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LANGUAGE ANXIETY:

A Study of Communication Apprehension
and Willingness to Communicate in the
Older Adult EFL Learners' Context.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores levels of communication anxiety in foreign language in older adult EFL context. Several scholars, including Horwitz, McCroskey, and MacIntyre have addressed the issue of anxiety related to communication in a foreign language and its effect on willingness to communicate in the foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; McCroskey, 1970, 1982, 1984.; MacIntyre, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2007). Moreover, Knowles et al.'s point at the importance of a specific teaching methods when adults are concerned (Knowles et al., 2005). By administering two self-report measurements (the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale*—FLCAS—and the *Personal Report of Communication Anxiety*—PRCA-24) and 13 open-ended questions to two English classes at the University for the Elderly of Venice, the present study aims to present an understanding of language anxiety that older Italian language learners may experience and its potential causes, and to provide useful elements which may lower language anxiety and improve older adult language learning. Findings showed that participants display a medium-to-high level of foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, and reveal that students have specific stereotypes about age which affect their anxiety towards the foreign language learning process. In addition, the lack of practice is pointed out as another potential affecting factor in creating anxiety in language communication situations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students of English at the University for the Elderly of Venice had remarkable stories to tell. Our experience as their English teacher for the winter semester 2016-2017 inspired and drove our research; some of them had never approached English before, and they aimed at being able at least to help a tourist lost in the Venetian maze, while some others wish to refresh the language they had learned at school, and enjoy English music, movies, and literature. Furthermore, their personal beliefs came to light when they had a chance to express their own opinion. “I study English just for personal pleasure and fun. You know, being a woman of seventy makes everything easier and funnier,” wrote a seventy-two-year-old woman who believes that approaching old age means being able to devote more time to her personal interests. Then, she added, “even if I cannot remember every single word and feel I am not learning, there is always something you can learn!” Not only do these ideas underlie how older students can be at ease with their age and its implications for learning, but they also show how older adults can be willing to learn English despite its complexity. Students also knew how to take advantage of their life experiences, and learning language through them. “I love traveling by plane,” a man in his seventies told us during a class conversation on their best and worst journeys, “indeed, it is amazing to fly, but I like it because of all that information flight attendants give you in English. Since they will translate them into Italian,” he added, “I can learn some new words every time that I take a plane.” In his case, he knew that translation was really important for his general understanding and memorizing of the English sentences, thus demonstrating awareness of his learning process, and the ability to benefit from many different situations. Unfortunately, not all the older students shared the same positive beliefs. Some students believed they are not gifted language learners, some others surrendered to disadvantageous stereotypical conclusions. “I think that learning something new is increasingly difficult when you are in your sixties,” wrote another sixty-seven-year-old woman when we asked whether she has ever been concerned about any lack of success in her language learning.

We rely on Grognet in saying that while older adult language learners encounter great benefits from their life experiences and have a positive attitude towards their general learning process, their age may represent a physical, educational, and psychological challenge for their language learning activity. First, many of the older adult EFL learners involved in this study blamed several inevitable health issues, especially concerning their

vision and hearing. Physical health is an important element in learning regardless of the age; according to the students' opinion, however, it seems that problems which arise in elderly may affect their ability to learn. These impairments hinder the correct language inputs to be quickly processed, and may thus negatively affect language learning of older adults (Grognet, 1997:1). Second, educational differences and lack of proficiency may prevent effective language learning in some students. In fact, although some students had approached English at school, many complained about the scanty and non-appropriate competence they had received (Grognet, 1997:2). Moreover, it seems that these differences create a gap among the students: while the more competent learners displayed basic language skills, some of the less proficient were overwhelmed by all the language inputs, and found it too challenging to accustom to them, thus reporting decrease in motivation. Third, some older adult language learners experience psychological barriers which may hinder successful language learning process. "I always encounter anxiety," said a sixty-three-year-old woman, "my brain paralyzes, and I cannot remember or utter a single word whenever I have to answer or speak in English," she continued. Unpleasant emotions such as fear of failure, doubts about their personal skill and possibility to learn a new language, and anxiety are common to language learners of all ages. They can occur as a consequence of a stable attitude of the individual, but they may also be the result of a specific context.

Of those three issues, the latter, namely language-related anxiety, is the matter of concern of this dissertation. Anxiety causes potentially severe problems for language learners, since it can interfere with the language comprehension and production (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991:86); some of our students felt an apprehensive state which seems to have a negative effect on the learning of English, and impedes the production of meaningful communication in that language. According to Krashen's Affective Filters Hypothesis, specific emotional conditions such as low motivation, high anxiety, and low student self-esteem prevent language from being acquired by the learners (Krashen, 1989:10). To overcome this impairment, Krashen suggested that "acquirers must assume that they will be successful and must consider themselves to be potential members of the 'club' of users of that language" (Krashen, 1989:10). Our teaching experience with older EFL learners was noteworthy since it led us to inquire into some interesting topics such as the relationship between anxiety in language-related communication and older adult learners. According to the current theoretical studies in the field of adult education, it seems that the concept of anxiety is an important issue when older adult language learners are considered. Although early research rarely framed the effects that anxiety may produce in adult language learners, recent advances in theories and assessment criteria have allowed

more research in foreign language learning. Nonetheless, there seem to be limited materials which referred to older adults; therefore, in order to provide some relevant data on the subject, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate levels of communication apprehension in language contexts among the older Italian adult EFL learner of the University for the Elderly of Venice. In our study, we adapted two instrument from the literature—the PRCA-24 (McCroskey¹) and the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986:128)—and we administered them to our participants; moreover, we produced and proposed 13 open-ended questions to add some relevant qualitative material to our quantitative dataset. According to the findings, it seems that older adult EFL learner display a medium-high level of anxiety towards foreign language and to communication. Furthermore, although questionnaires showed non-significative correlations between the two anxieties, open-ended questions enabled us to infer that language and communication anxiety in older adult students may depend on some cliché about their age and the lack of practice they display. By presenting an understanding of language anxiety that older Italian language learners may experience and its potential causes, our findings aim at contributing to the language teachers of adults and offering a valuable support to older adults' English learning.

As far as a proper definition of “older adult” learner is concerned, there is not a general consensus of which is the starting age to consider “older” adult learners. A model of ten developmental stages classify adults who are preparing for retirement and older than 55 years in the “old” group (Joiner, 1981:3-4); another scholar claimed that older learners are more than 40 years old (Homstad, 1987:374). We involved our students by asking them to define the age of an “older adult” learner. They generally believed that modern society has enhanced people's life quality and increased their life expectancy; therefore, it seems that 55 years is not a consistent standard anymore. As a consequence, we will rely on Levinson's (1986) three stages of adult life, thus considering our participants in their late adulthood², namely between their 60s and 80s.

Through this study, we want to answer the following three research questions:

1. Does communication apprehension affect older Italian adult EFL learners?
To what extent?

¹ James McCroskey Website <www.jamesmccroskey.com/measures/prca24.htm> [accessed 15 February 2017].

² D. J. Levinson divided adult life into three periods: early adulthood—17 to 45—, middle adulthood—40 to 60—, and late adulthood—age 60+ (Levinson, 1986:5-6).

2. Is there any correlation between general communication apprehension and anxiety towards language in older adult language learners?
3. Is there any specific variable which impacts their anxiety as regards communication in the foreign language?

This study consists of two sections; Part I will encompass a literature review and will lead to Part II, which will provide the reader with an empirical study we conducted on a set group of older Italian EFL learners. Then, a brief overview of the following chapters is provided.

Chapter 2 will review the main theories on willingness to communicate in a foreign language, language anxiety, and andragogy as the best teaching model to approach adult learning. Chapter 3 will offer a brief insight into the major studies on the connection among adult language learning, language anxiety, and adult willingness to communicate in the target language. Chapter 4 will set the ground for the study on older adult language anxiety by explaining our methodology. Chapter 5 will report our findings, and it will provide useful data to discuss. Lastly, this dissertation will present five important elements which we believe may improve adult language learning while lowering their anxiety towards the target language and communication.

PART I

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on communication anxiety, avoidance and fear represent the major body of research in the field of communication. In fact, over the last fifty years, anxiety and apprehension towards oral communication seem to be a pivotal matter of concern of social scientists who study communication (McCroskey, 1984:81). As Levitt (1971) stated, scientists distinguish human physical properties and reactions from human psychological traits, and they refer to *constructs* to describe states like emotions and concepts describing human personality traits and reactions which are not physically visible. Moreover, since constructs represent broad abstractions, or hypothetical entities, they are useful to portray human feelings such as phobia, fear, or anxiety³ (Levitt, 1971:25-28). The latter is the matter of concern of this study. According to Horwitz et al.'s definition, anxiety represents "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with the arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Horwitz et al., 1986:125). However, for the purpose of our study, we only refer to a specific anxiety related to language situations, thus omitting any other psychological implication⁴.

This chapter will review the literature on three intertwined concepts, and provides the reader with the theoretical background of the thesis' main study: first, since the study involves adult language learners, the chapter presents a brief overview of the major tenets of adult education, providing the reader with some of the differences between pedagogical and andragogical approaches; second, the chapter describes a specific language-related anxiety which has been broadly studied, namely the construct of communication apprehension, which is also the base of our experimentation; third, following from the idea that anxiety may impair learners' inclination toward the foreign language learning process (MacIntyre, 2007:565), the chapter includes an overview of the willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

³ Levitt distinguished among anxiety, fear, and phobia, stating that the distinction relies on how the reaction is unique to a given stimulus or how it is appropriate to a certain situation (Levitt, 1971:28-31).

⁴ Psychologists refer to a "specific anxiety reaction" to differentiate people who are generally anxious from those who are anxious only in given occasions (Horwitz et al., 1986:125).

2.1. LEARNING A LANGUAGE AT 50 AND MORE:

ANDRAGOGY

Schools were originally designed for teaching children. According to Knowles, teachers developed a set of assumption about learning and teaching strategies labeled *pedagogy*, which literally means “the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles et al., 2005:36). This model of education embodied the basis of organization for the majority of Western countries’ educational systems and persisted until the twentieth century. However, Knowles reported that as teachers started to systematically organize adult education during the 1920s, they experienced problems with the leading pedagogical teaching model. In fact, they found that many of the assumptions about learners’ features would not fit their adult students (Knowles et al., 2005:37). Teachers attempted different approaches and discovered that some of them produced better results. As a result, the marked evidence that teaching methods which were designed for children did not apply to adult learners led adult educators to debate how to improve teaching to adults (Knowles et al., 2005:36-38). Adults have different feelings and attitudes towards their process of information acquisition. Although defining adults may lead to a variety of definitions, Knowles believed that people become adults by degree as they pass childhood and adolescence, and different factor such as place of study, activeness of the individual and his or her responsibilities probably affect their level of personal development (Knowles, et al. 2005:64). As far as learning is concerned, many scholars (Horwitz et al., 1986; Knowles et al, 2005) acknowledge that adulthood is strongly related to the process of gaining self-concept, autonomy, self-esteem, and to take responsibility for each decision (Knowles et al, 2005:64). As a consequence, in order to incorporate new experiences and knowledge about adult learning differences, many scholars and researchers made efforts to formulate a specific theory of learning for more than fifty years. In fact, between 1929 and 1948 the American Association for Adult Education published many articles by successful teachers of adults describing ways in which they were treating adults which diverged from the pedagogical model. However, since their practices lacked a supporting theory, they almost followed their personal intuitions (Knowles et al., 2005:37).

The field of adult learning theory gained important contributions from psychotherapy’s cornerstones. For example, Sigmund Freud did not formulate a specific theory of learning, nevertheless he stated that the human subconscious influence behaviors,

thus it seems that some of his most famous psychological constructs such as repression fixation, projection, defense mechanism, and transference in blocking or motivating learning influenced many learning theorists when they tried to cope with adults' unconscious reticence toward learning (Freud, 1936, in trad. 2012:179-182; Levitt, 1971:39; Levitt, 1971:58-71; Knowles et al., 2005:45). Moreover, Knowles cited Carl R. Rogers, who developed an interesting theory of human personality and behaviour which arose from the study of adults in therapy (Knowles et al., 2005:49). This process led Rogers to conceptualize 'student-centered teaching' as parallel to client-centered therapy. His student-centered approach to education develops in five 'basic hypotheses'; the first hypothesis stems from the belief that every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he is the centre, and it requires a shift in focus from what the teacher does to what is happening in the student. Rogers' second hypothesis highlights the importance of making the learning relevant to the learner and puts into question the academic tradition of required courses. Rogers further grouped third and fourth hypotheses together: he acknowledged that some learning experiences may require a change in the learner, who may sometimes not be willing to change and resists the process; if that is the case, Rogers claimed that even significant learning may be perceived as a threat by the individual; he therefore accounted the importance of providing a supportive and non-threatening environment to the individual. He lastly expanded this concept in his fifth hypothesis. He stated that learning is successful when the learners do not perceive the educational situation as a threat: if students are comfortable with the learning situation, Rogers believed that they are also able to differentiate their perception towards what they are learning. It seems that Rogers considered learning as an entirely internal process controlled by the learner and engaging his whole being in interaction with his environment as he perceives it. (Knowles et al., 2005:49-51).

Following from these early contributions, a large part of the knowledge about adult learning needs came from other psychological and social disciplines, both in North America and Europe. By and large, this research-based knowledge supported the intuitions of the earlier teachers, and theorists began fitting the knowledge drawn from both sources into a comprehensive, coherent theory of adult learning.

The development of an integrated framework of adult learning found fertile ground in Europe, where theorists coined the label *andragogy* to differentiate the new concept from the theory of youth learning called *pedagogy*. Andragogy, in fact, consists of a set of assumptions about adult learners, which can serve the learning process alongside the pedagogical model of assumption. Accordingly, andragogy presents core principles of adult

learning which enable designing and conducting adult education to build more efficient learning processes for adults. The word was originally coined in 1833 by Alexander Kapp (Knowles et al., 2005:59), and it stems from the Greek words ἀνὴρ, ἀνδρoς (“man”), and ἄγω (“to lead”). In 1957, a German teacher firstly used “andragogy” to label the new emerging theoretical model which would distinguish from the traditional pedagogical teaching.

In the United States, in 1950 Malcom S. Knowles firstly provided an analysis of these teachers' ideas and listed principles they shared. Further in time, during the 1960s, educators and researchers started to acquire findings from scientifically designed research which focused on the internal processes of adult learning. According to Knowles (et al., 2005), in 1960s Cyril Houle, and Allen Tough's later extension, contributed the most to the field of adult education: he reported on many through in-depth interviews with a small sample of adults who were identified as «continuing learners», and stated that the subjects fell into three types: first, the goal-oriented, who uses education as a means of accomplishing his/her objectives; second, the activity-oriented, who participates in the learning process without a real interest in the content or the purposes of the activity; third, the learning-oriented, who seeks knowledge for its sake. Furthermore, one of the Houle's followers, was concerned not only with what and why adults learn but how they learn and what help they obtain for learning. His findings showed that there is a fairly universal 'natural' pattern of learning adults undertake when they learn something on their own. At some point, Tough claimed, adults need help, and they often seek someone who is not a teacher. More importantly, if they ask for teachers' help, pedagogical teaching methods seem to interfere with adults' natural learning process. Lastly, Tough concluded that adult learners proceed through several phases in the process of engaging in a learning project, and speculated that helping them to increase their competence might be one of the most efficient ways of improving their learning effectiveness (Knowles et al., 2005:54-58).

Lastly, according to Knowles, he was introduced to the term “andragogy” in 1967, when Dusan Savicevic, a Yugoslavian adult educator who attended a summer workshop at the Boston University, exposed participants to *andragogy*, which seemed to ostensibly contrast the pedagogical model since its definition—“the art and science of helping adults learn”. The concept captivated Knowles, who decide to use it to better distance his adult learning theoretical model from the existing pedagogical model (Knowles et al., 2005:58).

At this point, we believe that it could be useful to provide the reader with a brief explanation of the main core of pedagogy. Basically, within the pedagogical model, the teacher take complete responsibility for students' learning, thus autonomously deciding

methods, schedules and coursework. Since the pedagogical model is teacher-directed, learners are passive users of all the teachers' instructions. According to many scholars (Knowles et al., 2005:62-63), there are six basic elements about learners underpinning the pedagogical model: their need to know and self-concept, how they make use of past experiences and how willing they are towards their learning, and their general learning strategy and motivation towards learning.

- *The need to know.* In a pedagogical view, since learners are not aware of what they need to learn, they must learn what the teacher teaches unless they want to fail their exams.

- *The learner's self-concept.* Learners are likely to depend on their teachers due to the idea that teachers have responsibility for their learning, and design of teaching methods and coursework contribute to this concept.

- *The role of experience.* According to the pedagogical model, learners' experience does not play any relevant part in their learning. Therefore, they must rely both on teacher and their teaching materials.

- *Readiness to learn.* One of the pedagogical premise is that learners are not willing to learn. Accordingly, they follow teachers' instructions merely to succeed in their classes.

- *Orientation to learning.* In line with the previous elements, the pedagogical model considers learners as subject-oriented, which means that they are not interested in incorporating their learning in their own life. Therefore, pedagogical-oriented materials are organized in a "subject-matter content", namely as a mere list of contents and topics.

- *Motivation.* Learners are motivated to learn by external motivators: for example, grades, the teacher's approval or disapproval, or parental pressures (Knowles et al., 2005:63-64).

By contrast, Knowles developed a process model which took inspiration from the European concept of "andragogy", and distanced the traditional content model widely employed in pedagogical education. A content model aims at transmitting information and skills, whereas a process model provide the learners with some basic procedures and resources which boost both their knowledge acquisition and their competence. As we previously stated, traditional education gives full responsibility to the teacher, who decides and designs contents, skills, lessons, and materials in a content-logic order which s/he believes would fit students. Conversely, the andragogical teacher—also called

“facilitator”—does not plan lessons and contents: s/he only prepares a general frame to involve learners in a multi-step process. First, the facilitator delivers materials to the learners; second, s/he tries to establish a receptive environment to learning: this means that the facilitator needs to familiarize with students to allow them feeling comfortable in class. Third, s/he ask for the learners’ help in order to plan the coursework: in fact, goals, needs and ability to self-direct the learning process grow with the individual, therefore as people mature, not only are they prone to direct their own study, but they are also able to cooperate with the facilitator to plan it. Lastly, the facilitator combines learners’ experiences, needs, and goals with suitable techniques and materials in order to develop the best teaching method that fit the learners’ characteristics.

Figure 1 provides the original Knowles’ model named “Andragogy in practice”, and portrays andragogy as a set of adult learning assumptions. The centre of the model consists of this set of assumptions. It is important to note that he used the above described core elements of the pedagogical model to focus his “Andragogy in practice” model on hypotheses specifically directed at adult education, and their different learning strategies. The outer rings (“Individual and Situational Differences” and “Goals and Purposes for Learning”) represent some factors which may affect adult learning in specific situations, and which may adapt their behaviors to the six model’s principles. The andragogical model is therefore adapted to fit uniqueness of different adult learners in different learning situation.

It was alleged that Knowles’ model lacks solid frame, when compared with the traditional pedagogical model; however, as its inventor states, the model stems from the idea that people are different from each another, and each adult learner has different needs. Therefore, the andragogical model is flexible, and aims at accomplishing these needs by developing differently in accordance with learners’ differences.

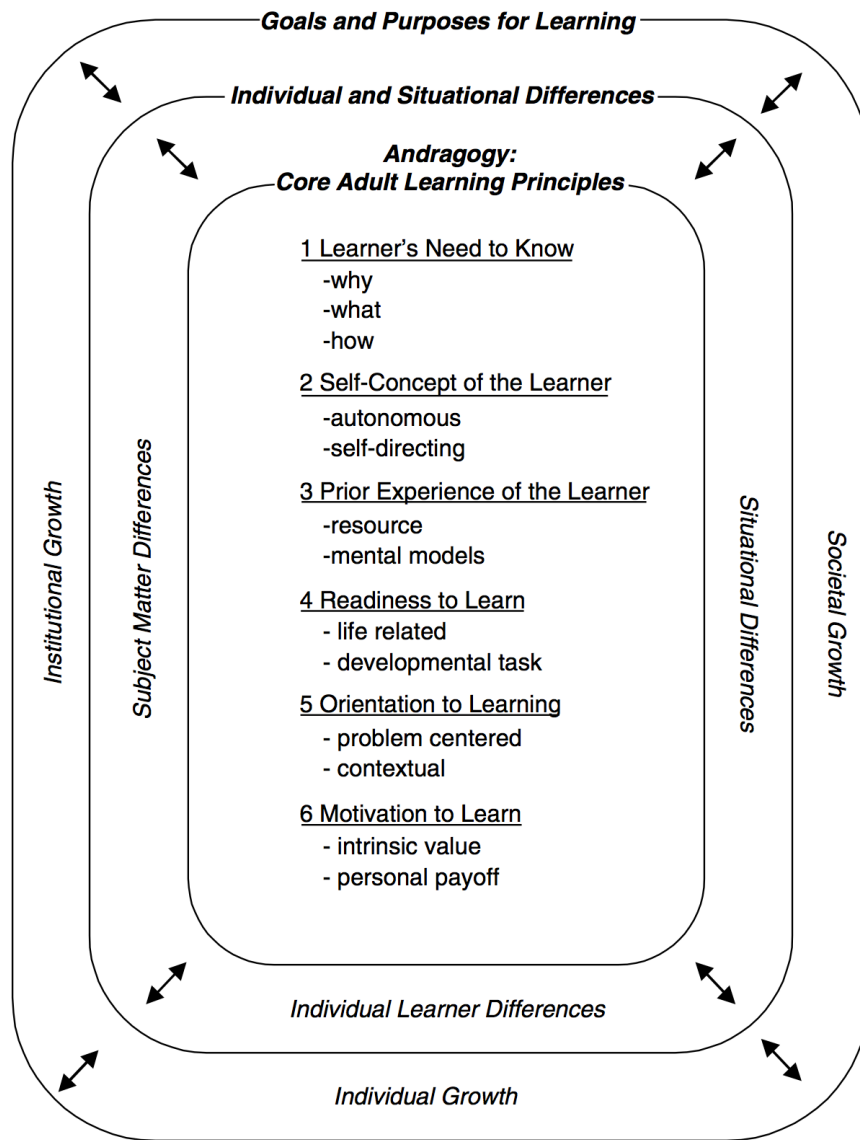


Figure 1 - *Andragogy in Practice Model* (Knowles et al., 2005:4).

