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**DIPLOMAMUNKA**  
**MA THESIS**

Papp Loránd  
Anglisztika MA  
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2016

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## MA THESIS

*Haladó Nyelvtanulók Szorongásának Vizsgálata  
Idiodinamikus Megközelítéssel*

*Investigating Advanced Learners' Language  
Anxiety Using an Idiodynamic Approach*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis reports on the results of a mixed method observation that investigates the construct of foreign language anxiety perceived by advanced-level English majors attending one Hungarian university. While considerable amount of empirical research has been carried out on the negative correlation between language anxiety and foreign language achievement, little interest was demonstrated in examining the effect that language proficiency and trait anxiety might have on foreign language anxiety. The aim of this thesis is to examine the sources and dynamic changes of foreign language anxiety in the case of upper-level language majors. In order to achieve this aim, this study uses diverse research instruments, including trait- and foreign language anxiety questionnaires and structured interviews, which are directed from an idiodynamic perspective, a new approach to the studying of affective variables. The findings indicate that there is no correlation between trait anxiety and foreign language anxiety; however, interview data suggests wide range of anxiety-provoking factors which are relevant at higher levels of language proficiency.

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## Introduction

For the past few decades applied linguistic researchers have been observing the effects of the negative psychological construct identified as anxiety on the behaviour and achievement of L2 (second language) learners (Horwitz, 2010). As a result of the intention to categorise distinct types of anxiety, researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986) proposed that the L2-related form of this construct is a unique, situation specific type of anxiety, labelled as language anxiety. As Dörnyei (2005) explained “*language anxiety* is undoubtedly an important learner characteristic with regard to L2 acquisition and use, consistently producing a significant impact on L2 criterion variables” (p. 201). Although considerable amount of research results (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) show that there is a stable negative correlation between language anxiety and language achievement, the role of language proficiency in the scope of FLA (foreign language anxiety) research is still scantily observed. As Tóth (2011) stated, “empirical findings suggest that the relationship between learners’ proficiency and foreign language anxiety is not as straightforward as it seems” (p. 40). Furthermore, the available studies (Ewald, 2007; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Tóth, 2009) dealing with the role of proficiency did not take into consideration students’ proneness to be generally anxious as a potential source of their FLA. Therefore, additional empirical research concerning the interplay between L2 proficiency, trait anxiety, and FLA is needed.

This thesis intends to investigate advanced learners focusing on Hungarian majors of English studies, a group of young adults. The reason for this choice is that little research has been devoted to observing this “under-researched” population (Tóth, 2012, p. 1167). This mixed-method empirical study will triangulate data collected from multiple sources, including questionnaires, structured interviews, and participants’ self-assessment of their own language performance. The overall aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the sources and dynamic changes of the FLA levels experienced by upper-level L2 learners.

In order to achieve this purpose, several instruments will be applied for data collection. The majority of qualitative studies use the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986) for measuring this affective variable. However, this thesis intends to approach the topic using a different anxiety measure in agreement with Piniel and Csizér (2013) who pointed out that studies which intended to test the validity of the widely accepted FLCAS still provide problematic results concerning the componential structure of that scale. Hence, the adapted version of the Speaking Anxiety Scale (Piniel, 2014) will be used during the data collection procedures. Likewise, omitting the use of the FLCAS, the A-Trait scale, designed to gauge general anxiety, from the validated Hungarian version of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-H) form Y (Sipos et al., 1983) will be applied in the current study. Since its publication, it is considered to be the valid version of this anxiety measure that “has excellent psychometric properties for high school and college students” (Spielberger, 2010, p. 1699). In the second, qualitative phase of the study structured interviews will be held in order to elicit first-hand information from the participants.

As the extensive research timeline compiled by Horwitz (2010) indicates, so far huge interest was demonstrated in gauging the several aspects of foreign language anxiety. Primarily, the effects of FLA on L2 achievement, the sources of this affective factor, and the variations of language anxiety in different contexts were examined. Despite the wide range of investigation in the area, research methodologies over the past forty years were considerably analogous, while the FLCAS became the “standard measure of language anxiety” (Horwitz, 2010, p. 158). As MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) explained, data was collected retrospectively by interviewing participants about their L2 learning history and researchers designed self-report surveys in order to elude the main reasons behind FLA perceived by the observed individuals. With the intention to open new research perspectives and examine the rapid changes of emotional states, MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) proposed an idiodynamic



method to measure foreign language anxiety. As Gregersen et al. (2014) explained, while former FLA measures merely described the manifestations, levels, and basic characteristics of foreign language anxiety “over a timescale of months and years, the idiodynamic method gives us the ability to track learners’ rapidly changing affect in context on a per-second basis and to have learners account for these fluctuations in stimulated recall interviews” (p. 576). In other words, this measurement approach can monitor subtle changes within an individual directly during a communication situation; therefore, provides valuable qualitative data as opposed to the summative data of questionnaires. In order to achieve the aims of the study, this novel approach called idiodynamic methodology will be applied with the expectation to gain more detailed understanding of advanced language learners’ foreign language anxiety.

