



“Silence Is What Causes Me Anxiety”: Nonverbal Cues in the Research of Language Anxiety in the Case of Interpreting Students

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Abstract. There has been a remarkable interest in language anxiety (LA) over the last four decades. Particularly foreign language anxiety (FLA) is currently the most widely studied emotion in second language acquisition (SLA) (Gkonou et al. 2017). Anxiety frequently appears in the case of oral tasks; perhaps this is the reason why most researchers tend to focus on the verbal cues of LA and neglect the nonverbal signs. Some claim that 65% to 93% of communication is done nonverbally (Knapp and Hall 2002), and thus it is essential to consider and study these cues in a language anxiety research. The present paper presents nonverbal cues observed during a simultaneous interpreting task from Hungarian to English. Participants (N = 12) were Hungarian-mother-tongue students studying translation and interpreting in BA and MA courses. Silence, pauses, and other body language cues will be observed and analysed based on their recorded interpreting performance, and the results of the follow-up interviews will be presented to support the findings. These findings raise awareness of the importance of acknowledging nonverbal cues of LA in the case of interpreting students.

Keywords: language anxiety, foreign language anxiety, nonverbal cues, interpreting peers, awareness

1. Introduction

Language anxiety (LA) is a complex emotion (Gkonout et al. 2017), and it is the concern and negative emotional reaction in second language acquisition (SLA) and production, thus frequently detectable in a foreign language classroom context (Gregersen and MacIntyre 2014). It is a common and greatly unwelcome emotion that can have numerous negative effects on students; it can even lead them to abandon their studies (Gkonou et al. 2017). People in all fields and

professions experience LA on different levels and situations, be it a student or a business owner (Marton 2023). Therefore, LA can affect proficient language learners as well (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014).

The subjects of the current paper are proficient language learners: interpreting students. In the past, interpreting had a different system. Interpreters were only interpreting from a second language (L2) to their mother tongue. Nowadays this has changed, and interpreting students interpret in other languages as well beside their mother language. Due to this change, interpreting students are still in the process of perfecting their foreign language skills while they are required to interpret into a foreign target language. Interpreting, let that be chuchotage, consecutive, or simultaneous, is extremely difficult and demanding; therefore, it is not a surprise that it stresses students out (Rosiers et al. 2011). What is surprising though is that not many researchers have recognized this and there are only few studies about language anxiety among interpreting students (Xu and Liu 2023, Liu 2024), or particularly in the case of consecutive (Ferdowski and Razmi 2024) or simultaneous (Al-Sowaidi and Mohammed 2023) interpreting processes that students go through.

In interpreting training, teachers should trace LA and ought to recognize its symptoms. There are overt and covert signs of LA. It manifests in verbal and nonverbal cues as well. Besides a shaky voice, mispronunciation of words and stuttering, body language, or eventually the lack of it can also show anxiety. The current study focuses on the nonverbal cues, since these signs are as present as the verbal ones, and they are actually harder to control and mask (Kang 2000), thus they help identify language anxiety in a more realistic and efficient way. There is a limited number of studies considering interpreting students' LA and no study observing nonverbal cues of LA in the case of interpreting students. The current paper intends to enrich the formerly mentioned existing literature and fill in the latter mentioned research gap to show the necessity not only to trace LA in the case of these proficient language learners but to dig deeper and see what they feel (Gregersen et al. 2017).

2. Interpreting

Interpreting was idealized and said to be mastered by only a few because the process of interpreting is extremely stressful and hard. Even for prominent interpreting students, it seems highly demanding due to the complex tasks placed on their attentional and cognitive skills (Hansen and Shlesinger 2007). Interpreting is an oral task, and since many students experience LA during oral activities, they may also experience it while interpreting, which can impair their performance and, in extreme cases, even lead to failure (Ferdowski and Razmi 2024).

