

THE EFFECT OF ANXIETY ON SERBIAN EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION ACCURACY

Abstract: The present study aims at investigating the effect of foreign language anxiety on Serbian secondary school EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy. The negative effect of a high degree of anxiety in EFL classrooms has been recognized in numerous studies (Aida, 1994; Kitano, 2001), especially regarding the overall communicative competence and the willingness to participate in classroom activities. The world scientific research abounds in papers dealing with the effect of anxiety on general proficiency and performance, however, the number of papers investigating the effect of anxiety on pronunciation is considerably smaller, and the situation is similar in the Serbian scientific context, as well. Hence, we aimed at exploring how debilitating or facilitating the presence of anxiety may be regarding the overall pronunciation accuracy, so we conducted a questionnaire incorporating a foreign language anxiety scale (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) with 62 secondary school EFL students and consequently divided them into two groups of high and low anxiety level, depending on their answers. Simultaneously with the questionnaire, the students underwent pronunciation testing, i.e. the participants were recorded performing three different tasks measuring their pronunciation accuracy. The results were quantitatively analyzed using appropriate statistical tests and they demonstrate strong effect of anxiety on pronunciation thus confirming the findings from a previous study (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). The paper likewise underscores important pedagogical implications regarding the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching and the possible solutions for overcoming pronunciation anxiety.

Key words: *pronunciation, EFL, anxiety scale, Serbian secondary school students*

INTRODUCTION

For more than four decades researchers around the world have been attempting at discovering the causes of foreign language anxiety and the possible ways for overcoming, or, at least, moderating it (McCoy, 1979; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Oxford, 1999; etc.). For example, Bailey (1983) recognized learners' self-esteem and the desire to compete with others, as well as fear of examination, as the major sources of anxiety. She also found that anxiety can be affected by the way students perceive their relationship with their teachers,

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which was confirmed by Young (1991), who also underlined the importance of teacher-student interaction, as well as teacher and students' attitudes and beliefs about language learning and teaching. The research especially flourished after the design of the *Foreign Language Anxiety Scale* (Horwitz et al., 1986) that was set to investigate several different aspects of foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension in L2 context is regarded as anxiety about communicating in L2 in front of other people and is further exhibited in the fear of misinterpreting the message in L2 (Wheeless, 1975). Fear of negative evaluation refers to academic evaluation, as well as interpersonal evaluations based on the performance in L2 (Watson & Friend, 1969), and test anxiety represents the fear of not performing well on the tests, along with the worry about frequent testing, resulting in avoidance of tests and frustrations (Sarason, 1978). Even though these three components of foreign language anxiety are suitable for providing exhaustive description of anxiety in L2 classrooms, Horwitz et al. (1986) believe foreign language anxiety is a more complex psychological phenomenon incorporating personal beliefs, feelings and attitudes specific to each individual language learning environment. Students are mentally aware of their inability to completely express themselves in a target language, hence they recognize the limitations of presenting themselves to others, which creates a particular discrepancy between who they are and what they can actually say to depict their personality, resulting in increased negative feelings, which simultaneously differentiates foreign language anxiety from other types of anxieties.

Numerous studies adopted the aforementioned scale and provided further insights into the nature of foreign language anxiety (Liu, 2006; Sheorey, 2006). Due to the lack of ability to effectively communicate using L2, i.e. to express their ideas and feelings, which is often caused by insufficient vocabulary resources, students' self-confidence diminishes, creating thus the favourable environment for anxiety to prevail, producing even greater strain and discomfort. Hence, highly anxious students often mishear what the others are saying, causing lack of comprehension, as well as unwillingness to participate in classroom activities, and eventually resistance to learning (Hashimoto, 2002). Moreover, especially with adolescents, there is the constant fear of being negatively evaluated by classmates, or instructors, which additionally worsens the situation (Horwitz, 2001).

