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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKING-IN-CLASS ANXIETY

The article reports the results of a study investigating the influence of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) of a group of second year university students. The research revealed no gender differences in the level of anxiety measured with the foreign language speaking anxiety scale (FLSAS) developed for the purpose of this study. Moreover, no statistically significant interaction was observed between gender and a) perceived difficulty of speaking skills, b) self-assessment of one's speaking skills, c) self-efficacy level, d) general speaking anxiety, and the level of speaking-in-class anxiety. Some gender differences in the apprehension level were observed in the case of speaking activities and patterns of interaction: females were found to be more anxious while speaking in front of the class, in small groups and during presentations and role-plays. However, in the majority of investigated speaking tasks gender differences did not reach the level of significance.

1. Introduction

Speaking has been found to be the most stressful set of skills for students of foreign languages (e.g. Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert, 1999, Kitano, 2001). Therefore it seems surprising that research devoted exclusively to foreign language speaking apprehension (FLSA), or in-class speaking anxiety, is still scarce. Moreover, unlike the scales measuring writing apprehension (the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory constructed by Cheng in 2004) or reading anxiety (Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale by Saito, Garza and Horwitz developed in 1999), whose psychometric evidence in score validity and reliability has been established, there is no widely accepted scale that would measure this type of anxiety. The majority of studies concerning anxiety experienced by foreign language learners have been devoted to so called foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), or language anxiety, a construct consisting of three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). FLCA is measured

with the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), whose score reliability and validity has been widely acknowledged. Though the scale contains some items related to speaking apprehension, it has not been designed to measure speaking as a separate construct. Therefore the purpose of this article is twofold: to investigate the issue of speaking anxiety experienced in a classroom context from a perspective of gender differences and to create a reliable scale that would measure this construct in a reliable and valid way.

2. Literature review

Mak's (2011) study is one of very few projects analysing speaking-in-class anxiety as a separate construct. The author investigated this type of apprehension in a group of Chinese university students. He identified five factors (out of the FLCAS items) that contributed to speaking apprehension experienced in a classroom: 'speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers; negative attitudes towards the English class; negative self-evaluation; and fear of failing the class/consequences of personal failure' (Mak, 2011: 207). Moreover, speaking in front of the class without preparation, being corrected when speaking, not enough wait-time and not being allowed to use the first language during classes were qualified by respondents as significant stressors leading to speaking anxiety.

The other studies devoted to speaking skills have not analysed speaking apprehension as such but they investigated the influence of language anxiety measured with the FLCAS on students' oral performance. To start with, a persistent negative correlation was found between language anxiety and achievements on oral examinations (e.g. Young, 1986, Phillips, 1992, Cheng et al., 1999, Sparks and Ganschow, 2007, Herwitt and Stephenson, 2011); the more apprehensive the students became, the worse they performed while speaking tasks. Herwitt and Stephenson (2011:12) found that higher levels of anxiety resulted in 'poorer performance in quantity and correctness of output as well as in complexity of grammatical features'. Furthermore, more anxious students made more errors while speaking and displayed greater difficulties in self-correction when recasts were played for them (Gregersen, 2003; Sheen, 2008). Kitano (2001) also observed that those who compared their speaking skills to other classmates suffered from stress more intensely. Horwitz et. al (1986: 130) found that students suffering from language apprehension might 'skip classes, overstudy, or seek refuge in the last row in an effort to avoid the humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak.' The level of language anxiety was found to be different while talking to friends and interacting with strangers (Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham, 2008), strangers being a greater stressor in this case. Moreover, the vision of going abroad and facing native speakers was identified as a factor intensifying FL anxiety experienced in a foreign language classroom (Kitano, 2001). Apprehension experienced while interaction in a foreign language was also discovered

to be ‘contagious’ (Dornyei and Kormos, 2000), stress experienced by one of the interlocutors after some time was adopted by the other student.