The thesis is organised as follows: The next section discusses the theoretical and empirical background of the study with the definition of the main terms, and a brief review of FLA research history and relevant research investigations. The research design and method section then provides information about the stages and participants of the study. Furthermore, it summarizes and elaborates on the research instruments used in the study, involving the two different anxiety scales. Then, it contains concise background information about the three speaking tasks assigned to the participants. Finally, the research design and method section provides the description of the idiodynamic method, a novel approach to the measurement of dynamic changes in affective factors. The results section firstly presents the outcome of the quantitative data analysis. Next, data collected during the qualitative phase is elaborated on by showing the idiodynamic self-ratings of participants’ FLA scores and by providing their report on the sources and changes of the FLA levels. The next section is the discussion, which interprets the findings of the paper and their relation to previous research results. The last segment of the paper is the conclusion where the main findings are evaluated and explained; limitations and further research directions are also mentioned here.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Background

The following section intends to provide a background to this thesis by summarizing the main theoretical and empirical research findings in connection with language anxiety. Firstly, it will start by defining language anxiety, which is the key construct of this study. Secondly, a brief overview of the most important milestones of second language-related anxiety research will be reported. Since discussing all the proposed theories, models, and ideas that have ever dealt with the conceptualization of language anxiety would certainly require tremendous space, the focus of this part will be on illustrating what makes language anxiety distinct from the other variants (Horwitz, 2010) of this affective factor. Finally, results of the few available studies dealing with the language anxiety of upper-level/advanced learners will be elaborated on. Examining the findings of these systematically selected empirical studies will situate this investigation in the scope of language anxiety research.

Being a natural human emotion, anxiety belongs to the extensive group of various individual differences (ID) variables that have an impact on the language learner and the learning process (Dörnyei, 2005). This type of anxiety was characterised as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). This conceptualisation indicates that language-related anxiety is provoked by situations when individuals are required to speak in a foreign language; however, different aspects of language learning and various facets of foreign language use can trigger anxiety as well. Besides this definition, MacIntyre (1999) described language anxiety as an affective factor that includes the “worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language” (p. 27). Although this characterisation is less specific than the previous one, it is consistent with the well-established concept that FLA is not barely a distinct form of

anxiety but a particular construct, exclusively related to L2 learning and use (Horwitz et al., 1986). A more recent conceptualization of this individual difference variable has been put forward by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012). In the present thesis, in line with their thorough definition, foreign language anxiety will be referred to in the following way:

Language anxiety is a term that encompasses the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue. The term covers language being learned in locations where intergroup contact is available (so-called *second* language) or not available (so-called *foreign* language) and also covers various language skills (especially speaking, but also reading, writing and comprehension). (p. 103)

In summary, language anxiety is an ID variable which is clearly separated from contexts where individuals use their native language. Furthermore, the construct of FLA as an affective variable which influences L2 performance and achievement can be relevant in any language learning environment regardless of the availability and role of the target language.

The intention to characterise the possible forms and impacts of anxiety has been formulated by psychologists in the beginning of the 1960s. The study of Alpert and Haber (1960), which has investigated how anxiety affects academic achievement performance, formed the concept of anxiety claiming it to be a twofold construct. In other words, the paper suggested that positive and negative manifestations of anxiety can be distinguished. The first one, labelled as facilitating anxiety, is characterized as an advantageous influence on performance; whereas, the second one, called debilitating anxiety, is defined as an obstacle which derives from the pressure and tension perceived by individuals. These forms of anxiety are also referred to as "beneficial" and "inhibitory" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 198). Other embodiments of anxiety were identified by Spielberger et al. (1970) who classified the momentary experience of this unpleasant feeling as state anxiety, which is primarily caused

by certain situations, interactions or encounters with people, and other external circumstances. In contrast to state anxiety, which is a short term construct, trait anxiety was conceptualised as an innate component of the personal attributes of a human being; therefore, trait anxiety is related to inner circumstances, involving personality. In other words, it is the permanent personal tendency to experience apprehension (Spielberger et al., 1970).

Since the middle of the 1960s, researchers of psychology and language learning have generally presupposed that anxiety behaves as an obstacle in the L2 learning process and hinders language performance and achievement (Horwitz, 2001). In order to epitomize the data of the constantly growing research sphere, Scovel (1978) summarized the initial research findings concerning the impact of anxiety on language achievement and reported that the results of the early studies are contradictory and problematic. The reason for this, as Scovel explained, is that different researchers used distinct anxiety measures hence it is obvious that they were not able to establish a straightforward connection between anxiety and language achievement. This investigation shown further directions to researchers and urged for the precise description of language anxiety and for the development of a new instrument of measurement (Horwitz, 2001). In the following decade, the next milestone in language anxiety research was reached by the publication of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) innovative paper, which provided a novel approach to the conceptualization of anxiety.

