreign language anxiety, foreign language writing anxiety, native language writing anxiety, EFL preservice teachers, gender

Ansiedad al escribir en futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera

En el presente estudio, se examinó la existencia de la ansiedad al escribir en lengua extranjera, relacionada con la ansiedad general en lengua extranjera y la ansiedad al escribir en lengua materna, pero distinta de ambas. Un total de 120 estudiantes, futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, de dos universidades venezolanas participaron en el estudio. Se usaron tres escalas para medir las ansiedades asociadas al lenguaje consideradas en la investigación: la Escala de Ansiedad en el Salón de Clases de Lengua Extranjera (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)); el Inventario de Ansiedad al Escribir en Lengua Extranjera (The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI)) para evaluar la ansiedad al escribir en lengua extranjera; y el Inventario de Ansiedad al Escribir en Lengua Materna (The Native Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (NLWAI))

para medir la ansiedad al escribir en lengua materna. Los resultados aportaron importante evidencia que sugiere la existencia de la ansiedad al escribir en lengua extranjera. Además, los resultados indicaron que mientras el género tuvo un efecto estadísticamente significativo en ambas ansiedades asociadas a la lengua extranjera, el entorno institucional tuvo un efecto significativo en los tres tipos de ansiedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ansiedad general en lengua extranjera, ansiedad al escribir en lengua extranjera, ansiedad al escribir en lengua materna, futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, género

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For almost half a century, second language (L2)¹ researchers have investigated the role of anxiety in L2 achievement and performance. However, as Scovel (1978) noted in his review of the anxiety research, earlier studies yielded contradictory findings. He attributed these discrepant findings at least in part to the inconsistency of the numerous instruments used to measure the construct and concluded: "It is perhaps premature to relate it [anxiety] to the global and comprehensive task of language acquisition" (p. 132).

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) reexamined the anxiety literature and suggested two reasons to explain the inconclusive relationship of anxiety and L2 achievement: 1) the lack of instruments specifically designed to measure anxiety in a foreign language context; and 2) the fact that few studies had assessed the subtle effects of anxiety on foreign language learning. These researchers conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the foreign language learning process and developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure the construct.

The use of the FLCAS has contributed to clarify the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning. Horwitz (2001) argued that, at large, anxiety research using the FLCAS has consistently indicated a significant although moderate negative relationship of anxiety and foreign language achievement, particularly final grades (Aida 1994, Horwitz 1986, Rodríguez 1995) and oral performance (e.g. Phillips 1992, Young 1986). However, some anxiety researchers (Aida 1994, Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert 1999, Phillips 1992, Rodríguez and Abreu 2003) have questioned the adequacy of the FLCAS, an instrument with a strong speaking-dominant component, to measure the potential types of anxiety provoked by language skills other than speaking.

In the last few years, anxiety research has increasingly focused on identifying and examining skill-specific foreign language anxiety, including reading anxiety (Abreu 2007, Saito, Horwitz, and Garza 1999, Sellers 2000), listening anxiety (Elkhafaifi

¹ In this article, unless a distinction is necessary, L2 is used as a superordinate term that encompasses both second and foreign languages. However, the authors acknowledge that the differences between second and foreign language learning contexts might play a significant role in language learning and communication.

2005, Vogely 1998), and writing anxiety (Atay and Kurt 2006, Cheng 2002, 2004; Cheng et al. 1999, Kurt and Atay 2007). Nonetheless, interest in foreign language writing anxiety contrasts sharply with that devoted to first language (L1) writing apprehension². Whereas the existence and significance of L1 writing apprehension as a distinct form of anxiety, unique to written communication, has been established empirically since the 70s, efforts to examine foreign language writing anxiety are fairly recent and scant.