In the traditional way of interpreting, foreign language (FL) is the source language and the target language is the interpreter's mother tongue because this way the interpreting will be of a higher quality. Newmark (1988: 3) said, “translat[ing] into your language of habitual use [...] is the only way you can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness”. He even dismissed those who interpret into L2 and calls the interpreting “service” translation. Marmaridou (1996) agrees with Newmark and claims that a professional translator should prefer to translate into their first language (L1), and changing the direction can only happen in experimental settings. There were articles written about the principles of translators, and they call this direction of translating the “golden rule”, and in the case of professional associations translating into L1 the latter mentioned rule is included in their code of ethics (Pavlovic 2007).

Although some believe that translating into L1 is more spontaneous and easier (Dendane 2012) or that this direction provides a better delivery and expression (Chou et al. 2021), there were researchers with opposing thoughts. Campbell (1998) was among the first ones to disagree with the traditional directionality. He believed that translating into L2 is as normal as translating into L1. Snell-Hornby et al. (1997) also agreed with this direction and suggested that this was part of modern life.

Indeed, nowadays, university students, including the participants of the present research, are supposed to interpret into L2 or L3. The downside of this is that translating into L2 is extremely difficult, and it can lead to LA. The first reason why this new direction leads to more anxiety is because interpreting peers are still developing their language skills while training to interpret (Yan and Liang 2022). Also, the thought that the success of interpreting depends on them places a heavy burden on interpreters (Besznyák 2019). Further factors that cause LA for interpreting students can be certain individual variables, for example self-efficiency (Xu and Liu 2023) and academic self-concept (Arnáiz Castro and Pérez-Luzardo Díaz 2016). These and other affective variables cause LA, which then negatively affect language production (Chiang 2009).

Consecutive interpreting is probably the less anxiety-provoking option compared to the simultaneous one because the interpreter has time to take notes and think, but that does not mean that it is a stress-free process. The interpreter is usually on stage, so while in the case of simultaneous interpreting the interpreter is hidden in a cabinet, consecutive interpreting can induce stage fright as well. In one study, 30 Iranian university students were assessed while learning to interpret into English. The author of the study aimed to explore the relationship between anxiety levels, emotional intelligence, and the quality of interpreting performance during consecutive interpreting (Rajabi and Yousefi 2022). Results showed that negative emotions and thoughts, particularly anxiety, had a direct relationship with the quality of interpreting performance.

The situation is even worse in the case of simultaneous interpreting, and the reason lies in different cognitive processes, which start with understanding the message and at the same time being able to convey the meaning on a different language while still paying attention to the next sentence. Besides language command and cognitive skills, there could be thousands of anxiety-inducing factors starting from external to internal ones. One frequent variable that can negatively affect language production is the speaker's speech rate. Korpál (2016) – in the form of a pilot study – assessed students' interpreting performance regarding how they reacted to a speaker with normal and then with a fast delivery of speech. The author measured their heart rate and blood pressure. Heart rate results showed a positive correlation with participants' language anxiety, indicating that in a faster phase interpreters find it hard to recall words and complete the task successfully. Thus, besides simultaneous interpreting being an extremely hard task by itself, there are several factors that can hinder the interpreter's attention and cause LA, which can then lead to silence and failure.

3. Language anxiety

Language anxiety is known for being elusive and affecting many in their everyday activities, in some cases even disturbing the quality of their life. Language anxiety is a major affective factor in the process of language learning and use (Simsek and Dörnyei 2017); thus, several researchers have studied its trajectory, symptoms, and manifestation affecting learners in their language learning journey (Marton 2024, Chan et al. 2025, Dewaele et al. 2023, Piniel 2024).

There are different affective variables studied in the context of SLA. Confidence (Peng and Woodrow 2010) and grit (Duckworth et al. 2007) are affecting the language acquisition process, while LA is mentioned as one of the negative affective variables distorting language learning (MacIntyre and Legatto 2011, Lee 2019, Lee and Lee 2019, Marton 2024), together with boredom (Derakhshan et al. 2021, Pawlak et al. 2021) and demotivation (Thorner and Kikuchi 2019, Gao and Liu 2022).

