

# Exploring Foreign Language Communication Apprehension among the English Language University Students in the English Language Classroom Setting

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J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language  
and Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Croatian  
Language and Literature

Gabrijela Crnjak

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Supervisor: Dr. Draženka Molnar, Assistant Professor

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the phenomenon of communication apprehension in a foreign language classroom setting. It tries to investigate if there is a difference in the total level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. Furthermore, it tries to explore whether there is a relationship between different aspects of communication apprehension and the total level of communication apprehension and which background factor is the best predictor of communication apprehension among the students. The first part of the paper brings a literature overview of the main concepts in this research, as well as an overview of relevant studies in the world. The second part of the paper reports on the research itself. A mixed-method approach, consisting of questionnaires completed by the students and in-depth interviews conducted among the teachers, is used for the purpose of this study. The results show that year of studying is not a significant predictor of the communication apprehension level which students experience. Among all variables included in the analysis, the only significant predictors of communication apprehension are *evaluations*.

Key words: in-class communication apprehension, English as a foreign language, university level, evaluations

## Sažetak

Tema je ovoga rada pojava straha od komunikacije na stranom jeziku kod studenata engleskog jezika u razrednom okruženju. Pokušava istražiti postoji li razlika u razini straha od komunikacije između studenata preddiplomskog i diplomskog studija Engleskog jezika i književnosti na Filozofskom fakultetu Osijek. Nadalje, pokušava istražiti postoji li povezanost različitih aspekata straha s ukupnim strahom od komunikacije te koji je čimbenik najbolji predskazivač straha među studentima. Prvi dio rada donosi pregled temeljnih ideja iz literature o ovom području, kao i pregled važnih istraživanja u svijetu. Drugi dio rada izvještava o samom istraživanju. Za potrebe istraživanja koristili smo mješoviti pristup - upitnik proveden među studentima i detaljan intervju proveden među nastavnicima. Rezultati pokazuju da godina studiranja nije značajan predskazivač razine straha od komunikacije koju studenti doživljavaju. Među svim varijablama uključenima u analizu, jedini značajni predskazivači straha od komunikacije su *procjene*.

Ključne riječi: strah od komunikacije na satu, engleski kao strani jezik, visokoškolska razina, procjene



## 1. Introduction

Over the past few decades the interest in communication apprehension has increased. The concept of communication apprehension is usually defined as an individual's fear of real or anticipated communication situation. Researchers (McCroskey, 1977; Horwitz et al., 1986; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006) have become extremely interested in investigating the phenomenon, especially its manifestation in a foreign language classroom setting. It is the setting in which communication (oral communication in particular) serves a double purpose, that of acquisition and production of knowledge. A foreign language classroom is also a place where communication is being observed and assessed. That is probably the reason why more and more studies have been carried out among primary and secondary school students, and even more so among university students. A lack of research on communication apprehension at the university level in Croatia served as an inspiration for the present study. Moreover, it has been suggested that communication apprehension may become a serious problem for pre-service foreign language teachers in their attempt to incorporate as much communicative competence as they can into foreign language teaching at all levels.

The theoretical part of this study identifies the term *communication apprehension* among a great number of similar, sometimes synonymously used terms which can be found in the existing literature and offers a distinction between *communication apprehension* and other related terms. The present study tries to investigate whether there is a difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students. It also tries to examine if there is a relationship between different aspects of communication apprehension and the total level of communication apprehension. The main hypothesis is that undergraduate students experience greater level of communication apprehension than graduate students. Furthermore, it is assumed that different aspects of foreign language classroom setting affect the total level of communication apprehension. The results of the study are presented and explained in detail.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Apprehension vs. anxiety - Defining the terms

When looking into the terminology, it can be noticed that *communication apprehension* as a term is often used synonymously with many other terms, among which is the term *speaking anxiety*. In the existing literature the two terms appear in the same contexts, frequently denoting the same phenomenon. Therefore, the first aim of the theoretical part of the present study is to offer a clear distinction between the terms. At the mere beginning of this attempt the aforementioned terms were looked up in five prominent English online dictionaries. Table 1 represents various dictionary definitions of the term *apprehension*, and Table 2a represents dictionary definitions of the term *anxiety*.

*Table 1. Dictionary definitions of the term “apprehension”*

Macmillan Dictionary	<i>a feeling of worry or fear that something bad might happen</i>
Oxford Dictionary	<i>anxiety or fear that something bad or unpleasant will happen</i>
Cambridge Dictionary	<i>worry about the future, or a fear that something unpleasant is going to happen</i>
Merriam-Webster Dictionary	<i>suspicion or fear especially of future evil</i>
The Free Dictionary	<i>fearful or uneasy anticipation of the future</i>

*Table 2a. Dictionary definitions of the term “anxiety”*

Macmillan Dictionary	<i>a worried feeling you have because you think something bad might happen</i>
Oxford Dictionary	<i>a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome</i>
Cambridge Dictionary	<i>an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future</i>
Merriam-Webster Dictionary	<i>apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill</i>

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The Free Dictionary	<i>a state of uneasiness and apprehension, as about future uncertainties</i>
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As Table 1 and Table 2a show, the terms *apprehension* and *anxiety* are rarely used synonymously in English dictionaries. However, the term *apprehension* is occasionally used to define the term *anxiety*. Spielberger (1983, as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986) defines anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. As it can be seen from the definition provided by the author, there is not always a clear distinction between the two terms. While using one term to explain the other, it could be concluded that the two terms partially overlap and one could be misled into considering the two terms to be synonymous. Furthermore, *anxiety* is the term which can also be found in psychiatric terminology, which can be seen from Table 2b.

*Table 2b. Dictionary definitions of the term “anxiety”*

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Oxford Dictionary	<i>Psychiatry: a nervous disorder marked by excessive uneasiness and apprehension, typically with compulsive behaviour or panic attacks</i>
Cambridge Dictionary	<i>Medical: a medical condition in which you always feel frightened and worried</i>
Merriam-Webster Dictionary	<i>Medical: an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it</i>
The Free Dictionary	<i>Psychiatry: a state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological functioning</i>

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In neither of the examined dictionaries is the term *apprehension*, unlike the term *anxiety*, confirmed as a term denoting a particular medical condition, nor is it associated with medical terminology, especially the psychiatric one.

When it comes to the concept of *communication apprehension*, it first appeared in the United States where it was first introduced by J. C. McCroskey in 1970. As Lahtinen (2013) points out, it first focused on English, or more precisely, on the first language. On the other hand, research related to the fear in a second, or a foreign language was conducted under the label of *foreign language anxiety*. Therefore, there are cases in which both terms denote the same phenomenon and are used interchangeably. In his latest research findings on communication apprehension, McCroskey (1977) gave a brief overview of the previous studies on the topic offering a variety of terms different researchers would use to cover the notion of fear and anxiety in oral communication. Some of these terms are *stage fright*, *reticence*, *shyness*, *audience sensitivity*, and *communication apprehension*. McCroskey (1976) also could not avoid the term *anxiety* when defining *communication apprehension*. He defined it as a broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Moreover, McCroskey (1977) mentions the term *speech communication anxiety*, which he uses interchangeably with the term *communication apprehension*. According to his definition, *speech communication anxiety*, or *communication apprehension*, is one variable in an individual's ability to communicate with others, and one which has received considerable attention in communication, education and psychology. McCroskey defines *speech communication anxiety* as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with another person or persons. It can be seen from aforementioned that *communication apprehension* and *speech communication anxiety* are treated as synonyms and that the two concepts denote the same phenomenon.

According to Allen and Bourhis (1995), communication apprehension refers to a family of related terms including: (a) *reticence*, (b) *shyness*, (c) *unwillingness to communicate*, and (d) *stage fright*. They claim that there are arguments about the appropriateness and applicability of the various terms, although the terms have many elements in common.

However, McCroskey (1976) finds it extremely important to differentiate the terms *communication apprehension* and *stage fright*. He identifies *communication apprehension* as a much broader term as well as a much more severe problem faced by a smaller percentage of the population that was overlooked because its manifestations were seldom observed except in public speaking settings. Research shows that *communication apprehension* is not so widely spread phenomenon and that it is experienced both in public and private settings. On the other hand, McCroskey claims that *stage fright*, which he often uses interchangeably with *speech fright* and *speech anxiety*, is rather a common phenomenon experienced to some

degree by almost everyone who engages in some kind of public activity, i.e. performance in front of an audience, such as singing, dancing, public speaking, and even oral reading. McCroskey (1977) also provides a reason for using the term *communication apprehension* for the purpose of his studies. He states that *communication apprehension* as a term more broadly represents the total of the fears and anxieties studied previously.