Research on foreign language writing anxiety has commonly used the second language version of the Daly-Miller's (1975) Writing Apprehension Test (SLWAT), the first instrument utilized to measure learners' anxiety toward and fear of writing in evaluative situations. Nevertheless, Cheng and her associates (Cheng 2002, Cheng et al. 1999) criticized the few earlier foreign language writing anxiety studies on two major methodological grounds: 1) selection of ethnolinguistically heterogeneous samples and 2) use of an English version of the SLWAT, a language the participants did not necessarily know well. These researchers conducted a series of experiments in which they eradicated those flaws by administering an L1 version of the anxiety measures to Taiwanese English majors. Cheng et al. examined the conceptual links of foreign language classroom anxiety (hereafter general foreign language anxiety) and foreign language writing anxiety as well as their relationships with foreign language speaking and writing achievement. The results indicated that general foreign language anxiety and foreign language writing anxiety were two related yet relatively independent anxiety constructs. Moreover, they indicated that students' low self-confidence was an important dimension of both types of language anxiety.

Cheng (2002) reported that foreign language writing anxiety was distinguishable from both general foreign language anxiety and L1 writing anxiety. In addition, she reported that perceived foreign language writing competence was the best predictor of L2 writing anxiety. Finally, she reported that female students experienced significantly higher levels of foreign language writing anxiety than their male counterparts.

Although the SLWAT has been found to have satisfactory internal consistency reliability as well as concurrent and predictive validity, and continues to be used in foreign language writing research (i.e., Lee 2005), its concurrent validity has been questioned recently (for a detailed discussion of criticisms raised against the SLWAT, see Cheng 2004). In order to improve measurement of the foreign language writing anxiety construct, Cheng (2004) developed the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI). The SLWAI is a 22-item scale that reflects a conceptualization of the construct as a tripartite model, comprising three relatively independent components: cognitive, physiological, and behavioral. Psychometric analyses confirmed the tripartite conceptualization of the foreign language writing anxiety construct and showed that the SLWAI had adequate reliability and construct validity.

² As writing anxiety and writing apprehension are typically used as synonyms in the literature, they were used interchangeably in the present paper.

Recently, the SLWAI has been administered to a group of Turkish prospective teachers of English to examine their perspective on L2 writing anxiety. Atay and Kurt (2006) reported that more than half of their participants experienced high or average levels of writing anxiety. Moreover, these students had difficulties to organize their thoughts and to generate ideas while writing in the L2. Additionally, they cited their college instructors and their past L2 writing experiences as their major sources of L2 writing anxiety. Finally, they believed that their writing experiences might affect their future teaching practices. Kurt and Atay (2007) reported that students who received peer feedback significantly reduced their levels of writing anxiety, became more aware of their mistakes, used their peers' opinions to improve their essays, and looked at the writing process from a different perspective.

As this brief review of the literature indicates, foreign language anxiety has been generally associated with oral performance. Additionally, it indicates that the use of the FLCAS has yielded consistent findings, suggesting a significant although moderate negative relationship between these two variables. Nevertheless, there has been a recent trend in anxiety research to identify and examine skill-specific foreign language anxieties. So far, few studies have focused on foreign language writing anxiety and the majority of them have used the SLWAT. Recently, Atay and Kurt (2006) and Kurt and Atay (2007) used the SLWAI, a scale that seems to be better suited for foreign language context. The present study also used the SLWAI to examine the existence of foreign language anxiety, but in a different educational context. Specifically, the present study examined whether writing essays in English as a foreign language was anxiety-provoking among students enrolled in English Composition I and II classes at Universidad de Oriente (UDO) and English Literacy I at Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador Barquisimeto (UPELB). Furthermore, it examined the extent to which foreign language anxiety differed from general foreign language anxiety and L1 writing anxiety.

Two research questions guided the present study:

1. Was there a specific foreign language writing anxiety, related yet distinct from general foreign language anxiety and L1 writing anxiety? and if so,
2. To what extent did it differ from the other two types of anxieties?

METHOD

Participants

The participants in the present study were 120 English majors (65.83% females) at two universities in Venezuela. Of these students, 83 were from UDO and 61 from UPELB. Their ages ranged from 18 to 48 ($M = 23.88$, $SD = 5.19$). The sample included 68 students enrolled in English Composition I (19 students) and II (49 students) at UDO and 52 students enrolled in English Literacy I at UPELB.

Instruments

Four instruments were administered in the present study. These included a background questionnaire and three language anxiety scales: the FLCAS, the SLWAI, and the NLWAI. The background questionnaire requested information regarding students' age, gender, institution, and course level.