A few more studies seem vital to be presented in the context of the study conducted by the author of this article. First, low self-efficacy was found to be a crucial element in developing stress during classes: a negative correlation was found between FLCA and belief in one’s skills and chances for success (Millis, Pajares and Herron, 2006). Secondly, perceived difficulty of a task or skill exacerbated an apprehension level: those who believed that a task was difficult suffered from greater amount of anxiety (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2008, Yan and Horwitz, 2008). Finally, the correlation between self-assessment of one’s speaking skills and FLCA was also found. It was discovered that the students who perceived their speaking skills as low experienced a higher level of stress (MacIntyre et al, 1991, Cheng et al., 1999, Matsuda and Gobel, 2004, Liu and Jackson, 2008).

Gender studies of language anxiety brought conflicting results. MacIntyre et al. (2002) found no statistically significant gender related differences in language anxiety experienced by students learning French as a second language. This observation was corroborated by the study of Matsuda and Gobel (2004) who investigated language anxiety of Japanese university students learning English as a foreign language and by Bekleyen (2009) who analysed the influence of gender on foreign language listening apprehension. In contrast to these studies there are some projects in which females were found to experience higher language anxiety levels. For example Abu-Rabia (2004) found that female seventh graders in Israel experienced a higher apprehension level which correlated with negative linguistic performance (reading, writing and spelling), Piechurska – Kuciel (2008) reported that Polish female students declared higher language anxiety throughout three years of their secondary school education and Ellkhafaiti (2005) observed more listening apprehension among female students of Arabic at American universities. Koul et al. (2009) conducted research among Thai university students learning English and discovered that women experienced greater FLCA than men though also women tended to be better language learners and received higher grades in English. These results were corroborated by Park and French (2013) in a Korean context, who observed that in this case anxiety might be of a facilitative character. It should be also added that there are studies in which male participants displayed greater anxiety level. Campbell and Show (1994) discovered females to be less apprehensive and better at foreign languages. Moreover, in the context of a skill specific anxiety, males were found by Zhang (2000) to be more anxious while reading in English than female students.

As it can be observed no empirical studies have so far addressed the role of gender in experiencing in-class speaking apprehension. The aim of this study was to examine whether there were any gender differences in foreign language speaking anxiety among Polish university students learning English as a foreign language. In detail, gender differences were to be sought in the results of the scale

measuring in-class speaking apprehension and in the level of anxiety experienced in different interactional patterns and while various, commonly used, speaking activities. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis was performed to check whether there is any interaction between gender and a) perceived difficulty of speaking skills, b) self-assessment of one's speaking skills, c) self-efficacy level, and the level of speaking-in-class anxiety. As the study was devoted exclusively to apprehension experienced in a classroom it seemed also worth investigating whether gender and the level of general speaking apprehension (experienced inside and outside a classroom) had influence on in-class speaking tension. For this purpose the following research questions were formulated:

1. Are there gender differences in the level of speaking anxiety experienced in a foreign language classroom?
2. Are there gender differences in particular items attributing to in-class speaking anxiety?
3. Is there any interaction between gender and self-perceived difficulty of speaking skills and foreign language in-class speaking anxiety?
4. Is there any interaction between gender and perceived foreign language achievement and foreign language in-class speaking anxiety?
5. Is there any interaction between gender and self-efficacy and foreign language speaking anxiety?
6. Is there any interaction between gender and general speaking anxiety and foreign language in-class speaking anxiety?
7. Are there gender differences in the level of speaking anxiety experienced in particular tasks and patterns of interaction used to develop speaking skills in a classroom?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A total of 106 students participated in the research, 52 of them studied International Relations and 54 studied Marketing and Management. There were 61 women and 45 men in the surveyed group. They were all students of the second year in one of public universities in Poland. All of them attended English as a foreign language classes once a week, a lesson being 90 minutes long. Their proficiency level was B1 or B2 – depending on a group.

3.2. Instrument and data collection

For the purpose of the study a questionnaire was constructed (see Appendix). It consisted of 26 items divided into three parts. In the first three questions of the first section the participants marked their gender, assessed difficulty of speaking

skills on the scale 1-5 (in order to measure a perceived difficulty of speaking), and graded their speaking skills from very good (5) to very poor (1) (to analyse self-assessment of their speaking skills). There were also two Likert scale items (the scale ranged from 1 – ‘I strongly agree’ to 5 – ‘I strongly disagree’) in which the level of general speaking anxiety (q.4) and self-efficacy were assessed (q.5). These five factors (from items 1 – 5) were later used as the independent variables to investigate the interaction between them and gender, and in-class speaking anxiety level.