As Horwitz (2010) described, this publication is “often credited with introducing the construct of FLA (foreign language anxiety) as a situation-specific anxiety” (p. 158), which was an innovative and therefore important conceptualisation of the construct. In a like manner, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) also pointed out the significance of that study by arguing that the research carried out by Horwitz et al. (1986) is regularly referred to in the language anxiety research sphere as a ground-breaking work. This seminal paper provided a new instrument for measuring anxiety, namely the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Scale (FLCAS) and also suggested that FLA is associated with the following three phenomena: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. These forms of anxiousness have earlier been related to the communication in the first language (L1) and other ordinary situations (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). However, Horwitz et al. (1986) have revealed that foreign language anxiety is a peculiar, situation-specific form of anxiety that is “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Based on the uniqueness of the language learning process, this separation of language anxiety from other forms of other academic and general anxieties was a revolutionary stage in the history of FLA research.

### **Empirical Background**

After providing the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis by defining the main terms and mentioning milestones of FLA research, findings of empirical investigations will be elaborated on in the following subsection, with particular focus on studies that examined foreign language anxiety of advanced learners. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) reported that the most consistent finding of FLA literature is that the more anxious individuals are, the less successful they are in the language learning process. In other words, there is a stable negative correlation between language anxiety and second language achievement as empirical results show. Tóth (2009), however, demonstrated that apart from this congruent result researchers of foreign language anxiety still encounter numerous, arguable issues to address. Although the presence of the negative correlation between FLA and L2 achievement is widely accepted by the research sphere (Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), the aspects of interplay between foreign language anxiety and other constructs is still debated. For instance, research that has investigated how individuals' level of language proficiency influences the extent to which they feel anxious while using an L2 shows contradictory results (Tóth, 2011).

On the one hand, a group of studies showed that learners with lower language proficiency usually tend to experience higher levels of anxiety (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Similarly, as other investigations indicate, beginners or students who have not yet reached the intermediate proficiency level “were found to carry higher levels of L2-related anxiety” (Tóth, 2009, p. 226). Another group of publications elaborated on by Tóth (2011) have suggested that the anxiety level of students of different language proficiency was significantly not different. Furthermore, additional studies confirmed that some advanced learners are more anxious than those of lower language proficiency (Ewald, 2007). Therefore, the presupposition that the increasing level of language proficiency reduces the levels of perceived anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) turned out to be questionable and unproved, as more recent research shows. In order to find conclusive empirical evidence that could properly demonstrate the role and effect of proficiency level on L2-related anxiety, some researchers who intended to fill this gap in the literature, carried out investigations that observed students with advanced proficiency level.

One example for this intention is the study of Ewald (2007) which observed students’ foreign language anxiety in a relatively unstudied context, namely upper-level foreign language classroom. The participants in the study were 21 advanced students of Spanish (majors and minors) who were enrolled in advanced language courses in a university. The study intended to shed light on the complexities of the language learning process of advanced learners by examining the forms of their anxiety. The findings of the study illustrate that the participants find upper-level courses challenging but they do not necessarily label them as sources of anxiety. However, it has been also revealed that general lack of students’ self-confidence and their dissatisfaction with the design of the classes that they attend can make them feel anxious. Furthermore, as Ewald (2007) summarized, “students claimed to experience more anxiety in advanced Spanish courses than in courses in other disciplines or

in beginning and intermediate Spanish classes. They highlighted the impact that their classmates' knowledge and ability have on their anxiety" (p. 136). Ewald's study (2007) pointed out that student's unrealistic expectations of themselves are major sources of anxiety, as well. Out of the 21 participants, 14 have indicated that making mistakes in class makes them anxious; however, they realize that slips and errors are natural, unavoidable parts of the language learning process. This finding of the study supports the results of the empirical investigation conducted by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) on the negative correlation between perfectionism and FLA. Their mixed-method study which involved eight highly-anxious participants in the interview phase argues that, "impossibly high performance standards create the ideal conditions for the development of language anxiety" (p. 563). Perfectionist language learners wanted to speak completely flawless, similarly to those advanced-level learners of Spanish in the study of Ewald (2007), where students' main source of frustration and anxiety proved to be the natural act of making mistakes. In brief, language requirements of advanced courses, students' insecurity, evaluation of teachers in the classroom, and student's own unrealistically high expectations of their own language performance turned out to be potential anxiety provoking factors.

Identically to the investigation done by Ewald (2007), Tóth (2011) has also observed the manifestations of language anxiety within a group of advanced-level students of a foreign language. Tóth's study concentrated on the sources of the anxiety of Hungarian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) majors who were identified as highly-anxious in a previous study of the author (Tóth, 2009). The five participants, selected from a sample of 117 first year English majors, were interviewed in order to gain more information about the underlying components of their FLA. Moreover, they were asked about their language learning histories and experiences with the target language to explore the causes of their L2-related anxiety. The study found that highly anxious English majors experienced "rather unpleasant psycho-

physiological symptoms” (Tóth, 2011, p. 44) in their classes; for instance, trembling, sweating or faster heartbeat. Furthermore, the participants reported that these dreadful symptoms were also the source of further anxiety. The author suggested that the way advanced-level language students perceived their learning situation and the relatively high requirements of their university classes was a primary factor that made them anxious.