Nowadays, positive psychology has become increasingly prominent in the study of affective variables and emotions, and in addition to negative factors, positive variables are also being examined. Therefore, besides FLA, foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is also taken into account. FLE is a positive emotion experienced by FL learners when their psychological needs are met in the FL classroom. FLE is basically the positive variable, the Janus-faced concept of FLA (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014).

In one study, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and FLE (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014) are investigated together. 1,746 FL students took part in this

study. Their FLE and FLCA was measured, and the results of statistical analysis have shown that FLE was significantly higher than their FLCA. The authors reported a number of variables that affect FLE and FLCA, for example participants' perception of their own language proficiency level and the actual level, number of languages known, education, age, gender, etc. Female participants turned out to have more of both FLE and FLCA, and the cultural background also posed as an affective variable. FLA, FLE, and foreign language boredom (FLB) are also assessed together (Dewaele et al. 2023a–b, 2024), and researchers highlight the fact that these three emotions affect academic results. FLE can be induced by teachers, and FLB has a negative effect on SLA, but not as negative as FLA. Researchers warn readers not to neglect and diminish the existence of LA in FL classroom (Dewaele et al. 2023a–b).

Due to the dynamic nature of LA, the coexistence of contradictory conditions that interact dynamically is normal (Gregersen 2020); thus, it is worthwhile to take both positive and negative emotions into consideration. Viewing FLA “as a complex and dynamically changing rather than a static learner variable” (Wukits 2022: ii) has changed in recent years, and it was influenced by the Complex Dynamic System Theory (CDST). This theory helps SLA research to reach its full potential by not only applying nomothetic methods that focus on average scores but also adding methods that are person-centred and that measure second-by-second values, providing the research with results on a wide scale (Lu 2022). Scales and average values are also needed in a research, but these results – only as a research method – can lead to ergodicity issues due to the very close constituent elements of a group, which then results in lack of data (Lowie and Verspoor 2019, Larsen-Freeman 2006). This is the reason why the idiodynamic method (MacIntyre and Ducker 2022) was created to help SLA researchers focus on interpersonal variations and to receive a microscopic perspective upon individuals' issues in SLA research (Lu 2022).

Recently, many researchers applied the paradigm of CDST in the research of LA (Piniel 2024, Huynh 2021, Kasza-Tóth 2021, Chang and Zhang 2021). The present study also used mixed methods, including the dynamic one and – as Rosenweig (1986) suggested – gathered data using three correlative approaches: nomothetic, demographic, and dynamic.

4. Nonverbal cues of language anxiety

Using the dynamic approach – which offers a deep insight into individuals' language anxiety – can help detect not only verbal but also nonverbal signs of anxiety. While some researchers hypothesise that 65% to 93% of communication is nonverbal (Knapp and Hall 2002), others swear by the 7-38-55 formula, where

communication is said to be 7 percent verbal, 38 percent vocal, and 55 percent facial (Mehrabian and Ferris 1967). Not everyone agrees with these numbers. One researcher wrote an article to prove that these numbers are just an urban legend (Lapakko 2007). Either way, one thing is for sure: a large amount of communication is done nonverbally; therefore, a lot can be deduced if researchers take a look at it, especially in the case of LA.

Verbal messages transmit a content, a cognitive orientation, while nonverbal signs serve as emotional function. Also, due to the fact that nonverbal communication is spontaneous, deception-free, often non-conscious and therefore hard to control, they are a more accurate way to show a person's emotions and feelings (Gregersen 2007).

One nonverbal sign of LA can actually be the lack of any sign: silence. Pauses or silence can have a positive correlation with anxiety, or it can be a safe and comfortable way to deal with a stressful situation; however, if this becomes a habit, it is extremely hard to break out of it (King 2013). There is a difference between pause and silence, and the difference is length. Longer types of silences are called non-talk (Jaworski 2000). In some cases, silence is only a sign of insignificant, not anxiety-related distraction (Saville-Troike 1985), the effect of cognitive processing (Bao 2014, Kusaka 2013), or just an unmarked silence (Sobkowiak 1997).