The research abounds in papers dealing with the relationship between anxiety and language proficiency (Wang, 2003; Gregersen, 2005; Osboe, Fujmura & Hirschel, 2007; etc.), especially the effect of anxiety on test performance, nevertheless, the number of investigations dealing with the influence of anxiety on pronunciation is significantly smaller in the world, as well as in the Serbian scientific context. Hence, the goal of the present paper is to explore the relationship between anxiety and pronunciation accuracy, i.e. whether a high level of anxiety

of Serbian secondary school EFL learners leads to the increase, or decrease of scores on pronunciation accuracy tests.

ANXIETY AS AN AFFECTIVE FACTOR IN SLA

The significance of affective factors on target language learning and acquisition has long been emphasized, yet the most attention was probably paid to motivation, learner's self-confidence and anxiety. High level of motivation is claimed to facilitate learning especially if acquired through positive classroom atmosphere and teacher-student interaction (Cooper & MacIntyre, 1998). A student lacking natural inclination and individual aptitude towards learning a foreign language can perform better than an exquisitely apt and intelligent, yet less motivated student, hence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are regarded as crucial factors for successful SLA (Reece & Walker, 1997). Self-confidence and self-esteem are also recognized as fundamental affective factors that can considerably influence the outcomes of learning, because they directly affect willingness to accept challenges, take risks, learn new things and participate in various activities (Brown, 2001). Lack of self-confidence, which can sometimes unintentionally be fostered in FL classrooms, often leads to excessive introversion and reluctance, even resistance to learning, so teachers are advised to approach the issue in a serious, but delicate manner.

Anxiety is one of the most frequent emotional states and is considered as one of the most influential affective factors in SLA, because it causes nervousness, fear, unwillingness to cooperate and inability to focus on important aspects of learning (Arnold, 2000).

According to the relevant research, various factors can affect anxiety, ranging from those related to the actual learning situation, such as the organization of the course, proficiency level, teacher's attitudes and behaviour and the interaction among peers (Young, 1991), to those related to the very learner, such as age, cognitive development, socio-economic and cultural background, gender, individual aptitude, personality traits, learning style and strategies (Skehan, 1991; Oxford, 1999).

Scholars approached anxiety from two different perspectives: the first one regarding foreign language anxiety as a transfer of other forms of anxiety into the foreign language classroom, which means that generally anxious students will continue to behave so in the EFL classroom, as well (Spielberger, 1983), and the second perspective, and more widely accepted one, which believes that language learning environment causes special kind of anxiety, unique to the language learning situation that only learners engaged in acquiring a specific language will

experience (Gardner, 1985). Similarly, Ellis (1994) underscored three types of anxiety: trait, state and situation-specific anxiety, the latter being the nucleus of attention for an extensive body of research in SLA.

ANXIETY AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

For the complete comprehension of anxiety and its effect on language acquisition, it is necessary to take, not only its causes, but its influences on learners and the learning process itself (including the input, mental processing and the output stage) into consideration, as well as how learners are able to handle and control it (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Psychological research demonstrated that students tended to cope with anxiety depending on the responsibility they ascribed to certain activities, i.e. they refused to cope with anxiety if there was no responsibility for the activity on their part (Matsumoto, Kudoh, Scherer & Wallbott, 1988).

SLA studies have repeatedly reported on the negative effects of increased levels of anxiety on target language proficiency and test performance. In a study on Japanese EFL learners Osboe et al. (2007) found personal factors to be crucial in predicting language learning outcomes and concluded anxiety had negative effect on L2 performance.