The fear of negative evaluation was also mentioned by the participants; however, interestingly, students happened to be more concerned about the negative comments of their peers than the in-class corrections of their mistakes made by teachers. Further results show that the Hungarian English majors in the study were generally worried about making mistakes while speaking their target language regardless of the presence of evaluation provided by classmates or instructors. Therefore, the results of Tóth (2011) were consistent with the findings of Ewald (2007) who pointed out that advanced learners of Spanish were highly concerned about making mistakes in language classes. In summary, these empirical studies that investigated the FLA of advanced-level students of different target languages revealed that lack of self-confidence, “student’s own lack of tolerance” (Ewald, 2007, p. 136), making mistakes, setting rigid, unreasoned goals and unreachable standards thus being perfectionist (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002) are the main sources of L2-related anxiety. Furthermore, the learning situation, involving the classroom, instructor, and course requirements also turned out to have an anxiety provoking potential. Finally and most importantly, the fear of harsh criticism (Tóth, 2011) that may be provided by peers in a language classroom has appeared as a serious cause of anxiety.

Despite the fact that anxiety has been in the focus of various L2 researchers for decades (Dörnyei, 2005) the majority of the studies dealing with this topic has used quite similar research methodologies for measuring anxiety. As MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) has argued, using questionnaires or developing structured interviews for gathering data are



reliable procedures; however, these approaches do not allow researchers to study affective factors including anxiety as they influence the process of communication from one moment to another. For this reason, MacIntyre (2012) has recommended an idiodynamic method, which is “a novel approach with a focus on the affective dimensions of communication as they unfold in real time, putting a metaphorical microscope on the variable(s) under study” (p. 362). Consequently, this method enables the studying of subtle components of communication thus providing opportunities for more thorough observation of FLA.

MacIntyre (2012) has suggested that the idiodynamic method has its roots in dynamic systems theory of human behaviour and development (van Geert, 2011). The theory claims that communication can be seen as the climatic point of numerous underlying systems that are never static and constantly have effects on each other. As deBot et al. (2007) summarised, dynamic systems have four major attributes. First of all, they are in a continuous flow: one state develops from its preceding state as time progresses. Second, dynamic systems are “characterized by what is called *complete interconnectedness*” (p. 8); elements of the system are inseparable and influence each other. Third, dynamic systems distinguish between *attractor* and *repeller* states, namely preferred and not preferred phases. Finally, even *attractor* states will be object to alternations due to different parts of the systems.

Thus, it is expected that studying L2-related anxiety from a dynamic systems perspective will provide better insight into how this affective factor fluctuates in a communication event. It is also anticipated that the “underlying mechanism that connect affect in general, or anxiety in particular, to language performance” (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p. 108) will be recognised in this study. So far, FLA research has mainly focused on correlations between affective factors and achievement, while numerous interview studies concentrated on the recollection of past language learning experiences of the participants. However, this paper intends to collect data from the self-assessment of English majors

immediately after they have been involved in a communication episode. Given these points, the idiodynamic approach will be used in the current thesis in order to identify the dynamic changes in the anxiety level of language learners enrolled in upper-level English courses.

The studies mentioned previously (Ewald, 2007; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Tóth, 2009, 2011) in this literature review wanted to expand the available knowledge of a relatively unknown context by investigating the sources of FLA experienced by advanced-level language learners. Although the empirical results discussed above shed light on the sources of anxiety within the classroom settings, they have not taken into consideration how language anxiety levels of students increase and decrease in different communication situations. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argued that “behaviour occurs with a person in context” (p. 88), thus contextual observation of FLA is essential to gain meaningful data. The reviewed studies used anxiety measures that gauge only L2-related anxiety; therefore, they have left out the observation of the role of students’ traits as a potential source of FLA. This indicates that so far little interest was demonstrated in examining the possible effects of personality and the general tendency to be anxious on FLA levels of language learners in university contexts.

This thesis intends to deal with these gaps in the literature by also investigating the relationship between trait anxiety and L2 anxiety of advanced language learners. Taking an idiodynamic approach, which allows for the thorough observation of alternating emotional states and affective factors, this paper also aims to examine the reason for anticipated rapid fluctuations of the FLA levels of upper-level English majors. The research questions to be answered in the proposed study are the following:

- (1) What are the sources of language anxiety experienced by advanced-level language students who are not anxious in general everyday situations?
- (2) How can we characterize the dynamic changes of FLA within anxious, advanced-level language learners while solving speaking tasks of different difficulty?