These are the six principal tenets that constitutes the core of the “Andragogy in Practice” Knowles’ model:

- I. *The need to know.* Contrary to the pedagogical model, which states that children do not show any desire to know in advance what they have to learn, the andragogical approach claims that almost all adults are more self-aware, thus wanting to know what they learn before undertaking the learning process, in order to decide whether it fits their needs. The andragogical facilitator must help learners to become aware of both positive and negative consequences of acquiring specific knowledge. In fact, it seems that adults who believe to benefit from the learning materials are more committed in learning, and will invest a large amount of their energy in it. (Knowles et al., 2005:64).

II. *The learners' self-concept.* Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their decisions and lives, in marked contrast to children, who are usually not autonomous. The more adults become independent, the deeper they are willing to be considered able of self-direction. As a consequence, a learning model which deprives them of their ability to self-direct their study is unsuitable for them, since it evokes previous and not-effective conditioning. This contrast unbalances adults: "the minute adults walk into an activity labeled 'education', 'training', or anything synonymous, they hark back to their conditioning in their previous school experience, put on their dunce hats of dependency, fold their arms, sit back, and say 'teach me'" (Knowles et al., 2005:65). As Knowles claims, this contrast may also be the cause of many voluntarily adult withdrawal from courses. To avoid it, adult educators must make efforts to create learning experiences in which adults are helped to make the transition from dependence to autonomy,

III. *The role of the learners' experiences.* While children did not acquire sufficient life experiences due to their young age, adults often undertake learning activity with experiences which are greater in volume and different in quality. Furthermore, not only these experiences positively contribute to adult education, but they may also impair the learning process. In fact, they foster the development of mental habits and presuppositions which might prevent their minds from new ideas and way of thinking. This leads to several consequences: to boost adults' ability to open their mind to new approaches and avoid preconceptions, facilitators need to take into account adults' experiences when they develop learning strategies.

IV. *Readiness to learn.* Since adults are self-directing and self-aware, they seem to be more willing to learn things which effectively fit their everyday situations. Knowles also hastens to add the importance of choosing learning experiences. In fact, he states that the ideal andragogical facilitator arranges multi-step strategies that coincide with adults' goals. In addition, facilitators may foster adults' willingness to learn by providing the learners with compelling materials, or helping them to foresee new career objectives (Knowles et al., 2005:67).

V. *Orientation to learning.* According to the pedagogical model, the subject is the only matter of concern for children when they approach their learning. In contrast, Knowles states that adults compare their study with their life experiences and situations, thus they seem to detect whether the specific learning will help them to

better perform tasks or to deal with personal problems. The andragogical model help adults by developing useful and engaging learning tasks.

VI. *Motivation*. In contrast with children's extrinsic motivation, adults have strong and internal reasons which drive their learning path, although some external motivators may still influence adults. For example, adults often acquire new knowledge in order to increase their self-esteem, or the life quality. Knowles reports on a Tough's (1979) belief that although adults are internally motivated to grow and develop, there are barriers such as self-consciousness or time constraints which forestall their motivation (Knowles et a., 2005:68). In accordance, the andragogical facilitator must pay attention to adults' motivation, and needs to develop a flexible schedule and comfortable environment in order to prevent those barriers.

Although Knowles tried to incorporate as much as qualities and differences of adult learners, there is some disapproval towards the "Andragogy in Practice". The main matter of concern is that the model does not encompass all adults' learning behaviors, thus it fails at describing adult learning situations. The scholar, however, concurred that adults learners are heterogeneous, and agreed that many external variables may affect human behaviors, thus considering all of them would divert attention from the main purpose of the model. As he stated, "the andragogical model is a system of elements that can be adopted or adapted in whole or in part. It is not an ideology that must be applied wholly and without modification" (Knowles, 1984:418, in Knowles et al., 2005:204). The andragogical model is not intended to be a handbook of affecting variables; rather, it provides adult facilitators with valuable insights of how adults behave and approach their learning process. Knowles goes even further, and listed three ideas to support that his model could be a useful tool for adult educators.

The first idea is that flexible approach as the andragogical model adapts to deal with many individual differences in ability, style and preferences. The role of the adult facilitator is to use her or his knowledge of individual difference to tailor effective learning strategies. First, facilitators acquire knowledge on their learners' cognitive and learning differences, then they make full use of the core assumptions of the model to understand learners, and to provide them with the highest efficient learning strategy, helping them to cope with their difficulties, to outreach their barriers, and to overcome their problems; lastly, adult facilitators modify their teaching methodologies to accommodate learners' need and goals in order to boost the learning process.

The second idea refers to the connection between adult development and adult education. As people become adult by degree, their abilities develop by degree as well. Adult development theories focus on physical, cognitive, and personality changes. In order to provide the best strategy to the students, the ideal adult facilitator not only is aware of students' personalities and cognitive differences, but s/he also knows how each individual may change throughout the time. According to Knowles, andragogy is the best approach to deal with these tasks, since it is moldable and it may accommodate to an array of different situations.

The third idea Knowles proposed to validate his model focuses on the whole lifespan development. Adulthood does not imply the end of development or changes. Moreover, life changes may often affect adult motivation towards learning. This means that people in their middle or late adulthood experience changes which may either boost or impair their motivation. For example, dealing with new technologies may prevent elderly from acquiring new knowledge; similarly, refresher courses or language courses may attract middle adult who want to update their professional knowledge. A rigid learning model would probably fail at dealing with those changes and developments. Conversely, the andragogical perspective, which may adapt to a variety of situations, would fit better adult differences (Knowles et al., 2005:204-230).

The concept of andragogy encompasses many different aspects of adult education and their behaviors, thus leading to different definitions and interpretations. There are scholars who rely on different version of the same andragogical model (Knowles, 1980; 1989), while other scholars choose to distance it: for example, Grace (1996) claims that andragogy merely focuses on an individual level, and do not relate adult education to the society (Knowles et al., 2005:2). Although criticism and discrepancy towards a clear definition of andragogy, people differ from each others in age, cognition, attitudes, beliefs, culture and many other aspect: the andragogical concept is an attempt to differentiate learning strategies and styles in accordance with those differences. Therefore, we agree with Knowles in stating that the focus of andragogy must be to find the best way to help adults acquire their desired knowledge.

As long as people grow, they create and fix habits, and become self-aware adults. Usually, adults perceive themselves as stable, reasonable, and intelligent individuals. Furthermore, adults do not usually challenge these assumptions throughout their life (Horwitz et al., 1986:128). However, approaching a foreign language may test adult self-perception. Furthermore, learning in middle or late adulthood may require even more effort and motivation (§ 1); in addition, some personality traits as well as unusual

situations may evoke distressing emotions which alter adults' self-perception and impair their positive attitude towards the target language (Krashen, 1989:10). The next section portrays one relevant feeling which affect adult language learning, namely apprehension towards oral communication.

2.2. A SPECIFIC TYPE OF LANGUAGE ANXIETY: COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Anxiety is an unpleasant emotion which prevents some people from succeeding in several field such as science or mathematics. Likewise, there are people who encounter anxiety during their foreign language learning process. Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that many people are highly motivated and willing to learn the target language, nonetheless report on a strong mental block against their foreign language learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986:125). To explain this mental block, Horwitz et al. took into account the variables foreign language introduce into adult communication. As they stated, as adolescents become adults, they increase their self-esteem, and deem themselves as sensitive, intelligent and capable individuals. Furthermore, adults compare themselves and their self-perception with each others through communication. Horwitz et al. claimed that in normal situation, when adults communicate in their native language, it is easy for them to understand others and to being understood, thus they rarely test their fixed self-perception. However, learning and communicating in a foreign language may subvert adult beliefs, "because individual communication attempts will be evaluated according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and socio-cultural standards, [...] foreign language communication entails risk taking and is necessarily problematic" (Horwitz et al., 1986:128). Moreover, the scholars stated that adults often struggle to make authentic communication, since their willing to express themselves collides with their scant vocabulary, thus making their communication very basic. Since adult foreign language learners are required to make difficult and calculated mental operations to communicate in the target language, and these operations challenge their self-esteem and self-concept of being competent communicators, they may be prone to reticence, self-consciousness, or anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986:128).

Language anxiety however is only one of the identified types of anxiety. Horwitz et al. believed that there are two different perspectives to address language anxiety: it could either be a manifestation of other more general types of anxiety, or a unique form of anxiety expressed in response to language learning⁵. Developing from the latter perspective, Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that language anxiety is an emotional experience which entirely arise within foreign language situations. They propose the valuable idea that language anxiety is related to three performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension consists of a specific anxiety towards oral communication, which has obvious consequences when foreign language learning is taken into account, since people who typically have difficulty speaking in public are likely to experience greater difficulty speaking in a language they do not master. Test anxiety stems from fearing failure, and it refers to a type of performance anxiety; some students experience anxiety during their language test due to their fear of failure, which in turn may prevent them from succeeding the test or pass the exam. Fear of negative evaluation is similar to test anxiety, though broader in scope. In fact, it is not limited to test-taking situations; rather, it may occur in any social situation where the individual fears to be evaluated by others. For the purpose of this study, we will only discuss the first performance anxiety related to language, namely communication apprehension.

Communication Apprehension (CA) is a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people. Since its first definition, only minor modifications of this definition have been made: therefore, communication apprehension is “a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication” (McCroskey, 1970 in Oxford, 1983:1). According to McCroskey, communication apprehension plays a pivotal role in foreign language anxiety. In fact, due to its emphasis on interpersonal interactions, the construct of communication apprehension is quite relevant to the conceptualization of foreign language anxiety. Considering CA a specify type of anxiety which independent of language anxiety, the most important and widely used instrument to measure communication apprehension is the *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension* (PRCA-24)—which also constitutes the instrumentation of the present study. McCroskey proposed this scale to self-assess apprehension and anxiety towards oral communication, especially when talking to or with others. Although the majority of the research refers to communication apprehension as a stable trait of human personality, in more recent papers, McCroskey edited the construct’s definition, thus broadening the concept from an intrinsic

⁵ It is important to note that the present study will only consider the second approach to language anxiety.

characteristic of the individual to an emotion which may occur even in given situations. Furthermore, to clarify any potential doubt concerning the nature of communication apprehension, the scholar listed types and causes of communication apprehension, also taking into considerable account its effect on individuals (McCroskey 1970, in Oxford, 1983:2). He relied on Spielberger's (1966) classification of anxiety to support his approach. Many scholars studied the difference between the acute feeling of anxiety and the natural predisposition towards it; nonetheless, Spielberger contributed the most to a clear distinction of these concepts. In fact, he named the first "*situational anxiety*", thus defining it as an ephemeral state evoked by a specific, given situation; by contrast, "*trait anxiety*" resides into the individual as a permanent state, and it is relatively steady in her or his behavior (Spielberger, 1966, in Levitt, 1971:34-36).

Therefore, relying on the current classification of anxiety, McCroskey developed four categories to address communication apprehension: trait-like CA, centralized-context CA, person-group CA, and situational CA.

1. *Trait-like CA*. McCroskey added "-like" in contrast with a more rigid perspective, which would consider apprehension and anxiety as a constant trait of the individual. A trait-like personality variables, in fact, may change during adulthood. However, trait-like communication apprehension is the more permanent variety of CA, it is relatively enduring, and it embodies personality orientations towards a specific mode of communication across a wide array of contexts;

2. *Centralized-context CA*. While a given mode of communication rouses anxiety in some people, some others are context-sensitive. This second category helped McCroskey to explain this difference. Centralized-context communication apprehension, in fact, regards apprehension which is triggered by a given context, such as school presentations or public speeches, and as the trait-like CA, is relatively enduring in individuals' behavior;

3. *Person-Group CA*. This third type of communication apprehension is linked to interpersonal relationships. McCroskey stated that some people fear talking with others, and they may be highly apprehensive when they encounter situations where they are forced to. As the scholar claimed, in some anxious subjects, apprehension develops as soon as they start communicating with other people, regardless of level of familiarity among them. As the previous two categories, McCroskey claimed that personality-group communication apprehension is relatively enduring attitude towards communication with a specific person (or group of people);

4. *Situational CA*. This last type of communication apprehension represents the temporary reaction of an individual towards communication. McCroskey's interpretation depends on Spielberger's definition, stating that when some people attempt to communicate, they accidentally hesitate or stumble upon a given person or group of people, without any consideration for contexts or mode of communication. In contrast with the other categories, situational communication apprehension is not a trait of human personality; rather, McCroskey believed that it is a response limited to the specific situation. As a consequence, the level of situational communication apprehension is unpredictable, and could widely fluctuate as the situation changes (McCroskey 1970, in Oxford, 1983:2-6).

It is important to notice, however, that these four types of communication apprehension do not refer to different types of people. On the contrary, each type of communication apprehension may impact different type of individuals, either to a greater or lesser degree. Furthermore, McCroskey's classification results in a description of pathological diseases. To avoid this description, he clarified what he believed should be considered pathological. In this perspective, McCroskey considered both low and high anxiety as alarming and irregular responses. Accordingly, he stated that withdrawing or trying to avoid a dangerous or anxiety-provoking situation could be a natural reaction. Furthermore, another natural reaction is when normal and comfortable situations do not trigger anxiety. Then McCroskey stated that when anxiety does not emerge, or is low in level, in a threatening situation, or when people experience high level of apprehension in a safe environment constitute an atypical reaction and could be a sign of a more severe issue (McCroskey, 1970, in Oxford, 1983:5-6). However, "only when such behavior is a consistent pattern of the individual would such a judgement seem warranted" (McCroskey, 1970, in Oxford, 1983:6).

Taking again into account anxiety towards communication situations, McCroskey claimed that, in order to understand the consequences of communication apprehension, researchers need to pay attention to all the causes involved in the anxiety arousal. As a consequence, the scholar inferred some causes he believed can apply to both trait-like and situational communication apprehension:

Firstly, he analyzed trait-like CA. According to the scholar, the most relevant origins of trait-like communication apprehension are heredity and environment. This means that people may either born with anxiety or permanently acquire during their life. As McCroskey reported, some social biologists agreed that heredity might play a role in social anxieties such as communication apprehension, although there is no evidence that a "CA

gene” would exist (McCroskey, 1970, in Oxford, 1983:8). Moreover, McCroskey and Richmond (1980) gathered supporting evidence for claiming that heredity is one of the cause of communication apprehension, as they stated that:

Researchers in the area of social biology have established that significant social traits can be measured in infants shortly after birth, and that infants differ sharply from each other on these characters. One of these traits is referred to as “sociability”, which is believed to be a predisposition directly related to adult sociability, namely the degree to which we reach out to other people and respond positively to contact with other people. Research with identical twins and fraternal twins of the same sex reinforces this theoretical role of heredity. Identical twins are biologically identical, whereas fraternal twins are not. Thus, if differences between twins raised in the same environment are found to exist, biology (heredity) can be discounted as a cause in one case but not in the other. Actual research has indicated that biologically identical twins are much more similar in sociability than are fraternal twins (McCroskey and Richmond, 1980:6, in Oxford, 1983:8).

According to their research, it seems that children come into the world with certain unchangeable personality predispositions and tendencies. In addition, environmental condition may have some impact on children’s predispositions. However, since these predispositions are different, children are likely to react differently to the same environmental condition. According to McCroskey and Richmond, therefore, this interaction of heredity and environment is a primary precursor of adult predispositions and tendencies such as communication apprehension.

Secondly, the scholar analyzed the roots of situational CA, which he considered much clearer: he claimed, in fact, that not only is there a sizable body of research on situational CA but also it is similar to other types of fear or anxieties, thus its causes are easier to classify. To operate his analysis, McCroskey relied on Buss’ (1980) lists of elements related to communication apprehension, thus found six variable which affect situational communication apprehension: novelty, formality, consciousness, unfamiliarity, similarity, and degree of attention from others.

1. *Novelty*. This is the main and general cause of situational communication apprehension stemming directly from its definition: a new and unpredictable situation, in fact, confuses people, who do not know how to behave. Anxious subjects who approach novelty are likely to display situational communication apprehension;

2. *Formality*. McCroskey associates formal situations with apprehension arousal, since their highly prescribed behaviors may increase situational communication apprehension. Conversely, a situation with less rigid behaviour rules may contribute to decrease communication apprehension level;

3. *Consciousness*. This cause draws attention to the personal perception of a situation, and it may relate with the fear of being negatively evaluated by the others. Being the new person in a social setting or meeting a new person seems to make a person feel conspicuous. The more conspicuous people are, the more situational communication apprehension they are likely to experience. According to McCroskey, being conspicuous in a given environment—standing up to speak—increases situational communication apprehension.

4. *Unfamiliarity*. Being acquainted with the audience may decrease situational communication apprehension; conversely, some people experience higher anxiety when they communicate with people they know. McCroskey noted that not all the individuals react to unfamiliarity in the same way. Therefore, he found a binary pattern of correlation between unfamiliarity and situational communication apprehension, regardless of the degree and direction of correlation.

5. *Similarity*. Close to unfamiliarity, this cause similarly impacts on individuals. Some people believe they have nothing to fear if their audience is greatly different, while other people are more concerned of being evaluated from an audience who have same opinions and ideas. Since talking to who is similar to oneself may result both in low and high situational communication apprehension, McCroskey relate similarity to situational communication apprehension without consideration for the level of correlation.

6. *The degree of Attention from Others*. The last cause is linked with the level of attention the audience pay to an individual's speech. McCroskey found that there are people who display increased level of situational communication apprehension either when the audience stare at them or totally ignore them (McCroskey, 1970, in Oxford, 1983:9-10).

In addition to Buss' causes of situational communication apprehension, McCroskey reported on Daly and Hailey's (1980) additional causes: degree of evaluation and prior history.

First, being evaluated may increase or decrease level of situational communication apprehension. As the previous causes, McCroskey believed that the level of others' evaluation influence people's level of communication apprehension. Second, McCroskey connected prior history to personal life experiences and self-esteem. In fact, failures and success alter people's self-esteem. When people experience failures, they are prone to think they will fail again; conversely, successful people are likely to believe they will succeed again (McCroskey, 1970, in Oxford, 1983:10-12). Therefore, it seems that past experiences impact situational communication apprehension levels.

As far as possible treatments to deal with communication apprehension are concerned, Mejias et al. (1991) conducted a study on the effects of communication apprehension on more than 400 Mexican-American students which led them to propose three general treatment methods: systematic desensitization, cognitive modification, and skills training (Mejias et al., in Horwitz and Young, 1991:87-97).

1. *Systematic Desensitization.* Desensitizing people to anxiety seems to result in a beneficial decreasing of oral communication apprehension. In fact, Mejias et al.'s findings proved that when students know how to relax when they encounter anxiety-provoking stimuli, they are likely to reduce their oral communication apprehension in a given situation. However, since the researchers noted that anxiety does not decrease in the same way across different contexts, they stated that this treatment may work only to reduce public communication anxiety;

2. *Cognitive Modification.* According to the "prior history" cause of situational CA, the way people perceive themselves influence their level of communication apprehension. As a consequence, it seems that changing people's negative self-perception towards a given communication situation help decreases their apprehension level. Mejias et al. provided students with unbiased evidences of anxious unproductive thinking, then taught them effective methods to self-evaluate themselves correctly, to assess their personal development; as a result, as students evaluate more realistically themselves and the consequences of their behavior, their oral communication apprehension level decreased. Similar to systematic desensitization, the researchers noted that this treatment is situation-specific, which means that it is more effective to deal with public speaking anxiety;

3. *Skill Training.* The last suggested treatment focuses on training. Mejias et al., claimed that students often do not have sufficient knowledge or they lack the requisite skills to perform successfully in oral communication situations; therefore their poor

performances negatively affect their anxiety level. By teaching the students how to perform correctly in public speaking, and by offered them the skills they need to succeed, the researcher helped students to acquire confidence, which incidentally lowered their oral communication apprehension. Training individuals' skills is therefore useful to reduce their apprehension towards communication: however, the researchers claimed that, similarly to the other two methods, it seems that Skill Training is more effective to cope with public communication situations⁶.

2.3. MASTERING A LANGUAGE THROUGH USAGE:

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

There is consistent evidence that language anxiety plays a pivotal role not only in impairing foreign language performances, but also in reducing individuals' willingness to use and communicate in the foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989; McIntyre et al., 2002; Clement et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Macintyre, 2007). Therefore, it seems useful to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the construct of willingness to communicate, in order to offer a coherent view of causes and effects of anxiety towards communication in the foreign language.

Oral communication represents the core of interpersonal relationships, although humans can convey meaning also through non-verbal messages such as body gestures, facial expressions or even mumbling. One of the accounted differences between verbal and non-verbal messages is claimed to be volition. However, many researchers have debated on which form of communication could be labeled as "volitional". According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990), oral communication is an act of volition, meaning that people voluntarily choose to communicate. It is important to note that, as people differ physically and psychologically one another, they display different degrees of oral production. As MacIntyre indicated, while some people tend to speak only when they are forced to, some others seem to be verbose and talk regularly (MacIntyre, 2007:564). To embody the array of these individual differences in the first language (L1) interpersonal communication, in

⁶ However, there is positive evidence which suggests that training people's skills may boost their confidence, thus reducing oral communication apprehension even in different contexts (Glaser, 1981:337; Boonkit, 2010:1305-1306).

1985 McCroskey and Baer (Baran-Łucarz, 2014:37) developed the construct of Willingness to Communicate, often shortened to WTC, which basically relates to the personal choice to engage communication with other people.

However, this constructs has gathered attention from second and foreign language researchers. Among them, MacIntyre (2007) noted that, similar to speakers of L1, some second and foreign language learners choose to speak and use their target language, while others neglect to communicate and loose the opportunity to practice their communicative skills (MacIntyre, 2007:564).