Besides silence, mime can show people's emotions as well. Nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, can show fear (Scherer et al. 2011), rigid facial movements in the brow and mouth area or, in addition, stiff posture and crossed legs are also signs of anxiety (Gregersen et al. 2017). Another study listed head movement, blinking, pupil size, and lip movement, among others, as nonverbal signs of anxiety (Giannakakis et al. 2017).

Table 1. *Observation criteria to assess examinees' anxiety status (Gregersen 2007: 213)*

Leaning behaviour	Towards interlocutor	1	2	3	4	5	Away from interlocutor
Bodily tension	Relaxed	1	2	3	4	5	Rigid
Bodily position	Open	1	2	3	4	5	Closed
Weight shifts	Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
Gestures	Natural	1	2	3	4	5	Unnatural
Self-touching	Rarely	1	2	3	4	5	Often
Foot movements	Stationary	1	2	3	4	5	Jittery
Head-nodding	Often	1	2	3	4	5	Rarely

Besides facial cues, body language can also show LA. Gregersen (2007) in her study observed different variables as criteria to assess anxiety, such as leaning

behaviour, bodily tension, bodily position, weight shift, gestures, self-touching, foot movements, and head nodding. These were examined based on how natural, frequent, and relaxed they were (see *Table 1*). In this study, 31 graduate and undergraduate students rated 7 students’ oral French exam (L2) before and after receiving the criteria. After learning the nonverbal signs, the accuracy of participants’ rating was significantly higher. This pedagogical study draws attention to the importance of knowing the nonverbal cues of anxiety to be able to track anxiety more accurately.

5. The study: Nonverbal cues of LA in the case of interpreting students

5.1. Previous findings

In the academic year 2022–2023, the author conducted a pilot study (Marton 2024) about language anxiety among interpreting students ($N = 26$). The participants were students from Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, from Miercurea Ciuc (12 MA students) and Târgu-Mureş (14 BA students). These students were Hungarians, learning Romanian as L2 and English as third language (L3). In that study, they interpreted a text from Hungarian to English, and then their LA was analysed. This study suggested that LA is present at this target group, and since it is an underrepresented research area, the author continued delving deeper into this topic in the case of this target group.

A larger study was then carried out one year later with 57 interpreting students. The students were from Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. From Miercurea Ciuc 19 MA interpreting students and from Târgu Mureş 38 BA students took part in this research. These Hungarian students were required to answer general questions about their interpreting experience, completed a Cambridge Placement Test to explore their language level, and then rated the statements in the modified FLCAS (Horwitz et. al. 1986)¹ to find out how high their general interpreting classroom anxiety was. After the qualitative part of the research, the quantitative part was made up of three phases: interpreting a Hungarian text to English, rating their LA with the help of the idiodynamic method (MacIntyre and Ducker 2022), and individual interview. Results have shown that a significant number of participants experience LA while interpreting ($N = 52$), and it mostly manifested as a mental block ($N = 36$). The study showed that interpreting students with high language levels can also experience LA.

1 Modified by the author from foreign-language-classroom-anxiety-related statements to language anxiety in interpreting-classroom-related statements.

5.2. Research aim and research questions

In the present study, I investigated the nonverbal cues of LA in the interpreting process of twelve students. The target group of this small-scale study were BA (N = 6) and MA (N = 6) interpreting students. These students are more or less on the same interpreting level, with similar interpreting experience, since the MA students did not necessarily finish a BA interpreting degree. Thus, these two groups were not meant to be compared with each other. Their mother tongue is Hungarian, and they are learning to interpret in three languages: Hungarian, Romanian, and English.

The research questions were the following:

Do interpreting students show nonverbal signs of language anxiety?

If so, what kind of nonverbal signs do they show?

What are their common and unique nonverbal signs of anxiety?

Are they aware of these signs of anxiety, and can they control them?

5.3. Methodology

The research consisted of both quantitative and qualitative parts. In the quantitative part of the research, participants (N = 12) were required to complete an online questionnaire (via Google Forms), which started with demographic questions. Out of the twelve participants, eight were female and four were male. The majority of them (N = 9) were aged between 18 and 25, two participants were in the age group from 26 to 30, and only one of them was aged between 31 and 40. Five participants came from Harghita County and five from Mureş County. There was one participant from Braşov County and one from Covasna County.