The aforementioned distinction is confirmed by other researchers. For example, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) claim that *foreign language anxiety* can be discriminated from the related constructs such as *communication apprehension* as well as other types of anxieties, although it is often associated with them. Their claims are based on the results which emerged from criterion-related studies examining correlation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) with scales measuring the above mentioned related constructs, such as Trait scale of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, and Test Anxiety Scale.

Horwitz (1986) classifies *communication apprehension* as one of the three performance anxieties along with *test anxiety* and *fear of negative evaluation*. Horwitz defines *communication apprehension* as a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people, which makes it relevant to the conceptualization of *foreign language anxiety*. She names some manifestations of the communication apprehension, such as difficulty in speaking in dyads or groups (oral communication anxiety), in public (“stage fright”), or in listening to or learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety).

## 2.2. Communication Apprehension

This section will deal with a selective literature overview of relevant research dealing with communication apprehension. It will also summarize the most important findings of researches conducted in different countries, one of which is also Croatia. These situations are not identical to the one in Croatia, but some of the findings can be related to the Croatian context.

Furthermore, this section will provide a distinction between different types of communication apprehension. It will also provide an insight into causes of communication apprehension, as well as into various effects of communication apprehension.

### *2.2.1. An overview of previous studies*

Over the past few decades, the interest in communication apprehension, as well as in related concepts, has increased.

McCroskey (1976) was the first to offer a clear distinction between the terms related to the concept of communication apprehension. In his research paper, McCroskey employed the correlation analysis in order to determine the relationship between communication apprehension and personality traits and intelligence. Furthermore, McCroskey examined the impacts communication apprehension has in the classroom, as well as some of the possible causes of communication apprehension such as intelligence, teacher expectations and students' attitudes. The findings showed that there is a relationship between students' attitudes and communication apprehension. Those findings will also be confirmed by the present study.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2004) carried out research to investigate if there is a relationship between language anxiety and a number of individual differences. In her study, she reveals that there is a correlation between language use anxiety and communication apprehension. In other words, individuals with high language use anxiety will also have high communication apprehension.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2006) also examined the role of affective factors in the development of productive skills. In this study she also touched upon language anxiety as one of the affective factors and concluded that language anxiety contributes to poor foreign language performance.

Toth (2006) explored the role of foreign language anxiety experienced during oral production of English in a qualitative study carried out among advanced-level learners. The study shows how anxiety affects Hungarian first year English majors' speech production and performance in a conversation with a native speaker of English.

Kostić-Bobanović (2007) investigated intercultural communication apprehension among freshmen students at the Department of Economics and Tourism at University of Juraj Dobrila in Pula. Her longitudinal study supported the notion that high level of communication apprehension negatively affects an individual's both academic and social success.

Lahtinen (2013) carried out a research among Finnish-Swedish population in Finland and measured the levels of communication apprehension of two groups of Finnish upper

secondary school students in order to find out if there is a difference in the levels of communication apprehension between them. The results showed that the Finnish-Swedes suffered less from communication apprehension than the Finns.

This section offered a brief overview of the previous studies conducted in Croatia and worldwide. Their findings contributed greatly to the investigation of communication apprehension, its relationship with individual differences, development of productive skills, as well as academic achievement and success. The theoretical part of the present study rests heavily on McCroskey's work, whereas the study itself on the aforementioned research conducted in Finland (Lahtinen, 2013). As the following sections will show, regardless of similarities in research methodology, the results would differ.

### *2.2.2. Types of communication apprehension*

Within the phenomenon of communication apprehension two types of communication apprehension can be distinguished. The first type is usually referred to as 'trait' apprehension, and the second type as 'state' apprehension. This distinction was offered by McCroskey (1977), who based it on the previous work of Spielberger (1966) and Lamb (1973).

- Trait apprehension

According to McCroskey (1977), trait apprehension is characterized by fear or anxiety regardless of the type of oral communication situation a person engages in, from talking to a single person or within a group of people to giving a public speech. He points out that it is not a characteristic of normal or well-adjusted individuals since people with high levels of trait communication apprehension experience very high levels of fear when engaging in any oral communication situation, both those which could be considered to be threatening and those which rationally could not. McCroskey (1977) reports on previous studies of college student populations which suggest that about twenty percent of the students experience high trait communication apprehension.

- State apprehension

As opposed to trait apprehension, McCroskey (1977) explains that state apprehension is specific to an oral communication situation. The situation may vary from giving a public

speech to being interviewed for a new job. As a famous manifestation of state apprehension McCroskey states so called “stage fright”, the fear or anxiety a person experiences when communicating orally in situations where others are in a position to observe and evaluate their communication attempt, as McCroskey (1977) explains. In situations such as acting or singing before an audience and giving a public speech many people experience stage fright, which is considered to be a normal response of people in a public setting mentioned above. Moreover, Bruskin Associate’s 1973 American Fears study which appeared in the London Sunday Times found that the fear of speaking in public was the most frequently reported fear (as cited in McCroskey 1977). In fact, McCroskey (1977) even claims that it would not be completely unreasonable to suspect the emotional stability of an individual who never experiences state communication apprehension in a threatening oral communication situation.

### *2.2.3. Causes of communication apprehension*

McCroskey (1977) states that the causes of communication apprehension are not and may never be fully known. However, there are studies (Phillips and Butt, 1966, as cited in McCroskey, 1977) and surveys (Wheless, 1971, as cited in McCroskey, 1977) which suggest that communication apprehension develops during early childhood years. So what are the causes of its development? Since it is believed that communication apprehension is not a hereditary, but a learnt trait, and since children exhibit communication apprehension when entering kindergarten, it can be assumed that they develop communication apprehension during the early, so called formative years of their lives. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) suggest that there are two primary explanations for any development of personality in human beings. He claims that these can also be applied on communication apprehension, and they are heredity and environment.

Based on previous research, Prusank (1987) proposes four approaches, i.e. four plausible explanations for the development of communication apprehension. Those are genetic predispositions, reinforcement, modelling, and learned helplessness. The first or genetic predisposition approach suggests that children are born with a predisposition to develop communication apprehension. McCroskey and Richmond (1982, as cited in Prusank, 1987) reviewed social biological research carried out with identical and fraternal twins and



supported the genetic predisposition approach based on the results of the research. Apart from the aforementioned approach which speaks in favour of inherited characteristics, other approaches (reinforcement, modelling, and learned helplessness) focus on the environmental aspects to which an individual is exposed. For example, reinforcement, as Friedrich (1981, as cited in Prusank, 1987) explains it, causes individuals to perceive avoidance of interaction as rewarding if they have previously been punished or negatively reinforced when communicating.

McCroskey (1977) also touches upon the reinforcement approach. He states that communication apprehension has roots in the reinforcement of children's communication behaviours. Therefore, if a child is reinforced for being silent instead of communicating during the formative years, it will most probably become a quiet child. Furthermore, if a child has negative experiences while attempting to communicate, it is even more probable that a child will become quiet. Moreover, a child is likely to enter the school environment with a well-established, high level of communication apprehension and to have developed communication skills at a lower level than other children due to the avoidance of communication or negative communication experiences. After entering the school, it is very likely to strengthen the child's communication apprehension because of the nature of school environment where a silent child with a certain level of communication apprehension may receive less reinforcement from teachers and peers due to its poorly developed language skills. Moreover, as McCroskey (1977) states, school demands silence much of the time so the child with high communication apprehension will find easy to conform to this requirement and will also observe negative reaction of the teacher towards the children who are not quiet. In that way, a child can additionally withdraw from any kind of communication situations.

Some studies (Richmond and Robertson, 1977, as cited in McCroskey, 1977) show that children who are raised in rural environment are more likely to develop communication apprehension than children who are raised in urban areas.

Prusank (1987) states that modelling is the second environment-conditioned approach to the development of communication apprehension. According to that approach, children tend to imitate the communication behaviour of their parents and even their teachers. Therefore, the child's perception of the rewards or punishments that parents receive when communicating as well as the reinforcement the child receives when modelling the parents affects child's future communication behaviour. Some (Phillips 1968, as cited in McCroskey, 1977) suggest that

children may develop communication apprehension if their parents use communication as a weapon against each other or against the children. These children try to escape such abuse and therefore tend to avoid communication.