In the field of second and foreign language acquisition, willingness to communicate consists of “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (MacIntyre, 1998:547). Furthermore, it takes into account both trait and state features: *trait* willingness to communicate concerns a stable attitude towards communication, while *state* willingness to communicate reflects the readiness to use the language in a given, specific context. Furthermore, like other researchers, MacIntyre believed that willingness to communicate is tightly anchored with language anxiety and motivation (MacIntyre, 2007:564-565). In his opinion, the unpleasant feeling of apprehension toward the foreign language is likely to alter self-perception, thus reducing the probability of engaging in communication. Similarly, degree and type of motivation towards the foreign language plays an important role in choosing to use it when communicating with other people; Accordingly, the scholar delved into details of these related factors and found that some specific aspects of

developed his “kernels of wisdom” which are firmly related to some specific aspects of to provide a solid base for a more structured model of L2 willingness to communicate, which takes into account several linguistics, communicative, and psychological variables. These kernels offer a broad

First, he claims that “*the relationships among variables under study in SLA may change substantially when concepts are defined at different levels of abstraction*”. In this kernel, MacIntyre addressed language anxiety as the main variable in Second Language Acquisition, and he connected language anxiety to that aforementioned distinction between anxiety as a permanent condition across situations and as an immediate and temporary state also applies to the specific language anxiety (Levitt, 1971:34; § 2.2). To relate willingness to communicate with language anxiety, MacIntyre moreover suggests focusing on situational language anxiety, which could be more complex than expected to detect, since the learners’ make active efforts to compensate for their anxiety. Lastly, he considers the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS)—which also constitutes

the instrumentation of the present study—as a reliable source of information for L2 researchers interested in language anxiety.

Second, MacIntyre states that “*the major motivation to learn another language is to develop a communicative relationship with people from another cultural group*”. MacIntyre’s idea stems from several studies on motivation (Knowles, 1984; Gardner, 1985; Geen, 1994; Ushioda, 2001; Dörnyei, 2005). The concept of motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of human behaviors (Geen, 1994:2-5). In the field of foreign language learning, moreover, not only does “motivation energises, directs and sustains behaviour” (McDevitt, 2006:575), but it is also connected to the desire to be accepted from the foreign language’s cultural community (MacIntyre, 2007:566). MacIntyre stated that recently, motivation has driven the attention of many second and foreign language researchers. He cited Ushioda’s (2001) and Dörnyei’s (2005) studies on learner autonomy and motivation, stating however that both of them seem to root their principles in Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model (MacIntyre, 2007:565-566). According to Gardner, motivation is a core quality of an individual, though it can be influenced by external forces. Gardner’s model portrays a specific type of motivation, namely *integrative motivation*, which is a combination of three major elements⁷: integrativeness, attitudes towards learning, and motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2002:541). Moreover, according to many studies conducted on human personality and tendencies, motivation can be either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*:

In Self-Determination Theory [...] we distinguish between different types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. Over three decades of research has shown that the quality of experience and performance can be very different when one is behaving for intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons (Ryan and Deci, 2000:55).

Furthermore, according to the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation:

Intrinsically motivated students are said to employ strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply.

⁷ The three elements which constitute Gardner’s model basically refer to the desire to meet, communicate, and emotionally identify other people, to the personal attitude students have towards their teacher and learning, and to the “desire to be accepted as a member of a new linguistic community” (Gardner and Lambert, 1959:272).

Extrinsically motivated students, by contrast, are inclined to make the minimum effort to achieve an award. Older behaviourist perspectives on motivation assumed that teachers could manipulate children's engagement with schoolwork through the introduction of controls and rewards. However, research tended to show that children usually revert to their original behaviour when the rewards stop. Furthermore, at least two dozen studies have shown that people who expect to receive a reward for completing a task or for doing it successfully do not perform as well as those who expect nothing. This condition appears to be true for children and adults, for males and females, for rewards of all kinds and for tasks ranging from memorising facts to designing colleges (OECD, 2000:28).

According to the majority of researchers, between the two types of motivation, intrinsic motivation is the most important phenomenon to observe, since it internally drive students to reach their personal goal and achieve the target language, thus resulting in high-quality learning (Ryan and Deci, 2000:56-60). Lastly, Knowles (2005) noted that, as people grow and become more independent, they they change focus and motivation: from a more extrinsic and utilitarian perspective, their motivation shifts towards a more reliable, lasting and internal motivation, which help them boost their self-esteem as well as their learning processes (§ 2.1.).

Clarifying the concept of motivation is functional to the understanding of what MacIntyre believes important in the interaction between willingness to communicate and motivation: the achievement of learners' personal goals outweighs any external reward. In fact, the reward of being accepted and integrated with the foreign language's culture is one of the strongest intrinsic motivation toward the target language, which may increase learners' readiness to use the language and attempt to communicate through it even if not perfectly mastered.

These ideas helped MacIntyre to elaborate his L2 WTC model of variables affecting willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998 in MacIntyre, 2007:568). In this pyramid-shaped model, MacIntyre takes into account both stable and temporary factors which affect willingness to communicate, to determine whether a learner choose to communicate when given a chance.

Figure 2 portrays the model. The three layers at the basis of the pyramid show the most stable factors. Layer VI encompasses factors which are independent from the individual's influence, namely intergroup climate and personality; the learner, as MacIntyre states, seems to have little impact on these factors, which in turn may impact her or his

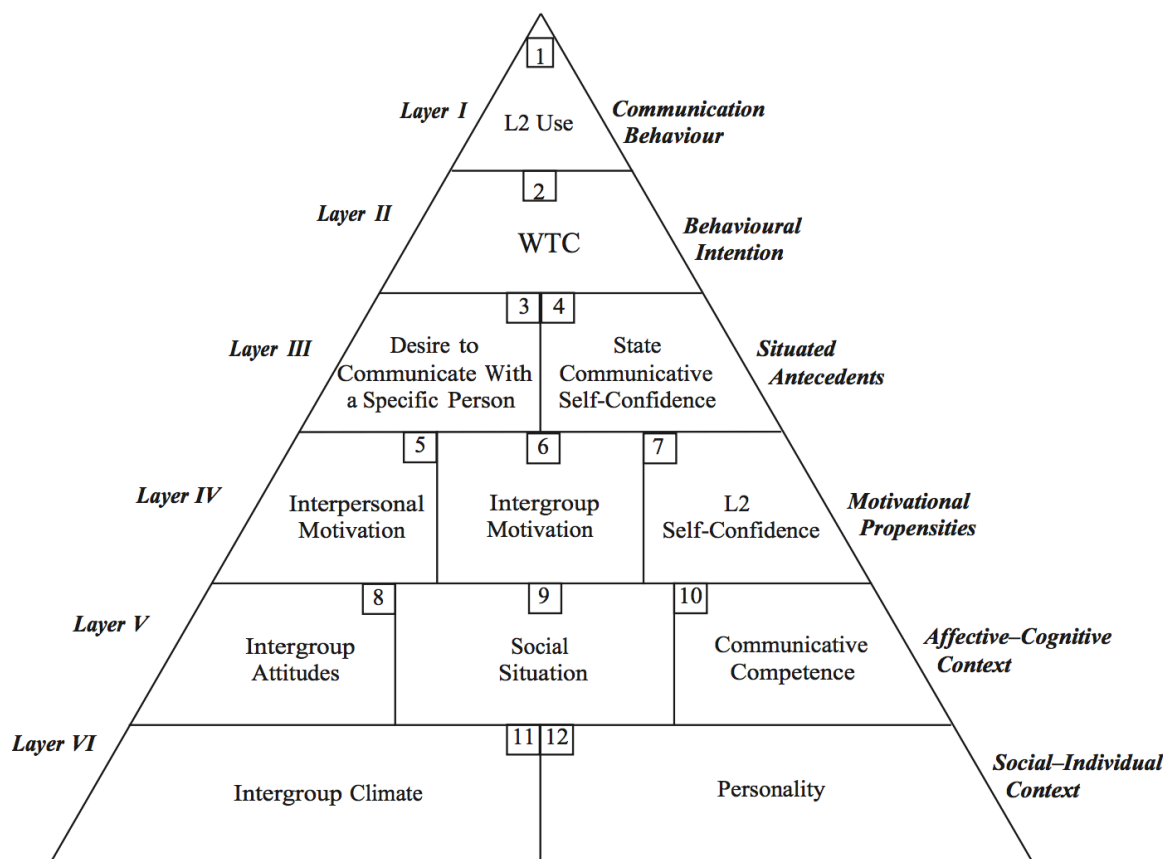


Figure 2 - The Pyramid Model of Willingness to Communicate
(MacIntyre, 2007:568).

WTC. Layer V represents affective and cognitive attitudes towards the target language. MacIntyre claims that these tendencies fluctuate from a desire to approach the language to a sense of reluctance. Layer IV displays specific motives and perceptions. In MacIntyre's view, when these motives and perception combine with high L2 self-confidence, there is a lack of anxiety which may increase willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, 2007:568). The three layers at the top of the pyramid displays situational factors which impact the decision to engage communication in a given situation. Layer III represents specific behavioral tendencies towards communication; according to Dörnyei (2005), by these situational behaviors, learners make their final decision concerning using their L2 in a given situation (MacIntyre, 2007:567-568). Layer II is "the last psychological step in preparation for L2 communication" (MacIntyre, 2007:568), namely willingness to communicate.

To conclude, it is noteworthy to say that the concept of willingness to communicate is a steady and pivotal component of second and foreign language acquisition (Kang, 2005:291), and that it is important to study and analyze its effect on language learning apart from language anxiety-related studies. However, many studies and researchers highlighted the negative correlation between communication apprehension and willingness

to communicate in a foreign language: in fact, it seems that the more apprehensive the learner is, the less willing to communicate in the foreign language s/he will be. Furthermore, not only the present study agrees with the idea that the willingness to communicate construct is useful, but it also considers the same construct essential in evaluating older adult's approach and personal attitudes towards the foreign language learning.

This chapter encompassed three topic important for our study: andragogy as an educational model which takes into account adults' personalities and differences;, communication apprehension in foreign language contexts, and willingness to communicate, which refers to the the desire which may both impact and be impacted by language anxiety. The next chapter will provide the reader with a more detailed review of the empirical studies on communication apprehension and willingness to communicate in the foreign language, with particular attention to their effects on adult foreign language learners.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF ADULT LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Language Anxiety has a significant influence on second language acquisition and willingness to communicate. Since the development of the concept (see § 2.2.), many scholars and researchers have tried to investigate the effects of anxiety among language learners and attempted to define how and why anxiety may impair second or foreign language learning, and which variable has the greatest role in these processes.

The Effects of Age on Foreign Language Acquisition and Anxiety

Age came out to be the first affecting variable in language acquisition and anxiety. In fact, the effect of age of acquisition on ultimate achievement of a second or foreign language has been debated for years (Penfield, 1959; Chomsky, 1972; Genese, 1978). As far as the concept of an optimal age of language acquisition, there are three major points of view which traditionally have been used to advocate early instruction in a second language: nativist, neuropsychological, and affective arguments. First, according to the nativist point of view, early exposure to a second language is advantageous because it capitalizes on the innate language learning ability that all children seem to have. Chomsky (1972) supported this position and postulated the existence of an innate Language Acquisition Device which allows children to derive syntactic structures and rules to learn a language, although it becomes inaccessible at a certain age by general cognitive strategies (Chomsky, 1972:120; DeKeyser, 2013:53). Second, the period of optimal language learning postulated by the nativists coincides with a critical period of neurological development: According to Genesee (1978), the young brain is more plastic and prone to modifications, and over its first developmental period, it differentiates its hemispheric features, particularly those related to language. Moreover, scientist alleged that by age 13 the human brain may complete hemispheric lateralization of these two types of functions. Accordingly, in 1959 Penfield argued that completion of this process of cerebral lateralization marks the beginning of the end of an optimal period for language learning, first or second (Genesee, 1978:147). Finally, young children are thought to be better second language learners because they have fewer affective predispositions which interfere with their learning. They are believed to be willing recipients of the learning experience. Gardner's (1985) socio-

educational model demonstrated the importance of positive attitudes and openness in second language learning, and his findings supported this point of view (MacIntyre, 2007:565-566). Older students, in fact, who have had previous experiences and formed views, may be more anxious and self-conscious toward the second language. Thus, these feeling might jeopardize their learning.

The Effects of Age on Foreign Language Acquisition and Anxiety: Chinese Women Immigrants

According to Johnson and Newport (1989), a recent reinterpretation of one of the most relevant studies to many second language researchers provided decisive support for a sensitive period in the acquisition of L2, emphasized that performance quality and age of arrival are correlated (Johnson and Newport, 1989, in Wang, 1999:1). As Wang suggested, there is a pattern of lower attainment in L2 associated with increasing of the starting age (Harley and Wang, 1997, in Wang, 1999:2).

Although the learner variables investigated in these studies may offer some plausible clues to describe the effect of age on adult L2 acquisition, quantitative studies on the possible explanations for the effect of age in adult L2 acquisition obviously lack the perspective of adult learners involved in the phenomenon under study. Because the age of arrival is negatively correlated to learners' L2 proficiency outcomes, indeed studying this phenomenon from the perspective of the adult learners may provide valuable new insights (Wang, 1999:2). However, it seems that only a few studies have examined this question from the students' perspective. For example, Wang (1999) conducted a study on Chinese women immigrants which discloses how language acquisition in adulthood may affect language achievement; the study investigated how adult learners perceive language learning and reported on 30 women immigrant learners' accounts of their experiences and impressions of learning English as a second language. Wang used the qualitative data to complement a previous study on the age-related effects in adult second language acquisition; she interviewed two different age-of-arrival groups of adult learners, and collected perceptions and interpretations of their experiences learning ESL to construct an understanding of the issue of age and L2 acquisition in adulthood (Wang, 1999:4-10). Her main findings provided further research with a valuable knowledge on adult learners' acquisition of a second or foreign language. First, she found that adults' achievement in L2 listening comprehension declined with increasing age, even when learners has the same time span and learning conditions. The scholar's interviews show that many learners of the later arrival group struggled with pronunciation and listening comprehension and

succeeded in writing and reading skills, whereas the earlier arrival group displayed a linear progress in all the four language skills. However, Wang claimed that difficulties experienced by some later arrival learners may be related to an increasing level of anxiety.

Anxiety, in fact, prevents some people from performing successfully in language learning. Students experiencing an anxiety-evoking situation as it would be in a language class attempted less interpretative and more concrete messages than those who experienced a relaxed state (Steinberg, 1986, in Horwitz et al., 1986:126). Furthermore, anxiety centers on the two core task requirements of foreign language learning, which are listening and speaking. Since anxiety makes students unreceptive to the language input and prevents them from learning improvement, many experts found that anxious students usually complain of difficulties in discriminating sounds (Krashen, 1980, in Horwitz et al., 1986:127), thus supporting Wang's specific findings on the later arrival group's lack of progress in listening and speaking. Moreover, the two age-of-arrival groups Wang interviewed reflected different learning strategies, which may indicate various levels of anxiety. In fact, while the earlier arrivals perceived a lack of language environment as a critical barrier to learning, the later arrivals believed that failing at recalling information and lack of memory could constitute their major obstacles. Wang's work revealed that the older study participants relied on memory more than the younger ones; this different perception of language barriers not only suggests a tendency for the later arrivals to place more reliance on memorizing L2 and for the earlier arrivals to rely more on obtaining language-acquisition contacts but also implies a higher level of anxiety and lack of confidence among the later arrivals. Accordingly, Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that overstudy is a common phenomenon among anxious students, who believe that they had to remember every single word and meaning before attempting to use the target language (Horwitz et al., 1986:126-127). However, since it is an impossible task, they experience frustration, and a lack of confidence in their abilities. Moreover, since they lack confidence, students are likely to expect to fail in acquiring the target language. Some researchers argued that language learners who think they are likely to succeed are more apt to be successful than those who expect to fail (Wang, 1999:11-14). Wang's study seems to confirm this condition: her interviews displayed that the later arrivals, who are less confident than the other group, believed that it would take them forever to achieve a reasonable level of oral proficiency. This discouraging belief is likely to have affected the later arrivals' efforts and commitment to their L2 learning, while the earlier arrivals' positive anticipation of success could have had a positive impact on their L2 acquisition. Their anticipation is also likely to help sustain their motivation to learn ESL (see §2.3).

The Effects of Age on Foreign Language Acquisition and Anxiety: Students of a French Immersion Program

Although it has been observed that students who experience high language anxiety usually underestimate their competence (MacIntyre et al., 2002; Horwitz et al., 1986), some studies have contrasted this assumption, claiming that the lack of experience may sometimes block the relationship between language anxiety and lower perceived competence. A study MacIntyre et al. (2002) conducted on sex and age effects on communication apprehension and willingness to communicate disclosed that there is a non-significant correlation among willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language, language anxiety, and perceived competence in the target language. MacIntyre's assumption was that their relatively lower perceived ability does not relate to individual differences in anxiety. He investigated second-language (L2) communication apprehension and willingness to communicate in the target language among students in French late immersion programs, in order to test the effects of sex, age, and language on willingness to communicate and anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 2002). MacIntyre globally examined the effects of language, sex, and grade on willingness to communicate, anxiety, and perceived communication competence, on the frequency of communication in French, and on the attitude and motivation variables at each grade level of the program (MacIntyre et al., 2002:555-560). Moreover, the significant negative correlations he highlighted between language anxiety and perceived competence among students are consistent with the notion that the negative relationship between anxiety and perceived competence is a function of repeated experience (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989:50-53).

Indeed, age is a crucial element which alters language proficiency and level of anxiety, though many other factors contribute to increasing communication apprehension among language learners. It has been discovered that some elements such as gender, motivation, and social context may alter levels of anxiety, thus contributing to different outcomes in language achievement. It is evident that gender may have an impact on L2 communication and other individual difference variables. According to Gardner's (1985) view, girls had more positive inclinations toward language learning; he argued that attitudinal differences might be responsible for given sex differences in achievement (MacIntyre et al., 2002:542). This idea seems to be in line with the common perception that modern languages are a "female" subject. Moreover, in 1987 Worrall and Tsarna provided teachers' self-reported practices which suggest a pattern that would favor girls over boys in the language classroom; English and French teachers, in fact, harbored greater expectations of girls than of boys, thus giving girls more guidance and providing women with more career

encouragement than men (MacIntyre et al. 2002:542-543). The aforementioned MacIntyre et al.'s study on sex and age effects on communication apprehension and willingness to communicate not only revealed significant correlations between levels of anxiety and age of the students but also confirmed this pattern, revealing that male and female students have different attitudes and behaviors towards language learning. MacIntyre's findings showed that whereas boys' overall willingness to communicate and anxiety levels are constant across all the classes involved in the study, girls' willingness to communicate firstly increased, then its values decreased when girls were promoted to the subsequent grade (MacIntyre et al. 2002:555-560). However, these results may be explained through developmental psychology: MacIntyre relied on Sigelman (1999) stating that increased self-consciousness seems to be associated with the beginning of puberty, which is, on average, earlier for girls than for boys (MacIntyre et al., 2002:557-560).

The Effects of Age on Foreign Language Acquisition and Anxiety: Turkish ESL learners

Contrary to MacIntyre's work, Elaldı's study on Turkish English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students discovered that foreign language anxiety among males was higher than females. The scholar aimed at examining whether gender acts as a variable in altering levels of anxiety. He used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986:128) to test 98 students, which 57 of them were females; his findings indicated that male participants experienced higher language anxiety than their female counterparts. More specifically, males' results are higher regarding communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation (see § 2) and the overall FLCAS score. Elaldı's opinion depended on Awan et al.'s (2010) assumption that females are better language learners (Elaldı, 2016:225). The effects of anxiety, in fact, may extend its consequences beyond classroom: whereas it may act as a critical filter, distancing women and other members of supposed minority groups from high-demanding careers which are considered to be males' prerogative, it may prevent male learners to acquire enough confidence in achieving the target language (Horwitz et al., 1986:131). Although other researchers addressed the increased level of anxiety to a merely socio-cultural issues which are common to Turkish English language learners, who cannot speak English in front of others because of their lack of motivation, self-confidence, and practice to use the language, Elaldı's findings are corroborated by other studies which reached the same conclusion (Elaldı, 2016:225-227). However, Elaldı's results also underline the role of social context in altering language anxiety levels. Accordingly, it seems that different circumstances result in different

opportunities to learn and use the target language, thus contributing to increase or decrease learners' confidence. This reaction seems to be negatively correlated to anxiety: the more confident students are when using the language, the less anxious they will be (Elaldi, 2016:227).

The Effects of Social Context on Foreign Language Anxiety

Not only does Wang's (1999) study examine age effects on language proficiency, but also reveals how social context may affect language achievement; in fact, almost all the women of the two groups involved in the study report on a lack of situations where they could learn to speak and practice English. Many scholars speculated that this might result from a settlement pattern, which may be responsible for the lack of motivation among immigrants, particularly older immigrants, to learn the target language. However, data revealed that behind learners' high motivation, both groups experienced the frustration of being unable to have language contacts which they needed. In fact, as Wang stated, "what seems to best characterize both groups in this study is their strong desire to have meaningful language-acquisition contacts and their desperate feeling of being unable to do so" (Wang, 1999:11). According to Horwitz (1987), she claimed that even if individuals may be aware of the opportunities to speak and use the target language, it does not mean that they are willing to benefit from them (Horwitz, 1987, in Wang, 1999:11). Moreover, the earlier arrivals group in Wang's study appeared more confident about their memory capacities than the later arrivals. To explain why they lack confidence, Wang identified two reasons: first, it seems that the later arrivals group considered English could be better learned by rote: their emphasis on memorizing information may thus have led them to overly rely on their memory. As a consequence, they experienced discouragement when their memory fails; second, the interview data revealed the consequences of the relationship between memory and the way the language is learned. In fact, Wang claimed that memory seemed to work best when learners had opportunities and necessities to use the language (Wang, 1999:11-14). When adults do not have the opportunity to use, practice and produce the target language, Wang believed that their memory may easily release information, thus lessen learner proficiency (Wang, 1999:14).

All the studies presented here offered a brief insight of many of the separate variables that alter communication and language anxiety levels and affect second and foreign language learning. However, the majority of these research concerns young students at the college or university level. Therefore, to support the idea that adult language learners of different ages experience the same condition, next two sections will report on studies on

communication anxiety, and aim at demonstrating how communication apprehension and psychological barriers may impact second and foreign language learning and how their willingness to communicate may suffer from adult psychological filters, which act as an obstacle, thus preventing them from learning and successfully communicating in the target language.