The demographic questions were followed by general questions of interpreting experience. Participants clarified whether they had interpreted before outside of the classroom and, if so, at what kind of events. They were also asked open- and closed-ended questions about the manifestation of their language anxiety while interpreting and about how they dealt with it.

The Cambridge Placement test,² which measures general English proficiency, was also completed by the students. The results of this test showed participants' language levels. There were 25 multiple-choice items in total. Participants with the highest points (24-25) were on C2 level, those who received 23-22 points were on C1 level, 21-20 points meant B2 level, 19-17 points denoted B1 level, and any point below showed A2 or A1 level.

The last item in the questionnaire was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et. al. 1986).³ The scale was slightly modified by the author. The

2 <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/general-english/> (Last accessed: 20 June 2025).

3 <https://dept.english.wisc.edu/rfyoung/333/FLCAS.pdf> (Last accessed: 20 June 2025).

statements referring to FLCA were replaced by statements referring to language anxiety in the interpreting classroom. The scale consists of 33 statements which have to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. These statements show the correlation between language anxiety and three other types of anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative judgment and test anxiety. Thus, according to how much participants agreed with these statements, it could be deduced what exactly causes their language anxiety in the interpreting classroom. Besides these results, this scale can also show a mean value of students' interpreting classroom anxiety if certain statements are reverse-coded (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 31). This reverse-coding system was indispensable, so in each case 1 meant strong disagreement and 5 suggested strong agreement (Tóth 2009). The answers to the statements were extracted in Excel sheets, converted into numbers from 1 to 5, and reverse-coded so that the mean value of participants' language anxiety in interpreting classroom could be calculated.

The second step was the qualitative part of the research, which was carried out following the three phases of the idiodynamic method (MacIntyre and Ducker 2022). In the first phase, students simultaneously interpreted a speech repository text⁴ from Hungarian to English. This text was designed for learning purposes, and the language level was chosen according to the target groups' average English level, which was intermediate. Their language level was known from the Cambridge Placement Test results. The text was almost eight-minute long, and the topic was healthy lifestyle. Participants' performance was recorded, which was required for the second phase.

In the second phase, the recorded videos were uploaded in the psychometric study provided by the developers of the idiodynamic method. This software functions as a video player in which participants could rewatch themselves and could rate their own language anxiety during their interpreting performance. They rated their LA on a scale from 0 to 3, where 0 meant no anxiety and 3 was equal to the highest possible anxiety level. After the rating, a graph in Excel was automatically generated for each participant.

In the third phase, the graphs and participants' own experiences were discussed in the form of individual interviews. These interviews were half-structured, and later on transcribed and analysed. In the present study, the focus is on the nonverbal signs of language anxiety and on participants' awareness of them.

4 <https://speechrepository.webcloud.ec.europa.eu/speech/cenz%C3%BAr%C3%A1zotteg%C3%A9szs%C3%A9g> (Last accessed: 20 September 2025).

5.4. Results and discussion

The participants of this study were twelve interpreting students from Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania: MA students (N = 6) from Miercurea Ciuc and BA (N = 6) students from Târgu-Mureș. These students' mother tongue was Hungarian, and they learned to interpret in three languages: Hungarian, Romanian, and English.

Their first task was to complete an online questionnaire, which had multiple items. The first items were questions related to their interpreting experience and their language anxiety during interpreting. Three of the students stated that they had interpreted besides the university classes at different events such as Tourism Conference, Spanish Intercultural Night, and one of them interpreted for Caritas. Out of the twelve students, eleven claimed that they experienced anxiety while interpreting. In a multiple-choice question, they were asked about verbal and nonverbal symptoms of anxiety, and the options given were mental block, sweating, stuttering, memory problems, or other. Mental block was chosen by the majority (N = 10), then stuttering (N = 4), sweating (N = 3), and memory problems (N=3) were also chosen. One participant added blushing, trembling, and the inability to stand still as nonverbal signs of language anxiety: "Blushing, feeling hot, slight trembling, mainly in my limbs and stomach, sudden feelings of intense stress, inability to sit still." One participant – the only one who did not experience anxiety during interpreting – wrote, "It is very rare for me to show visible signs of stress." In an open-ended question, they were asked about their anxiety coping methods. The most mentioned method was breathing control and deep breath (N = 6). Besides breathing control, preparing in advance (N = 5), motivational self-talk (N = 3), focusing on one point (N = 2), and closed eyes (N = 2) were also mentioned.