The third environmental approach to the development of communication apprehension is learned helplessness and it builds upon reinforcement and modelling (Daly and McCroskey, 1984, as cited in Prusank, 1987). When children are constantly punished for certain communication behaviours or when they are inconsistently reinforced, they tend to develop a sense of helplessness in order to avoid the feeling of anxiety.

All of the aforementioned studies explored the possible causes of communication apprehension with children born and raised in different families. However, there are cases where children are born and raised in the same family, but only one of them develops communication apprehension. According to McCroskey (1977), some research findings did not succeed in providing an empirically supported theoretical explanation of why some children have higher (or lower) levels of communication apprehension than the other children in the same family, which leads to an assumption that the causes of communication apprehension are not completely known.

#### *2.2.4. Effects of communication apprehension*

From the early work on communication apprehension of Lomas and Henning in the 1930s to the more recent work of Phillips and McCroskey in particular in the 1960s and 1970s, the effects of communication apprehension on people's communication behaviour and on other aspects of people's lives have been observed. The effects have proved to be generally negative. Nadler (1991, as cited in Miller and Edmunds, 1992) classified the effects of communication apprehension into three categories: classroom performance, social and self-perceptions and occupational efforts.

Huntley's research (1969, as cited in McCroskey), focusing on the relationship of communication apprehension and individual personality variables, suggests that people with high level of communication apprehension are usually introverted individuals lacking self-esteem. They are typically resistant to change, have low tolerance for ambiguity and lack self-control and emotional maturity.

The main effect of high communication apprehension level is a complete or partial avoidance of communication, especially in some threatening situations, such as public speeches, job interviews, etc. High communication apprehensive students tend to talk less even in a small group communication setting, or tend to include more rhetorical interrogatives in their interaction than low communication apprehensive students (Smythe and Powers, in press, as cited in McCroskey, 1977). Based on the results of his research, McCroskey (1977) claims that people with high communication apprehension will choose occupations which require less communication. They will also avoid advancements in their careers if it requires an increase in communication. McCroskey and Leppard (1975) also supported their hypothesis that people with high communication apprehension prefer housing remote from centres of interaction. Further research (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, & Cox, 1975; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976; Quiggens, 1972; Fenton & Hopf, 1976; Wissmiller & Merker, 1976, as cited in McCroskey 1977) suggested that people exhibiting high levels of communication apprehension have been found to be perceived as less attractive, less competent, and less sociable, as opposed to those exhibiting low levels of communication apprehension. In general, high communication apprehensive students tend to be perceived less positively than low communication apprehensive students, which, according to McCroskey (1977) may leave an impact on their economic, academic, political, and social lives. Seiler, Boohar and Garrison (1978) also claim that communication apprehension affects occupational choice and desirability and that it lowers the amount of interaction within groups. Furthermore, high apprehensive students usually rate themselves lower in self-esteem and credibility, lack trust in others' communication and avoid competitive situations.

#### *2.2.5. Effects of communication apprehension in the classroom*

Although there are many different fields in which it appears, language classes are considered to be most affected by the phenomenon called language anxiety. As Horwitz (2004) points out, probably no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does. As well as communication apprehension, foreign language anxiety encompasses all aspects of communicating, that is, all language skills used in a language class.

When it comes to the classroom environment and the effects communication apprehension has in such environment, McCroskey and Andersen (1976, as cited in Boohar and Seiler, 1982) have found that students with high communication apprehension level prefer mass lecture classes to small classes, in order to avoid communication. In such classes, students with high communication apprehension do not manage to establish as effective communication with the teacher as students with low communication apprehension level. They also found that apprehensive students performed better in lecture classes than in small classes in which communication was intensified. Research (McCroskey and Sheahan, 1977, as cited in Boohar and Seiler, 1982) has shown that those students interact less with peers they are not close to and that they are more often dissatisfied with the college environment.

McCroskey (1976) claims that high apprehensive students avoid taking speech courses and public speaking courses. When they enroll in such courses after all, they are very likely to drop them before the first performance, regardless of whether the course is required or not. In cases in which they do not drop, students experience very severe problems from being absent on the day of an assigned speech or refusing to speak due to not being ready to fainting and escaping from the classroom (McCroskey, 1978).

Some studies (Young, 1986, Scott, 1986, Phillips 1992, as cited in Toth, 2006) have shown that there is a negative relationship between anxiety level and academic achievement, which indicates that students with high anxiety level do not perform on tests as their peers with low anxiety level. Studies (Scott and Wheelless, 1976) have also shown that high communication apprehensive students have lower achievement in small classes.

In a study on class performance, McCroskey and Daly (1976, as cited in Miller and Edmunds, 1992) found that, because of the teachers' low expectations of high communication apprehensive students, those students were less likely to succeed in a formal education setting.

### **3. The research**

#### 3.1. Aims and research questions

The aim of the quantitative part of this study was to examine communication apprehension among the university level students of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

Furthermore, the aim of the study was to assess the difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English, if there was any, and to look into different communication apprehension aspects among students.

The aim of the qualitative part of the study was to explore the concept of communication apprehension from the teachers' point of view. The interview conducted among the university teachers tried to reveal how teachers perceive communication apprehension in the foreign language classroom setting and how they overcame potential classroom management difficulties in practice.

The study tries to answer the following research questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub> Is there a difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English language?

RQ<sub>2</sub> Which background factor is the best predictor of communication apprehension among the students?

RQ<sub>3</sub> Is there a relationship between different aspects of communication apprehension and the total level of communication apprehension?

RQ<sub>4</sub> Is there a relationship between the level of communication apprehension and students' behaviour in a foreign language classroom setting?

RQ<sub>5</sub> How do university foreign language teachers perceive communication apprehension and how do they cope with it in their classes?

Hypotheses:

Based on the previous discussion on research findings on the issues underlying the concepts of communication apprehension, the following hypotheses are made:

H<sub>1</sub> There is a significant difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students. It is assumed that undergraduate students experience a greater level of communication apprehension than their graduate colleagues, i.e. that the level of communication apprehension decreases throughout the years of studying.

H<sub>2</sub> Background factors, as well as different aspects of communication apprehension affect the total level of communication apprehension.

H<sub>3</sub> High levels of communication apprehension affect students' behaviour in a foreign language classroom setting and the students with high level of communication apprehension choose their seats in order to avoid communication in classes.

H<sub>4</sub> English language teachers notice students with high levels of communication apprehension in their classes. Teachers perceive communication apprehension as something negative and they are familiar with some methods for coping with it.

### 3.2. Participants

A total of ninety-eight subjects participated in the quantitative part of the research. All of the subjects were students of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. The research was conducted among four groups of students - first and second year undergraduate students and first and second year graduate students (Table 3a). The number of undergraduate and graduate students was unequal. There was a total number of fifty-four undergraduate and forty-three graduate students.

*Table 3a. Participants with regard to year of studying*

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 1 <sup>st</sup> year undergraduate	52	53.6
2 <sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate	2	2.1
1 <sup>st</sup> year graduate	25	25.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> year graduate	18	18.6
Total	97	100.0

The number of male and female students was also unequal (Table 3b). However, this was irrelevant for the study because its primary aim did not include investigation of the differences between male and female students.

*Table 3b. Participants with regard to gender*

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	male	34	35.1
	Female	63	64.9
	Total	97	100.0

As far as the qualitative part of the research is concerned, it included five participants, all of which were teachers at the department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. The teachers were chosen carefully with regard to courses they teach (linguistics, literature, or applied linguistics). The information about the interviewees can be seen in Table 3c below.

*Table 3c. Information about the interview participants*

Participant	Courses	Field	Years of experience
Participant 1	Overview of the Morphosyntax of English Parts of Speech, English Phrasal Syntax, English Clausal Syntax, Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Selected Topics in Sociolinguistics	Linguistics	17
	Contemporary English Language I, Contemporary English Language II		
Participant 2	Second and Foreign Language Acquisition, Theory of Foreign Language Teaching, Research in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Testing and Evaluating Communicative Language Ability, The Use of Literature in Teaching English as a Foreign Language	Applied Linguistics	20

Participant 4	Survey of American Literature II, Contemporary American Drama, Contemporary American War Prose, English Composition – Literature	Literature	10
Participant 5	British Culture and Civilization, American Culture and Civilization	Literature	30

Because the participants were only from Osijek, this cannot be considered as a representative sample of Croatian teachers and students.