3.1. STUDIES OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Investigations of foreign language anxiety have been for the most part quantitative studies, primarily correlational research. Quantitative data are critical in uncovering the relationship between language proficiency and communication anxiety, and between fluctuation in the levels of language anxiety and the influencing variables. In the 1960s and 1970s, early quantitative studies on the relationship between foreign language proficiency and learner variables examined anxiety among other variables (Chastain, 1975 Gardner et al., 1976). However, results of these studies were not conclusive: in fact, since anxiety arises in several occasions and different researchers developed various statistical measures, language anxiety was not easy to detect and study. Therefore, over the last decades, foreign language anxiety quantitative research moved from focusing on the relationship between anxiety and learner variables (Horwitz, 1986, in Horwitz and Young, 1991:37-39) to examining the effects of anxiety on the foreign language learner (Young, 1986, in Horwitz and Young, 1991:59-63). However, few studies remarkably examined the learners' perspective. In 1991, Price first used interviews to investigate the relationships between foreign language learners and language anxiety. The interview is a qualitative technique that has been successfully employed in many fields. In fact, the interview allows the researcher to obtain descriptive information on variables not easily assessed through empirical research. It can also provide a way to view phenomena from the point of view of the subject. Therefore, Price interviewed ten former students of the University of Texas who were supposed to be anxious towards their French as a foreign language learning, in order to use student insights as a source of information on questions of potential interest to the foreign language anxiety research, and to obtain a detailed description of the meaning of being an anxious student in a foreign language class. According to her findings, Price firstly outlined four factors which are extremely anxiety-inducing, then she tried to identify

the leading causes of language anxiety. First, former students were afraid of speaking the target language in front of their peers. As presented above (§ 2.2), fear of negative evaluation is a common apprehension which not only affects many anxious students in a traditional learning environment, but it also impacts any social evaluative situation such as a job interview. Second, students were concerned about making errors in pronunciation. Many students often think that they have to master their foreign language perfectly before starting to use it. This detrimental belief leads highly potential anxious students to experience even more anxiety, since “students are expected to communicate in their foreign language before fluency is attained” (Horwitz et al., 1986:127). Third, many students reported frustration of not being able to communicate effectively in the target language. Apart from the fear of making errors, second and foreign language adult learners often display apprehension towards their ability to communicate with native speakers. A pivotal condition for succeeding in any language learning situation is the student’s ability—and willingness—to communicate in the target language. Since highly apprehensive students often believe that their audience, after hearing them speak, would evaluate them as poor or limited speakers, their irrational fear prevent them from engaging situations where to communicate. Moreover, since avoidance insinuates into their behaviors, when these individuals encounter situations where communication is required, they are likely to fail to actively participate in conversations (Cao, 2011:84). Fourth, Price found that former students believed that the complexity of their language classes increased their anxiety. As we previously stated, foreign language classes may be demanding and may contribute to a language anxiety arousal in those students who may display a genetic predisposition toward anxiety (see § 2.2.). Furthermore, the interviews provided Price with sufficient data to develop a guideline for language teachers, who should take into account emotional and psychological states of their students, thus contributing to a more comfortable environment to reduce their anxiety towards language learning (Price, 1991, in Horwitz and Young, 1991:107-108).

Apart from the qualitative use of interviews, which can be used both to obtain an “authentic” description of the interviewees’ experiences and to investigate specific questions of interest to the researcher, there are many quantitative studies which explored the relationship between adult language learners’ anxiety and their target language achievement. For example, Chastain provided a useful study on the correlation between students’ affective barriers and their progress in language acquisition. The scholar found that anxiety, among the variables he analyzed, may have an important role in altering

language proficiency; his findings, though not complete, underpinned following research (Chastain, 1975).

Communication Apprehension: the Taiwanese Context

Along the side of Chastain's findings, in 2010 Wu investigated how 66 Taiwanese students aged from 23 to 54 perceive the relationship between their language learning strategy and anxiety in the foreign language classroom. Wu used both qualitative and quantitative methods and used several standard measures to examine the study members' perceptions toward learning English. His findings reveal high levels of language anxiety among the students, which prevent them from successfully achieve the target language. Furthermore, the scholar correlated levels of anxiety with age of the participants: in fact, students between 24 and 30 years old seemed to have lower levels of anxiety than the older participants. Wu attributed this reticence to a lack of experience in speaking English. However, according to other statistical data, it seems that reticence is a typical pattern among almost all Asian learners, which scored passive and unwilling to participate and communicate in the foreign language classroom (Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2004 in Wu, 2010:178). Moreover, Wu identified the reason in what Kouraogo (1993) claimed: learner are anxious and avoid communication in the target language due to the environment in which most L2 learners communicate (Wu, 2010:176). Since they have less time to allot to their practice, and they are less exposed to the native language outside of the classroom, many adult language learners lack confidence in their spoken target language and become anxious when they need to use it a vehicle of communication. As a consequence, Wu noted that students who experienced the pressure of examination rarely communicate in the target language in the classroom or after class, and they use their L1 as a mean of communication in the foreign language classroom. To help the student cope with anxiety in the foreign language classroom, Wu addressed Krashen's (1989) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which promoted a less threatening classroom environment to reduce students' anxiety thus fostering their confidence and learning (Wu, 2010:174). Furthermore, since adults are more stable and confident concerning their personal growth, they may believe that learning a language in their adulthood will discredit their steady critical thinking and their ability to retain and recall information (Horwitz et al., 1986:128; Doidge, 2007:162). Moreover, Wu's interviews reveal that sources of anxiety are often intertwined. For example, teachers, activities, pedagogical practices, and evaluation are plausible anxiety-provoking factors in the language classroom (Wu, 2010:177-184).

Communication Apprehension: the Malaysian Context

In 2015, Latif conducted research on the factors influencing the level of language anxiety among 132 adult language learners of the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. In addition to the main contributing factors of language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; see also § 2.2), Latif addressed gender, age and years of learning as variable to be considered. Accordingly, age is relevant to language anxiety since it accounts for the differences in the adults' way of thinking, learning ability and learning styles (Latif, 2015:223-224). However, although all students involved reported on a general feeling of anxiety in learning English, his findings displayed a non-significant relationship between anxiety and age. Latif agreed with Majid et al.'s (2007) and claimed that adult learners are different from conventional learners: their stable role in the society would enhance their shaping of more positive values, behaviour and thinking (Latif, 2015:225). Adults' enhanced self-confidence may, therefore, provide adult language learners with a useful element to cope with anxiety. Additionally, the scholar found an interesting correlation between language anxiety and years of learning English, which supported the idea that increased proficiency reduces language anxiety (Latif, 2015:228-231). This findings suggest that adult students experience moderate levels of anxiety, which Latif related to adult learners' high motivation and self-confidence: since they are more independent, they display the ability to solve their learning problems control their nervousness. Latif also believed adult learners have a positive attitude towards language learning, and their expectations are ore realistic. Therefore, these findings led Latif to conclude that motivation and self-confidence might be the most important features to enhance the second language learning environment, since it seems that age does not alter anxiety levels (Latif, 2015:231).

Communication Apprehension: the Korean Context

Park's (2014) research led to a similar belief; his study on the hidden variables of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) using two groups of Korean adult English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learners revealed that Korean learners experienced a consistent level of communication anxiety towards their target language. In fact, Park highlighted that "Communication Apprehension and Understanding" and "Communication Apprehension and Confidence" were the strongest factors in the participants' perceptions (Park, 2014:267-269). Nonetheless, other studies portrayed different outcomes: While Park addressed the fragmented and varied methods of administration of the FLCAS as the main reason for such different findings, his opinion

seems to contrast with a comparative study between adult Chinese and English second language learners' perception of foreign language anxiety conducted by Lin in 2012.

Communication Apprehension: the Chinese Context

Lin's (2012) study distanced from the critical period hypothesis; in fact, she believed that adults might actually learn a language as good as their younger counterparts. The scholar was interested in how adults learn their second language, since they have specific thinking models and have a greater amount of life experiences, especially when compared with younger students. As Lin found, adults apply their life experiences as well as their first language knowledge to their second or foreign language, thus fostering the learning process. The scholar relies on findings from another study, which show that older students are more able to incorporate their life experiences into their second or foreign language learning situation, whereas younger students merely focus on the process of learning (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000:6). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) suggested that language anxiety increases at the beginning of second or foreign language learning and may block the process; however, Lin believed that older students possess more relevant life skills and first language knowledge, which may act as a basis to help them absorb and/or adjust the new linguistic system into their native language (Lin, 2012:37). Along the lines of Lin, other studies displayed that older learners make fewer first language influenced mistakes when compared with younger students did (Figueredo, 2006, in Lin, 2012:32). Therefore, it seems that older students' previous experiences help them not only to pursue their ambition and rely on their needs but also to ease their anxiety in second and foreign language classrooms easily. Not unlike Lin, in fact, she reported on Dewaele et al.'s (2008) examination of the relationship between the age of the adult multi-linguals and their Classroom Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety. Lin stated that these findings indicated a negative correlation between age and students' language anxiety, which means older adult students are less anxious than young adult students (Lin, 2012:48). However, Lin developed these findings, and postulated that increased age and previous life experiences may have different outcomes: on the one hand, a more stable mental status boosts adults' self-confidence while learning a second or foreign language, which indirectly alleviates students' anxiety; on the other hand, Lin believed that some cultural backgrounds and experiences affects adult language learning. The scholar found that beside individuals' characteristics and age, ethnic and educational backgrounds may act as influencing elements in language anxiety levels and language proficiency. In her study, the scholar compared two different culture—Western and Non-Western—and two separate language

—English and Chinese. Students with different cultural backgrounds acquire knowledge with diverse strategies and have various perceptions of the target language. Furthermore, she found some similarities between her results and Chiswick's findings, which revealed that the success of older L2 learners would be affected by culturally-influenced experiences, such as their prior learning background and educational system (Lin, 2012:33;48). Moreover, Lin reported on another study Dewaele conducted on cultural differences; its findings indicated a different cultural background may hinder adult language learners to successfully express their emotions in the second or foreign language. This difficulty may thus prevent them from being closer to the target language's culture and from mastering the language. (Dewaele, 2005, in Lin, 2012:48). Specifically, Lin's comparative findings outlined that Chinese-as-a-second-language (CSL) students who were educated under Western educational systems display different achievement expectations, anxiety levels, and motivational learning factors as compared to English as a Second Language (ESL) students who were trained under Non-Western education. Accordingly, ESL students' anxiety levels were lower when compared with the one of CSL students (Lin, 2012:95-113).

3.2. STUDIES OF WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

As human beings, communication is extremely important. Thompson (1995) argued that among all the activities humans may engage in, communication is perhaps the most prevalent, consequential, and dynamic (Thompson, 1995:10-12). The main part of fulfillment and pleasure as human beings relies on the quality of individuals' mutual communication, within a variety of different social groups such as family, peers, or community. Unfortunately, however, it seems that age alters the way individuals are considered by the others. In 2013, a study on people's perceptions of elders, Barnhart claimed that modern society devalues old age. She collected individuals' opinion on being elderly: from being irritable and unwilling to change to being forgetful, the scholar noted that almost every stereotype people associate with the process of aging has often a negative nuance. Despite this unpleasant opinion is widespread throughout different cultures and societies, a considerable number of studies on adults investigated whether aging impacts people's self-awareness and their willingness to communicate with each other and with younger people (Barnhart, 2013:1133-1140). It has been argued that people who are

willing to communicate are more inclined to start a conversation with strangers in private or public occasions (Wrench et al., 2008, in Del Villar, 2014:152). To verify whether this assumption may apply to older adults, Del Villar (2014) conducted a research on Filipino elders' attitude about aging and willingness to communicate with other people and highlighted the importance of self-esteem in engaging communication. According to her findings, it seems that Filipino elders were comfortable interacting with strangers, and even with people from other cultures. Further, elder respondents who reported a high level of willingness to communicate also displayed high self-esteem. In fact, when she correlated willingness to communicate levels with elders' self-esteem scores, she found a significant correlation between the two variables, thus meaning that the more self-esteem elders experience, the higher willingness to communicate they will have (Del Villar, 2014:159). They gladly anticipated different situations that would allow them to share their minds because they felt that they had so much to impart.

Willingness to Communicate: the Singaporean context

As regards ethnic and cultural variables, culture discrepancy is a relevant factor not only in determining the connection with language anxiety (§ 3.1) but also in deducing whether different cultures impact adult language learners' willingness to communicate. There are, in fact, many studies which explored communication differences across national cultures, with emphasis on communication apprehension and its impact on willingness to communicate. For example, Hsu (2004) argued that North Americans are more willing to communicate than East Asians, that they are less apprehensive communicators and have higher self-perceived communication competence (Hsu, 2004, in Croucher et al., 2016:1404). Developing these findings, Croucher et al. (2016) investigated on Chinese and Malay people living in Singapore to reveal whether cultural differences may affect their willingness to communicate. Scholars chose to study Singapore's situation because, according to them, the city is politically and culturally different from North American, European, and South-east Asian national cultures (Croucher et al., 2016:1405). Their findings showed that, when compared with European and North American scores, Singapore's levels of willingness to communicate are lower, which means that Chinese and Malay participants were less prone to communicate with each other, as a consequence of their high anxiety. According to Croucher, one possible explanation could either lie in the educational system and in a culture discrepancy between Western and Non-Western society; while European and North American educational systems encourage active participation in class and to express one's opinion, Asian cultures rely on a more

pedagogical structure. Asian educational system seems to be more teacher-oriented, thus giving the responsibility for students' knowledge on the teacher (Lin, 2012:40-43). Moreover, among Asian cultures such as in China and Japan, people tend to avoid opposing individuals with higher social ranks, for example, the elderly and people with high scholary (Croucher, 2016:1628). Additionally, it seems that Asians elude or are extremely cautious when communicating with others to prevent getting negative comments (Kim et al., 2007, in Croucher, 2016:1628). Such findings, however, pointed out the importance of investigating in how people, no matter of cultures or ages, communicate what prevent them from actually interacting with others. Furthermore, willingness to communicate is even more important when second or foreign languages are taken into account, since it may foster communication and tighten relationships with the target language community, and may contribute to improve language proficiency. Researchers, therefore, believed that examining on older adults' behavior in different communication contexts would provide them with crucial insights of adults needs and features, in order to help them to achieve their goal and supply teachers and educators with important element to suit language learning methods to adults.

Willingness to Communicate: The Chinese context

Peng and Woodrow (2010) conducted an interesting study on adult willingness to communicate in a second language and its most important predictors. By involving several Chinese EFL classes, the scholar hypothesized a model which incorporates willingness to communicate in English, confidence, motivation, learner beliefs, and classroom environment, and discovered that motivation indirectly influences willingness to communicate through confidence. According to their findings, confidence acts as the most significant predictor of willingness to communicate. Peng and Woodrow's findings also seem to be consistent both with L2 willingness to communicate theory (MacIntyre et al., 2002; see §2.2) and empirical studies across different contexts, such as the Japanese EFL context (Yashima, 2002 in Peng and Woodrow, 2010:836). As the scholars stated, these convergent findings confirm that communication confidence enhances L2 willingness to communicate regardless of cultural and regional differences (Peng and Woodrow, 2010:837). Intuitively, it seems clear that students who have a high self-evaluation of their L2 competence and less anxiety arousal tend to be more willing to enter into communication using their target language. Furthermore, as far as motivation is concerned, Peng and Woodrow's study is important since it corroborated Yashima's (2002) claim that motivation influences L2 willingness to communicate, though he found it has

an indirect effect on willingness to use the foreign language (Yashima, 2002, in Peng and Woodrow, 2010:855-860). The indirect effect implies that, although the motivation is closely related to L2 WTC, students with extrinsic motivation (§ 2.2) to learn English may not necessarily be willing to communicate using English. This conclusion is along the lines of several studies which suggested that integrative motivation has a positive influence on the second or foreign language proficiency (Gardner, 1985, in MacIntyre, 2007:565-566)). Here, the cultural discrepancy is again taken into account. Peng and Woodrow alleged that Chinese people often study English to pass their examinations and tests rather than for satisfying communicative purposes, thus their lack of intrinsic motivation lead them to a less willingness to speak and use English in conversation.

Willingness to Communicate: the Japanese Context

Similar to Peng and Woodrow, Hashimoto (2002) tried to investigate the factors which affect willingness to communicate by studying Japanese ESL students. His study partially replicated the one MacIntyre and Charos' conducted on predictors of second language communication, although their study did not take into account the relationship between willingness to communicate and motivation (Hashimoto, 2002:29). By contrast, not only Hashimoto's replication reported on a relevant connection between willingness to communicate and motivation, but he also found a strong relationship with perceived competence. In fact, the scholar showed that motivation and perceived competence in the target language affect classroom willingness to communicate in the target language. When students think they possess fluency and proficiency in the target language, they are more willing to communicate and use their L2. Moreover, Hashimoto also noted that students who have greater motivation for language learning and who are more willing to communicate report using the language more frequently in the classroom, which means that increased perceived competence lead to increased intrinsic motivation, which in turn affects the frequency of their second or foreign language use. Additionally, Hashimoto's findings confirmed that language anxiety negatively influences perceived competence, thus reducing students' willingness to communicate (Hashimoto, 2002:56-57).

Willingness to Communicate: the Iranian context

The majority of researchers agreed that motivation and both perceived and actual competence in the target language affect students' willingness to communicate. However, some theorists argued that there are other factors which play a significant role in increasing willingness to communicate in a foreign language. For example, Khaki (2013) believed that learner autonomy, which is crucial for education, is also pivotal in making language

learners willing to use their target language. In fact, autonomy represents the ability of a rational individual to make an aware and relaxed decision. The concept of autonomy relate to the human, social and cultural activity of acquiring or increasing knowledge, behaviors, and skills, and as far as the field of language learning is concerned, learner autonomy has been a key theme in the field of foreign language learning for over 30 years. (Khaki, 2013:98). Furthermore, Dickinson defined autonomy as “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions” (Dickinson, 1987:11); accordingly, autonomy is a process and not a product, therefore, individuals may only work towards autonomy. Moreover, the concept of autonomy refers to a learning process where learners take charge and responsibilities of their own learning. Developing Dickinson’s argument, Khaki reported on Little’s (2007) claim that autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, and as a consequence, their learning is more efficient and effective. It seems that the efficiency and effectiveness lead the autonomous learner to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to situations that may arise outside the classroom (Little, 2007, in Khaki, 2013:103). Following from these results, Khaki postulated that learner autonomy might be related to her or his willingness to communicate. His study aimed at demonstrating whether there is a statistically significant relationship between learner autonomy and willingness to communicate in Iranian EFL learners, and to achieve this objective, the scholar tested 77 Iranian EFL learners. According to the collected data, Khaki found a significant and strong correlation between learner autonomy and trait-like WTC in Iranian EFL learners, and a significant but weak correlation between learner autonomy and situational willingness to communicate in Iranian EFL learners. Based on Khaki’s findings it seems therefore that autonomous learners tend to be willing to communicate; however, some other factors in the classroom environment may increase or decrease their second or foreign language use. Among the studies on willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language in the classroom context, many research pointed at elements such as topic, students’ perceptions, type of interlocutors, and their interaction pattern as the main variables which affected learners’ willingness to communicate. For example, Kang (2005), reported that situational WTC in a second language emerges from the combined effect of three interacting psychological factors: security, excitement, and responsibility. Security refers to the “feeling safe from the fears that non-native speakers tend to have in L2” (Kang, 2005:282); excitement is a feeling of happiness when using the target language, Responsibility relate to an individual’s feeling of commitment to communicate. Kang found that learners’ sense of security, excitement, and

responsibility altered regarding the topic, interlocutors, or the context, and they which have a significant effect on students' willingness to communicate. Moreover, he stated that teachers have an important role in developing these psychological factors. Kang's perspective is in line with all past research on the variables affecting WTC in the classroom context; as they indicated, in fact, teachers' attitude, involvement, and style have a significant and determining influence on learners' willingness to communicate in the target language (MacIntyre et al., 2002:557). Among these research, Zarrinabadi's (2014) study is noteworthy: he used qualitative methods to investigate the potential effects of teachers on 50 Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Study participants were asked to describe relevant situations in which teachers influenced their willingness to communicate in English. The validation process consisted on a focused essay technique to explore how teachers affect learners' tendency to talk in class. Zarrinabadi's findings indicate that learners' willingness to communicate depends on four factors: teachers' wait time, error correction, decision on the topic, and support. First, the time a teacher waits for receiving the response affected the students' willingness or unwillingness to communicate. The study demonstrated that learners need more time to prepare their sentences or to find the most appropriate structure (Zarrinabadi, 2014:291-294). According to MacIntyre, hesitation, which is a sign of the learner's difficulty to make actions, might create reactions from interlocutors, which in turn reinforce the tendency to hesitate more in the future (MacIntyre, 2012, in Zarrinabadi, 2014:292). As Zarrinabadi's study participants suggested, teachers should mold their tendencies in dealing with hesitant learners and notice involuntary responses they may generate. Second, the study found that the teacher's approach for selecting classroom discussion topics influence L2 willingness to communicate. As we previously stated, acquiring knowledge and achieving important language goals boost learners' self-confidence. Furthermore, when the students felt unsure and insecure about the topic under discussion, they were less willing to communicate about it (Kang, 2005 in Zarrinabadi, 2014:292). Third, the way the teacher deliver errors correction has an impact on students' willingness to communicate. The study portrayed a close connection between error correction and feeling of security. Making mistakes is a natural step of every language learning program; however, while some students who mispronounce or skip over some words do not experience anxiety or any negative feeling toward their teacher's error correction, some others, especially the older students, may focus too much not only on their errors but also on the the moment and the way teachers correct them. Some adult language learners, in fact, may feel ashamed or humiliated if the teacher does not create an environment in which make errors are non-threatening (Kang, 2005 in

Zarrinabadi, 2014:292-293). The specific essays in Zarrinabadi's study confirmed that when the teacher's error correction and feedback immediately follow the individual's error, they lower students' willingness to communicate. Conversely, delayed error correction seems to increase willingness to use their target language, since it let the students keep the flow of their speaking and deliver the message. Fourth, Zarrinabadi found that teacher's support critically influences learners' willingness to communicate. The study participants' essays showed a positive correlation between teacher support and learners' tendency to communicate: when the teacher is confident and prone to support students, their willingness to communicate increases, while the opposite occurs when teacher is not able to effectively help students coping with their L2 issues (Zarrinabadi, 2014:293-294). Additionally, Kang (2005) reported that even a short confirmatory phrases or a teacher's smile might positively affect learner's willingness to communicate: according to her, in fact, social support, especially from tutors, plays a major role in creating security and increasing proneness to use the language. The learners are more willing to communicate when they felt "secure from the fear of being an unpleasant conversation partner" (Kang, 2005:283).