The next task was the Cambridge Placement test, which measured their English language level. According to the results, four students were on C2 level, 5 students on C1 level, one participant on B2, one on B1 level, and one participant was on A2 level. This means that ten participants were on B2 level or above, and only 2 participants were below B2 level. The interpreting text was chosen based on these results: on B1 (intermediate) level, an adequate language level for all the participants.

On the one hand, according to participants' answers, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale showed a negative correlation between students' interpreting classroom anxiety and communication apprehension and fear of negative judgment but a positive correlation with test anxiety. Therefore, it can be deduced that the participants are not afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers or in communication with anyone, but they get language anxiety while interpreting because it feels like a test. On the other hand – after reverse

coding the answers –, the results have shown the mean value of each participants’ interpreting classroom anxiety. The numbers were from 1 to 5, where 1 meant the least anxious state and 5 the most anxious one. The least anxious student had a 1.63 mean value of anxiety, and the most anxious participant had a 4.18 mean value of anxiety in interpreting classroom context (see *Table 2*).

Table 2. *Mean values of students’ interpreting anxiety level and the highest and lowest value*

MA students																																		
Candidate 1	4	2	2	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	2	4	4	2	3	3	4	2	2	4	3.39
Candidate 2	4	5	5	4	4	1	5	5	4	4	5	5	3	4	3	5	5	5	4	4	1	5	3	4	3	3	3	5	4	3	2	4	3	3.84
Candidate 3	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	3	3	3	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	2	2	5	5	5	5	3	4	3	5	4.18
Candidate 4	2	4	4	3	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	4	2	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	1	1	2	4	4	4	4	4	1	3	4	3.51
Candidate 5	4	5	3	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	4	2	3	2	2	1	2	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	1	2	2	2	4	1	2	2	2.45
Candidate 6	4	5	4	5	4	3	5	2	5	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	2	5	3	4	3	4	3	5	4	3	4	3	3	3.75
BA students																																		
Candidate 7	1	3	4	2	1	3	3	4	4	2	4	4	2	1	3	4	1	4	4	4	1	4	2	1	1	4	2	4	3	3	1	2	3	2.69
Candidate 8	3	2	1	1	2	3	2	3	1	2	2	2	1	2	5	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2.06
Candidate 9	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	4	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	5	2	4	1	4	1	1	3	4	2	3	3	4	1	2	3	2.45
Candidate 10	3	4	2	3	2	1	2	4	4	4	5	5	2	3	2	3	1	3	2	3	3	1	3	4	2	4	4	4	2	3	1	3	2	2.84
Candidate 11	2	4	2	2	2	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	2	5	3	5	2	4	1	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	4	2.78
Candidate 12	2	4	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	4	2	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1.63

The results of this latter mentioned test and scale were analysed together and placed on a graph. They suggest that language proficiency level has a negative correlation with interpreting classroom language anxiety because although the most anxious student was the one on A2 level, the next most anxious results belong to participants with C1 and C2 English language levels (see *Figure 1*). Therefore, interpreting students with high and low language proficiency can also experience LA.