### 3.3. Methodology

#### 3.3.1. Instrument - questionnaire

The first instrument used for the purpose of the present study was *A questionnaire on foreign language communication apprehension*. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of basic background questions (gender, age, year of learning English, year of studying English, and grade in English language after finishing high school). Its second part was the latest version of *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)*, which consists of twenty-four statements. The instrument was designed by James C. McCroskey, according to whom ‘it is highly reliable (alpha regularly  $>.90$ )’. According to Rubin et al. (1994) the questionnaire is one of the most frequently used and the most valid self-report measure for trait-like communication apprehension. McCroskey (1985) states that the instrument measures trait-like communication apprehension in four different communication contexts: public speaking, speaking in small groups, speaking in meetings and speaking in dyads. Each of the contexts is represented by six items. The original questionnaire items 7 - 12 and 19 - 24 were adapted according to the foreign language classroom setting. Therefore, speaking in meetings (questionnaire items 7 - 12) was changed to responding in English and the public speaking (questionnaire items 19 - 24) was changed to speaking English in front of the class (see Appendix 2). The changes were made with regard to participants’ age and English language proficiency. Considering the adaptations which were made, internal consistency was measured. The scale demonstrated a very high level of internal reliability, achieving an alpha coefficient of .954, regardless of the changes made.



The third part of the questionnaire was adopted from a study on communication apprehension *Communication Apprehension in the EFL Classroom: a study of Finnish and Finnish-Swedish upper secondary school students and teachers* conducted in Finland (2013). The original questionnaire had two versions, one of which was in Finnish and the other one in Swedish, thus it was translated in English for the purposes of this study. According to Lahtinen (2013), the purpose of this part of the questionnaire was to map out the intensity of different aspects in the EFL classroom environment that can contribute to the emergence of CA. It consisted of thirty-one statements. Initially, the factorability of the statements was examined by conducting exploratory factor analysis. Although the statements were divided into four theme areas in the original study, the solution with four factors could not be interpreted in this case because a number of statements showed very low factor loadings and some statements showed factor loadings for several different factors. Apart from Principal component analysis extraction method, Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization was used and provided the best defined factor structure. All items in this factor analysis had primary loadings over .4 (Table 4). Tables which show factor analysis before and after rotation can be found in Appendix 1.

*Table 4. Factor analysis results for questionnaire items 25 - 55*

Item	Factor		
	1	2	3
I think that I speak English worse than average.	.71		
I am embarrassed to speak English during English classes.	.81		
I think the teacher will give negative feedback on my speaking.	.82		
I'm afraid that the other students will judge my speaking abilities.	.8		
It often feels that the other students speak English better than me.	.77		
I'm afraid that the other students will laugh at me.	.84		
I have not got enough practice in speaking English.	.68		
I do not feel confident about my English speaking skills.	.86		
I'm not quite sure that what I think is not wrong.	.7		
I'm afraid that what I'm saying is wrong.	.82		
I'm afraid that the teacher could point out errors or shortcomings when I speak English.	.8		
It feels that the others want to see me do wrong or fail.	.49		
I feel that my English teacher thinks I'm a bad student.		.61	

Other students do not speak English.	.59
English teacher is too demanding regarding the level of language skills.	.69
I do not understand everything the teacher says in English classes.	.72
English classes seem official or formal.	.46
I do not like the teacher.	.71
I feel that I cannot get enough positive feedback from the teacher.	.6
I am not one of those who are good at languages.	.5
It irritates me when I do not understand when the teacher corrects me in English.	.43
I have received so much negative feedback earlier in English classes.	.56
I know that my language skills are assessed when I speak.	.62
I see English classes as a competition and I want to be better than the other students.	.57
There are so many people in the classroom listening to me when I talk.	.57
English teacher exhibits authority and trust in the classroom.	.51
I have high expectations of my presentation skills.	.69
There are not enough opportunities to speak English in English classes.	.43

After conducting factor analysis which crystalized three relevant factors and therefore defined three subscales within the scale, internal consistency of the three subscales was measured. Two subscales showed high internal consistency, and one subscale showed slightly lower internal consistency. Table 5 represents three subscales i.e. three aspects of communication apprehension given by factor analysis with belonging questionnaire items and internal consistency values of each subscale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient which reached 0.86. The first aspect of communication apprehension is labelled *evaluations* because the belonging questionnaire items described situations where self-evaluations and peer evaluations were present. The second aspect is labelled *teacher* due to its strong direct or indirect connection with the teacher, his or her characteristics or class management. Finally, the third aspect is named *atmosphere*. It is considered to be an umbrella term for questionnaire items covering different foreign language classroom situations which contribute to the atmosphere created in the foreign language classroom environment.

*Table 5. Aspects of communication apprehension (subscales, questionnaire items, and internal consistency coefficients)*

Aspect of communication apprehension	Questionnaire items	Cronbach's alpha
Evaluations	Q26, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q38, Q41, Q42, Q45, Q47, Q49, Q50, Q52	.93
Teacher	Q27, Q29, Q30, Q34, Q36, Q39, Q43, Q44, Q51, Q55	.82
Atmosphere	Q25, Q28, Q37, Q40, Q48, Q54	.57

Lower reliability coefficient was interpreted as a result of fewer items in the category, as well as a result of a broader area which is covered by the statements. Furthermore, it is possible that inaccurate translation also resulted in lower Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The third theme area was retained but the results gathered shall be interpreted as not completely reliable.

The five-point Likert scale was used for both the second and the third part of the questionnaire. The participants were asked to indicate the degree to which a statement applied to them using (1) = completely disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = neither agree nor disagree, (4) = agree, and (5) = completely agree. In the first part of the questionnaire twelve items had to be reversed prior to statistical analysis.

The fourth and the last part of the questionnaire, adopted from the above mentioned Finnish study, reports on participants' feelings about communication in English in the English language classroom setting. Two open-ended questions from the original questionnaire were omitted as redundant as they had been previously covered in the quantitative part of the research. It consisted of two yes or no questions, a scale ranging from 4 to 10 where participants were asked to assess their English language skills, two questions about attitudes towards school and English language with a five-point Likert scale (1 = very negative and 5 = very positive), one question about the strength of participants' feeling of excitement or shyness in English classes as well with a five-point Likert scale (1 = very strong and 5 = very weak), and the last four questions were open-ended questions. In the first two participants were asked to express their personal opinion about the causes of excitement and shyness in English classes and about the measures they could undertake in order to be less anxious to speak English. In the last two questions participants were asked about obligatory and elective

courses which required most speaking in class. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

### *3.3.2. Method - interview*

As a part of the mixed- mixed method approach, the initial instrument (questionnaire) was supported by an interview designed for the purpose of the present study. The interview consisted of twenty-four questions. Each question was followed by one or more sub-questions. Questions were divided into three categories. The first category was related to the phenomenon of communication apprehension, the second category examined errors and error correction, and the third category dealt with interviewees' own experiences with communication apprehension. The interview questions divided into three categories can be seen in Appendix 3.

### 3.4. Procedure

The study was conducted in June 2016. Both questionnaires and interviews took place at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. Before the questionnaire on foreign language communication apprehension was administered to undergraduate and graduate students of English Language and Literature, participants were familiarized with the aim of the research. The basic information about the research was specified on questionnaires as well. Prior to answering the questionnaire, participants were promised to remain completely anonymous. The data collected in the form of questionnaires were analysed in IBM SPSS Software Version 23. After conducting a research with the students, interviews with five university teachers from the department of English were held. Teachers were familiarized with the content of the interview. The interviews themselves were recorded and transcribed afterwards.

### 3.5. Results

#### 3.5.1. Quantitative results – questionnaire

As aforementioned, the collected data were analysed in SPSS. First of all, basic descriptive analysis of the items connected to participants' feelings about communicating in English language in the English language classroom setting in different situations (questionnaire items 1 – 24) is shown in Table 6.