To conclude, many recent studies examined many variables which are supposed to affect language anxiety when adults approached a second or foreign language and investigated how these variable influences learners' willingness to communicate. The aim of these studies was often to discover which variable impacts language learning proficiency the most, and which alters willingness to communicate and language anxiety levels. According to their different purposes, it was found that gender, psychological barriers, previous beliefs, learning preferences, learning motivation, individual interdependent level, language aptitude, and years of learning influence language anxiety levels. Moreover, it seems that willingness to communicate and anxiety are negatively correlated, which means that the higher students' anxiety is, the less willing they will be to use the target language. Studies also showed that motivation, perceived competence, learner autonomy, and teachers' attitude towards students is the main predictors of learners' willingness to communicate. Despite those differences in findings and grounds, all the studies reported above seem to highlight that adult language learners report strong self-awareness and self-esteem, which strengthen their motivation thus lowering their language anxiety level when compared to younger students. Further, their strong motivation and lower anxiety actively contribute to making them willing to use their second or foreign language either inside and outside of the classroom.

Next part of this study will provide the reader with the actual examination we conducted on a small sample of adult Italian EFL learners in their late adulthood to assess their perceived levels of communication apprehension and language anxiety, and to confirm whether some of the hypotheses aforementioned may apply to older adult learners (§ 1).

PART II

4. THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON OLDER ITALIAN ADULT EFL LEARNERS

This chapter presents the methodology of the present study. This study involves an investigation on Communication Apprehension and Language Anxiety among older Italian adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in a classroom environment. The study investigates older adult language anxiety and communication apprehension levels, and aims at discovering if any predisposition towards communication apprehension may negatively affect language learning. The study was conducted in three phases. Phase I embodied a preliminary review of documents concerning learning motivation and language goals written by the participants, in order to identify their general motivation and willingness to communicate; Phase II involved administering the instrumentation adapted from the literature to volunteer adult EFL learners; Phase III was the main study involving the process of analyzing, validating and correlating instrument items using sample analysis and simple correlation of the scales. The open-ended questions were analyzed by qualitative content analysis. The Microsoft® Excel® (version 15.30) was used to analyze the entire quantitative data collection, while the IBM® SPSS® Statistics (version 24) was used to check data analysis results.

4.1. PARTICIPANTS

The instrumentation was piloted among 28 Italian adult EFL students (males, n= 12; females, n =16) ranged from 59 to 85 years old (female age mean = 69.1; male age mean = 72; general age mean = 70.7). Among the entire sample, 15 students decided to answer to the open-ended questions. Apart from a French woman, all the participants were Italian. Participants' English level ranges from beginner to pre-intermediate (A1-A2 of the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), with few students reaching a low intermediate level. Among the sample, almost half of the students (n = 12) had attended to English courses during their school years, and 24 of them have a basic knowledge of other languages (French, n = 19; German, n = 3; Spanish, n = 1; Slovenian, n = 1). The volunteer participants were recruited from two English courses, a basic grammar-based class (Inglese I) and a conversation class (Inglese II) at the University for the Elderly of Venice. Educational qualification was not verified during the study: however, a noticeable general culture emerged from informal conversations with the participants. Both classes give students the opportunity to use and improve their English level through a relaxed environment, since the University for the Elderly aims at engaging people's interest with enjoyable and useful activities. Therefore, no final test is provided for the students. Lastly, participants were informed that the study would aim at assessing their level of communication and language anxiety, and that their participation in the study was optional and totally anonymous.

4.2. PROCEDURE

In accordance with the wishes of the University administration, although questionnaires were administered to the participants in their regular classes, they were asked to fill them at home. Due to the methods of administration, we paid serious attention to explaining operating methods and to specify any relevant instruction; moreover, we guaranteed that the data collected was intended to be part of a master thesis' project, therefore their use would be limited to academic purposes. Since the questionnaires would anonymously measure students' anxiety towards language learning, and no personal details were asked, they were lastly asked to answer carefully and honestly. The scales and the open-ended questionnaire were administered and the data recollected during the fall semester, between December 2016 and January 2017; since Christmas break interrupted both language courses involved in the study, the process of recollecting data took five class periods. Additionally, to set a general background of the main reasons for approaching and communicating in English, which they defined as "difficult" or "complicated", very early in the fall semester students were asked to answer to an open-ended written question on their motivation towards learning English. These written

documents represent an honest and useful insight of the stimuli that may drive elderly and make them willing to communicate in English.

While the language of the open-ended questionnaire was Italian, both self-report questionnaire are originally designed in English; hence we translated them into Italian due to the participants' basic language proficiency, in order to avoid mistakes and text miscomprehension. However, languages are not isomorphic and so translation does not operate on a one-to-one basis across languages, which means that the translated version cannot completely match the original. Moreover, translation is not solely concerned with translating meaning: some of the questions within the instruments aimed at conveying emotional effects; therefore, questions from both the scales were culturally adapted into the language of the study participants, in order to minimize semantic loss in translation (Zacchi, Morini, et al., 2002:74-75). For example, while some of the original FLCAS items we included in our study referred to language tests, the Italian adapted version only referred to conversations or questions from the teacher; students of the University for the Elderly of Venice did not take final or midterm evaluations, therefore, items concerning situations they did not experience might have been ineffective in portraying students' feelings. Lastly, following the participants' desire to challenge themselves, we provide them with the English version of the two scales, and some students answered the scales in both languages. Nevertheless, we noticed a lot of discrepancy among the answers, therefore we decided to take into account Italian questionnaires' answers only.

4.3. INSTRUMENTS

The study consists of a demographic section, two self-rating scales adapted from the literature, and a open-ended questions. In addition, self-written documents on participants' motivation and willingness towards English provide a general background. The demographic section concerned general details such as age, gender, mother tongue, number and kind of any other spoken language. The self-rating scales measured general perceived communication apprehension (*Personal Report of Communication Apprehension—PRCA-24*) and foreign language anxiety in classroom environments (*Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale—FLCAS*). Lastly, 13 open-ended questions aimed at clarifying participants' personal emotions and attitudes towards English. Each scale as well as the

open-ended questionnaire is described below and all the items are displayed in Appendix A.

Self-report scales are the most employed method for measuring communication apprehension. “Many people argue that the best way to find out something about someone is simply to ask her or him” (McCroskey, 1984:85). As McCroskey states, these measurements are appropriate when they are used to assess perceived competence, emotions, or feelings, such as anxiety or shyness. Therefore, as long as the person knows the answer and is willing to tell the truth, self-report scales are the most useful measurement to assess communication apprehension. However, self-report scales fail at measuring reticence, since subjects can only report how they perceive themselves and their abilities, McCroskey believed that self-reports are not effective to assess how skilled or anxious people actually are. Moreover, self-reports can be influenced by the respondents’ self-esteem. In fact, people may report lower communication apprehension levels due to their high self-esteem, and vice-versa (McCroskey, 1984:85-86).

Despite their limitations, this study uses self-report measures since they usually have strong validity and, among the major approaches to measurement, they are the only measures isomorphic with the communication apprehension construct, which means that it is most likely that the instrument’s statements reveal the subject’s communication apprehension.

4.3.1. Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)

The PRCA-24 is one of the most valid and still widely used scale to measure *trait*-like CA, namely that permanent feeling of apprehension towards communication occasions which characterizes the individual. It was developed by McCroskey in 1982 to investigate the origin of troubles many people experience when they try to communicate with each other. Since it is a self-rating questionnaire, individuals may assess their own level of communication apprehension, as well as see how nervous they are when they communicate. Moreover, the instrument helps respondents to think about developing strategies for coping with personal communication apprehension by clarifying the foundations of it. According to McCroskey, in fact, the instrument is designed not only to measure overall anxiety, but also to allow respondents to examine their relative degree of apprehension between and among four specific anxiety-provoking communication contexts: interpersonal communication, small groups, large groups, and public speaking

Table 1: *PRCA-24 scoring formula (McCroskey, 1982:23).*

1. GROUP DISCUSSION (LARGE GROUPS)	18 - (scores for 2, 4, and 6) + (scores for 1,3, and 5)
2. MEETINGS (SMALL GROUPS)	18 - (scores for 8, 9, and 12) + (scores for 7, 10, and 11)
3. INTERPERSONAL	18 - (scores for 14, 16, and 17) + (scores for 13, 15, and 18)
4. PUBLIC SPEAKING	18 - (scores for 19, 21, and 23) + (scores for 20, 22, and 24)
PRCA-24 OVERALL SCORE	All the four sub-scored added together.

situations (McCroskey, 1982⁸). The PRCA-24's inventor states that the instrument has very high predictive validity, and is highly reliable ($\alpha > .90$). The scale uses five-point Likert items, ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"), and it may be overall scored by adding up the rating of the 24 items, or it can be computed separately for each context by subtracting then adding to 18 the score of specific questions. Table 1 presents the scoring formula of the PRCA-24). However, as McCroskey warned, these sub-scores are less reliable than the total PRCA-24 scores, due to the reduced number of items. Overall scores range from 24-120, and McCroskey's instructions state that scores below 51 indicate a very low CA level, scores between 51-80 represent the average CA level, and scores above 80 correspond to individuals with a high level of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1982⁹).

Even though the PRCA was not specifically developed to assess anxiety towards a foreign language, we decided to include it in the present study to investigate whether a correlation between communication apprehension in general situations and anxiety towards language occurs in older adult EFL learners. Therefore, this study incorporates the original McCroskey's PRCA-24, and we only translated the 24 items into Italian.

4.3.2. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

The FLCAS is one of the most commonly used instrument to assess foreign language anxiety. Horwitz et al. developed the instrument based both on their language anxiety theory and on the findings of a study they conducted on Spanish language students to assess their anxiety toward language classes. The FLCAS was claimed to have a high internal reliability, with Cronbach's α coefficient = .93, and since its pilot test, the instrument succeeded in identifying anxious students, who were found to share a lot of

⁸ [see footnote 1](#)

⁹ [see footnote 1](#)

features related to anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986:128). The instrument consists of a 33-item individual self-report Likert-type scale, and depends on the three main aspects of language anxiety. In fact, according to what Horwitz et al. suggested, the instrument includes specific items which are indicative of four specific aspects of language anxiety: speech anxiety—which also stands for communication apprehension—, fear not to understand all language input and fear of making mistakes in the foreign language—which represent test anxiety—, and fear of being considered less competent than others by teacher or other students—which corresponds to the fear of being negatively evaluated (Horwitz et al., 1986:129-130).

To follow the main purpose of the study, an adapted version of the original FLCAS was provided: in order to simplify the scale, we proposed only 27 of the 33 original items, cutting item n° 5, 8, 9, 20, 21, and 33, which were believed to be redundant. Furthermore, we added four items, n° 6a, 11a, 16a, and 26a, which served to identifying any relevant fear or negative feelings towards younger generations, in order to find out whether age of “the others” impact participants’ fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, the term ‘foreign language’ in the original FLCAS were replaced with ‘English language’. Therefore, this version of the FLCAS scale consists of 31 items which were translated into Italian. As the original scale, this version of the FLCAS utilizes a five-point Likert items, ranging from “Strongly disagree” (“Fortemente in disaccordo”, scored as 1 point) to “Strongly agree” (“Fortemente d’accordo”, scored as 5 points). When statements of the FLCAS were negatively worded, participants’ responses were reversed and recoded, in order to consistently associate higher scores with higher anxiety. For example, the answer “strongly agree” to the item “I get upset when I don’t understand why the teacher is correcting” (“Mi agito quando non comprendo le correzioni dell’insegnante”) was scored as 5 points; by contrast, the same answer to the item “I would *not* be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers” (“Parlare con persone madrelingua *non* mi renderebbe nervoso”) was scored as 1 point. As a consequence of this adaptation, a proportional scoring was computed: in fact, since the number of items was different, the overall score actually ranged from 31 to 155 (compared to the 33 to 165 of the original FLCAS). Table 2 clarifies the scoring method used in this study. In contrast to the PRCA-24 presented above, the FLCAS does not provide the individual with a clear score range which allows to self-assess his or her foreign language

Table 2: *FLCAS scoring formula* (Horwitz et al., 1986:129-130).

	+(*)	-(**)
FA	5	1
A	4	2
N	3	3
D	2	4
FD (*)	1	5

(*) FA = Strongly agree; A = Agree;

N = Neither agree nor disagree;

D = Disagree; FD = Strongly disagree.

(**) = Statements negatively worded.

anxiety in classroom settings: however, according to the number of the items included in the present study, we mirrored the PRCA-24's section scores. Thus, an overall score division is provided: scores below 65 indicate a low foreign language anxiety, scores between 65-100 represent the average language anxiety level, and scores above 100 correspond to an individual with high level of foreign language anxiety. Lastly, since this version of the FLCAS included four items which represented a slightly different aspect of fear of negative evaluation, namely the fear of being negatively evaluated by younger students, we decided to load them on a different category, therefore, we added "Fear of Negative Evaluation by Younger Generation" to include those items.

Even though many researchers have doubted and criticized the FLCAS (§ 5.4.2), we decided to use this measure since it was believed to be the most complete, reliable and effective tool to pursue this study purpose, namely to investigate foreign language anxiety levels in older adult EFL learners, to find out whether participants' foreign language anxiety is independent of generalized communication apprehension as mentioned in the literature, and to reveal any relevant variable affecting participants' foreign language anxiety.

4.3.3. Open-ended Questions on Personal feelings and attitudes towards English Language

The last instrument is an open-ended questionnaire especially designed for the present study in the native language of the participants. The PRCA-24 and the FLCAS instruments raise some questions concerning participants' attitudes and emotions toward their English language learning, therefore we decided to use this qualitative instrument in order to clarify and complement the quantitative data results. In fact, qualitative research methods allow researchers to obtain explanatory and descriptive information on variables not easily assessed by quantitative techniques, and they offer the subjects' point of view, and provide a vivid and broader interpretation of human experiences (Dörnyei, 2007:39-40).

The questionnaire consisted of 13 open-ended questions which challenged participants to think about their perceived general anxiety, i.e. "Si è mai sentito escluso o isolato perché non parlava abbastanza bene inglese?" ("Have you ever felt excluded or isolated because of your lack of English proficiency?"), their personal attitudes toward difficulty in language learning, i.e. "Come reagisce quando crede di non poter imparare / migliorare il suo inglese?" ("How do you react when you think you can not learn / improve your English?"), their previous language learning experiences, i.e. "Per quanto riguarda la

lingua inglese, quali sono gli errori che la preoccupano di più? Quali di meno?” (“As far as English language is concerned, which mistakes cause you anxiety the most and the least?”), and asked for their own opinion, i.e. “Pensa che in passato i metodi di insegnamento e gli insegnanti abbiano influito nella sua ansia verso l’inglese? Se sì, in che modo e cosa suggerirebbe per risolvere il problema?” (“Do you think that past teaching methods and teachers influenced your anxiety towards English? If yes, how, and what would you suggest to solve the problem?”).

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involved three steps: a sample analysis of both scales, simple correlation between the two scales, and a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions. The first step aims to answer the first research question, thus we generated sample distribution, frequencies of the answers, standard deviation, variance, and scores for each scale. McCroskey’s instructions were used to correctly score the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982; see § 4.3.1). Since there were five missing answers in the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986:128; see § 4.3.1) overall scores, missing data were replaced with neutral answers (“Neither agree nor disagree” or “Né d’accordo né in disaccordo”, scored as 3 points either in positively and negatively worded statements), which were unlikely to change the results. Moreover, the FLCAS was reliable according to the Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .8$)¹⁰. The second step provided a correlation between PRCA-24 and FLCAS scores in order to answer to the second research question. It is important to note that, among the participants, there were four male students who did not answer the PRCA-24; accordingly, correlations between the two instrument were made using the same number of participants’ answers, thus we used only 23 valid questionnaire from both the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS. First, the sub-scores of PRCA-24 was computed (see § 3.3.); these scores were used as measures of generalized-context communication apprehension in the four contexts presented. Second, five partial scores of the FLCAS were computed: four partial scores correlated with the subcategories Horwitz et al., (1986) highlighted when we introduced the instrument, while one

¹⁰ Cronbach’s alpha coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1, the more internal consistency there is in the scale. According to the general rule, we considered the computed coefficient “good”, thus validating the study use of the FLCAS (George and Mallery, 2003:231).

represented all the questions we added to the instrument. This procedure was chosen because it was believed to allow not only the highest possible internal correlation of both instruments, but also to generate the highest reliable correlation between the two scales. In fact, we believed that correlating each PRCA-24 sub-score with the four FLCAS partial scores would provide the most appropriate method to compare the results of the two scales. The last step involved a qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions: first, all the forms were read and each passage which was pertinent to this study was recorded and analyzed. Every statement which was relevant to our third research question was broken down in order to detect its constituent elements, then we developed different categories for the underpinned emotions expressed in the statements. For example, every statement which referred to anxiety or apprehension conditions fall into an “anxiety-proneness” category. Second, an inferential answer to the third research question was provided, according to the experiences, emotions and feelings towards English study the participants’ reported.

5. ANALYSIS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

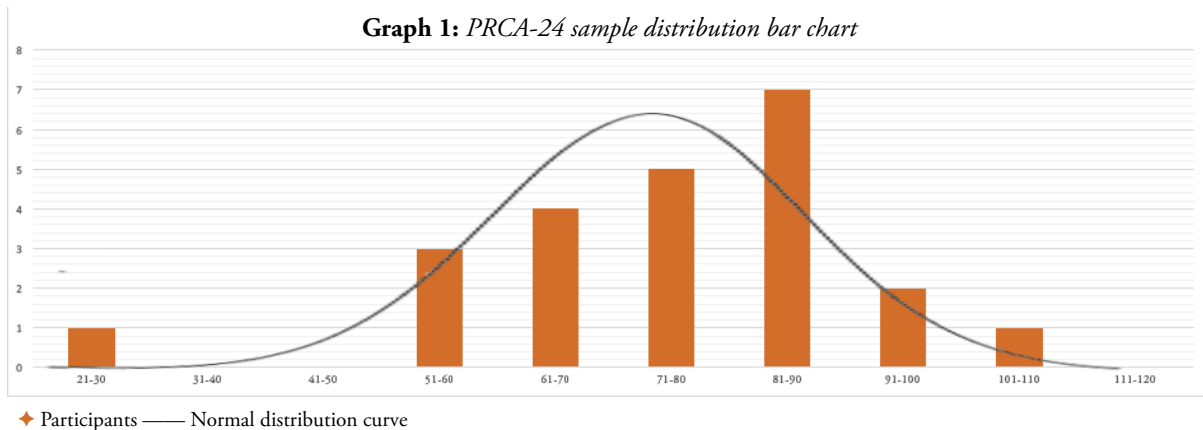
This chapter presents a full description of the results of our analysis, and provides the reader with a discussion of our findings and further developments. As we mentioned in the Introduction, the study aimed to investigate whether communication apprehension affects older adult language learners, detect potential correlations between general and language-related communication anxiety, and seek any relevant variable which could have impacted older adult EFL anxiety towards foreign language situations (§ 1). Accordingly, this chapter firstly address the first research question by yielding separate reports of the the dataset analysis of the quantitative instrumentation, then results of the correlation analysis were presented and discussed to answer the second research question; lastly, results and discussion of the open-ended questions were provided to address the third research question.

5.1. RESEARCH QUESTION #1

The first question of interest in this study was to investigate levels of communication apprehension and classroom language anxiety among older adult EFL learners. We asked whether and to what extent anxiety towards communication and language anxiety affect adult in their middle or late adulthood. Therefore, PRCA-24 and FLCAS were administered in order to answer the question. According to the findings, it seems that older adults suffer from an average and high communication apprehension, and present a medium-high classroom language anxiety. Results of the instruments' analysis are presented and discussed below.