The second part of the questionnaire included the scale measuring speaking anxiety in a classroom, referred to in this article as the foreign language speaking anxiety scale (FLSAS), which was constructed especially for the purpose of this study (as it was stressed earlier there seems to be no widely accepted scale measuring in-class speaking apprehension). Its reliability was Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$, which can be qualified as high. It consisted of 22 Likert scale questions on the five point Likert scale: 5 – I strongly agree, 4 – I agree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree, 2 – I disagree, 1 – I strongly disagree (in the Appendix these are items 5 – 26).

A few items (q. 5, q.12, q.14, q.18, q.24) in the FLSAS were borrowed or adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz et al (1986), for example item 2 from FLCAS: ‘I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class’ was changed into the item: ‘13. I do not worry about making mistakes while speaking’ or item 10 from FLCAS: ‘I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class’ was modified into ‘12. I am not worried by the fact that the way I speak will affect my grade in my index book’. The rest of the questions were constructed by the author of the article. They were based on the studies concerning causes of foreign language anxiety and adapted into the context of speaking in a foreign language. For example Young (1986) and Ewald (2007) observed that teachers’ behaviour was a major cause of students’ language anxiety and consequently item 16 was constructed: ‘The way my teacher behaves during classes makes me afraid of speaking’. As the lack of satisfaction with one’s skills was found to generate language anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2008), item 8 was formulated: ‘I believe that at this stage of learning I should speak English better.’, etc.

The third part consisted of two items in which students assessed the level of their FLSA (on the scale from 1 – no anxiety to 5 – high anxiety) in different types of interactional patterns (q.27 a-d) and while taking part in a variety of speaking tasks (q. 28 a-i).

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis involved Cronbach’s alpha to estimate reliability of the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale, the Mann-Whitney U test and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The Mann-Whitney U test was chosen to compare differences between two independent groups, females and males, as

the dependent variable, which was speaking apprehension, was measured on an ordinal scale. MANOVA was used to analyse the influence of two factors simultaneously on the dependent variable, which was speaking anxiety.

3.4. Procedure

The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire after one of their last lectures. Participation in the research was voluntary. They were asked to provide sincere answers and assured that the questionnaire was anonymous. No time limit was imposed on students though most of them finished after 15 minutes and after 20 minutes all the questionnaires were filled in. There were 125 questionnaires collected in total, however 19 of them were discarded due to some missing data.

4. Results

As far as the first research question is concerned the results of the study showed that there was no gender related difference in the level of foreign language speaking anxiety experienced in the context of a foreign language classroom measured with the scale prepared for the purpose of this study. With reference to a Mann-Whitney U test it cannot be claimed that women differ from men in the level of speaking anxiety (the mean ranks of women and men were 57.6 and 47.8 respectively; $u = -1.62$, $p = .106$).

To answer the second question the FLSA scale items were analysed separately. Out of 22 factors adding to speaking anxiety there was only one in which gender difference was observed, namely the item 'I would feel less stressed if I knew the topic of discussion in advance and could prepare for it at home'. The Mann-Whitney's U test results showed that mean ranks for women and men were 58.24 and 47.08 respectively ($u = -2.09$, $p = 0.37$; $p < 0.05$), which means that women were more stressed by the lack of opportunity to prepare in advance for discussions which occurred in the classroom.