## Research Design and Method

### Design

This thesis has a sequential mixed method design (Dörnyei, 2007) with particular focus on the qualitative segment which was performed after the quantitative phase. This approach was chosen due to the beneficial attributes of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies which complement one another when combined. It was anticipated that triangulating data (Dörnyei, 2007) collected from distinct sources would result in better comprehension of the construct of foreign language anxiety. More specifically, by taking a mixed method perspective, common features in a certain population along with personal motives for individual behaviour could be investigated. Hence, the aim of the quantitative phase of this study was to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the correlation between trait anxiety and FLA of advanced L2 learners. The qualitative phase, being of main interest here, focused on participants' linguistic behaviour exploring the sources and the dynamic changes of their FLA while performing speaking tasks.

### Participants

In the quantitative segment of the study 45 participants (boys,  $n = 5$ ; girls,  $n = 40$ ) filled in an online survey. The sampling procedure used in this phase was convenience sampling, which is also known as opportunity sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). All of the participants were second-year BA in English majors who have passed a B2+ level proficiency examination, as defined in the "Common European Framework of Reference" standards (Council of Europe, 2001). Therefore, based on this qualification, the sample in this study consisted of upper-level speakers of English. More than 50% of the participants ( $n = 23$ ) have studied English for more than 10 years, whereas one of them claimed to have studied the language for 20 years. In the qualitative phase, four interview participants (girls,  $n = 4$ ) were selected from the sample of 45 university students, through purposive sampling.

## Instruments

The primary tool for data collection in this thesis was the Hungarian version of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-H) form Y (Sipos et al., 1983). This anxiety measure consisted of two independent scales, each containing 20 items, which were designed to gauge separately the temporal state (A-State) of anxiety and the proneness to be anxious in general (A-Trait). Trait anxiety was operationalized as the “stable tendency to attend to, experience, and report negative emotions such as fears, worries, and anxiety across many situations” (Gidron, 2013, p. 1989). In order to measure this construct, the A-Trait scale from the STAI form Y was used in the quantitative segment of the current study. The items could be rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale, where 4 indicated *always* and 1 indicated *never*. An example item is provided here: “I try to avoid facing a crisis or difficulty” / “A kritikus helyzetekkel és nehézségekkel való szembenézést igyekszem elkerülni” (see Appendix A).

The other instrument used in the quantitative part of the study was the Speaking Anxiety Scale adopted from Piniel (2014). In its original form, the scale consisted of 7 items which measured language learners’ anxiety while involved in different speaking situations, including classroom activity and interaction with peers in class or with native speakers out of class. In the adapted version an extra item was added and most of the statements of the scale were reformulated so that they referred to speaking activities performed in university language development courses. In order to illustrate this alternation, an example item is given: “Zavarba ejtő számomra a többi diák előtt angolul beszélni”. / “Zavarba ejtő számomra a többi diák előtt perceként angolul beszélni a nyelvfelkészítési kurzusokon”.

In the second phase of the study structured interviews were conducted in order to elicit qualitative data from the participants. The speaking tasks assigned to respondents were adopted from The European Language Certificates (TELC; 2007, 2013) practice exam books and were sequenced in increasing order of difficulty (see Appendix B). All of the tasks

required participants to give short presentations about three different topics. Respondents were asked to elaborate on topic one and topic two spontaneously; however, for topic three they were given a brief preparation time before they were told to start. The level names included in the specification of each task below are described by the “Common European Framework of Reference”, a standardized system which explains what a particular speaker is ideally able to do in the four major areas of language use (Council of Europe, 2001).

In the first, intermediate level speaking task, respondents had to describe the details of the flat or house they live in. Time limit for this task was 90 seconds. The second speaking task, which was the longest among the three, required upper-intermediate L2 abilities. In this task, respondents were asked to give a short presentation on a song or album they have listened to. Keywords in parentheses, related to music were provided in this task in order to help participants to concentrate on certain aspects of this broad topic. Time limit for this task was 150 seconds. The third oral task, in which respondents had to give a presentation on the positive and negative aspects of getting a job abroad required effective operational proficiency. Before this advanced-level task, participants were given a short time (max. 15 seconds) to prepare for the presentation. Time limit for this task was 90 seconds. A digital stopwatch was used during the tasks to measure speaking and preparation time of participants.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection took place during a 2-week period in the beginning of the spring semester of 2016 in Budapest, Hungary with university students. The procedures for data collection consisted of two main stages. Firstly, in the quantitative section, members of the relevant target population were contacted by e-mail and through appropriate groups of the most popular social network. An online questionnaire in Hungarian was distributed among them. They were asked to fill in this electronic survey, which contained the A-Trait scale

from the STAI form Y (Sipos et al., 1983) and the Speaking Anxiety Scale (Piniel, 2014). All of the participants were asked to provide their e-mail addresses for further communication. Secondly, in the next data collection stage of the quantitative part, which took place in March four participants having grades below the standardized score (Sipos et al., 1983) of the A-Trait scale, while demonstrating high levels of language anxiety based on the information elicited by the Speaking Anxiety Scale were invited via e-mail to participate in the subsequent part of the study. Respondents were encouraged to select their own pseudonyms; therefore, the names appearing in this research are fictitious in order to keep anonymity for each of the students who provided interview data. Quotations from participants were translated into English from Hungarian by the author of this paper, with the intention to keep the content of the original lines as much as possible in order to convey the intended thoughts of participants. Where it was necessary, technical corrections and adjustments of fragmented speech provided by respondents were made to make the interview data more accessible.