5.1.1. PRCA-24 Results and Discussion

The first analysis of the participants' sample concerned measuring their distribution. In fact, it was important for the purpose's study to examine whether there was a tendency towards or against communication apprehension in older adult students. To check the normality of the dataset, the Shapiro-Wilk test was chosen due to the small size of the sample, in order to verify significance and reliability of the outcomes (Table 3). As a



consequence, a classification within a 10 points range was made to find normal distribution within the sample. According to the data portrayed in the Graph 1, the bar chart highlights that the distribution of the sample moderately fluctuates above the mean score, meaning that the majority of the participants displayed a tendency towards communications apprehension, deviating as a consequence from the middle of the normal distribution curve. Moreover, since our

sample was composed of a fairly homogeneous number of males and female, we carried out an independent-sample t test to investigate differences in communication apprehension levels

Table 3: PRCA-24 normality test

	Normality test		
	Stat.	n	Sign.
overall scores	,965	23	,562

between female and male students. As Graph 2 shows, females are slightly more sensitive to communication apprehension than males when their individual levels are compared, which seems to be in line with previous research on different levels of communication apprehension and willingness to communicate between genders (§ 3.2; § 3.3). Accordingly, it is noteworthy that the lowest and the highest score were done respectively by a male and

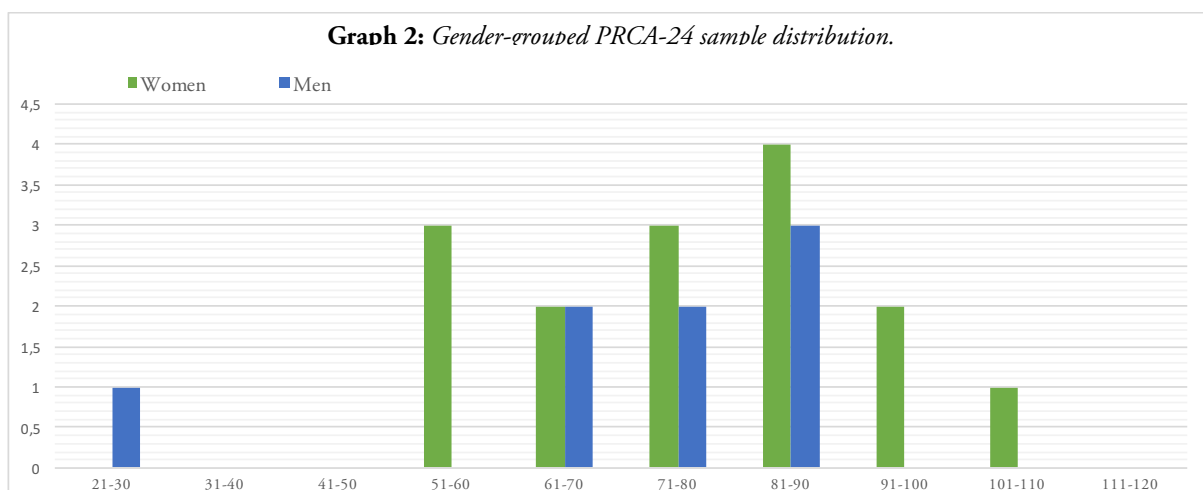


Table 4: *PRCA-24 scores and sub-scores mean, standard deviation, and variance.*

	Group Discussion	Meetings	Interpersonal	Public Speaking	Overall Score
n	23	23	23	23	23
M	19,0000	18,6522	17,5217	19,4783	74,6522
SD	5,10793	5,33094	4,64043	4,82295	16,82425
Variance	26,091	28,419	21,534	23,261	283,055

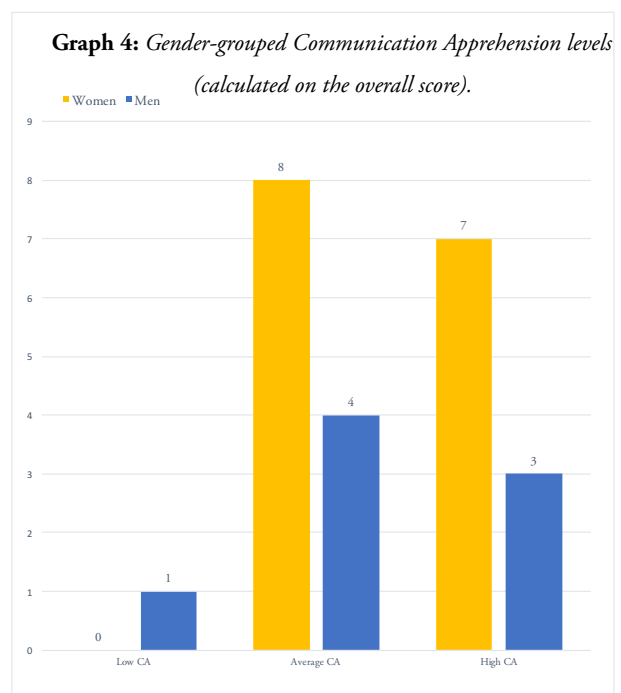
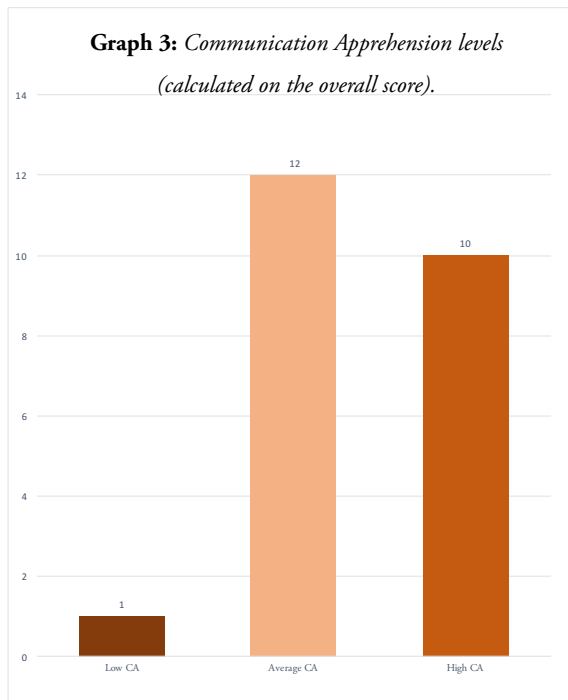
n = number of validated complete questionnaires; **M** = mean; **SD** = standard deviation.

a female student. The high value of standard deviation and variance reported in Table 4 provided additional evidence of these two extreme scores, since both measures indicate how the scores distance from the given mean; as a consequence, the two extreme scores modified the values (Dörnyei, 2007:214). Furthermore, when outcomes of the four sub-categories were computed, their mean was approximately the same, which enable us to observe that communicating in small groups (Group Discussion), meetings (Meetings), dyadic conversation or to an extended audience (Public Speaking) has in general the same impact on communication apprehension among the study participants.

The second step of the analysis of the PRCA-24 data outcomes was to compute scores of each participant according to the original instruction of the scale (§ 4.3.1., Table 1). When the four sub-scores are added together, dataset results clearly indicate that the participants perceive a medium-high level of communication apprehension (Table 5). The majority of the scores, in fact, clusters near the highest point of the “Average CA” range. Furthermore, while females did not present any “Low CA” level, males display a relatively high level of communication apprehension. According to the background information on motivation students were asked to write, they often feel isolated due to their lack of English proficiency: in fact, they reported a strong desire to improve English in order to improve their communication skills and broaden their knowledge. Due to the small size of the sample, this study cannot generalize any conclusion; however, this desire may connect with the participants’ reported communication anxiety: it could lead them, in fact, to be overly focused on language formality rather than the process of conveying meaning, and therefore it may contribute to increasing their communication apprehension levels. Graphs 3 and 4 visually show the results presented above: in fact, it is instantly visible that apprehension towards communication is an apparent condition of the

Table 5: *Self-reported CA percentages.*

	Overall	M	F
Low CA	(4%)	(12%)	(0%)
Average CA	(52%)	(50%)	(53%)
High CA	(44%)	(38%)	(47%)



(NB: Numbers displayed over the bars represent the number of people per each level).

study sample, since levels of the “High CA” and “Average CA” categories are high both in the overall score and in gender groups.

Once the results confirmed that the phenomenon affect the selected students, we examined answers’ scores to find out whether any of the items provided in the scale had a reaction which could be significant to the study’s purpose; in fact, it could be a sign that the majority of the students perceived more—or less by contrast—apprehension in connection to a specific situation. Table 6 summarizes percentages of self-reported perception degree of each PRCA-24 items. Accordingly, the most significant items were n°18, 21, 6, 14, 8, 23, 2, 11, 20, and 24¹¹. Since the items refer to different fields of communication, inference descriptions of each item are presented following McCroskey’s categories.

The first category is Group discussion. Among the related items, n° 6—“I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions”—and n° 2—“Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussion”—scored the highest point of disagreement (respectively 48% and 39%), meaning that participants encounter discomfort when their opinion is required in small group discussion. Furthermore, when percentages of each answers were compared, it seems that score of item 3—“I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussion”—opposes this tendency: in fact, participants displayed a moderately relevant 30% of disagreement and 22% of strong

¹¹ Items ranked in order of highest score.

disagreement to the statement, which is clearly the contrary of item 2, thus contrasting the conclusion. However, the tendency towards group communication apprehension reported a higher score, therefore it is plausible to infer that group discussion apprehension concerns the study participants.

Items 8—“Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting”—and item 12—“Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable”—belong to the Meeting section. The statements negate one another, thus the high disagreement (43.5%) reported to item 8 and the agreement (39%) to item 12 seem to confirm a fair level of apprehension in situations where students are asked to converse with several individuals at the same time.

Items 14—“I have no fear of speaking up in conversations”—and 18—“I’m afraid to speak up in conversation”—relate to the Interpersonal category. Participants showed strong agreement with item 18 (52%) and a correlated disagreement with item 14 (48%), which leads us to infer that dyadic conversations may cause apprehension; additionally, the fact that item 18 scored the highest point of the Interpersonal section seems to corroborate our inference.

Lastly, the Public speaking section contains the majority of the items with relevant scores for our analysis. In fact, strong disagreement (52%) to item 21—“I feel relaxed while giving a speech”—, high disagreement (43.5%) to item 23—“I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence”—, and high agreement (39%) to item 20—“Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech”—and to item 24—“While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know”—lead us to conclude that the larger is the audience, the higher apprehension study participants’ perceived.

Table 6: *PRCA-24 items with percentages of students selecting each alternative.*

	1 (°)	2	3	4	5
1 (°)	I dislike participating in group discussions.				
	13	26	26	22	13
2	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.				
	22	39	22	9	9
3	I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.				
	22	30	26	22	/
4	I like to get involved in group discussions.				
	22	17	43.5	9	9
	1	2	3	4	5
13	While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.				
	17	35	26	17	4
14	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.				
	4	48	17	30	/
15	Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.				
	22	22	39	17	/
16	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.				
	/	35	48	9	9

Table 6: *PRCA-24 items with percentages of students selecting each alternative.*

	1 (*)	2	3	4	5	
5	Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.					
	17	22	13	30	17	
6	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.					
	9	48	35	9	/	
7	Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.					
	13	26	13	39	9	
8	Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.					
	9	43.5	4	39	4	
9	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.					
	9	35	26	22	9	
10	I am afraid to express myself at meetings.					
	26	22	17	26	9	
11	Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.					
	22	13	17	39	9	
12	I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.					
	22	35	35	4	4	
	17	While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.				
	9	26	39	17	9	
	18	I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.				
	13	26	9	52	/	
	19	I have no fear of giving a speech.				
	13	29	26	9	13	
	20	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.				
	22	9	26	39	4	
	21	I feel relaxed while giving a speech.				
	26	52	17	/	4	
	22	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.				
	17	22	30	30	/	
	23	I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.				
	22	43.5	26	/	9	
	24	While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.				
	17	30	17	39	/	

(*) 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

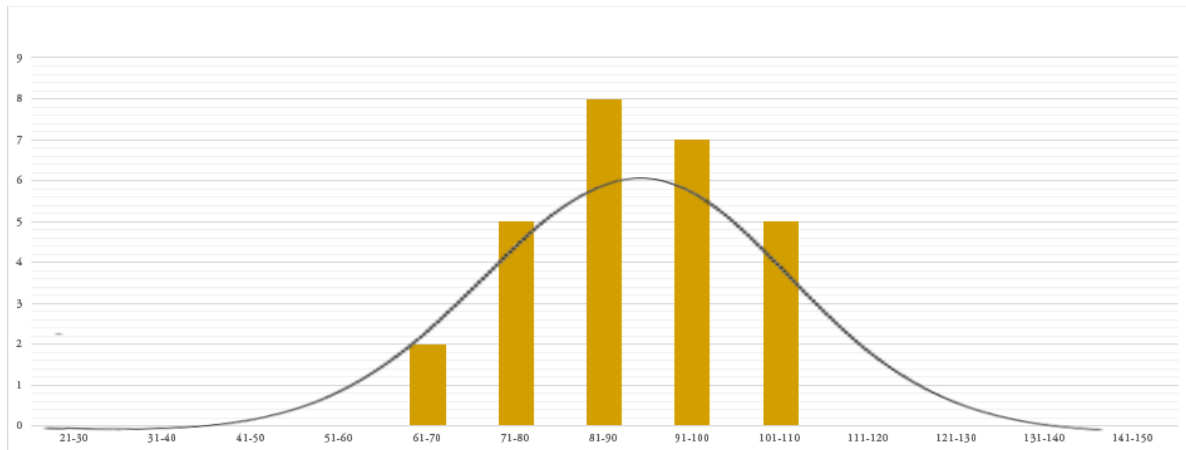
Data in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not therefore add to 100.

(**) Items displayed here are the original PRCA-24's items. Italian translated items were provided to the participants.

5.1.2. FLCAS Results and Discussion

For the analysis of the FLCAS instrument, we proceeded as for the previous instrument. Firstly, in order to detect classroom language anxiety among the participants, distribution of the sample was computed. As for the PRCA-24 scale, in fact, examining the sample in order to find a predisposition towards foreign language anxiety among the sample was a matter of interest for the study. A Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was conducted to verify the significance of the analysis result (Table 7). Therefore, similar to the previous analysis, a classification within a 10 points range was provided to find normal distribution within the sample. Graph 5 explains the findings: according to the bar chart, values seems to be normally distributed, which means that the sample is arranged around the middle of the normal distribution curve. Comparing the distribution of both the

Graph 5: FLCAS sample distribution bar chart



◆ Participants — Normal distribution curve

PRCA-24 and the FLCAS highlights differences: in fact, the FLCAS values are more homogeneously distributed, which implies that study participants had almost the same reaction to the scale's items. Moreover, as a result of the independent-sample t-test we carried out to compare language anxiety levels for men and women, Graph 6 illustrates gender distributions and highlights some relevant information: females and males students reported similar outcomes, with only few discrepancies. One possible explanation for discrepancies may be related to the uneven number of males and females within the sample. However, it is remarkable to report that 6 female students scored between 91-100 in the range distribution, while only 1 male student displayed the same range score. Furthermore, analyzing the bar chart when genders are divided shows that females students are equally

Table 7: FLCAS normality test

	Normality test		
	Stat.	n	Sign.
overall scores	,965	27	,488

Graph 6: Gender-grouped FLCAS sample distribution.

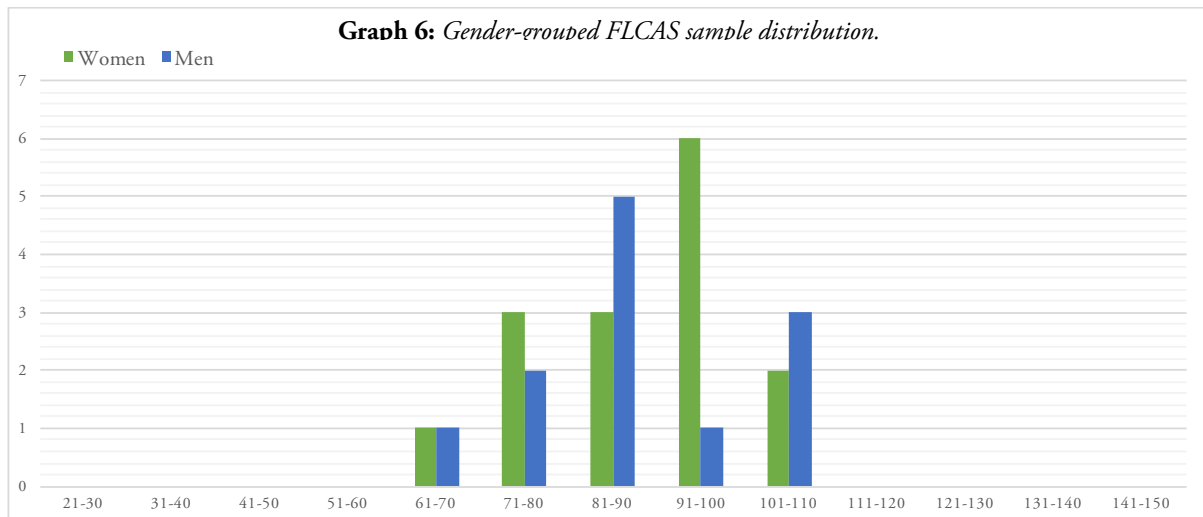


Table 8: *FLCAS scores and sub-scores mean, standard deviation, and variance.*

	F			M			Overall Participants		
	15			12			27		
	M	SD	Variance	M	SD	Variance	M	SD	Variance
CA	10.13	2.39	5.31	9.42	2.31	4.91	9.81	2.34	5.26
TA	5.87	2.01	2.85	5.88	1.82	3.19	5.87	1.75	3.00
Fear of N.E.	14.53	2.23	4.65	13.66	3.77	14.24	14.15	2.98	8.57
Fear of N. E.. (younger generations)	10.6	3.25	2.32	10.75	2.77	7.02	10.66	2.99	8.59
FLCAS overall score	89.73	12.39	143.39	88.2	13.98	179.13	89.03	12.88	159.88

n = number of validated complete questionnaires; **M** = mean; **SD** = standard deviation.

CA = communication apprehension; **TA** = test anxiety; **Fear of N.E.** = fear of negative evaluation;

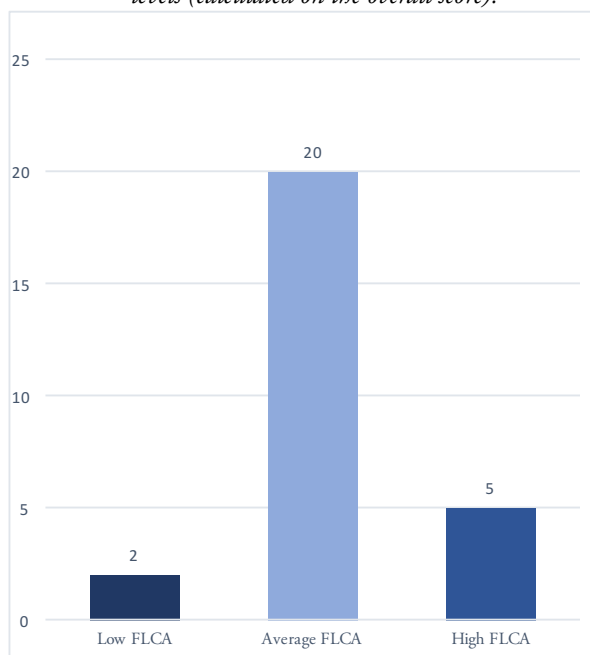
distributed among different classroom anxiety levels, whereas males do not show the same consistency; their scores are concentrated around the mean and far above the average. Before the process of score computing, observing the sample distribution offered the opportunity to infer that classroom language anxiety could have some impact on the older adult EFL learners who participated in this study. In addition, since females displayed a general medium-high level of language anxiety, it seems that the result corroborates what previously stated on a greater female inclination towards anxiety (§ 3.1; § 3.2). Table 8, which provides the overall mean's scores, standard deviation and variance confirms what we infer: although there is a fairly similar variance among males and females, some of the values are higher in the male group of the sample, which which quantifies the heterogeneity of the sample (Dörnyei, 2007:214). Moreover, since sub-scores of the FLCAS were computed according to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) suggested categories, Table 8 also displays all the related values. In addition, "Fear of Negative Evaluation (younger generations)" was added to the original three categories in order to cluster scores from the items added in this study.

Table 9: *Self-reported FLCA percentages.*

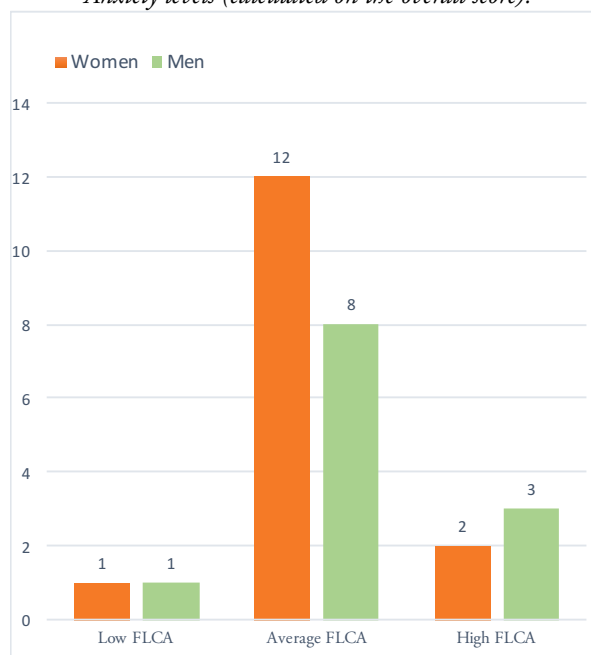
	OVERALL	M	F
LOW FLCA	2 (7%)	1 (8%)	1 (7%)
AVERAGE FLCA	20 (74%)	8 (67%)	12 (80%)
HIGH FLCA	5 (19%)	3 (25%)	2 (13%)

It is important to recall, however, that the FLCAS overall score is based on the the sum of the scores collected from all the complete and valid questionnaires, and it does not rely on the four sub-scores. The total score was computed, and the dataset shows that 20 students out of 27 perceive an average level of classroom foreign language anxiety (Table 9). According to the Likert-scale scoring formula used in this study (§ 4.3.2., Table 2) the majority of the scores clusters around the "Average FLCA" range. Graphs 7 and 8 visually display the results: a moderately higher number of female students reported an average language anxiety level, though males seem to be slightly more anxious towards the target

Graph 7: Classroom Foreign Language Anxiety levels (calculated on the overall score).



Graph 8: Gender-grouped Classroom Foreign Language Anxiety levels (calculated on the overall score).



(NB: Numbers displayed over the bars represent the number of people per each level).

language. However, some average scores were close to the “High FLCA”, and the two scores from “Low FLCA” were close to the average point: 3 students scored 100, which was considered the upper limit of the average (65-100), while both students who are supposed to have a lower classroom foreign language anxiety level scored near the upper limit of the “Low FLCA” section (female student = 64; male student = 61). Since the three sections proposed in this study were proportionally calculated in correlation with the scoring range of the PRCA-24, it seems reasonable to allege that classroom foreign language anxiety clearly affect the sample, which reported generally high scores.

Since preliminary findings confirmed the initial hypothesis that older adult students might display classroom foreign language anxiety levels in line with similar studies (§ 3.), we deepened the analysis by scrutinizing each answer score to deduce other significant inferences relevant for this study. Table 10 provides the percentages of each self-reported perception degree for all the FLCAS items. Accordingly, the most significant scores were found in correlation to items n°1. 16, 26-a, 6-a, 10, 12, 14, 17, 20, 4, 5, 7, 19, 26, 15, 16-a, and 21¹². Since the items denote different nuances of foreign language anxiety, inferential descriptions for the items are presented in accordance with the three suggested categories of classroom foreign language anxiety and the category added in this study.