The FLCAS is a 33-item scale, developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) to measure general anxiety when learning a foreign language in a school context. The SWLAI is a 22-item scale, developed by Cheng (2004) to assess the anxiety provoked by writing in a foreign language; and the NLWAI is a version of the SLWAI, adapted by the researchers to measure the anxiety produced when writing in our native language. Both the FLCAS and the SLWAI were translated into Spanish to facilitate the reading and responding process and their original statements modified to suit the EFL learning situation in Venezuela. All of the scales adopted a 5-point Likert response format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items worded negatively were reverse scored. Consequently, a higher score indicated a higher level of anxiety.

It is interesting to point out that in the present study, the SLWAI was preferred to the SLWAT on the basis that the construct validity of the latter has been questioned in the last few years. The SLWAT was originally developed to tap first language writing anxiety and conceptualizes it as a unidimensional construct. However, multifactor solutions have been reported when used in foreign language contexts (Cheng et al. 1999). In contrast, the SLWAI was especially developed to measure foreign language writing anxiety and its tripartite conceptualization of the construct appears to reflect better the complexity of L2 writing anxiety (for a more detailed review of the development of the SLWAI, see Cheng 2004).

Given the strong reliability and validity indices of the SLWAI reported in Cheng (2004), it was modified by the researchers to measure native language writing anxiety. The same items and response format of the SLWAT were maintained; the only difference was that in the NLWAI, the word "*español*" (Spanish) substituted for the word "*inglés*" (English).

Procedure

The instruments were administered in the students' regular classes either by the class instructor or the first two experimenters. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and asked to read each instrument carefully. Furthermore, they were urged to complete all the items and to do it honestly because their responses would be totally anonymous.

RESULTS

Reliability of the Anxiety Measures

The internal consistency of the scores generated from the FLCAS, the SLWAI, and the NLWAI was computed. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .92, .90, and .84 for

the FLCAS, the SLWAI, and the NLWAI, respectively. These results indicated that the three anxiety scales were sufficiently reliable in terms of their internal consistency.

Anxieties Assessed

General Foreign Language Anxiety. For each participant, the level of general FL anxiety was computed by summing their score on each of the 33 items of the FLCAS. The items that received the highest scores were: item 10 “I worry about the consequences of failing my English classes.” ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.2$), item 6 “During my English classes, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.” ($M = 3.55, SD = 1.26$), item 2 “I don’t worry about making mistakes in my English classes.” ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.38$), and item 9 “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my English classes.” ($M = 3.19, SD = 1.37$). More specifically, 83.3% of the participants endorsed item 10; 55% endorsed item 6; 53.3% rejected item 2; and 49.2% endorsed item 9.

Foreign Language Writing Anxiety. The level of FL writing anxiety was the sum of the scores on the 22 items of the SLWAI. The items with the highest scores were: item 9 “If my English composition is to be evaluated, I would worry about getting a very poor grade.” ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.25$), item 7 “I don’t worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others’.” ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.32$), item 21 “I’m not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor ($M = 3.43, SD = 1.29$), and item 18 “I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.” ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.12$). Overall, 76.6% of the participants endorsed item 9; 56.7% rejected item 7; 55% rejected item 21; and 36.6% rejected item 18.

Native Language Writing Anxiety. The level of L1 writing anxiety was computed by adding the scores on the 22 items of the NLWAI. The items that received the highest percentages of endorsements and rejections by the students were the same as those of FL writing anxiety. Whereas 66.7% endorsed item 9; 59.2%, 57.5%, and 33.3% rejected items 21, 7, and 18, respectively.

The means and standard deviations of general foreign language anxiety, foreign language writing anxiety, and native language writing anxiety by institution and overall are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for the General Foreign Language Anxiety, the Foreign Language Writing Anxiety and the Native Language Writing Anxiety by Institution and Overall

Institution	GFLA		FLWA		NLWA	
	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DS</i>
UDO	87.66	21.30	59.72	14.74	53.90	11.34
UPEL-B	77.29	20.39	52.02	13.69	46.02	10.86
Global	83.17	21.45	56.38	14.74	50.48	11.76

Note. The maximum possible score for the GFLA = 165; FLWA and NLWA = 110.