In the other 21 scale items measuring speaking anxiety the differences between males and females were not statistically significant. The details can be found in the table below:

Table 1: The Mann-Whitney U test results for gender differences in items from the FLSAS

Question	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
p5	1146.500	2181.500	-1.528	.126	F	61	57.20	3489.50
					M	45	48.48	2181.50
p6	1340.000	2375.000	-.243	.808	F	61	54.03	3296.00
					M	45	52.78	2375.00
p7	1241.500	2276.500	-.880	.379	F	61	55.65	3394.50
					M	45	50.59	2276.50
p8	1189.500	2224.500	-1.266	.206	F	61	56.50	3446.50
					M	45	49.43	2224.50
p9	1164.000	2199.000	-1.395	.163	F	61	56.92	3472.00
					M	45	48.87	2199.00
p10	1344.500	2379.500	-.186	.852	F	61	53.96	3291.50
					M	45	52.88	2379.50
p11	1131.500	2166.500	-1.629	.103	F	61	57.45	3504.50
					M	45	48.14	2166.50
p12	1234.000	2269.000	-.922	.356	F	61	55.77	3402.00
					M	45	50.42	2269.00
p13	1254.500	2289.500	-.812	.417	F	61	55.43	3381.50
					M	45	50.88	2289.50
p14	1280.500	3171.500	-.625	.532	F	61	51.99	3171.50
					M	45	55.54	2499.50
p15	1271.500	3162.500	-.680	.497	F	61	51.84	3162.50
					M	45	55.74	2508.50
p16	1242.000	2277.000	-.881	.378	F	61	55.64	3394.00
					M	45	50.60	2277.00

Question	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
p17	1220.000	2255.000	-1.028	.304	F	61	56.00	3416.00
					M	45	50.11	2255.00
p18	1187.500	2222.500	-1.287	.198	F	61	56.53	3448.50
					M	45	49.39	2222.50
p19	1083.500	2118.500	-2.088	.037	F	61	58.24	3552.50
					M	45	47.08	2118.50
p20	1257.000	2292.000	-.773	.440	F	61	55.39	3379.00
					M	45	50.93	2292.00
p21	1301.000	2336.000	-.486	.627	F	61	54.67	3335.00
					M	45	51.91	2336.00
p22	1225.000	2260.000	-.993	.321	F	61	55.92	3411.00
					M	45	50.22	2260.00
p23	1372.000	2407.000	-.003	.997	F	61	53.51	3264.00
					M	45	53.49	2407.00
p24	1128.000	2163.000	-1.650	.099	F	61	57.51	3508.00
					M	45	48.07	2163.00
p25	1120.500	2155.500	-1.709	.088	F	61	57.63	3515.50
					M	45	47.90	2155.50
p26	1162.000	2197.000	-1.412	.158	F	61	56.95	3474.00
					M	45	48.82	2197.00

In order to answer research question number 3 a MANOVA was performed to analyse interaction between two factors simultaneously: gender and self-perceived difficulty of speaking skills and in-class speaking apprehension (gender and self-perceived difficulty being independent variables and speaking anxiety the dependent variable). As shown in the table below the interaction effect between the former two factors and speaking anxiety did not reach a level of significance ($F = .257$, $df = 2$, $p = .774$). In other words, gender and belief that speaking is difficult or easy did not influence speaking anxiety.

Table 2: MANOVA by gender and difficulty and speaking-in-class apprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1741.783 ^a	5	348.357	2.609	.029
Intercept	410870.038	1	410870.038	3077.072	.000
Gender	220.918	1	220.918	1.654	.201
Difficulty	1243.714	2	621.857	4.657	.012
Gender * Difficulty	68.750	2	34.375	.257	.774
Error	13352.632	100	133.526		
Total	483454.000	106			
Corrected total	15094.415	105			

The study also investigated the interaction between gender and perceived foreign language achievement and a foreign language speaking anxiety level. A MANOVA analysis revealed no statistically significant interaction between these two factors and in-class speaking apprehension ($F=2.84$, $df=2$, $p=.063$). Specifically, gender and belief that one's speaking was e.g. satisfactory did not influence a speaking apprehension level. The detailed statistical analysis has been presented in the table below.

Table 3: MANOVA by gender and perceived language achievement and speaking-in-class apprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	5562.155 ^a	5	1112.431	11.670	.000
Intercept	325728.455	1	325728.455	3417.117	.000
Gender	267.116	1	267.116	2.802	.097
Perceived lg. achievement	3348.435	2	1674.218	17.564	.000
Gender * Perceived lg. achievement	542.182	2	271.091	2.844	.063
Error	9532.260	100	95.323		
Total	483454.000	106			
Corrected total	15094.415	105			

For research question number 4 MANOVA was also performed with gender and self-efficacy as independent variables and in-class speaking anxiety as the dependent variable. As the table below shows interaction between these three

variables did not reach a level of significance ($F = .570$, $df=2$, $p = .567$). In other words, gender and self-efficacy level did not influence speaking apprehension in a foreign language classroom.