Students who reported high scores in classroom foreign language anxiety agreed with items which are indicative of communication apprehension: 57% of them endorse

¹² Items ranked in order of highest score.

item 1—“I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class”—which signals a negative predisposition towards communication in English; item 4—“It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in English” (41%)—and item 24—“I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the teacher says” (52%)—which relate not only to communication anxiety, but also to a personal fear not to understand instructions; item 19—“I feel very self-conscious about speaking in English in front of other students” (41%)—indicates both communication apprehension and fear of being negatively evaluated by others, which is one of the matter of concern of adult foreign language learners, since they are forced to express themselves in a language they do not master, thus limiting and impairing genuineness of their conversations (see also § 2.2.). Moreover, item 15—“I feel confident when I speak in my English class”—reports 37% of students disagreement and 18.5% of their strong disagreement, thus making relevant the lack of confidence they perceive when communicating in English.

Study participants do not seem to feel test anxiety in their English class. They rejected item 7—“I worry about the consequences of failing my English class” (41%)—; they strongly disagreed with item 14—“I often feel like not going to my English class” (44% of strong disagreement and 41% of disagreement)—and item 21—“I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes” (26% either of strong disagreement and disagreement). By contrast, they agreed with item 17—“I *don’t* feel pressure to prepare very well for my English class” (44%). However, these scores might also rely on the specific English courses students attended: in fact, the University for the Elderly of Venice does not assess students’ achievements, and its main purpose is to offer enjoyable, interesting and compelling courses to any adult student, regardless of proficiency and personal background. Additionally, students agreed with item 20—“The English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind” (44%)—which reveals students’ full consciousness of their own language difficulties.

As far as the fear of being negatively evaluated by others, students displayed a moderately agreement to item 10—“It embarrasses me to volunteer answers to my English class” (44%)—which however does not seem to indicate a real anxiety towards other people’s evaluation; their reaction may depend on a a normal shyness due to their lack of English proficiency. Accordingly, in fact, students reject item 16—“I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make” (56% of disagreement and 18.5% of strong disagreement)—and item 26—“I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak in English” (41% of disagreement and 15%of strong disagreement)—which support our assumption.

Furthermore, the present study inquired whether fear of negative evaluation may be altered by the age of the evaluators, therefore we provided the participants with four specific items. According to their answers, it seems that age is not relevant, and does not affect their scant fear of being negatively evaluated. Although students agreed with item 6-a —“I keep thinking that younger students are better at languages that I am” (49%)—, they strongly reject item 16-a—“I am afraid that people younger than me are ready to correct every mistake I make” (37% of disagreement and strong disagreement)—and item 26-a —“I am afraid that younger students will laugh at me when I speak in English” (52% of disagreement and 15% of strong disagreement).

Lastly, study participants report a strong commitment to learning English: they totally rejected to item 5—“During my English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course”—which scored 41% of disagreement and 37% of disagreement. This result seems to be in line with the background written documents concerning motivations and language goals students provided for this study: in fact, more than half of the sample are strongly motivated to learn and improve their English, since they want to communicate with tourists, enjoy English entertainment programs, or get closer to foreigner children-in-law and families who live abroad. Personal comments of their motivation lively confirmed the intrinsic motivation which drive them towards the target language.

Table 10: *FLCAS items with percentages of students selecting each alternative.*

	SA (%)	A	N	D	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.				
	15	57	30	/	/
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class.				
	7	30	30	26	7
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in my English class.				
	7	33	51	15	4
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.				
	11	41	15	33	/
5	During my English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.				
15	I feel confident when I speak in my English class.				
	4	4	37	37	18.5
16	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.				
	/	4	22	56	18.5
16-a	I am afraid that people younger than me are ready to correct every mistake I make.				
	4	/	22	37	37
17	I <i>don't</i> feel pressure to prepare very well for my English class.				
	7	44	22	18.5	7
18	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.				

Table 10: FLCAS items with percentages of students selecting each alternative.

	SA (%)	A	N	D	SD
	11	4	7	41	37
6	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.				
	7	26	37	26	4
6-a	I keep thinking that younger students are better at languages than I am.				
	22	49	11	15	4
7	I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.				
	11	4	26	41	18.5
8	I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes.				
	8	37	30	22	4
9	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.				
	4	18.5	26	37	15
10	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.				
	11	44	22	18.5	/
11	I would <i>not</i> be nervous speaking English with native speakers.				
	7	26	22	30	15
11-a	I would <i>not</i> be nervous speaking English with younger speakers/students.				
	15	33	26	18.5	7
12	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.				
	7	44	/	37	11
13	Even if I am well prepared for my English class, I feel anxious about it.				
	4	33	18.5	37	7
14	I often feel like not going to my English class.				
	4	/	11	41	44

	SA	A	N	D	SD
	7	30	22	30	11
19	I feel very self-conscious about speaking in English in front of other students.				
	4	41	33	15	7
20	The English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.				
	7	44	15	30	4
21	I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.				
	4	33	11	26	26
22	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.				
	7	30	22	37	4
23	When I'm on my way to my English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.				
	7	22	48	18.5	4
24	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.				
	4	52	26	15	4
25	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.				
	11	37	22	26	4
26	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak in English.				
	4	11	30	41	15
26-a	I am afraid that younger students will laugh at me when I speak in English.				
	/	11	22	52	15
27	I would probably feel comfortable around English native speakers.				
	4	22	30	37	7

(*) SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree nor disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

Data in this table are rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not therefore add to 100.

(**) Items displayed here are the adapted FLCAS' items (§ 4.3.2.). Italian translated items were provided to the participants.

5.2. RESEARCH QUESTION #2

The second purpose of the present study aimed at correlating communication apprehension and language anxiety levels to verify whether the small or non-significant correlation pattern between communication apprehension and language anxiety also apply to elderly and older adult language learners. As our findings indicated, there is almost no correlation between results of the two anxiety scales ($r = 0.04$), thus confirming what Horwitz detected (see § 4.3.2.) while administering her scale to foreign language learners who were younger than participants of this study. Therefore, self-report correlations of both the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS are provided, and results of the correlations are presented and discussed below. However, the analysis highlighted some unexpected outcomes; further analysis and clarification are presented in § 5.3.

5.2.1. Correlations

Since the samples were almost normally distributed, and the analysis of the PRCA-14 and the FLCAS dataset demonstrated a medium-high level of both communication apprehension and classroom foreign language anxiety within the older adult EFL learners involved in this study, we conducted Pearson simple correlations to

Graph 9 - Internal and simple correlations between the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS scores
(computed on the complete sample of participants).

Overall Participants (**)

	Group Discussion	Meetings	Interpersonal	Public Speaking	PRCA-24 overall score	CA	Test Anxiety	Fear of Neg. Eval.	Fear of Neg. Eval.-a	FLCAS overall score
Group Discussion	1,00	0,70	0,51	0,67	0,86	0,24	0,39	0,23	0,10	0,21
Meetings		1,00	0,53	0,68	0,87	0,27	0,10	0,42	0,10	0,05
Interpersonal			1,00	0,61	0,77	0,07	0,16	0,43	0,06	0,01
Public Speaking				1,00	0,87	0,06	0,08	0,40	0,22	0,15
PRCA-24 overall score					1,00	0,19	0,22	0,44	0,11	0,04
Communication Apprehension						1,00	0,41	0,36	0,31	0,78
Test Anxiety							1,00	0,03	0,14	0,63
Fear of Neg. Eval.								1,00	0,46	0,59
Fear of Neg. Eval.-a									1,00	0,58
FLCAS overall score										1,00

(**) The overall number is intended to be the sum of all the participants who completed both instruments.

analyze internal relations of the two instruments, and to determine whether or not the variables are significantly related according to the outcomes.

As a consequence of the correlation analysis, significant differences were found between the two scales when internal correlations were firstly analyzed. As the correlation matrix displays¹³ (Graph 9), when PRCA-24 values were correlated, all of the subcategories coordinate with each other, with only few irrelevant discrepancies. For example, when all the variables are taken into account, values from reported Interpersonal communication apprehension show lower correlations with Group Discussion, Meetings, and Public Speaking, meaning that apprehension aroused by dyadic conversations is independent from anxiety which is triggered by speaking to several individuals at the same time. Graph 10 and Graph 11 also provide independent-sample correlations to compare correlation coefficients for women and men; when women and men PRCA-24 internal correlations were compared, it seems that female students have a strong positive correlation between Meetings and Group Discussion. This means that the size of the group does not affect their apprehension, which persists either in small and large group discussion. By contrast, male students' coefficient was lower for the same association ($r = 0.34$), meaning that the amount of people and the communication apprehension are reciprocally associated. Moreover, there are minimal differences among Interpersonal, Group discussion and Meetings correlations and among Public Speaking, Group discussion and Meetings when gender are compared; these difference are relevant to report only to clarify the overall scant correlation among the aforementioned variables.

As far as the FLCAS is concerned, matrices revealed scarce internal correlation. In fact, although the correlation between the sub-categories and the overall score is reasonably positive, among the sub-categories the correlation coefficient indicates that Test Anxiety is not associated either with Fear of Negative Evaluation by peer students ($r = 0.03$) or by younger generations ($r = 0.14$). Furthermore, among study participants, the fear of being negatively evaluated has non-

Graph 10 - Females' internal and simple correlations
between the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS scores.

	Women									
	Group	Meetings	Interpersonal	Public	PRCA-24 overall score	CA	Test Anxiety	Fear of Neg. Eval.	Fear of Neg. Eval.-a	FLCAS overall score
Group Discussion	1,00	0,85	0,51	0,69	0,90	0,71	0,40	- 0,13	0,00	0,53
Meetings		1,00	0,58	0,72	0,92	0,60	0,30	- 0,21	- 0,02	0,43
Interpersonal			1,00	0,58	0,76	0,41	0,17	- 0,18	0,19	0,33
Public Speaking				1,00	0,85	0,57	0,22	- 0,18	- 0,16	0,29
PRCA-24 overall score					1,00	0,67	0,32	- 0,20	0,01	0,47
Communication Apprehension						1,00	0,51	0,24	0,38	0,79
Test Anxiety							1,00	- 0,09	0,17	0,64
Fear of Neg. Eval.								1,00	0,68	0,54
Fear of Neg. Eval.-a									1,00	0,68
FLCAS overall score										1,00

¹³ According to the matrix, correlations are represented by colors, ranging from red (- 1) to green (+ 1).

significant correlation with Communication Apprehension ($r = 0.36$), which in turn does not correlate with Test Anxiety ($r = 0.41$). Graphs provide the reader with a clarification of this internal lack of correlation between the FLCAS variables. Moreover, one matter of interest of this study was to discover whether age of other individuals may alter students' fear of being negatively evaluated. Accordingly, we provided the participants with specific items added to the FLCAS. When correlations were computed, all three matrices reported a general scarce non-significant correlation among all the other three categories; even though correlations are taken into account by gender. In fact, values barely differs one another, thus leading us to infer that not only adult students who participated in this study do not fear other's evaluation, but also that age does not influence their language anxiety levels.

Lastly, this study considered inter-correlation among PRCA-24 and FLCAS values. As visually displayed, it seems that the two instrument do not correlate together. In fact, correlation coefficient was $r = 0.04$, meaning that variables of the two scales do not influence each other. Moreover, when individual variables are considered, there is a significant and unexpected inverse correlation between Fear of Negative Evaluation and all the PRCA-24 variables. However, taking into account all the collected data, we may suppose that the negative correlation reported between self-reported Communication Apprehension's categories and FLCAS's Fear of Negative Evaluation may be an outlier result: in fact, it could be the consequence of the difference in scoring and grouping the categories of the two scales. As we mentioned, the categories in the FLCAS was only suggested by its inventors (§ 4.3.2.); moreover, many statements seem to point at more than one single aspect of classroom language anxiety. As a result, answers may not perfectly coincide with the recommended categories, and correlating them with the PRCA-24 sub-categories could have resulted

in an unexpected negative correlation. However, the implication of this result, however, needed to be verified and explained in order to forestall outliers, and further analysis would be interesting in order to verify the latter assumption.

The correlation

Graph 11 - Males' internal and simple correlations between the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS scores.
Men (*)

	Group	Meetings	Interpersonal	Public	PRCA-24 overall score	CA	Test Anxiety	Fear of Neg. Eval.	Fear of Neg. Eval.-a	FLCAS overall score
Group Discussion	1,00	0,34	0,78	0,58	0,77	- 0,78	0,41	- 0,51	- 0,24	- 0,41
Meetings		1,00	0,67	0,56	0,77	- 0,29	- 0,35	- 0,84	- 0,19	- 0,58
Interpersonal			1,00	0,85	0,97	- 0,56	0,19	- 0,77	- 0,36	- 0,54
Public Speaking				1,00	0,89	- 0,67	- 0,17	- 0,77	- 0,29	- 0,77
PRCA-24 overall score					1,00	- 0,66	- 0,00	- 0,86	- 0,32	- 0,68
Communication Apprehension						1,00	0,13	0,60	0,09	0,77
Test Anxiety							1,00	0,29	0,07	0,61
Fear of Neg. Eval.								1,00	- 0,03	0,70
Fear of Neg. Eval.-a									1,00	0,25
FLCAS overall score										1,00

(*) Only male participants who completed both questionnaires are included.

analysis of the two instruments not only reported useful details on non significant inter-correlations, but also highlighted relevant information on low internal correlation of the FLCAS items and an odd negative correlation among PRCA-24 items and fear of being negatively evaluated by other people. Moreover, since the FLCAS' categories we proposed are based on suggestions, and classroom foreign language anxiety is assessed on the overall score of the self-reported scale, this analysis cannot provide a clear explanation of variables affecting classroom language anxiety levels. Therefore, open-ended questions were administered to the study participants in order to clarify correlation results. In addition, they are students' authentic materials which provided this study with remarkable insights into older adult learners ideas, behaviors and beliefs.

5.3. RESEARCH QUESTION #3

The third and last question of this study wondered if there is one or more variables which impacts communication apprehension and language anxiety in adult EFL learners. To find useful information, we provided the sample with 13 open-ended questions that aimed to investigate anxiety-provoking factors. Additionally, by answering the questions, participants clarified some odd results of the correlation analysis (§ 5.2.). Moreover, although written data lack nonverbal aspects of the communication, such as mumblings, eye-movements, body gestures or facial expressions (Dörnyei, 2007:245-247), they allow us to have a more objective interpretation of the data, and thus they were believed to be the most appropriate type of material for the purpose of this study. According to the answers, it seems that there is not a specific variable which impact on adults' communication apprehension and language anxiety; rather, respondents reported on a set of variables such as age and the lack of practice, probably because of wrong methods. Below, the analysis of the participants' answers is presented and discussed.

5.3.1. Open-ended Questions

When participants of this study were asked to share their personal opinion rather than ranking standardized statements, some of them immediately started to write, while some others looked at the questions with a worried facial expression. As they finished answering, they commented that recalling previous experiences and attitudes towards English encouraged them to write more: according to the answers, questions evoked a

considerable deal of vivid emotions, which were hopeful and optimistic in the non-anxious students, and cynical, and generally negative in the most anxious students.

Students' Opinion: Feeling of Isolation

The strong motivation that the respondents displayed is in line with the initial opinion provided by the information on students' attitudes and motivation they provided at the beginning of this study (§ 4.3.) and, in our opinion, supports the idea that adults have a solid intrinsic motivation which help them to achieve their goals (§ 2.3). All of them have one, or more, reason which drives them to learn English: 4 students report on a strong desire to acquire the target language because they have children abroad, and they want to communicate with their families-in law; 5 students displayed a lively desire to enjoy English music and movies in the original language. Moreover, answers clearly state that communication is the most important reason for learning English: study participants expressed the desire to learn English to successfully communicate with the billion of tourists who come to Venice from all over the world every year, and to prevent them from feeling isolated when they travel abroad. The lack of proficiency in a language, in fact, may cause an unpleasant feeling of isolation. Accordingly, a question asked students whether they ever felt isolated because of their lack of English knowledge: only half of the respondents did not report any negative feeling. Analyzing the other half of the answers, it seems that apprehension towards communication in the target language may connect with the feeling of isolation, delusion, and fear not being considered, since some of the students who experienced isolation, also experienced anxiety towards the language. A female student reported on several occasions in which she felt totally isolated when she was in the USA: accordingly, she encountered great difficulties even for her primary needs due to her scarce language knowledge (“[...] in America mi son sentita in grande difficoltà a comunicare con le persone ache per i bisogni più elementari”). By contrast, a male student report that all the difficulties he experienced because of the lack of English proficiency led him to boost his study and to improve their knowledge (“Si, mi son sentito escluso più di qualche volta [...] Però questo mi ha spinto ad impegnrmi di più nella lingua”).

Students' Opinion: Approach to English

Despite some negative feelings, it seems that the respondents have a positive approach towards English; when asked to describe their general feelings as regards the English language, students do not “lose heart”, as one participant wrote, although they are well aware of the complexity of the language. Some respondents also added a story connected to his or her feelings which led us to confirm their high willingness to

communicate and use the target language: a student wrote about a wrong bus she took in London. She did not speak English and she did not know where she was; however, she did not “lose heart” and found a way to communicate with other people. Another student thought that using the language could enhance his proficiency, thus even if he does not speak English well, he tries to use it to help tourists. Their answers clearly stated that they have a very positive orientation; one of the questions, in fact, asked them to write their most usual reaction when facing problems with the foreign language: 12 out of 15 answers included strongly committed statements, meaning that adult students try to work harder and continually search for better stimuli and methods to cope with their difficulties. Among them, a female student reports that she studies English “just for fun”, and therefore, she is not worried about not learning (“C’è solo divertimento. Anche se non imparo qualcosa, qualcosa si impara sempre”). A male student displayed the highest positive attitude by writing that not only does he always study harder whenever he faces a problem with the language, but he also usually seeks videos and materials on the Internet to improve pronunciation and vocabulary (“Cerco sempre nuovi metodi, come video su YouTube per la pronuncia e la ricerca di nuove parole”). However, some students did not have a clear opinion towards the language, while some others felt discouraged by the language difficulties. English is “always a mystery” for a female student, and it is perceived as difficult for a male student. Moreover, one student believes that, despite her hard work, she does not perceive any improvement, thus experiencing discouragement (“Mi sento molto motivata ad imparare l’inglese, ma vedo che non imparo facilmente, perciò mi deprimò”), while another respondent wrote that he does not have a proper way of coping with language difficulties, thus he usually gives up when facing a problem.

Students’ Opinion: Approach to the younger generations

As far as the relationship with younger generations is concerned, to confirm the results of the FLCAS data analysis (§ 5.1.2.) we asked the students to report on any relevant emotion they encountered as regards the foreign language and younger generations. According to their answers, they express high admiration for younger generations’ learning abilities, and no one feared to be negative evaluated by younger individuals.

Students’ Opinion: The Classroom Environment

To verify how much the classroom environment influences language anxiety in the study participants, we asked them to report their perceived anxiety when they are in class. 7 students indicate that being in class may increase their anxiety levels. For example, a

student stutters when she is asked to speak in class, and another does not want to speak in front of the class; a student experiences apprehension whenever she is in class or has an oral exam (“[...] stare in classe, anche quando sono interrogata, mi procure ansia”). However, the majority of the answers are in line with our previous findings, namely that speaking in front of a group of people triggers apprehension. Furthermore, the most relevant reactions were reported by female students, thus corroborating the higher level of anxiety we proved in previous analysis.

Anxiety Affecting Variables: Age and Lack of Proficiency

Not only were open-ended questions useful tools to corroborate previous findings, they also enhanced this study with pertinent information from students' authentic ideas and opinion. Furthermore, a question of interest in this study was to discover any relevant variable which is supposed to impact anxiety arousal when communicating in English. As a result of the analysis of students' personal perspective, we may infer that a combination of age, and lack of proficiency may be potential elements which might impair students' confidence, thus producing more anxiety when students use English language.

First, while reading their answers, we noted that many respondents felt rather dejected about their achievement in English learning because of their age. Students who learn a language in their late adulthood may surely encounter more difficulties, and age may be one of the most impairing factors. For many respondents, in fact, age is detrimental to their learning. They believe that as they grow older, they lose the ability to learn and retain new information; with reference to the language, this loss results in a discouraging experience which raises anxiety whenever they have the opportunity to use it. For example, although one student does not perceive herself as anxious, she experiences discouraging situations due to her age (“Non provo ansia, ma un po' di sconforto per le difficoltà incontrate. Le cause le attribuisco all'età. Penso che a sessantasette anni sia più difficile apprendere qualcosa di nuovo”); moreover, another student believes that her age (she is 75 years old) does not allow her to succeed in learning English, thus she feels that every effort to learn the language results in a failure. Furthermore, when asked to express her personal feelings toward younger generations, she was envious of the time they have to learn and achieve their language goals (“Mi impegno, ma non riesco molto, all'età mia”; “Provo invidia, perché studiano inglese fin dall'infanzia e hanno molto più tempo per imparare”). Age may impact anxiety levels: the idea that there is an “optimal age” to learn a language lead students to believe that they are “too old” to learn anymore. However, according to some recent discoveries in neuroplasticity, adults may have the same chances as children to

learn a language. Merzenich, a famous neuroscientist, in fact, believes that adults may learn second or foreign language by training their brain, and he developed specific training techniques (Doidge, 2007:31-34). As far as the students involved in this study are concerned, however, although children may learn a language faster than adults, adult students are more internally motivated; they aim at acquiring language rules and try to create situations in which they can use their foreign language, thus we believe that their strong desire to learn may help them to cope with the language complexity.

According to the answers students wrote, a second variable which seems to affect students' anxiety level may be connected to their lack of proficiency, since they may experience isolation, or they may fail during an oral test in classroom. Many students also expressed concern about their grammar and vocabulary errors, they believe they need more practice in order to memorize rules and discover new words. However, some other students has a positive attitude towards errors and mistakes: in fact, as a student reports, it is impossible not to make mistakes and to know everything (“[...] ho sempre pensato che non posso sapere tutto”) while another student believes that communicating is more important than being grammatically correct, therefore she is not afraid of the errors she makes when speaks English (“Ho imparato che è importante capire, parlare e pensare in inglese, e non importa se si fanno deli errori”). It is noteworthy to add that when students answered all the questions, they commented that errors are a matter of fact and it is difficult avoid them: their main goal is succeeding in communicating and expressing themselves in English. Communicating, however, may be difficult if they lack the sufficient practice and they do not have chances to learn the language in “real” or realistic conversation: as many students believe, in fact, one of their primary cause of anxiety is related to their inability to produce sentences and sustain meaningful conversations, and they perceive that they should increase their oral proficiency. For example, a student believes that the more he talk during English lessons, the more he feels relaxed and confident while using the language outside of the classroom. Another student asked for English lessons focused on current events and real conversations. Respondents generally indicate that their self-confidence would benefit from practicing their oral communication skills, and by boosting their self-confidence, their anxiety would naturally decrease.