*Table 6. Descriptive analysis (PRCA-24)*

PRCA-24	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I dislike participating in group discussions.	1.00	5.00	2.59	1.17
Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.	1.00	5.00	3.39	1.15
I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	1.00	5.00	2.54	1.15
I like to get involved in group discussions.	1.00	5.00	3.28	1.01
Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.	1.00	5.00	2.84	1.23
I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.	1.00	5.00	3.32	1.06
Generally, I am nervous when I have to respond in English during English classes.	1.00	5.00	2.36	1.14
Usually, I am comfortable when I have to respond in English during English classes.	1.00	5.00	3.69	1.16
I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion in English during English classes.	1.00	5.00	3.44	1.13
I am afraid to express myself in English during English classes.	1.00	5.00	2.06	1.03
Responding in English during English classes usually makes me uncomfortable.	1.00	4.00	2.18	1.09
I am very relaxed when answering questions in English during English classes.	1.00	5.00	3.48	1.13
While participating in a conversation with a	1.00	5.00	2.37	1.07

colleague I don't know well and rarely talk to, I feel very nervous.				
I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.	1.00	5.00	3.61	1.17
Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.	1.00	5.00	2.1	1.01
Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.	1.00	4.00	3.73	.95
While conversing with a colleague I don't know well and rarely talk to, I feel very relaxed.	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.03
I am afraid to speak up in conversations.	1.00	5.00	2.2	.92
I have no fear of speaking English in front of the class.	1.00	5.00	3.46	1.21
Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while speaking English in front of the class.	1.00	5.00	2.56	1.22
I feel relaxed while speaking English in front of the class.	1.00	5.00	3.23	1.21
My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am speaking English in front of the class.	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.21
I face the prospect of speaking English in front of the class.	1.00	5.00	3.44	.93
While speaking English in front of the class, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	1.00	5.00	2.36	1.19

It can be noticed that mean values do not vary a lot. They are slightly lower for questionnaire items which express communication apprehension and slightly higher for the ones expressing lack of communication apprehension.

Table 7 represents descriptive analysis of questionnaire items connected to the reasons why participants feel nervous and timid to speak English during English classes (questionnaire items 25 – 55).

*Table 7. Descriptive analysis (Aspects of communication apprehension)*

Aspects of communication apprehension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I know that my language skills are assessed when I speak.	1.00	5.00	3.54	1.07
I think that I speak English worse than average.	1.00	5.00	1.88	1.02
I feel that my English teacher thinks I'm a bad student.	1.00	5.00	1.91	1.03
I see English classes as a competition and I want to be better than the other students.	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.41
Other students do not speak English.	1.00	4.00	1.66	.86
English teacher is too demanding regarding the level of language skills.	1.00	5.00	1.97	.92
I am embarrassed to speak English during English classes.	1.00	4.00	1.88	.96
I think the teacher will give negative feedback on my speaking.	1.00	5.00	2.08	1.11
I am afraid that the other students will judge my speaking abilities.	1.00	5.00	2.67	1.27
I do not understand everything the teacher says in English classes.	1.00	5.00	1.79	.91
My expectations and beliefs about speaking in English classes are negative.	1.00	4.00	1.78	.88
English classes seem official or formal.	1.00	5.00	2.49	.93
There are so many people in the classroom listening to me when I talk.	1.00	5.00	2.97	1.09
It often feels that the other students speak English better than me.	1.00	5.00	2.7	1.2
I do not like the teacher.	1.00	5.00	1.74	.94
English teacher exhibits authority and trust in the classroom.	1.00	5.00	3.37	1.11
I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me	1.00	5.00	2.24	1.24
I have not got enough practice in	1.00	5.00	2.67	1.35

speaking English.				
I feel that I cannot get enough positive feedback from the teacher.	1.00	4.00	2.1	.93
I am not one of those who are good at languages.	1.00	5.00	1.95	1.15
I do not feel confident about my English speaking skills.	1.00	5.00	2.26	1.23
I have not had enough time to think of what I wanted to say.	1.00	5.00	2.48	1.12
I am not quite sure that what I think is not wrong.	1.00	5.00	2.68	1.04
I have high expectations of my presentation skills.	1.00	5.00	3.57	1.07
I am afraid that what I'm saying is wrong.	1.00	5.00	2.53	1.23
I am afraid that the teacher could point out errors or shortcomings when I speak English.	1.00	5.00	2.58	1.17
It irritates me when I do not understand when the teacher corrects me in English.	1.00	5.00	2.24	1.14
It feels that the others want to see me do wrong or fail.	1.00	5.00	1.97	1.05
I cannot pronounce the "right", or the same way as native speakers.	1.00	5.00	2.37	1.1
There are not enough opportunities to speak English in English classes.	1.00	5.00	2.53	1.27
I have received so much negative feedback earlier in English classes.	1.00	5.00	1.44	.71

It can be seen from the table that the highest mean values concern *evaluations, teacher, and expectations*.

In order to test the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the total level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English language, one-way ANOVA was used. The results are shown in Table 8a. The test showed statistically significant difference between groups Sig. = .03 ( $p < .05$ ).



*Table 8a. Difference in the total level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students (ANOVA)*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.911	3	1.637	2.933	.038
Within Groups	45.767	82	.558		
Total	50.678	85			

However, post hoc tests did not show where the difference was, as it can be seen from Table 8b.

*Table 8b. Post hoc test results*

(I) Year of Studying	(J) Year of studying	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1st year undergraduate	2nd year undergraduate	-.12103	.54070	.997	-1.6644	1.4224
	1st year graduate	-.04117	.19117	.997	-.5868	.5045
	2nd year graduate	.56647	.21047	.072	-.0343	1.1672
2nd year undergraduate	1st year undergraduate	.12103	.54070	.997	-1.4224	1.6644
	1st year graduate	.07986	.54984	.999	-1.4896	1.6493
	2nd year graduate	.68750	.55685	.678	-.9020	2.2770
1st year graduate	1st year undergraduate	.04117	.19117	.997	-.5045	.5868
	2nd year undergraduate	-.07986	.54984	.999	-1.6493	1.4896
	2nd year graduate	.60764	.23294	.087	-.0573	1.2726
2nd year graduate	1st year undergraduate	-.56647	.21047	.072	-1.1672	.0343
	2nd year undergraduate	-.68750	.55685	.678	-2.2770	.9020
	1st year graduate	-.60764	.23294	.087	-1.2726	.0573

Pearson Correlation test was conducted to investigate if there is a relationship between the total level of communication apprehension and different aspects of communication apprehension (*evaluations, teacher, and atmosphere*). The test shows that the total level of communication apprehension is positively correlated with two aspects of communication apprehension (*evaluations and teacher*), both at the 0.01 level. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Pearson Correlation of the total level of communication apprehension and different aspects of communication apprehension

	Evaluations	Teacher	Atmosphere
PRCA-24	.779**	.325**	.079

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In order to find out which background factors predict the total level of communication apprehension, regression analysis was conducted. The total level of communication apprehension measured by PRCA-24 was the dependent variable and various background factors such as *gender*, *age*, *year of studying*, and *grade in English after finishing high school* were independent variables in the analysis. The results show that there is a significant correlation between *grades in English after finishing high school* (see Table 10a). However, after conducting the analysis in more detail and after including aspects of communication apprehension as independent variables, the results showed that there is only a significant correlation between *evaluations* and the total level of communication apprehension. The results can be seen in Table 10b.

Table 10a. Results of regression analysis (dependent variable: PRCA-24) with background factors as predictors of total level of communication apprehension

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	$\beta$	t
PRCA-24	Gender	.104	.064	.606
	Age	-.043	-.114	-.654
	Year of studying	-.068	-.110	-.633
	Grade in English	-.463	-.319	-3.006**

\*\* $p < .01$ ;  $R = .403$ ;  $R^2 = .162$

Table 10b. Results of regression analysis (dependent variable: PRCA-24) with background factors and aspects of communication apprehension as predictors of total level of communication apprehension

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	$\beta$	t
PRCA-24	Gender	-.042	-.026	-.372
	Age	-0.19	-.050	-.439

Year of studying	-.129	-.208	-1.831
Grade in English	-.011	-.008	-.101
Evaluations	.605	.780	10.200**
Teacher	.028	.023	.296
Atmosphere	.023	.020	.282

\*\*p<.01; R=.816; R<sup>2</sup>=.666

In the first step, the results of regression analysis (R=.403; R<sup>2</sup>=.162; F=3.726; p<.01) show that background factors explain only about 16% of the total level of communication apprehension measured by PRCA-24. Only *grade in English after finishing high school* proved to be a significant predictor of communication apprehension ( $\beta = -.319$ ; p<.01).

On the other hand, when three different aspects of communication apprehension were included in the second step of the regression analysis, the results (R=.816; R<sup>2</sup>=.666; F=37.245; p<.01) show that all factors together explain about 67% of the total level of communication apprehension measured by PRCA-24. With both background factors and aspects of communication apprehension included in the analysis, only *evaluations* ( $\beta = .78$ ; p<.01) proved to be a significant predictor of the total level of communication apprehension.