The interpreting was done individually in a classroom in a sitting position. Participants were tape-recorded with their permission because this was needed for the next step. Afterwards, they watched back their own performance, using headsets, and rated their language anxiety from 0 to 3 during the interpreting. After the rating, in the above-mentioned psychometric study – in which the whole rating was done – a graph (see *Figure 2*) was generated for each participant, which was then discussed in the form of a semi-structured interview. The changes on the graph helped the author and the participants find the nonverbal signs of

their anxiety and the cause of it. The graph below shows the results of the most anxious student. It can be seen that the participant did not choose 0 at all and the movement on the graph is between 1 and 3. This is just one part of the graph, but in the Excel program the changes can be traced back from second to second, and together with the tape, the exact moment of a spike in anxiety can be traced back and the reaction can be watched back.

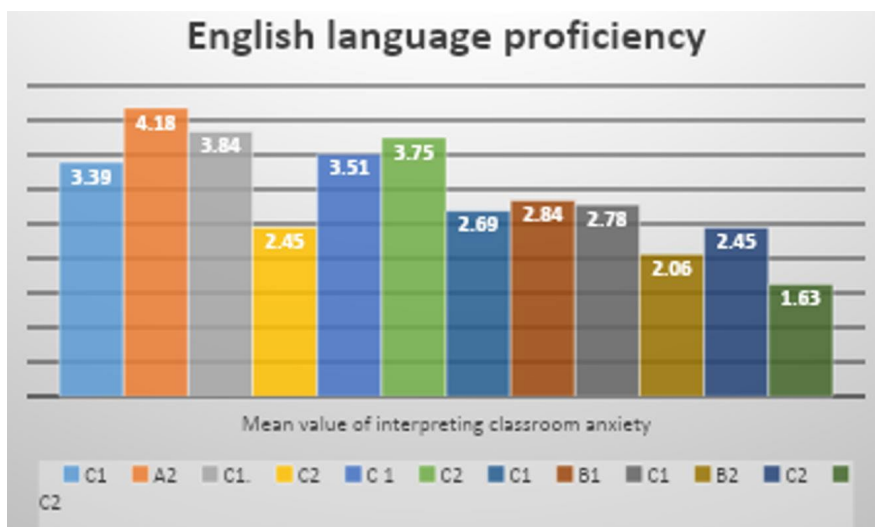


Figure 1. Participants' English proficiency levels and the mean values of their interpreting classroom anxiety