As can be seen from Table 1, the participants in the present study reported relatively low levels of anxiety as these were considerably below the average theoretical levels for each type of language anxiety [$99 = (33 \times 3)$ for general foreign language anxiety, and $66 = (22 \times 3)$ for foreign language writing anxiety and L1 writing anxiety, respectively].

Existence of Foreign Language Writing Anxiety

In order to determine the existence of a foreign language writing anxiety related to, albeit distinct from general foreign language anxiety and L1 writing anxiety, a three-step process was followed. In the first step, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed among the three types of language anxiety under study. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients among the GFLA, the FLWA, and the NLWA

	GFLA	FLWA	NLWA
GFLA	1,00		
FLWA	0,738 **	1,00	
NLWA	0,277 **	0,372**	1,00

Note. ** $p < 0,01$.

The relationships among the three types of language anxiety under study were positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher levels on general foreign language anxiety were associated with higher levels of writing anxiety in both languages and vice versa. However, the correlation of foreign language writing anxiety with general foreign language anxiety was relatively strong as opposed to that with L1 writing anxiety, which was low. In the second step, coefficients of determination (r^2) were computed by squaring Pearson's correlation coefficients. The r^2 coefficients were .5446 ($.738^2$) between foreign language anxiety and general foreign language anxiety and .1383 ($.372^2$) between the two language writing anxieties. Finally, the r^2 coefficients were multiplied by 100 to be interpreted as the percentage of shared variance between the variables. These percentages indicated that foreign language writing anxiety shared 54.46% of its variance with general foreign language anxiety, but only 13.83% with L1 writing anxiety. In other words, 45.54% and 86.17% of foreign language writing anxiety variance were not shared respectively with general foreign language anxiety and L1 writing anxiety, indicating that foreign language writing anxiety is distinct from the other two language anxieties under study.

Additional Findings

Effects of Gender and Institution on General Foreign Language Anxiety, Foreign Language Writing Anxiety, and Native Language Writing Anxiety

As recent research on skill-specific foreign language anxiety has reported statistically significant effects for gender (Cheng 2002) and institution (Abreu 2007), the effects of these variables on the language anxieties under study were examined. In order to compute these effects, separate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. The results of the ANOVAs are summarized in Table 3. Whereas institution had a statistically significant effect on all three language anxieties, gender had a statistically significant effect on general foreign language anxiety and foreign language writing anxiety. The effect of their interaction, however, did not reach statistical significance on any of the language anxieties.

Table 3. ANOVA Summary Results of the Effects of Gender and Institution on GFLA, FLWA, and NLWA

Source	GFLA		FLWA		NLWA	
	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>F</i>	η^2
Gender	13.246**	.102	4.673*	.039	.808	.007
Institution	7.083**	.058	8.217**	.066	14.981**	.114
Gender* Institution	.834	.007	.614	.005	.060	.001
df (error)	116		116		116	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

These results indicated that although female and male students reported comparable levels of native language writing anxiety, the former exhibited significantly higher levels of general foreign language anxiety and foreign language writing anxiety. Furthermore, they indicated that the students from UDO reported significantly higher levels of all three kinds of language anxieties than their counterparts from UPELB.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to investigate the existence of a foreign language writing anxiety related to yet distinct from the general language anxiety experienced in a foreign language context or when writing in L1. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. The first research question examined whether writing in a foreign language provoked a specific type of language anxiety. The second research question, conditioned to the existence of such an anxiety, assessed the extent to which this language anxiety differed from the other two language anxieties under study.

The results of the present study indicated that the relationships among all the three language anxieties were positive and statistically significant. Nonetheless, the coefficients of determination indicated that foreign language writing anxiety shared a little more than half of its variance with general foreign language anxiety and only about one eighth with L1 writing anxiety. These findings represented strong evidence suggesting the existence of a foreign language writing anxiety related to but distinct from other language anxieties.

In the present study, the percentage of shared variance between foreign language writing anxiety and general foreign language anxiety was slightly greater than those reported by Cheng et al. (1999) and Cheng (2002)³. The discrepancy between our findings and those of Cheng and her colleagues might be due to the use of a different instrument to measure foreign language writing anxiety. While they used the SLWAT, we used the SLWAI, an instrument claimed to be better suited to assess foreign language writing anxiety (Cheng 2004). Unfortunately, our findings could not be compared with those of Atay and Kurt (2006) because these researchers did not measure general foreign language anxiety.