In a study on Chinese EFL learners Wang (2010) showed that anxiety was a determinant predictor of success, or failure, on foreign language proficiency tests, which was also confirmed in other studies on students with the same L1 (Lu & Liu, 2011). The impeding effect of anxiety on performance was noted in a study on Japanese learners (Kitano, 2001) and on Iranian students (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012), as well. Furthermore, a study on Spanish EFL learners confirmed the negative effects of high levels of anxiety on speaking (Wilson, 2006). It seems suitable to mention a study on Australian students of English for academic purposes, that likewise confirmed the negative correlation between anxiety and communicative skills, i.e. oral proficiency (Woodrow, 2006), yet the study is particularly interesting because the author found two different types of anxiety to be equally worth recognizing, in-class and out-of-class anxiety. Another study of FL learners, but of French as L2, underscored negative correlation between anxiety and students' self-reports and estimations of their own target language achievement in terms of listening, reading, writing and speaking (MacIntyre, Noels & Clément, 1997). Hence, anxiety is negatively correlated both with student's actual performance, as well as their perception of personal achievement in L2.

Even though numerous studies demonstrated negative influence of anxiety on language learning outcomes, there are some that recognized the beneficial

effects of the presence of anxiety on linguistic performance (Kleinmann, 1977); however, there are also the ones that found no significant correlation whatsoever (Young, 1991), or came to inconsistent conclusions (Brandmeier, 2005).

ANXIETY AND L2 PRONUNCIATION

Even though the link between pronunciation and foreign language anxiety is not so directly conspicuous, which is probably why it has not been a matter of frequent investigations, pronunciation is said to be a significant contributor to all three aspects of anxiety suggested by Horwitz et al. (1986) (Shams, 2006). The anxiety may arise from the situation in which a speaker is afraid that their unintelligible pronunciation might lead to communication breakdown or when a student is concerned that pronunciation represents a considerable part of the teacher's oral proficiency test evaluation. The problem may be caused by underestimating pronunciation proficiency, but also from excessive self-confidence resulting in a distorted image of the actual pronunciation quality (Nowacka, 2006). In a study investigating the relationship between anxiety and perceived and actual pronunciation level of students, Baran-Łucarz (2011) showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between anxiety and pronunciation level, and the interconnectedness was especially evident in the perceived pronunciation level measured by a questionnaire and the presence of anxiety. Investigating German learners' perception of pronunciation and speaking anxiety, Gerndt (2014) interestingly concluded that German students had no fear of speaking German, yet felt anxiety about their pronunciation, probably due to the fact that the majority of respondents believed pronunciation was very important and were willing to receive explicit pronunciation instruction. Students' constant comparison with native speakers may affect their self-esteem and result in embarrassment and avoidance of communicative situation for fear of not sounding like a native speaker, thus the self-perception of pronunciation seems to be an important trigger for speaking anxiety (Price, 1991). Students likewise reported that they would change their pronunciation, or their accent, if they were nervous (Derwing & Rossiter, 2002), which is logical having in mind the physical and psychological aspect of enunciation, especially considering that the vocal apparatus gets affected by the emotions causing the muscle strain and influencing respiration and phonation, consequently altering the usual articulation of segmental and suprasegmental features of phonology (Rogerson-Revell, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of the present paper was to discover the effect of anxiety on pronunciation accuracy of Serbian EFL learners at the secondary school level.

Research Questions

The investigations in the present paper are based on the following research questions:

What is the level of anxiety present in Serbian secondary school EFL classrooms?

What is the relationship between the level of foreign language anxiety and pronunciation accuracy among Serbian secondary school EFL learners? Is the effect of anxiety positive or negative?

Participants

A total of 62 students participated in the study, 23 male and 39 female, mean age 16.39. They all belonged to the second and third-year class of a secondary school “Svetozar Marković” in Jagodina and were approximately at the same level of English proficiency since they underwent an online Oxford Diagnostic Test¹ and passed it as intermediate. The initial 62 students participated in the survey measuring their anxiety level, and were later divided into two groups (high and low level of anxiety) based on their answers. 11 students could not be grouped in either of the categories since their answers were mostly neutral, so we grouped them as undecided and omitted them from pronunciation testing. The remaining 51 students underwent further examinations to explore their pronunciation accuracy.