In the second, qualitative section an idiodynamic methodology (see MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011) was used for further data collection. This procedure consisted of three interlinked main stages which were carried out sequentially. These phases of the idiodynamic measurement approach had been clearly explained to the participating students before the qualitative information gathering procedure was started. Clarifying these stages was essential in order to avoid misunderstandings which may result in redundant communication breakdowns. In the first phase, structured interviews were organised, each lasting about 6 minutes. Before starting the interviews, participants were handed over a task sheet which contained the necessary written instructions to follow. A brief time was given for them to read the guidelines. Next, they were asked to solve speaking tasks of different proficiency level ranging from B1 to C1 (Council of Europe, 2001). This means that initially participants were assigned a basic communication task and then finally a relatively demanding one.

All of the interviews were camera recorded directly to a computer using a Panasonic HC-V100 Camcorder. Each of the approximately 6-minute clips was captured in *.mp4* format, a file extension that can be easily edited and processed on PC. While respondents completed the task, an observation scheme was used to monitor the following phenomena and behavioural patterns of them: visible signs of anxiety; elements of nonverbal communication; body language; posture; maintenance of eye contact; reasons for laughing and ways of laughing; whether participants speak fluently or hesitate frequently; whether participants speak coherently or jump from one thought to another; whether participant freeze up or remain self-confident while presenting the topics. Furthermore, notes were taken when participants provided explicit lexical or pronunciation mistakes (provided in *italics*).

In the second phase of the idiodynamic method, after students completed the speaking tasks of increasing difficulty, they were immediately asked to rate the moment-to-moment changes in their level of FLA, using the Anion Variable Tester V2, software specifically written for this purpose. With this application, participants could review their language performance which had been captured on video previously and rate it continuously on a scale ranging from (-5) to (+5). After the self-rating procedure, Anion V2 drew graphs based on participants' evaluation. Finally, in the third stage, participants were asked to give explanations on the alternating levels of their L2-related anxiety while reviewing the graph and then summarize their linguistic performance (Appendix C). These parts of the interviews were transcribed and analysed. The total time for each session was approximately 35 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data gained during the quantitative phase was interpreted using SPSS version 21. First, descriptive statistics were performed to examine some attributes of the sample. The reliability of the two anxiety measures by calculating Cronbach's Alphas was also checked. Furthermore, mean values of participants' scores on the scales and standard deviation of

those scores were also computed. These values are shown in Table 1. Then, Pearson correlation was run to determine whether there is any given relationship between trait anxiety and foreign language anxiety. In the next step, participants having trait anxiety value below the standardized average score calculated by Sipos et al. (1983) were selected. Their score achieved on the Speaking Anxiety Scale (Piniel, 2014) was analysed and four of them having higher scores than the sample's average were chosen for further participation. Finally, in the qualitative phase, content analysis was carried out to identify the emerging themes of the interviews related to the changes and sources of FLA of the participants.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

In the following section the results of the quantitative part of the study will be presented first, and then findings of the qualitative segment will be shown. In the first phase, the two observed constructs of this investigation were trait anxiety (A-trait) and foreign language anxiety (FLA). Quantitative results show that the research instruments which were used to gauge the proneness to be generally anxious (STAI-H, form Y; Sipos et al., 1983) and the specific anxiety reaction to L2 speaking situations (Speaking Anxiety Scale; Piniel, 2014) were reliable measures of FLA, demonstrating acceptable alpha reliability coefficients ( $\alpha \geq .90$ ) which are illustrated in Table 1. Subsequent results depict that the mean value of the observed sample's trait anxiety was higher than the standardized score ( $M = 46.13$ ) of university students ( $n = 111$ ) provided by the STAI manual (Sipos et al., 1983) for the validated Hungarian version of the scale. This result indicates that the English majors belonging to the current sample ( $n = 45$ ) of this study experience moderately higher levels of anxiety compared to those participants majoring in different disciplines who were observed in the study of Sipos et al. (1983). However, it must be noted that this result is neither generalizable nor representative of the population of Hungarian second-year English majors.



Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Anxiety Measures: Cronbach's Alpha, Mean, Standard Deviation*

Scale (item number)	$\alpha$	Mean	$\sigma$
A-Trait (20)	.92	47.08 <sup>a</sup>	11.19
FLA (8)	.90	19.13 <sup>b</sup>	8.03

*Note.* Theoretical range of A-Trait scale = 20–80. Theoretical range of Speaking Anxiety scale = 8–40. Higher scores indicate higher anxiety levels.

<sup>a</sup>Maximum A-Trait score = 69.00. Minimum A-Trait score = 26.00.

<sup>b</sup>Maximum FLA score = 36.00. Minimum FLA score = 8.00.