Students' Suggestions

We also asked students how would they improve their proficiency. According to many answers, one solution could lie in the teaching methods. Many students indicate, in fact, that teaching methods could not always fit their needs, and that they would benefit

from a relaxed classroom environment and from content-oriented lessons. They seem to aim at conveying meaning and when they attempt to use English language in class, they do not want to be stopped by the teacher every time they make errors. For example, as a student writes, English teaching should be focused on speaking, listening and conversation. Another student indicates that she would probably learn more and better if she are not forced to speak or answer when she does not want to; in her opinion, teachers should encourage students without forcing them to achieve standardized goals.

In addition, a student indicates that her anxiety towards English lead her to forget even simple grammar rules: her brain paralyzes when she is required to speak in English, and she forgets words she knows when she encounter English communication occasions (“Provo sempre ansia, perché quando devo rispondere in inglese mi si paraliza il cervello e non riesco più a parlare [...] non riesco a meter in pratica le regole grammaticali. Inoltre, dimentico i vocaboli”); although this student displayed a deep anxiety and discomfort towards English, we are inclined to suppose that a more appropriate teaching methods, which would focus on her personal goals and take into account her actual key strengths and weaknesses may help to enhance her confidence, thus lowering their anxiety.

5.4. DISCUSSION

Overall, our findings revealed that investigating older adult anxiety levels in foreign language and communication is both relevant and to be encouraged, given the pattern of the results and the reliability of the measurements used in the study. Furthermore, students’ personal opinions provide this study with their inner perspective which is valuable for designing language lessons that help them acquire confidence, increase their proficiency and lower their anxiety. As a consequence, a discussion on the andragogical implications of our findings is provided below. Moreover, since one of the purposes of this study aimed at finding an appropriate strategy to lower older adult EFL learners’ anxiety, we provide the reader with some suggestions which may foster this desirable result.

5.4.1. Andragogical Implications and Suggestions

The older Italian adults EFL learners who participated in this study portrayed a medium-high classroom language anxiety level, and they also seemed to fear communicating with a group of people, regardless of the size of the group. However, when

given a chance to express their personal opinion and trace the origin of their anxieties, students revealed some stereotypes about their age—such as fear of forgetting information or not having enough time to learn the language—and a lack of practice due to non-appropriate teaching methods as the the main causes for their apprehension and reticence towards English. It is comforting to note, however, that a relaxed environment, authentic materials, and a general “learner-oriented” learning style are indicated by the study participants as the best way to reduce their anxiety. In fact, the students generally suggested that language courses should preferably focus on the content more than on the amount of errors students make, they should create real or realistic situations in which students can use the language, and should take into account students’ emotions concerning the language. Following from the main principles of the Knowles’ model, their suggestions perfectly match the aim of andragogy (§ 2).

From an andragogical perspective, the students’ ideas seem to perfectly match the most recent approaches about language teaching adults. In fact, while the early methods were based on grammar rules and mainly relied on the learner’s memory, current approaches embody different procedures that improve the students’ confidence and lower their affective filters (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:3-5). Among the variety of widely used teaching approaches, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) seems to be one of the most popular and suitable, since it takes into account both language achievement and the emotional and cognitive efforts of the students. It stemmed during the 1960s as a response to Chomsky’s theory of competence, and does not rely on any specific model (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:155). the Communicative Language Teaching approach is based on the belief that language is communication, and the main purpose of language teaching should promote the learners’ ability to communicate, namely their “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972, in Richards and Rodgers, 2001:159). CLT basically helps students to acquire fluency and improve communication skills by focusing on communicative tasks. The belief that learners need a purpose for communicating fosters their willingness to produce authentic conversations and centers their attention on contents rather than on form; furthermore, along the lines of Krashen’s (1989) idea that grammar accuracy spontaneously occurs through exposure and not by repeatedly giving corrective feedback, CLT approach makes full use of restating students’ incorrect utterances to correct grammar mistakes (Krashen, 1989:59-60; Richards and Rodgers, 2001:160-170). Moreover, since CLT teachers act as facilitators—or counselors—, by helping learners only when they need support, students thus benefit from a non-threatening classroom, since it allows them to reduce their affective barriers, included

anxiety. Therefore, we believe that by leaving learners free to engage in realistic communication without fear of being constantly corrected for their errors, CLT is one of the approaches which positively contributes to reduce language-related communication apprehension.

Taking into account the existing literature, we selected five elements which we believe to be crucial not only for encouraging anxious students to focus on the learning process, but also to help teachers to make them feel comfortable and reduce their anxiety. Thus we incorporated such elements into our actual experience as an older adults EFL learners' teacher and tested them in order to prove their effectiveness

1. *Familiarize with students' attitudes, experiences, and skills.* The ideal teacher of adults is aware of the students' belief, goals and abilities. In our study, although many students involved reported on similar needs and goals, they portrayed varying life experiences, expressed different abilities, and showed different emotional perception of their language learning. It seems that learners should be encouraged to discuss their expectations and purposes. From an andragogical point of view, in fact, understanding learners' different backgrounds could be beneficial to the development of a learner-oriented language program. Furthermore, since each adult has a different learning style, prior history, beliefs, and experiences, familiarizing with students may provide the teacher with relevant information concerning any potential affective barrier; therefore, s/he may adapt lessons and contents to help them feel secure and confident in their classroom environment (Oxford et al., 1990:208-209). For example, tasks adapted for the students' abilities would encourage them to perform activities, strengthen their self-confidence, and lower their apprehension towards language communication.

2. *The teacher's role.* Some students benefit from teachers who help them by translating, restating, emending their utterances, or even providing words (e.g. when students do not remember the correct word to express their thoughts), only when needed. In the andragogical perspective, the teacher facilitates student learning, providing them with the general frame of the lesson, helps students to feel comfortable in the classroom environment, and enables communication and usage of the language, supporting students only when they ask for help. As Knowles stated, adult education gives full responsibility to the learner, which also means that adult learners cooperate with teachers to direct their learning and create personalized contents (Knowles, 2005:64-69; § 2.1). Furthermore, if students perceive the teacher as a guide, or a

facilitator, rather than a judge of their mistakes, their anxiety to use the target language may decrease.

3. *Mutual learning.* Reciprocal learning helps adult students to be independent learners. Boud believes that students may learn from each other by explaining their own ideas or participating in activities where they work together. Furthermore, students are encouraged to give feedback to their peers, evaluate, and self-evaluate language learning (Boud, 2001:3). Moreover, fostering cooperation and collaborative learning may help anxious students to deal with their public speaking anxiety and fear evaluation by others. According to our findings, adult students involved in the study do not seem to fear negative evaluation by other people. Nonetheless, some anxious students stated that speaking in front of the class prevented them from producing any relevant sentence. However, by establishing constructive evaluation, some of the more anxious students seemed to cope with their fear of being negatively evaluated, since they received reasonable reviews of their performances, and received useful suggestion in order to improve their language proficiency.

4. *A comfortable environment.* The classroom environment has a crucial role in affecting the learners' apprehension and other impairing barriers. Students involved in this study reported that speaking in front of the class and being frequently interrupted because of their grammar errors is discouraging, and makes them unwilling to use the language. As we mentioned, the CLT approach claims that teachers should notice any relevant student error by reformulating the sentence according to the correct rule (Ellis and Sheen, 2006:576). Moreover, as far as the classroom environment is concerned, another teaching method called Suggestopedia is based on a similar assumption. According to this method, in fact, a friendly environment help student to relax, release anxiety, and be more receptive to language inputs (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:100-106). Taking into account our participants, they seem to confirm that a comfortable classroom environment plays a great part in positively affecting communication apprehension and language anxiety. Our findings seem to confirm that when classroom environment is friendly and relaxed, and teachers use implicit methods to address errors, students experience less anxiety and are more prone to participate and produce language communication.

5. *The importance of "real life" in classroom.* Unlike children and young students, adult learners have a great amount of life experiences, and they need to incorporate them into their language learning. In fact, as our study indicated, promoting real use

of the language and offering the opportunity to acquire new knowledge is a valuable approach for increasing student language proficiency. This could include providing authentic materials such as L2 newspapers to start a conversation, or playing a role-play to produce realistic communication. Moreover, when students are involved in meaningful conversations, they focus on the content of the conversation, and usually do not over judge their performance. As MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued, the main goal of language teaching should be to enhance students' willingness to use the target language and help them to produce authentic communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998:558); accordingly, we believe that language courses that captivate learners in realistic and appealing communication tasks draws their attention away from their language weaknesses, lowering their language-related communication apprehension.

5.4.2. Critics, Limitations, and Need for Further Developments

Our study used two self-report instrument to collect quantitative data, and an open-ended questionnaire to complement it with qualitative details. However, some researchers criticized both the PRCA-24 and the FLCAS, questioned about their reliability and effectiveness.

As far as the PRCA-24 scale is concerned, the instrument overcomes several critics due to many different versions of the instrument available. For example, in 1980, Parks' investigation reported low correlations between the original PRCA scores and self-perceived anxiety in different interpersonal communication contexts. Furthermore, as McCroskey reported, in 1981 Porter noted that, both the 1970 original PRCA and the 1978 revised PRCA scales were unbalanced: in fact, the public speaking subcategory had redundant statements which weighed down the instrument (McCroskey et al., 1985:165-166). However, the latest version of the scale—the PRCA-24—is claimed to be content valid, internally consistent and highly reliable: a study McCroskey et al. conducted in 1985 provided substantial support for the effectiveness of the instrument.

As regards the FLCAS, many researchers have tested it in order to prove its validity and whether it is actually able to predict foreign language anxiety. For example, Aida (1994) analyzed the FLCAS in a study on Japanese learners to assess its reliability and efficacy in relating students' anxiety and their language performance. Aida added a factor to the original three suggested by Horwitz et al., and removed six items from the final model which were claimed not to load on any of the four factors; nonetheless, Aida's findings demonstrated that the FLCAS was a high reliable instrument to measure college students anxiety towards Japanese language (Aida, 1994:163-165). In 2011, Cao's re-examination of

the FLCAS also demonstrated that the items were significant indicators for their respective factors (Cao, 2011:79-87). However, Park (2014) criticized the measurement, claiming that Horwitz et al. (1986) did not clarify their classification of the three sections (Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation) of their instrument. Moreover, since the instrument lacked this clear classification, researchers often misinterpret the scale and its three sections, and most of them used only explanatory analysis, which Park label as subjective (Park, 2014:263-264). Horwitz (2016) concurred with Park's arguments, although she replied by stating that the three subcategories of the FLCAS were only suggestions by its inventors. Moreover, the scholar reported that she found small or non-significant correlations between the FLCAS and the three constructs; therefore, she pointed out that there is strong empirical support that foreign language anxiety is independent of other anxiety constructs. Accordingly, she claimed that as FLCAS better detects language oral anxiety, namely speaking or listening skills, therefore the measure would not be appropriate to assess other aspects of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2016:72).

Lastly, taking into account the open-ended questions and the qualitative analysis they rely on, there is a general agreement that qualitative research may be influenced by the researcher's interpretation, who may misinterpret some answers or generalize some outcomes, and that the non-standardized nature of qualitative instruments is often criticized for not having a systematic set of rules of analyzing data (Dörnyei, 2007:39-41). As a consequence, to minimize weaknesses of both research methods, and to reduce outlier results, this study presented both quantitative and qualitative research in order to provide the highest reliable outcomes.

A couple of limitations of the present study are important to note.

First, this study cannot reach a general conclusion, since the hypothesis based on self-report data should be verified by statistical and behavioral studies on larger samples. In fact, due to the small amount of people who participated in this study, it was not possible to infer whether our findings are powerful enough to generalize to a greater population. Nonetheless, investigating on our participants' behavior, emotions and personal attitudes towards English allows us to draw some hypothetical deductions. In fact, even though we cannot provide a general conclusion, our findings lead us to suppose that individuals who are similar to our sample may also display similar attitudes, emotions and reactions, therefore it may be plausible to believe that although EFL learners in late adulthood display a reasonable anxiety level, their remarkable intrinsic motivation and greater willingness to

communicate in English act as a positive affective variable to cope with their anxiety. In addition, a synergy of learning strategies and learner-oriented teaching methods seems to reduce adults' anxiety by boosting their confidence. However, further developments in the analysis of the relationship between late adulthood, language learning, and related communication anxieties would be interesting to confirm our hypotheses. Such research would be a valuable addition to the literature on language anxiety, willingness to communicate and communication apprehension and related variables in late adulthood.

Second, this study offers a portrait of adult EFL learners' language and communication anxiety levels, and our findings are based on a single examination of personal cognitions and emotions towards the target language. Our results are useful for assessing participants' uneasiness with learning English language and for proposing a model which may contribute to ease their language-related apprehension. As a part of a master's thesis dissertation, however, time restrictions did not enable us to extend our research on language anxiety over time and collect data of the same or comparable sample in different time periods; thus, we were not able to monitoring the long-term effects of our suggestions.

Therefore, further longitudinal research would explain any relevant pattern of development and explain the highlighted causal relationships within our findings; furthermore, information gathered over time could provide insightful and actionable contributions to understand how teachers may actively help EFL learners in their late adulthood to achieve personal language goals, foster their willingness to use English, and to decrease their anxiety towards the language. Additionally, in order to enhance our awareness of older adults' needs, inclinations, and personal strategies, it could be interesting to produce more qualitative data such as interviews, diaries, or focused essays which may act as a catalyst to deepen the current knowledge of late adulthood impairing emotions towards language learning.

Conclusion

The present study began by wondering whether older adult EFL learners suffer from a specific type of anxiety, namely language anxiety, and to what extent it impair their language learning. A review of the main literature in the field of adult education and language-related communication anxiety has revealed that many researchers have investigated the language anxiety levels among adult learners. However, as far as adults in their late adulthood are concerned, it seems that only few studies investigated on their

relationship with anxiety, and even fewer addressed the field of language acquisition and learning. Therefore, this study sought to investigate levels of communication apprehension and classroom language anxiety among EFL students in their late adulthood. We administered two of the most used self-report scales to two English classes of the University for the Elderly of Venice to assess students' perception and to provide a set of quantitative data to analyze. Furthermore, students answered some open-ended questions in order to freely express their own opinions. According to our findings, adult EFL learners portrayed a medium-high classroom anxiety level; they also seem to fear communicating in front of a group of people, regardless of the size of the group. Furthermore, as we correlated the two instruments together, we detected non-significant correlations between communication apprehension and classroom anxiety which were in line with previous research (Horwitz, 2016:72). However, when given a chance to express themselves and their opinion, open-ended questions indicated that their anxiety might mainly depend on some stereotype about their age, specifically the fear of forgetting language inputs. Furthermore, students were concerned about active speech practice and blamed the environment and inappropriate teaching methods for their lack of proficiency and language-related apprehension arousal. Stemming from their opinion, this study analyzed perceived cause of language anxiety, took into account the existing literature, and presented some elements which may be crucial to encourage anxious students to focus on the learning process, and to help teachers to make provide the most appropriate learning materials and create a comfortable environment to reduce learners' anxiety.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - ITALIAN PRCA-24 ITEMS

Lingua madre: _____

Sesso: M F

Età: _____ Lingue parlate: _____

Quali? _____

Questo strumento è composto da ventiquattro affermazioni riguardanti sensazioni ed emozioni sulla comunicazione con gli altri. Per favore, indicare il grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni secondo questa legenda: **Fortemente in disaccordo = 1; Disaccordo = 2; Neutrale = 3; D'accordo = 4; Fortemente d'accordo = 5.**

1. Non mi piace partecipare a discussioni di gruppo.
2. Generalmente, Mi sento a mio agio quando partecipo a discussioni di gruppo.
3. Mi sento teso e nervoso mentre partecipo a discussioni di gruppo.
4. Mi piace essere coinvolto in discussioni di gruppo.
5. Intraprendere discussioni di gruppo con persone che non conosco mi rende teso e nervoso.
6. Sono calmo e rilassato quando partecipo a discussioni di gruppo.
7. Generalmente, sono nervoso quando devo partecipare a delle riunioni / assemblee.
8. Di solito, sono a mio agio quando partecipo a e riunioni / assemblee.
9. Sono calmo e rilassato quando devo esprimere la mia opinione a una riunione / assemblea
10. Ho paura di esprimermi durante una riunione / assemblea.
11. Comunicare a una riunione / assemblea di solito mi rende nervoso.
12. Sono molto rilassato quando rispondo a domande durante una riunione / assemblea.
13. Quando partecipo a una conversazione con una nuova conoscenza, sono nervoso.
14. Non ho paura di parlare a voce alta durante una conversazione.
15. Solitamente sono molto teso e nervoso durante le conversazioni.
16. Solitamente, sono molto calmo e rilassato durante le conversazioni.
17. Quando parlo con una nuova conoscenza, sono molto rilassato.
18. Ho paura di parlare a voce alta durante una conversazione.
19. Non ho paura di tenere un discorso in pubblico.

20. Alcune parti del mio corpo sono molto tese e rigide quando tengo un discorso in pubblico.
21. Sono molto rilassato quando tengo un discorso in pubblico.
22. I miei pensieri diventano confusi e caotici quando tengo un discorso in pubblico.
23. Affronto la prospettiva di tenere un discorso in pubblico con sicurezza.
24. Durante un discorso in pubblico, sono così nervoso che dimentico informazioni che conosco.

APPENDIX B - ITALIAN FLCAS ADAPTED ITEMS

Lingua madre: _____

Sesso: M F

Età: _____ Lingue parlate: _____

Quali? _____

Per favore, indicare il grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni secondo questa legenda: **FA = Fortemente d'accordo; A = D'accordo; N = Né d'accordo né disaccordo; D = Disaccordo; FD = Fortemente in disaccordo**

1. Non sono mai sicuro quando intervengo durante la lezione di inglese.
2. Non sono preoccupato di commettere errori durante la lezione di inglese.
3. Mi agito quando so che verrò chiamato durante la lezione di inglese.
4. Mi agito quando non comprendo quello che l'insegnante dice in inglese.
5. Durante la lezione di inglese, Mi ritrovo a pensare a cose che non hanno nulla a che vedere con il corso.
6. Credo che gli altri studenti siano più bravi nelle lingue di quanto non sia io.
- 6-a. Credo che gli studenti più giovani di me siano più bravi nelle lingue di quanto non sia io.
7. Mi preoccupo delle conseguenze di non essere all'altezza nel corso di inglese.
8. Non comprendo perché alcune persone sono così turbate dalle lezioni di inglese.
9. A lezione di inglese, sono così nervoso che dimentico cose che so.
10. A lezione di inglese, mi imbarazza rispondere volontariamente.
11. Parlare con persone madrelingua *non* mi renderebbe nervoso.
- 11-a. Parlare in inglese con persone più giovani di me *non* mi renderebbe nervoso
12. Mi agito quando non comprendo le correzioni dell'insegnante.
13. Anche se ben preparato per il corso di inglese, mi sento ugualmente ansioso.
14. Spesso vorrei non andare al corso di inglese.
15. Mi sento sicuro quando parlo in inglese in classe.
16. Ho paura che il mio insegnante di inglese sia sempre pronto a correggere ogni mio errore.
- 16-a. Ho paura che le persone più giovani di me siano sempre pronte a correggere ogni mio errore.

17. *Non* mi sento sotto pressione all'idea di prepararmi per la lezione di inglese.
18. Credo sempre che gli altri studenti parlino l'inglese meglio di me.
19. Sono molto a disagio all'idea di parlare in inglese di fronte ad altri studenti.
20. Il corso di inglese procede così velocemente che ho paura di rimanere indietro.
21. Mi sento molto più teso e nervoso durante la lezione di inglese che nelle altre lezioni.
22. Quando parlo in inglese durante la lezione mi innervosisco e confondo.
23. Quando vado al corso di inglese, mi sento molto sicuro e rilassato.
24. Mi innervosisco quando non comprendo ogni parola che l'insegnante di inglese pronuncia.
25. Mi sento sopraffatto dalla moltitudine di regole da imparare per parlare inglese.
26. Ho paura che gli altri studenti riderebbero di me se parlassi in inglese.
- 26-a. Ho paura che le persone più giovani di me riderebbero di me se parlassi in inglese.
27. Probabilmente, mi sentirei a mio agio insieme a dei madrelingua inglesi.

Il presente questionario è completamente libero e anonimo: non è richiesto nessun dato personale a esclusione di età, sesso, lingua madre, e lingue parlate. Questo questionario sarà parte di un progetto di tesi magistrale, per cui l'utilizzo dello stesso è limitato a soli scopi accademici.

APPENDIX C - ITALIAN OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Età: _____

M F

- Da quanti anni studia inglese?
- Ha mai seguito dei corsi di inglese in passato, o è autodidatta?
- Quando e cosa l'ha spinto a voler imparare / migliorare la lingua?
- Quali sono i suoi sentimenti nei confronti dell'inglese?
- Si è mai sentito escluso o isolato perché non parlava abbastanza bene inglese?

Racconti un aneddoto.

• Conosce altre lingue? Prova la stessa ansia quando deve esprimersi in un'altra lingua?

• In relazione alla lingua inglese, qual è il suo rapporto con i giovani (es. competizione, ammirazione, altro, etc.)?

• Ha mai provato ansia di non riuscire? Quali pensa che siano le cause?

• In generale, si considera una persona ansiosa? Crede che essere presente in classe abbia un effetto sulla sua ansia? Se sì, come?

• Come reagisce quando crede di non poter imparare / migliorare il suo inglese (es. rinuncia, si impegna di più, cerca nuovi metodi, etc.)?

• Per quanto riguarda la lingua inglese, quali sono gli errori che la preoccupano di più? Quali di meno?

• Pensa che ci sia qualche elemento che potrebbe aiutarla a limitare la sua ansia? Se sì, quale?

• Pensa che in passato i metodi di insegnamento e gli insegnanti abbiano influito nella sua ansia verso l'inglese? Se sì, in che modo e cosa suggerirebbe per risolvere il problema?