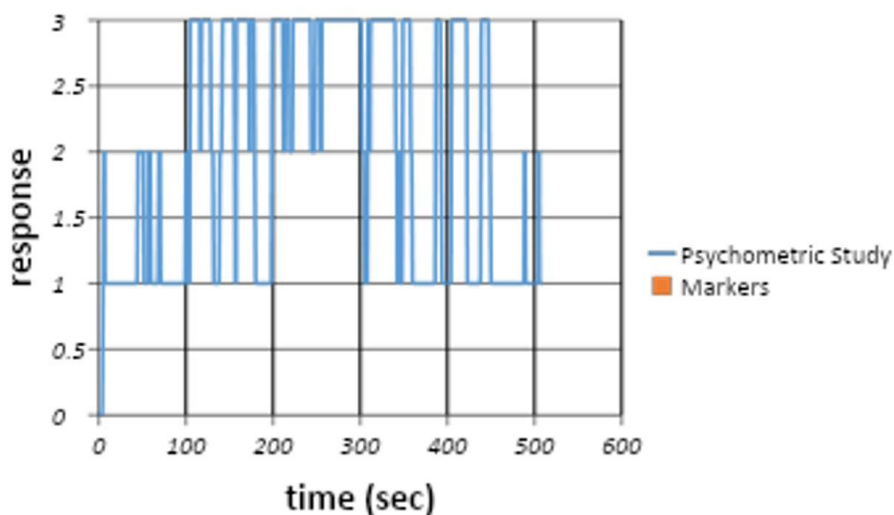


Figure 2. Graph of the most anxious student

There were certain guiding questions that helped participants to open up and remember the whole process. Regarding the rating, half ($N = 6$) of the participants barely chose 0; therefore, they had a basic level of anxiety during the interpreting process. One participant claimed, “I have never had a 0 state, it’s the same in life. With family, relationship, university, friends (...) anxiety is always present.” Out of twelve students, three did not use number 3, as they did not need it. Others chose number 3 when they had a mental block or there was silence, “I chose 3 when I missed one sentence totally or I froze.” There were five participants out of twelve who claimed that at some points of the interpreting process they could choose a number even higher than 3: “The part with the specific and even unknown words was the peak of anxiety. There I left out some information, and I tried to sum it up. At some point, I was so anxious I would give much more, even 7.” This part mentioned by the latter participant is at four minutes and ten seconds, and at that moment all participants had an anxiety spike on their graph. One participant also mentioned that she experienced anxiety on a higher level at some point, and she mentioned nonverbal cues as signs of it: “I made some comments while I was frozen because I was angry with myself. In that situation I would have given myself a value higher than 3. At this point, I had bad facial expression, and I tried to give up. But I’m the same in my everyday life too.” Her facial expressions simultaneously displayed fear (Scherer et al. 2011) and anger, which may have been influenced by individual factors such as a weak self-concept (Xu and Liu 2023) and low academic self-efficiency (Arnáiz Castro and Pérez-Luzardo Díaz 2016).

There were different factors that triggered language anxiety in this interpreting process. Besides the presenter’s accent, speed (Korpál 2016), terminology, headphone issues, being tired, or not having a suitable room temperature were mentioned. The most frequently mentioned triggering factor was silence ($N = 8$) (King 2013). Participants had a mental block and froze, and these long pauses gave them anxiety. Thus, for most of the participants, silence meant anxiety ($N = 8$), but there was one participant who claimed that silence was needed for regaining concentration, and another participant claimed that her silence was in fact a cognitive process (Bao 2014, Kusaka 2013). When it comes to regaining concentration, there was one participant who used *öööö*⁵ a lot, which was the cause and effect of her anxiety and silence.

There were other nonverbal signs of anxiety besides silence such as blushing, playing with their hair (Gregersen 2007), necklace, or pen, and rolling eyes. One visible nonverbal sign at all participants was limited eye contact ($N = 12$), but silence ($N = 8$), fidgeting ($N = 5$), facial cues ($N = 3$), and head nodding ($N = 3$) (Giannakakis et al. 2017) were also mentioned. There was a participant who

5 Hungarians use this filler when they do not know what to say and are trying to gain time and collect their thoughts; usually, the filler word ‘um’ is used in English.

claimed that he had not realized that he had played with his hair and had closed his eyes when he had been anxious until he watched himself back. These results demonstrate not only how language anxiety (LA) can operate at a non-conscious level (Gregersen 2007) but also how adversely it can affect interpreter students' performance, potentially even leading to failure (Ferdowski and Razmi 2024).

6. Conclusions

The subjects of this study were interpreting students whose strength is language knowledge. Perhaps this is the reason why it is assumed that they do not have FLA, and this could be why there is a research gap in this topic. Consistent with earlier studies (Marton 2023, 2024), the present research demonstrates that proficient language learners and interpreting students alike can experience language anxiety (LA). In this research, they interpreted a text from their mother language to English, which – for most of them – was on a lower level than their language proficiency level, though they still experienced LA.

Their LA was triggered by mental block caused by special terminology or a certain topic, while some were bothered by the speaker's accent or speed. Most of them dealt with these anxiety-provoking situations with breathing control and taking a deep breath, while others prepared in advance and tried to motivate themselves with self-talk.

There were different nonverbal signs of anxiety, which could be traced back based on the spikes of their anxiety on their graphs. These signs were limited eye contact, fidgeting, face gestures, head nodding, and blushing. Even though for some of them silence was just a sign of regaining concentration, a cognitive process, or simply an unmarked silence, the biggest effect and cause of language anxiety in this research was silence. Participants' own silence frightened them and caused them to stress even more. They felt the need to talk because interpreting students cannot afford to have a long silence in the process of a simultaneous interpreting. Thus, this silence often ended in a mental block caused by the pressure in this stressful situation.

Further investigation could be done in this field with this target group interpreting in a standing position so that body language can be observed better. A longitudinal study could also be done to see changes in their LA before and after becoming aware of their nonverbal signs of LA.

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