All the participants were asked for consent and received course credits for participating in the present research.

¹ Oxford Practice Grammar Diagnostic test can be found on <https://elt.oup.com/student/practicegrammar/test?cc=us&selLanguage=en>.

Instruments

To determine the level of anxiety of the participants we used the renowned Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986), that was also used previously in numerous studies (Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012; Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Boonyaparakob, Puntai & Ponata, 2015). The questionnaire contains 33 statements with five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and it covers three aspects of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

To measure pronunciation accuracy of the participants we recorded them performing three production tasks, each of them comprising word lists. The first task was a word list of 25 examples containing the monophthongs and diphthongs of English, notoriously problematic in terms of correct pronunciation. The second task contained the most problematic consonants, 15 tokens in total, and the third task included 15 words frequently mispronounced due to the incorrect stress placement. Before the testing we made sure all the words from the lists are familiar to the students regarding their meaning, even though the words were taken from the suggested list for their level of vocabulary, or below². The participants were recorded using the computer microphone and the frequently used recording software *Audacity version 2.0.3*. The recorded samples were later analyzed for the correct pronunciations and the obtained results were compared among the members of the two groups of different anxiety levels.

Procedure

The diagnostic testing, questionnaire and pronunciation recording was performed during the winter term of the 2015/2016 school year October to January. The students completed the questionnaire first, the results were analyzed and the students were divided into the high level of anxiety group (30 students) and low level of anxiety group (21 students), and 11 students were excluded from the further testing of pronunciation since their answers were either neutral or inconsistent. The remaining 51 students were recorded and their pronunciation was later analyzed. A native speaker and the author of the paper assessed the accuracy of students' pronunciation relying on the auditory method. Heavily foreign accented vowel productions, i.e. vowel productions affected by mother tongue interference, as well as consonant productions substituted with a similar sound from the mother tongue were regarded as inaccurate and counted as such.

² The majority of words in word lists were taken from the suggested vocabulary for Cambridge PET exam, available at <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/search-results/?filter=search-term:vocabulary+list+f>

Incorrect stress placement in words was counted as an error, as well. The chosen method was found appropriate based on the research questions of the current study, since we aimed at measuring the effect of anxiety on pronunciation accuracy and additional acoustic analysis of the features of the students' vowels and consonants would exceed the scope of the present study, although it is recommended for future research.

Statistical Data Processing

Percentage counts, correlation analysis and t-testing were performed using the SPSS statistical software version 20.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To measure the level of anxiety of Serbian secondary school EFL learners we conducted a questionnaire (Horwitz et al., 1986), the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of the *Foreign Language Anxiety Scale* Survey (%)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	22.6	38.7	14.5	14.5	9.7
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	6.5	22.6	22.6	19.4	29.0
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	12.9	35.5	12.9	27.4	11.3
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	17.7	19.4	12.9	25.8	24.2
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	8.1	12.9	19.4	24.2	35.5
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	32.3	54.8	/	6.5	6.5

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	25.8	22.6	23.8	19.4	8.5
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	3.2	8.1	27.4	33.9	27.4
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	30.6	16.1	17.7	19.4	16.1
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	22.4	25.8	17.7	22.6	6.5
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	11.3	22.6	22.6	37.1	6.5
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	38.7	37.1	/	16.1	8.1
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	9.7	19.4	17.7	32.3	21.0
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	32.3	30.6	6.1	14.5	14.5
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	21.0	33.9	11.3	19.4	14.5
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	12.9	14.5	12.9	35.5	24.2
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.	30.6	41.9	6.5	12.9	8.1
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	12.9	24.2	16.1	29.0	17.7
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	14.5	22.6	16.1	25.8	21.0
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	14.5	24.2	11.3	24.2	25.8
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	8.1	30.6	1.6	43.5	16.1
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	33.9	30.6	3.2	16.1	16.1