Table 4: MANOVA by gender and self-efficacy and speaking-in-class apprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3020.336 ^a	5	604.067	5.003	.000
Intercept	308341.352	1	308341.352	2553.746	.000
Gender	655.209	1	655.209	5.427	.022
Self-efficacy	1936.653	2	968.327	8.020	.001
Gender * Self-efficacy	137.658	2	68.829	.570	.567
Error	12074.079	100	120.741		
Total	483454.000	106			
Corrected total	15094.415	105			

The fifth research question was aimed to determine whether there was any interaction between gender and general speaking anxiety and foreign language in-class speaking anxiety. A MANOVA analysis revealed no statistically significant interaction between these two factors and in-class speaking apprehension ($F = 1.69$, $df=2$, $p = .189$). Specifically, as shown in the table below, gender and general speaking apprehension did not influence in-class speaking apprehension level.

Table 4: MANOVA by gender and general speaking anxiety and speaking-in-class apprehension

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	3979.530 ^a	5	795.906	7.161	.000
Intercept	391046.407	1	391046.407	3518.223	.000
Gender	284.724	1	284.724	2.562	.113
General speaking anxiety	2451.012	2	1225.506	11.026	.000
Gender * General speaking anxiety	376.612	2	188.306	1.694	.189
Error	11114.885	100	111.149		
Total	483454.000	106			
Corrected total	15094.415	105			

The study also attempted to analyse gender differences in experiencing speaking apprehension in various patterns of interaction used in teaching English in a foreign language classroom, and to check whether particular speaking activities, out of these most often used by teachers to develop speaking skills, are more stressful for male or female students.

As far as the sixth research question is concerned, the analysis of interactional patterns used for speaking skills development, namely speaking in front of the whole class, speaking in pairs, group of fewer than five students and groups consisting of six to ten people, showed some differences in the anxiety experienced by males and females. Women tended to be more stressed while speaking in small groups than men. The Mann-Whitney's U test results showed that mean ranks for these groups were 61.88 and 42.14 respectively ($u = -3.42$, $p = .001$; $p < 0.05$) and the results were statistically significant. Moreover, it was found that female students seemed to experience higher apprehension while speaking in front of the whole class, with mean rank for women 61.88 and men 42.14 ($u = -3.42$, $p = .001$; $p < 0.05$). The obtained results were statistically significant. There were some minor differences observed in the case of the other two analysed patterns (suggesting women to experience more apprehension), however, the results did not reach a level of significance. The detailed statistical analysis of the discussed interactional patterns have been presented below.

Table 6. The Mann-Whitney U test results for gender differences in speaking anxiety experienced in different patterns of interaction

Interaction	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
class	1032.000	2067.000	-2.124	.034	F	60	58.30	3498.00
					M	45	45.93	2067.00
pairs	1123.000	2158.000	-1.655	.098	F	60	56.78	3407.00
					M	45	47.96	2158.00
small groups	861.500	1896.500	-3.422	.001	F	61	61.88	3774.50
					M	45	42.14	1896.50
large groups	1068.500	2103.500	-1.877	.060	F	60	57.69	3461.50
					M	45	46.74	2103.50

The last element of the study was an attempt to find whether there were any speaking tasks in which the anxiety level would differ in relation to gender. Students were to assess in the 1–5 scale the level of anxiety they experienced while participating in the following speaking activities: presenting a scene or a dialogue, giving a presentation or a mini-lecture, participating in a role-play,

volunteering answers to the teacher's questions, repeating after the teacher, answering questions spontaneously, participating in a discussion, reporting a group or pair work, talking in pairs spontaneously. The analysis performed with the Mann-Whitney's U test revealed that women tended to experience more stress while giving presentations in front of the class (a mean rank for women was 59.71 and for men was 45.08; $u = -2.48$, $p = .013$, $p < 0.05$) and performing role plays (mean ranks for females and males were 59.71 and 45.08 respectively, $u = -2.03$, $p = .043$, $p < 0.05$). As far as the rest of analysed activities and gender differences in experiencing speaking apprehension are concerned no statistically significant results were obtained. The detailed analysis has been presented below.