The very small percentage of variance shared by the two language writing anxieties is consistent with Cheng (2002). Indeed, the correlation reported by Cheng approached zero. This finding lent support to Cheng's claim that foreign language writing anxiety and native language writing anxiety are two distinct constructs.

The fact that foreign language writing anxiety related more strongly with general foreign language anxiety, which has been shown to include a strong speaking component by Cheng et al. (1999), than with L1 writing anxiety, seems to indicate, as Cheng (2002) asserted, that the relationships between different kinds of anxiety across different modes of communication within one language are stronger than across different languages (p. 653). This assertion should be investigated in future research.

It is interesting to point out that a high percentage of students reported their concern about the possibility that their essays were evaluated as very poor. Indeed, the three items that received the highest mean scores attested to it. This concern was present when writing in both native and foreign language, although it was stronger in the latter. Also noteworthy was the finding that one of every three students reported their reticence to write outside of the classroom. This seemed to be a personal characteristic because it manifested equally strong in both languages. Hence, it is suggested that foreign language instructors promote writing out of the classroom; perhaps by persuading students that writing more out of the classroom would develop their writing competence in the language.

The findings about the effects of gender and institution on the different kinds of language anxiety under study were also interesting in the light of those reported in previous research and added to the complexity of language anxiety. Gender had a statistically significant effect on the two foreign language anxieties; in both cases, females reported superior levels of anxiety to males. The effect of gender on general foreign language anxiety contradicted the findings of previous research (Abreu 2007; Aida 1994). On the other hand, its effect on foreign language writing anxiety was consistent with that reported by Cheng (2002). Whether gender effect is more prevalent in skill-specific rather than in general foreign language anxiety should be addressed in future research.

The effect of institution on the three kinds of language anxiety under study indicated that students at UDO rated themselves as significantly more anxious than their counterparts at UPELB. These findings might have been due to the selected

samples because the same outcome was observed even for the native language writing anxiety. Therefore, it is very likely that the UDO students might have simply been more anxious than their UPELB counterparts. However, because a trait anxiety scale was not used in the present study, this hypothesis could not be tested. It is suggested that a trait scale be included in future studies to disentangle this issue.

At any rate, EFL writing instructors, particularly those at UDO, where one of every four students reported levels of foreign language writing anxiety higher than the scale midpoint, should implement some of the suggestions advanced by Cheng (2002: 652-653) to alleviate their students' writing anxiety. These include: a) to instill in their students a positive and realistic perception of their writing competence; b) to help their students learn to deal with the difficulties and failures associated with the process of learning to write in a foreign language without losing their self-confidence; c) to change writing in a foreign language into a pleasant experience by creating a learning environment where students can write in their foreign language without feeling embarrassed about their errors, where their contributions are adequately valued, where activities let them experience success, and where their self-confidence is strengthened. Cheng argued that writing instructors may accomplish this goal by providing their students with more encouraging and positive feedback, giving them credit for their good ideas even if their writings are linguistically flawed, marking errors sparingly in early drafts, and at times allowing students to write without the fear of being evaluated.

In sum, the results of the present study provided strong empirical evidence suggesting the existence of a language anxiety that arises specifically from the experience of writing in a foreign language. This specific anxiety is related to but distinct from other language anxieties. Additionally, it was found that the relationship between the language anxieties within one language was stronger than that between the same type of anxiety across languages. This issue is theoretically interesting and needs to be further investigated. Also, it was found that females rated themselves as significantly more anxious than males either in the general context of foreign language learning or when writing in a foreign language. This finding warrants further research. Finally, it was found that the students at UDO were more anxious than their counterparts at UPELB. Whether this outcome was due solely to sampling error or to its combination with other variables is to be addressed in future studies.

LIMITATIONS

Although the results of the present study are theoretically relevant, they must be interpreted with caution because of the limitations of the study. First is the question of generalizability. Participants were English majors from two universities in Venezuela and were not randomly selected. Second, data were collected with self-report instruments and distortions associated with self-reports are well documented in the literature. Furthermore, the presence of class instructors and experimenters during the administration of the instruments might have influenced the participants' perceptions and/or willingness to report truthfully.

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