Another Pearson Correlation test was conducted to investigate if there is a relationship between the total level of communication apprehension and students' choice of seat in the classroom. The test results show a positive correlation at the 0.01 level. The results are shown in Table 11.

*Table 11. Pearson Correlation of the total level of communication apprehension and students' choice of seat*

	Students' choice of seat
PRCA-24	.398**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Finally, when students were asked about the causes of the excitement and shyness in English classes, the majority of them (forty-one of ninety-eight students, i.e. 42%) wrote that the main

cause for this is the fear of being evaluated by their teacher, as well as being evaluated or even laughed at by their peers. They stated that they are mostly afraid of being negatively evaluated or being embarrassed in cases of making a mistake. That confirms the results emerged from the third part of the questionnaire. Apart from the aforementioned, students also listed some other causes such as teacher and class atmosphere, lack of knowledge or low language skills, lack of preparation and student's personality.

When it comes to students' suggestions, students (forty out of ninety-eight, i.e. 41%) consider good preparation to be the key for alleviating communication apprehension in classes. Minority thinks that communication apprehension can be alleviated by positive encouragement by the teacher, smaller, less formal, and more relaxed classes.

The results reported in Table 12 show that eighty-two of ninety-eight participants, i.e. 84% of both undergraduate and graduate students consider Contemporary English Language to be the course which required most speaking in class. They often consider it to be the only course of that kind. The results are not surprising because of the nature of the course. Students are divided into several smaller groups in which all students have the opportunity to participate in discussions. Contemporary English Language is followed by literature courses. Since graduate students had a wider choice of obligatory courses to name, all literature courses were taken into consideration when analysing students' answers. Seventy-six participants (78%) thought that various literature courses are the ones in which they had most opportunities to talk and to express their opinion. Finally, American Culture and Civilization was listed by twenty-four (24%), and Morphosyntax by seventeen (17%) participants.

*Table 12. Obligatory courses which required most speaking in class according to students*

Contemporary English Language	84%
Literature courses (Introduction to English and American Literature, Survey of English Literature I & II, Survey of American Literature I & II)	78%
American Culture and Civilization	24%
Overview of the Morphosyntax of English Parts of Speech	17%

Some other courses worth mentioning are Second and Foreign Language Acquisition and Theory of Foreign Language Teaching which are not reported in the table because they could be listed only by graduate students.

When it comes to the elective courses which required most speaking in class, the majority of students chose literature courses, which were again taken into account as a group of different courses. They were followed by Nonverbal Communication, Discourse Analysis and some elective courses offered at a graduate level, such as Elements of Culture and Civilization in English Language Teaching and Language Learning Styles and Strategies. Table 13 reports on the results.

*Table 13. Elective courses which required most speaking in class according to students*

Literature courses (Contemporary American War Prose, The Fantastic in American and English Literature, Popular Fiction, Literature of the American South, etc.)	32%
Nonverbal Communication	12%
Discourse Analysis	8%

Both obligatory and elective courses which students listed in questionnaires are mainly taught by teachers who participated in the interview.

### *3.5.2. Qualitative results – interview*

This section focuses on the findings emerged from the interviews conducted with five teachers from the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, in order to examine how English teachers perceive communication apprehension in the foreign language setting and to investigate how they cope with it.

The interview results show that the term communication apprehension is not well known among the interviewees. Some of them were not even familiar with the term:

*Well, I don't think I've ever heard it as such term. I didn't know that now it became a technical term. To me, it's something like stage fright that maybe actors have on stage or sometimes students have in classroom.*

*I have heard of the term, but I am more familiar with the term “speaking anxiety” or “communication anxiety” and I have also been using it more frequently.*

*Yes, I have heard of that, but not in any technical term.*

*I cannot give you any formal definition of the term, but I would expect that to be just sort of the anxiety that we noticed that students experience in class.*

The interviewees consider communication apprehension to be a very negative phenomenon which has a great influence in the foreign language classroom setting:

*It has a great influence because when it comes to learning a language speaking is one of the most prominent skills and if you are afraid to say something it can be quite an impairment actually to have communication apprehension in classroom. It is a downside and it has no positive sides.*

*It has many negative sides because students can't concentrate so well, which is a problem and then they do not think about the things they should think about.*

*It does influence learning and speaking in the language classroom. The negative sides are obvious. It leads to either complete withdrawal from communication or contributing little to communication thus leaving an overall negative impression of the speaker in terms of his or her language ability.*

Further, the results show that interviewees notice communication apprehension causing problems in their classes, particularly when students deliver their presentations. They also notice that some students experience fear regardless of their preparation prior to the presentation:

*During the presentations, that is definitely where we notice it because some students do not have a problem with speaking ten, even fifteen minutes to their colleagues and they do this quite well. But some people who I think prepared or they tried to prepare themselves but they are so afraid of speaking to a larger group and sometimes this tends to be a problem.*

*There are students who are really shy and it causes problems for them because they can't show what they know. Sometimes you literally discover a student through the test because that student didn't open their mouth at all during the lessons and then you figure out that this is a*

*person that knows so much actually in the tests or in the written assignments but they are too afraid to say anything in the classroom.*

All of the interviewees consider good preparation to be the key to alleviate communication apprehension:

*The less prepared you are, the more anxious you are. If you are a person prone to stress, then there's nothing you can do to alleviate that amount of stress if you come unprepared.*

*It may lead to the awareness of the importance of thorough preparation.*

It can be seen from some answers that interviewees thought of communication apprehension as a personality trait. When it comes to the causes of communication apprehension and different aspects of the phenomenon, they notice that the main source of fear lies in peer evaluations, which speaks in favour to the quantitative results of the study:

*Well, I teach the first year, so ... If the student is shy in all situations, then probably in the English classroom their shyness is even stronger. They feel that the other students will laugh at them or maybe notice. And sometimes the students are actually very cruel. So the other students listening to our presenters sometimes tend to even look at me and expect from me to react in certain situations.*

*Probably because they are shy, shyness, not the language itself. I think that our students particularly have great language skills and their English is quite good but probably the teachers, the talk to the teacher or maybe they are shy in front of their peers (on the causes of communication apprehension).*

*Well, I think it comes down to person's personality. There are people who are naturally shy and introvert and therefore refrain from communication ... There is also the group dynamics which means that there are groups which promote communication and then everybody feels okay when they want to say something and then there are groups where people tend to feel inhibited by the group itself so it's either that somebody from the group would laugh at or ridicule what somebody else has to say and there for the others would rather choose not to say anything.*

*Students are shy because they don't want to come across as uninformed or foolish. The other side of this coin is their attempt to build some kind of image among their peers. So they want to build some kind of identity or face that the group would approve eventually.*

Surprisingly, interviewees' expectations on the relationship between year of studying and the level of communication apprehension overlap with the principal hypothesis of the study:

*Also, it depends on the year of studying. So first year students are always very quiet predominantly whereas, I'm teaching third year so by then they start to speak up and it's kind of easier to teach, especially at the graduate level. Then we have no problems and everyone is willing to participate and state their opinion. The year of studying definitely matters.*

*Well, the discussions we mostly have at the ELP where I have the students from the fourth year so basically they would be the ones who are more proficient. I don't think they have the fear of making mistakes the first year students have.*

The interviewees also revealed their ways of dealing with communication apprehension in their classes:

*Most of the time I try to create an easy-going atmosphere, especially in English language practice. I also never force them into groups so they work with people with whom they want to work and I don't put them in any sort of pressure situations.*

*But once the students get to know me, I try to entice them to state their opinion and to talk as much as possible. This is how I'm making my classes around discussions and I'm encouraging them to speak. So it's not as prominent as in some other classes, with some other professors but for me it's not a problem. I can get to my students.*

*I am trying to create a very positive and friendly atmosphere where they can feel safe to say what they want and what they mean.*

*I give my students enough time to prepare, I put them in pairs and I try to encourage interaction.*

The interviewees' ways of error correction differ, but they choose them carefully in order not to cause their students' level of communication apprehension to increase:

*I try to address all of the errors but I try to choose the time to do it. And I try to choose a time when all of the students will have use of that.*

*I will never stop the presenter unless it is something really incorrect about the data. But if it is one of these errors like using the wrong article or the wrong preposition, I will try to pose a*



*question later on. But I don't think it is a good idea to stop someone in the middle of their presentation.*

*If it is an oral presentation, I let them talk and I will not intervene. If it is a discussion, I would correct only big grammar mistakes or I would help them find the word if they are lacking. I want to get them talking and later they will become aware of their mistakes. I always try to give positive encouragement.*