23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	16.1	29.0	21.0	24.2	9.7
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	46.8	30.6	16.1	3.2	3.2
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	33.9	17.7	/	17.7	30.6
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	30.6	17.7	8.1	22.6	21.0
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	32.3	21.0	24.2	6.5	16.1
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	19.4	27.4	19.4	14.5	19.4
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	19.4	17.7	27.4	21.0	14.5
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	27.4	38.7	12.9	9.7	11.3
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	22.6	24.2	25.8	11.3	16.1
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	41.9	21.0	8.1	24.2	4.8
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	32.3	24.2	19.4	14.5	9.7

When it comes to the answers to the questions related to communication anxiety (1,9,14,18,24,27,29,30,32), we see that about a half of the participants is anxious about communicating in the target language, resulting from the lack of confidence (about 60% of respondents) and even verging with panic when asked to speak without previous preparation (about 46%). About 70% of the respondents said they felt very self-conscious when speaking in front of other students and, interestingly enough, about 60% of the students felt more comfortable speaking with native speakers, perhaps pointing to the fact that students feel more pressure

when speaking in front of the classmates, which is understandable having in mind that the respondents are teenagers. More than 50% of the students feel nervous when they have to speak in class, yet it seems encouraging that only about 36% get nervous when they do not understand everything the teacher says, which speaks about the relationship between the teacher and the students, as well as the students' awareness about the importance of holistic approach to comprehension without the insistence of understanding each individual word or phrase. The results of the present study regarding the communication anxiety agree with the previous findings with e.g. Japanese (Kitano 2001), Thai students (Boonyaparakob et al., 2015) and Iranian (Mesri, 2012).

Contrary to the previous conclusions with Thai students (Boonyaparakob et al., 2015), fear of negative evaluation is not the aspect of foreign language anxiety that causes the most distress among Serbian EFL learners. The fear of being negatively evaluated definitely exists among our respondents, yet the percentage is slightly lower than with communication anxiety, which is evident from the questions related to this particular issue (3,4,7,13,15,20,23,25,31,33). The reason of the fear may either be due to the foreign language, or their age, notorious for being dependent on other people's judgments. Hence, about 45% of our respondents said they thought others were better at English than themselves, and that they trembled before being called on in class. However, about 30% feel embarrassed to volunteer, which again points to the teacher-students relationship and the overall class atmosphere. About a similar percentage feels their heart pounding when actually called on in class. Approximately 54% of students get upset when they do not understand teachers' corrections and about 46% are afraid that the others will laugh at them. Preparation in advance seems to be crucial for anxious students, nevertheless, it is positive that students realize the greater significance of understanding teachers' corrections than being able to comprehend every single uttered word in class.

Test anxiety is another indispensable aspect of foreign language anxiety estimation (questions 2,8,10,19,21), at least when it comes to Serbian EFL learners participating in our study. Almost 50% of the students are afraid of making a mistake and around 60% are usually not at ease during tests. About 48% of the respondents worry about the consequences of failing the class and around 30% of them fear that their teacher is ready to correct every mistake they make, which should either be the result of students' high level of anxiety, or an indicator of the teacher's attitudes. Almost 60% of the students disagree that the more they study the more confused they get which is encouraging since the students realize the importance of devotion and self-engagement. The results of our study generally confirm previous findings with e.g. Spanish, Iranian and Thais students respectively (Guillén & Arnaiz, 2012; Jalali & Jalali, 2015; Boonyaparakob et al., 2015).

The remaining questions (5,6,11,12,16,17,22,26,28) are related to the general attitude towards the very language classes. It seems alarming that more than 80% of students think about things unrelated to the very class and about 70% of them often feel like missing the class, which may point to their motivation and class organization. Only about 20% of the students would like to take more language classes. About 75% of students say they forget the things they know and almost 50% feel more nervous in a language class than in other classes. Only about 36% of the respondents feel confident and relaxed before attending a foreign language class. These results diverge from the findings obtained in a previous study (Boonyaparakob et al., 2015), since students did not seem to have negative attitudes towards the very classes, which is opposite to what we encountered.