Furthermore, correlation analysis was conducted between the two constructs measured by the scales in order to calculate the relationship between them. Pearson's correlation coefficient showed that trait anxiety (A-Trait) and foreign language anxiety (FLA) are not correlated significantly ( $r = .286$ ,  $p = .057$ ). Thus, changes in the amount of participants' trait anxiety are not statistically linked to changes in their levels of foreign language anxiety. This result suggests that fluctuations in the first variable are not significantly associated with increases or decrease in the second variable. In summary, based on the analysed data, there is no clear linear relationship between the two constructs either because the collected information provides only insufficient evidence to make inferences or there are other factors which might influence the link between the scales. This result of the study is in line with the findings of MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) who argued that trait anxiety is a factor that proved to be not effective in prognosticating L2 achievement, a construct which is correlated negatively with FLA.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

After providing the results of the statistical analysis carried out in the study, the idiodynamic data gathered during the qualitative phase will be shown in the next segment. Firstly, anxiety scores will be mentioned, and then information about participants' behaviour, including language samples, signs of anxiety, nonverbal communication and other physical actions performed during the communications tasks will be elaborated on. Secondly, the

graphs provided by Anion V2 will be presented and reviewed in parallel with participants' explanation of the alternations of their anxiety level. The foreign language anxiety rating scale appearing on the graphs ranged from (-5) to (+5). The speaking time of respondents was measured in seconds and it is also included in the graphs. The main focus here is on the fluctuations of FLA levels experienced by participants with particular interest on the reason for these rapid changes. Grammatical and lexical accuracy of the actual language used by subjects is only of secondary importance to the current analysis; therefore, critical evaluation of these aspects of the language provided by participants is not included in this paper. Table 2 summarizes background and biographical information of the four participants of the qualitative phase of the study. There is a linear ratio between scores and levels of anxiety, thus high scores on both of the anxiety measures represent high levels of anxiety.

Table 2

*Scores on Trait- and Speaking Anxiety Scales; Years of Studying English*

Participants	A-Trait Score <sup>a</sup>	Speaking Anxiety Score	Year of Studying English
BB	38 <sup>b</sup>	33 <sup>c</sup>	14
Giselle	36	32	6
Erica	44	29	10
Jane	45	29	5

*Note.* Theoretical range of A-Trait scale = 20–80. Theoretical range of Speaking Anxiety scale = 8–40.

<sup>a</sup>Standardised score for females = 45.37 (Sipos et al., 1983).

<sup>b</sup>Maximum A-Trait score = 69.00. Minimum A-Trait score = 26.00.

<sup>c</sup>Maximum FLA score = 36.00. Minimum FLA score = 8.00.

**BB.** Based on the results of the online questionnaire survey, BB had the highest score on the Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLA = 33); however, the second-lowest value on the Trait Anxiety Scale (A-Trait = 38). After starting the first task, in which she had to explain the room or flat she lives in, her face immediately turned red and she crossed her arm, but considering solely her facial expressions she did not seem anxious. On the contrary, she maintained eye contact throughout all of the three tasks, and smiled a lot. She was even laughing quite a few times, but these laughs indicated the presence of anxiety, since she was

chuckling when she made a grammatical or lexical mistake or was looking for a word that she could not immediately utter. BB gave short answers and the pacing of her speech was relatively slow. When she was asked to move on to the second task (see Figure 1 from 108s; +4), which was in connection with music, albums, and lyrics, BB became jittery and started to feel uncomfortable. One visible sign of this was that she tried to find a comfortable position on her chair but was not able to do so; therefore, she was rapidly changing her posture while trying to start the presentation about the next topic.

Based on recorded video data and the notes taken during the interview, BB provided coherent speech; however, hesitated for a relatively long time between bursts and said “umm”, “er”, and “ah” since she could not retrieve words immediately when she wanted to. In some cases she used wrong idioms and did not manage to pay attention to tense agreement. When she realised her mistakes, she immediately broke eye contact and started to roll her eyes, but when she managed to continue her talk she established eye contact again. Even in situations when BB was visibly so anxious that she started to scratch her arms and face, which was constantly red, she organized her thoughts and used linking words to establish cohesion between the sentences of her presentations. While doing the third task, she ran out of ideas to express and stared rigidly at her task sheet while hesitating. During a longer period (from 192s to 209s) BB’s FLA self-rating was constantly (+5), which is the highest value on the rating scale used in this study. She showed signs of anxiety, for instance she bit her lips and started to shake her head but finally managed to finish the topic. Apart from this situation, where she froze up and seemed considerably anxious, BB successfully completed all of the tasks.