*I somehow support students and try to help them but while they are trying to express their own opinion and their ideas I try not to interrupt them. I don't do that, only to support them a little bit to continue with their speech.*

*If some mistakes are very serious, I would maybe mention them after the presentation. But I try not to interrupt students during their presentations.*

Some interviewees shared their personal experiences with communication apprehension:

*I did have that. When I came from the United States, I experienced that with Croatian. My Croatian was an issue and I needed to improve my Croatian. I also studied German and my German definitely wasn't what it should have been to study here so the anxiety was there. Maybe that's why I have so much understanding for the students.*

*Not in English. I studied German so, I think, if someone would ask me to say something in German, I would definitely have communication apprehension. We have foreign teachers here who come from Germany so when we meet and they ask me something I am not sure if I should say something in German or English. I don't like to reveal that I speak German so I definitely have communication apprehension in German.*

*Maybe I'm not a person prone to panicking, but I have more experience of that in German language than in English, I would say. It's not a simple thing. Sometimes what I do is actually this...I try to forget all of these things and stand up and start talking and the words will come. That's what I hope for.*

*I am bilingual by birth and I spoke Hungarian at the same level as Croatian and now I don't so now when I have to speak Hungarian, I do feel terribly apprehensive. I started learning Italian and when I had the chance to speak with the Italians I was terribly shy because I think I have high expectations of myself.*

They have also noticed that communication apprehension is present even among some of their colleague teachers:

*I have noticed that some teachers who are still struggling with certain aspects of the language do not feel so easy-going when coming into classes.*

*With some colleagues it is rather obvious that they are rather tense and their voice is a bit shaky and I always wonder whether it must be hard for them to deal with it every single day and to feel tense during every single lesson.*

*I have noticed it with some teachers. For some teachers it is more or less a permanent feature.*

### 3.6. Discussion

The results of the regression analyses showed that there is no difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English. Furthermore, *year of studying* as a background factor does not influence the level of communication apprehension at all and therefore it cannot be interpreted as a predictor of apprehensiveness students experience in the foreign language classroom setting. With regard to those findings, our first hypothesis is refuted. Before research was conducted, it was assumed that the oral communication apprehension decreases with experience and that first year undergraduate students experience a higher level of anxiety and apprehensiveness while speaking in class than their graduate colleagues. However, the research did not confirm those assumptions. The reason for these findings could lie in the ratio of undergraduate and graduate students, which was unequal. Although the discrepancy was not that large, it could be assumed that the results would be different if the ratio was equal. On the other hand, the results could be explained in another way. The only instrument for measuring the level of communication apprehension for the purpose of this study was PRCA-24, which measures only trait communication apprehension. If we observe communication apprehension only as a personality trait, then the background factor such as *year of studying* in the present study cannot be considered as a predictor of communication apprehension and expected to influence the level of anxiety or fear which high communication apprehensive students experience in a foreign language classroom setting.

As opposed to *year of studying*, when other background factors were taken into consideration, the analysis showed that students' *grade in English language after finishing high school (High School Leaving Exam)* is a significant predictor of the level of communication apprehension students experience in a foreign language classroom setting. It partially confirms our second hypothesis and speaks in favour of previous findings about the relationship between the level of communication apprehension and academic achievement. If we observe students' *grade in English language after finishing high school* as a kind of indicator of pre-university achievement, it can be assumed that lower grade in English language predicts higher level of communication apprehension.

However, when aspects of communication apprehension were included in the analysis, students' *evaluations* turned out to be the only significant predictor of the level of communication apprehension that students experience, which again partially confirmed our third hypothesis. It means that students who experience higher levels of communication apprehension fear being less competent than their peers (tend to evaluate themselves negatively) as well as being negatively evaluated by their teacher or their peers. That was expected because it was confirmed in the existing literature. Horwitz (1986) claims that fear of negative evaluation, also called “apprehension about others”, is a special type of anxiety related to foreign language learning, very similar to test anxiety. However, according to Horwitz, it is much broader in scope because it is not limited to test-taking situations. Furthermore, it can occur in any evaluative situation very common in foreign language classes. Students who experience high level of fear of negative evaluation tend to avoid evaluative situations and often expect that others would evaluate them negatively. The nature of foreign language classes in which evaluation is inevitable represents a problem for these students who are faced with continual evaluation by the teacher but often with the evaluation by their peers as well. These findings are also confirmed by the results of the qualitative part of the research. Interviewees also considered the presence of other students and peer evaluations to be one of the greatest causes of communication apprehension in their classes. Moreover, students also listed “others” and the fear of being laughed at as the main cause of communication apprehension.

The hypothesis that the level of communication apprehension affects students' behaviour in a foreign language classroom setting, such as choosing a seat so they would not have to speak is confirmed, which can be seen from Pearson Correlation test. It can be concluded that students who score high on PRCA-24, i.e. who have a high level of communication apprehension

choose a remote seat in a foreign language classroom in order to avoid oral communication in class. As opposed to them, students who score low on PRCA-24, i.e. who experience a low level of communication apprehension do not tend to choose seats from which they would not be seen or asked to respond in English. The results speak in favour to findings from previous research (McCroskey, 1976) which indicates that, compared to people lower in communication apprehension, high communications apprehensive students choose seats in a small group where they are less likely to be forced to interact. Furthermore, research indicates that high communication apprehensive students are four times as likely to sit outside the interaction area in the classroom as they are to sit in it.

## 4. Conclusion

This research which included the total of ninety-eight students and five university teachers was carried out primarily in order to investigate if there is a difference in the level of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students of English Language and Literature, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the level of communication apprehension experienced by undergraduate and graduate students and *year of studying*. The results of the research show that *year of studying* as one of the background factors is not a significant predictor of communication apprehension. Moreover, no difference in the levels of communication apprehension between undergraduate and graduate students was found, so the principal hypothesis of the study was refuted. However, other background factors such as *grade in English after finishing high school* proved to influence the level of communication apprehension, which confirmed previous findings that suggest the correlation between communication apprehension and academic achievement. The relationship between the level of communication apprehension and three different aspects of communication apprehension emerged from factor analysis was also investigated. The results showed that the correlation at a significant level exists when it comes to *evaluations* and *teacher*. These findings also speak in favour of previous research findings, especially when it comes to the correlations between the level of communication apprehension and *evaluations*.

Because of the limitations of this study regarding the ratio of the participants as well as some flaws in the translation of the Finnish version of the questionnaire, the results obtained in the study may not be completely reliable. However, the study may serve as a guideline for further research of communication apprehension, since the results show that the phenomenon is quite present among the students of English Language and Literature, as well as among some university teachers.

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## 6. Appendices

### Appendix 1

*Factor analysis results for questionnaire items 25-55 (without rotation)*

Item	Factor		
	1	2	3
I know that my language skills are assessed when I speak.	.01	.34	.53
I think that I speak English worse than average.	.71	-.15	-.18
I feel that my English teacher thinks I'm a bad student.	.62	.24	-.25
I see English classes as a competition and I want to be better than the other students.	.1	.31	.47
Other students do not speak English.	.2	.54	-.2
English teacher is too demanding regarding the level of language skills.	.36	.57	-.18
I am embarrassed to speak English during English classes.	.78	-.22	-.00
I think the teacher will give negative feedback on my speaking.	.79	-.24	-.07
I'm afraid that the other students will judge my speaking abilities.	.76	-.22	.18
I do not understand everything the teacher says in English classes.	.43	.51	-.28
My expectations and beliefs about speaking in English classes are negative.	.59	.17	-.15
English classes seem official or formal.	.41	.32	.03
There are so many people in the classroom listening to me when I talk.	.33	.15	.51
It often feels that the other students speak English better than me.	.7	-.29	.23
I do not like the teacher.	.14	.69	-.31
English teacher exhibits authority and trust in the classroom.	.05	.48	.32
I'm afraid that the other students will laugh at me.	.78	-.32	.08
I have not got enough practice in speaking English.	.62	-.28	.06
I feel that I cannot get enough positive feedback from the teacher.	.6	.31	-.09
I am not one of those who are good at languages.	.54	.24	-.07
I do not feel confident about my English speaking skills.	.83	-.24	-.04
I have not had enough time to think of what I wanted to say.	.63	-.15	-.01
I'm not quite sure that what I think is not wrong.	.69	-.12	.03