After the questionnaire the students were divided into two groups depending on their answers: the high anxiety group (n=30) and the low anxiety group (n=21). The students were then tested for pronunciation accuracy and the results of all three tasks are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pronunciation Accuracy Mean Scores Across Tasks

Tasks	High Anxiety Group	Low Anxiety Group
Task 1 (Max. 25)	Mean 8.93 Min. 5 Max. 17 St.Dev. 3.02	Mean 19.33 Min. 12 Max. 25 St.Dev. 3.75
Task 2 (Max. 15)	Mean 8.87 Min. 4 Max. 15 St.Dev. 3.46	Mean 11.33 Min. 7 Max. 15 St.Dev. 2.99
Task 3 (Max. 15)	Mean 9.7 Min. 7 Max. 15 St.Dev. 2.35	Mean 12.57 Min. 5 Max. 15 St.Dev. 2.84
Overall accuracy (Max. 55)	Mean 27.5 St.Dev. 5.67	Mean 43.24 St.Dev. 6.72

Even without performing statistical testing we notice considerable differences in mean scores between the two groups especially regarding the first task, i.e. production of vowels. The results are more favourable for the low anxiety group in the remaining tasks, as well. The results of the Pearson Correlation analysis (Table 3) demonstrate statistically significant negative correlation, i.e. they show that there is a strong negative correlation between the level of anxiety and the students' performance on pronunciation tests. The analysis demonstrated that the higher the anxiety, the lower the score on pronunciation test was, and vice versa. The results are the same for all three tasks (Task 1: $r=-0.843$ $p=0.00$; Task 2: $r=-0.354$ $p=0.01$; Task 3: $r=-0.491$ $p=0.00$).

Table 3. Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Correlations		Anxiety Level	Production T1	Production T2	Production T3
Anxiety Level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.843**	-.354*	-.491**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.011	.000
	N	51	51	51	51

To further establish the effect of anxiety on pronunciation accuracy and reach more valid conclusions, we performed additional independent samples t-testing to see whether there are any statistically significant differences in the performance between the high and low anxiety groups. Levene's test for equality of variances proved not statistically significant for either of the tasks (Task 1: $F=0.903$, $p=0.481$; Task 2: $F=0.064$, $p=0.801$; Task 3: $F=0.027$, $p=0.871$) which enabled us to regard t-test results as reliable. The results of t-testing demonstrated statistically significant differences across tasks between the two investigated groups (Task 1: $t=10.985$ $p=0.00$; Task 2: $t=2.646$ $p=0.01$; Task 3: $t=3.940$ $p=0.00$), hence we can ascribe the difference in scores to the level of anxiety and not to pure chance. High anxiety leads to less successful performance on pronunciation accuracy examinations, as opposed to the low anxiety. Thus, we could say that the level of anxiety strongly affects pronunciation accuracy, in the sense that a high level of anxiety has a debilitating effect on the production, while low anxiety leads to more accurate production. The results agree with a previous study dealing with the relationship between anxiety and pronunciation exclusively (Baran-Łuczarska, 2014), but they also agree with other studies confirming that high levels of anxiety lead to less successful performance in the target language either regarding overall motivation, or test scores (Kitano, 2001; Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz 2010; Salehi & Marefat, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The present paper aimed at investigating the effect of foreign language anxiety on Serbian secondary school EFL learners' pronunciation accuracy, i.e. we sought to explore whether high anxiety negatively affects students' performance on pronunciation tests, and vice versa. To that end, we conducted a survey to classify students according to the level of experienced anxiety, as well as pronunciation testing by which we measured students' vowel and consonant production, along with accent placement accuracy. The results demonstrated strong negative correlation between the level of anxiety and pronunciation accuracy, i.e. the scores on pronunciation test decreased with the increase of anxiety level, which indicates that a high level of anxiety can be regarded as an impediment in pronunciation enhancement at least when it comes to the investigated sample of participants. T-test results likewise confirmed statistically significant differences in scores between the high and low anxiety groups, underscoring once again the negative effect of the high level of anxiety in EFL classrooms.