Table 7: The Mann-Whitney U test results for gender differences in speaking anxiety experienced while different speaking activities

Speaking activity	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	p	Gender	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
presenting a scene or a dialogue	1295.000	3186.000	-.517	.605	F	52.23	3186.00
					M	55.22	2485.00
presentation	993.500	2028.500	-2.484	.013	F	59.71	3642.50
					M	45.08	2028.50
role-play	1062.500	2097.500	-2.027	.043	F	58.58	3573.50
					M	46.61	2097.50
volunteering answers	1148.500	2183.500	-1.466	.143	F	57.17	3487.50
					M	48.52	2183.50
repeating after the teacher	1180.000	2215.000	-1.291	.197	F	56.66	3456.00
					M	49.22	2215.00
answering questions spontaneously	1192.500	2227.500	-1.196	.232	F	56.45	3443.50
					M	49.50	2227.50
participating in a discussion	1212.500	2247.500	-1.052	.293	F	56.12	3423.50
					M	49.94	2247.50
reporting group or pair work	1194.500	2229.500	-1.171	.242	F	56.42	3441.50
					M	49.54	2229.50
pair talk	1234.500	2269.500	-.956	.339	F	55.76	3401.50
					M	50.43	2269.50

5. Discussion

The study did not show statistically significant differences between males and females in experiencing foreign language speaking anxiety in a classroom context. The results of the scale measuring in-class speaking apprehension were similar for both groups. Moreover, the MANOVA analyses were performed to check the interaction between a) perceived difficulty of speaking skills, b) self-assessment of one's speaking skills, c) assessment of the level of general speaking anxiety, d) self-efficacy level and gender and the level of speaking anxiety; and no interaction effect that would reach a significance level in any of the analysed factors was found. The results of this study are partially in line with the results obtained by MacIntyre et al (2002) and Matsuda and Gobel (2004) who did not observe any statistically significant gender dependent differences. Though it should be stressed that these researchers investigated general foreign language anxiety and not speaking anxiety which seems to be a separate, skill specific construct. As it was suggested before, it may be very difficult to draw any analogies between the results of this study and any other studies as gender differences have been investigated mainly in the context of foreign language classroom anxiety.

The conflicting results of gender studies in the field of language anxiety may be partially attributed to socio-cultural aspects. Park and French (2013: 468) suggested that female participants of their studies may have experienced greater anxiety as they 'shied away from social interaction' because they were brought up in Korea that is 'a conventionally male dominant society'. No differences in gender among Polish students' apprehension could imply that female students feel to be of the same social status as males and their speaking during foreign language classes may not be significantly affected by social roles.

The lack of gender differences may be also attributed to the character of English classes students participated in. In this study an English course was not the participants' major and the pressure the students experienced was probably smaller than in the case of English courses younger students are obliged to take at Polish primary, lower-secondary or secondary schools. English classes there are of the same importance and significance as other courses and more pressure is put on students' achievements by parents, school authorities and students themselves who strive to pass final examinations. Therefore it may be presumed that these circumstances may make gender differences in experiencing language apprehension more vivid, as it was observed by Piechurska-Kuciel (2008) among students at lower-secondary schools.

The total scores from the questionnaire did not show any gender differences but a closer look was made at the particular items in the questionnaire. The analysis indicated that there was one issue in which the differences were statistically significant, namely women were more stressed by the lack of opportunity to prepare themselves for a discussion at home. The difference in this particular matter may be explained by women's strive to be good students,

their greater motivation to study foreign languages and the need to do their best during classes (e.g. Dorney and Csizer 2002, Csizer and Dorney 2005). The option of preparing oneself for a speaking activity would allow female students for a better oral performance, which goes in line with Piechurska-Kuciel's (2008: 196) observation that 'girls are found to care more about the quality of their work', and taking away this opportunity from women might make them more stressed than males during classes.