I have high expectations of my presentation skills.	-.18	.19	.75
I'm afraid that what I'm saying is wrong.	.76	-.32	.07
I'm afraid that the teacher could point out errors or shortcomings when I speak English.	.78	-.16	.1
It irritates me when I do not understand when the teacher corrects me in English.	.44	.3	.13
It feels that the others want to see me do wrong or fail.	.57	.21	.02
.I cannot pronounce the “right”, or the same way as native speakers.	.45	.23	.25
There are not enough opportunities to speak English in English classes.	.32	.3	.26
I have received so much negative feedback earlier in English classes.	.52	.28	-.16

*Factor analysis results for questionnaire items 25 - 55 (Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization)*

Item	Factor		
	1	2	3
I think that I speak English worse than average.	.71		
I am embarrassed to speak English during English classes.	.81		
I think the teacher will give negative feedback on my speaking.	.82		
I'm afraid that the other students will judge my speaking abilities.	.8		
It often feels that the other students speak English better than me.	.77		
I'm afraid that the other students will laugh at me.	.84		
I have not got enough practice in speaking English.	.68		
I do not feel confident about my English speaking skills.	.86		
I'm not quite sure that what I think is not wrong.	.7		
I'm afraid that what I'm saying is wrong.	.82		
I'm afraid that the teacher could point out errors or shortcomings when I speak English.	.8		
It feels that the others want to see me do wrong or fail.	.49		
I feel that my English teacher thinks I'm a bad student.		.61	
Other students do not speak English.		.59	
English teacher is too demanding regarding the level of language skills.		.69	
I do not understand everything the teacher says in English		.72	

classes.	
English classes seem official or formal.	.46
I do not like the teacher.	.71
I feel that I cannot get enough positive feedback from the teacher.	.6
I am not one of those who are good at languages.	.5
It irritates me when I do not understand when the teacher corrects me in English.	.43
I have received so much negative feedback earlier in English classes.	.56
I know that my language skills are assessed when I speak.	.63
I see English classes as a competition and I want to be better than the other students.	.55
There are so many people in the classroom listening to me when I talk.	.57
English teacher exhibits authority and trust in the classroom.	.51
I have high expectations of my presentation skills.	.69
There are not enough opportunities to speak English in English classes.	.49

Appendix 2

**A QUESTIONNAIRE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION  
APPREHENSION**

The aim of this questionnaire is to examine what causes foreign language communication apprehension among the English language university students in different situations in the English language classroom setting. The results of this survey will be statistically analysed and they will be exclusively used for academic purposes. The questionnaire is completely anonymous and your participation will not affect your grades in any way. There are no incorrect answers so please be sincere.

Background:

Gender:        M        F

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of learning English: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of studying:    Undergraduate:        1<sup>st</sup>        2<sup>nd</sup>        3<sup>rd</sup>

                         Graduate:                1<sup>st</sup>        2<sup>nd</sup>

Your grade in English language after finishing high school (High School Leaving Exam):

\_\_\_\_\_

The following set of statements concerns feelings about communicating in English language in the English language classroom setting in different situations. On the scale please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you **1 - completely disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – completely agree.**

Question		Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
1	I dislike participating in group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I like to get involved in group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Generally, I am nervous when I have to respond in English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Usually, I am comfortable when I have to respond in English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion in English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am afraid to express myself in English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Responding in English during English classes usually makes me uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I am very relaxed when answering questions in English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
13	While participating in a conversation with a colleague I don't know well and rarely talk to, I feel very nervous.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
17	While conversing with a colleague I don't know well and rarely talk to, I feel very relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I have no fear of speaking English in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while speaking English in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I feel relaxed while speaking English in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
22	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am speaking English in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5

23	I face the prospect of speaking English in front of the class.	1	2	3	4	5
24	While speaking English in front of the class, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	1	2	3	4	5

The following set of statements concerns the reasons why you feel nervous and timid to speak English during English classes. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you **1 - completely disagree**, **2 – disagree**, **3 – neither agree nor disagree**, **4 – agree**, **5 – completely agree**.

I feel nervous and timid to speak English during English classes because...

Question		Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
25	I know that my language skills are assessed when I speak.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I think that I speak English worse than average.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I feel that my English teacher thinks I'm a bad student.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I see English classes as a competition and I want to be better than the other students.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Other students do not speak English.	1	2	3	4	5
30	English teacher is too demanding regarding the level of language skills.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I am embarrassed to speak English during English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I think the teacher will give negative feedback on my speaking.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I'm afraid that the other students will judge my speaking abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I do not understand everything the teacher says in English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
35	My expectations and beliefs about speaking in English classes are negative.	1	2	3	4	5
36	English classes seem official or formal.	1	2	3	4	5
37	There are so many people in the classroom listening to me when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
38	It often feels that the other students speak English better than me.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I do not like the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5

40	English teacher exhibits authority and trust in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
41	I'm afraid that the other students will laugh at me.	1	2	3	4	5
42	I have not got enough practice in speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I feel that I cannot get enough positive feedback from the teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
44	I am not one of those who are good at languages.	1	2	3	4	5

I feel nervous and timid to speak English during English classes because...

Question		Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
45	I do not feel confident about my English speaking skills.	1	2	3	4	5
46	I have not had enough time to think of what I wanted to say.	1	2	3	4	5
47	I'm not quite sure that what I think is not wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
48	I have high expectations of my presentation skills.	1	2	3	4	5
49	I'm afraid that what I'm saying is wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
50	I'm afraid that the teacher could point out errors or shortcomings when I speak English.	1	2	3	4	5
51	It irritates me when I do not understand when the teacher corrects me in English.	1	2	3	4	5
52	It feels that the others want to see me do wrong or fail.	1	2	3	4	5
53	I cannot pronounce the "right", or the same way as native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
54	There are not enough opportunities to speak English in English classes.	1	2	3	4	5
55	I have received so much negative feedback earlier in English classes.	1	2	3	4	5

The following set of questions concerns your feelings about communication in English in the English language classroom setting.

56. Do you feel the excitement and shyness in English classes as a positive thing? Circle.

YES NO

57. In English classes I choose my seat so I will not have to speak. Circle.

YES NO

58. How would you assess your English language skills generally on a scale from 4 to 10? Circle.

4 5 6 7 8 9 10

59. a) What is your attitude towards school? Circle.

very negative      negative      neither negative nor positive      positive      very positive

b) What is your attitude towards the English language?

very negative      negative      neither negative nor positive      positive      very positive

60. How strong would you rate your feeling of excitement or shyness in English classes? Underline or circle.

very strong      strong      neither strong nor weak      weak      very weak

61. In your opinion, what causes excitement and shyness in English classes most?

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62. What could you do differently in English classes in order to be less anxious to speak English?

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63. Can you name three obligatory English courses at the university which you think required most speaking in class?

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64. Can you name some elective English courses which required most speaking in class?

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Thank you for your participation!



## Appendix 3

### INTERVIEW ON COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

1. Have you ever heard of the term communication apprehension? Are you familiar with any other terms denoting the same phenomenon?
2. What is your opinion on the influence communication apprehension has on the learning and speaking English language?
3. What are the negative and what are the positive sides of communication apprehension?
4. According to you, what is the main reason of shyness in English classes?
3. Do you feel that shyness and the fear of speaking English are causing problems in your classes?
4. Have you noticed any signs of students' shyness, tension or anxiety to speak in English during your English classes? What kind of signs?
5. Have you noticed that some students would be more timid and tense in some areas than others?
6. Do you know any means, methods or strategies to alleviate the anxiety and shyness to speak English? Do you use any strategies?
7. What is the atmosphere in your English classes? Have you taken into account communication apprehension?
8. What type of atmosphere would you like to have?
10. Have you noticed that you would approach differently to those who are very shy and those who are more talkative?
12. Have you discussed communication apprehension within your work community?

## ERRORS AND ERROR CORRECTION

13. What is your view of the role of oral error correction in the class?

How do you treat errors and what is your approach to oral error correction?

14. How do you proceed when a student makes mistakes?

What would be a conscious way to correct that is careful with the student? Could you give an example?

15. Do you ever ask your students to respond even if they do not raise their hands?

16. Do you think it's hard for you to get your students to speak in English?

## OWN EXPERIENCES WITH COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

17. Do you have personal experience with communication apprehension (anxiety, fear and tension) when speaking English or other languages?

18. Has communication apprehension influenced your career choices or controlled it?

19. In your opinion, is communication apprehension visible in the profession of an English teacher? Can you see its impact?

20. What is your view of the teacher's role and importance in the learning and teaching a foreign language?

23. Can you give me some tips about communication apprehension in the classroom?