The findings of the present study agree with the conclusions made in previous research (Kitano, 2001; Awan et al., 2010; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; Baran-Lucarz, 2014; Boonyaparakob et al., 2015) and have significant pedagogical implications. Namely, EFL teachers should be aware of the students with high level of anxiety and be prepared to organize the lesson or classroom activities in a more accepting and positive manner. Perhaps more frequent peer or group activities could enhance students' cooperation and reduce the fear of classmates' judgments. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to test formats, timing and distribution, in order to relieve the stress caused by test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The established relationship between the teacher and the students, as well as among the students themselves seems crucial in achieving more positive and motivating learning environment in which the affective filter is lowered. Communication apprehension present in the majority of our respondents could be explained by the lack of confidence, as well as insufficient knowledge. Therefore, teaching and learning goals might focus on advancing communicative competence and performance in everyday situations outside the classroom and allow students to interact more on regular basis. Involving students with a high level of anxiety in curriculum planning and decision making process regarding EFL classroom goals might help in increasing students' willingness to participate. Hence, anxiety may eventually diminish and, consequently, pronunciation could improve, as well as the rest of the skills.

The design of the pronunciation tests may be one of the limitations of the study since more valid conclusions would require additional examples and a task that would include intonation, as well. Moreover, the sample of participants could

have incorporated students from lower and higher levels of proficiency to obtain more comprehensive results.

Further research may concentrate on the effects of anxiety on reading and writing, listening and speaking skills, so that we could gain a more reliable insight into the influence of anxiety on overall target language proficiency, further contributing thus to the ongoing research regarding the affective factors in SLA.

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UTICAJ ANKSIOZNOSTI NA TAČNOST IZGOVORA SRPSKIH UČENIKA ENGLESKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA

Rezime

U radu se ispituje uticaj anksioznosti prema stranom jeziku na tačnost izgovora kod srpskih srednjoškolskih učenika engleskog kao stranog jezika. Brojne studije pokazale su da visok nivo anksioznosti ima negativan uticaj naročito na opštu komunikativnu kompetenciju učenika, kao i na želju da učestvuju u nastavnim aktivnostima (Aida 1994; Kitano 2001). Svetska naučna literatura obiluje radovima koji se bave uticajem anksioznosti na opšte postignuće pri učenju jezika cilja, dok je broj radova koji se bave uticajem anksioznosti na tačnost izgovora znatno manji, a situacija je slična i u srpskom naučnom kontekstu. Stoga naš rad ima za cilj da istraži da li prisustvo anksioznosti olakšava ili otežava tačnost izgovora, te smo u tom cilju sa 62 učenika srednje škole sproveli anketu koja je sadržala skalu anksioznosti (Horwitz et al. 1986), podelivši ih kasnije u dve grupe, u zavisnosti od odgovora, na one sa visokim i one sa niskim stepenom anksioznosti prema stranom jeziku. Istovremeno sa anketom, testirali smo i tačnost izgovora kroz tri zadatka kada su ispitanici snimani kako izgovaraju određene liste reči. Kvantitativno obrađeni rezultati korišćenjem adekvatnih statističkih testova pokazali su snažan uticaj anksioznosti na tačnost izgovora i potvrdili nalaze iz jednog prethodnog istraživanja (Baran-Łucarz 2014). U radu se takođe ističu važne pedagoške implikacije vezane za efikasnost učenja izgovora i mogućnost prevazilaženja anksioznosti prema izgovoru stranog jezika.

Ključne reči: izgovor, engleski kao J2, skala anksioznosti, srpski srednjoškolski učenici