As far as gender differences and interactional patterns and types of speaking activities are concerned women were found to be more stressed by performing in front of the class, giving presentations or mini-lectures and taking part in role-plays. All of these involve an element of public performance which may suggest that women may be more stressed while speaking to the audience. As a consequence it may be suggested that teachers should approach these activities with caution, for example students should not be forced to speak in front of the class and only volunteers could prepare presentations or act out role-plays publicly. Otherwise the level of speaking apprehension may rise even among adult students.

The second observation relating to patterns of interaction may be slightly surprising: women were more stressed than men when they spoke in small groups, but in larger groups and in pairs the difference was not statistically significant. The question why interaction in smaller groups would be more anxiety provoking than in pairs and in larger groups is very difficult to answer. First, it may be hypothesised that small groups are not as intimate and 'safe' as pairs and females may be more stressed by the vision of speaking in front of more than one person. Second, in small groups it may not be possible to shy away from speaking, which seems possible in the groups of 6-10 people, and it could be presumed that this inevitability of speaking publicly in groups made female students more anxious.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to fill a gap in the research devoted to skill specific anxieties, namely to foreign language speaking-in-class apprehension. In detail, it analysed the influence of gender on speaking anxiety and proposed the scale which can be used to measure this construct in a reliable way. Gender was found to have no significant effect on the level of speaking anxiety, though some gender differences were observed in the case of interactional patterns and types of speaking tasks used during foreign language classes.

Appendix

1. On the 1-5 scale (1-very easy, 5 – very difficult) assess how difficult for you speaking in English is.
2. How do you assess you speaking skills in English? 5 – very good; 4 – good, 3 – satisfactory, 2 – weak, 1 – very weak
3. I am relaxed and at ease when I speak English (in and outside the classroom).

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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4. I believe I can learn speaking in English successfully.
5. I am not afraid to speak English during classes.
6. I can overcome the stress of speaking English during classes.
7. I eagerly participate in discussions in English.
8. I believe that at this stage of learning I should speak English better.
9. I am afraid of speaking during classes as I fear what others will think about me.
10. I am afraid of what my teacher will think about me when s/he hears me speaking English.
11. I am nervous by the fact that although I have a lot to say about a given topic my English knowledge is too scarce to say what I want.
12. I do not worry that the way I speak English will affect my final grade in my index book.
13. I do not worry about the mistakes I make while speaking.
14. I get nervous when the teacher corrects my errors while or after my speaking English.
15. The way my teacher behaves during classes makes me afraid of speaking.
16. I feel stressed when the teacher asks me to correct the error I have just made.
17. The way my teacher reacts to the errors I make while speaking makes me afraid of speaking.
18. I am worried when I know I will have to say something spontaneously.
19. I would feel less nervous if I knew the topic of a discussion and could prepare for it in advance at home.
20. I am afraid of speaking during classes because we haven't practiced speaking enough.
21. The activities my teacher uses to assess my speaking make me afraid of speaking.
22. The way the teacher assesses my proficiency makes me afraid of speaking.
23. The form in which the teacher assesses students makes me stressed while speaking.
24. Speaking in front of a class is not stressful for me.
25. I am not afraid of giving presentations or speaking English at the front of a classroom.

26. I am not stressed when the teacher asks some other students to correct the error I made.
27. Assess the level of anxiety in the 1-5 scale (1- no anxiety, 5 – high anxiety) that you experience while speaking English.
 - a. in front of a class
 - b. in pairs
 - c. in small groups (up to 5 people)
 - d. in large groups (6-10 people)
28. Assess the level of anxiety in the 1-5 scale (1- no anxiety, 5 – high anxiety) you experience in the following speaking activities:
 - a. presenting a dialogue
 - b. giving a presentation or a mini-lecture
 - c. role-play
 - d. volunteering answers to teacher questions
 - e. individual repeating after the teacher
 - f. answering a teacher's questions spontaneously
 - g. participating in a discussion
 - h. reporting group or pair work
 - i. talking in pairs.

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