BB never switched to Hungarian during the interviews and did not ask any questions from the interviewer. When she had difficulties in explaining her thoughts she used intense hand gestures and fillers including “you know” and “you see”. Despite the fact that BB

remained seemingly highly anxious almost during the whole interview she did not abandon any of the tasks and overcame the language barriers by explaining her ideas using different words and nonverbal signs. She rated her FLA level mostly on a positive trajectory, while the lowest rating she gave herself was merely (-1) which occurred during the third task, but only five times. This indicates that she felt constant apprehension (see Figure 1). When she was asked why her FLA rating increased immediately after the interview has started, BB explained that she does not like to speak English in general, which claim is supported by her high Speaking Anxiety Score (FLA = 33). She also added that she was even extremely anxious before the interview, while sitting in class, since she did not know what would happen despite the fact that the structure of the idiodynamic method and details of the interview has been explained to her previously. In the second half of the first task, BB felt relief, since she was able to think over what to express in the remaining time, but her FLA level only approached zero and fluctuated around that value because as reported, she “experienced a constant fear”. FLA increased before the second task, music, since BB realized that she had no “plan” for the next presentation and she had “no clue” what to say about the next topic. She admitted that she always tried to plan ahead.

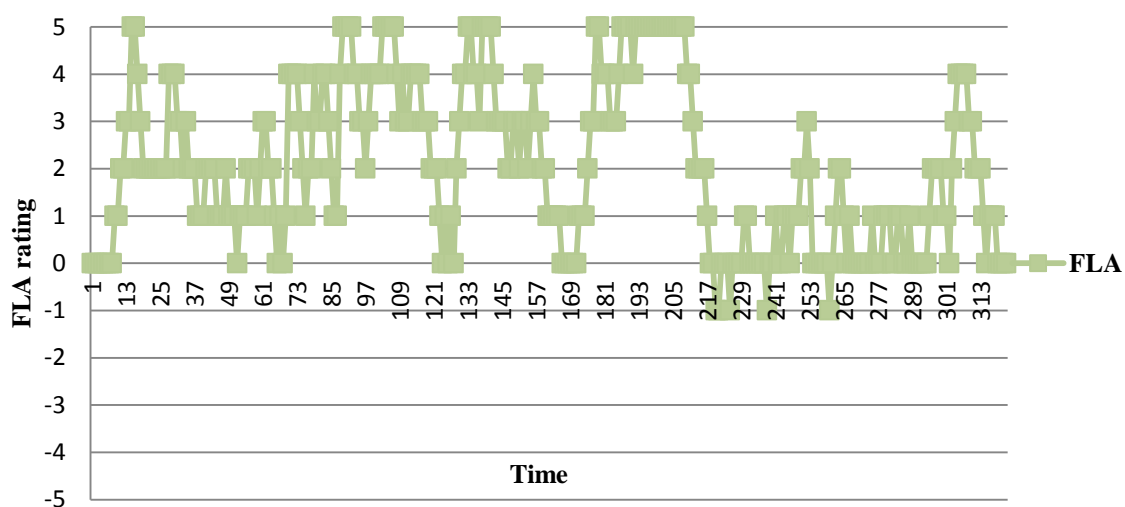


Figure 1. BB's idiodynamic FLA ratings. Speaking time is measured in seconds.

When BB was asked about why she finds it important to formulate ideas before an L2 communication situation instead of spontaneously expressing her ideas, she sadly reported the following:

Quite frankly, I don't speak English as good as I'd like to, I mean, I'm not satisfied with my proficiency level. Whenever people ask what my major is, I don't even mention my major, I just tell them the name of the university I attend, because I feel that it's so awkward, that I'm an English major, whereas I'm not as proficient as other English language majors. I'm always completely passive on language development courses, because if I compare myself to my peers, I must say that they were much better than me. This was the main reason why I felt particularly anxious before and during this session.

FLA decreased before the third task (from 268s), where she had to give a presentation about the advantages and disadvantages of getting a job abroad. Before this task 15 seconds preparation time was provided. As BB reported, this short period especially helped her to calm down moderately, since she eventually had time to think about what she would say in connection with the final task, as opposed to the previous task for which she had to prepare simultaneously while doing the first presentation. This statement is supported by Figure 1 which shows that during the preparation time (from 268s to 283s) preceding the third task BB's FLA ratings was fluctuating between (0) and (+1). Moreover, the maximum value of her FLA level was (+4) as opposed to previous tasks where she rated her anxiety level constantly with (+5) for a longer period (from 192s to 209s).

BB stated that if it had not been for the preparation time before the last topic, her FLA level would never have gone below zero during the interview. Fluctuations of anxiety around (+1) and (0) occurred, as she reported, because although she was able to talk about the topic coherently, word repetitions and her "messy sentences", as she described them, made her

anxious again. She also expressed that her familiarity with the last topic, getting a job abroad (advantages / disadvantages), made her more self-confident, since it was a topic they dealt with both in secondary school and during the preparation for the language proficiency examination, which is obligatory for English major students. BB also expressed, that the source of relief besides her knowledge about the task towards the end of the interview was the fact that she did not have to prepare for a fourth speaking task; however, her self-confidence faded away quickly when she could not find the word “appreciated” and uttered “*approciated*” instead (301s).

When BB was asked to compare her different emotional states during the three tasks, she explained that regardless task difficulty, she felt mostly calm during the last presentation because of the given preparation time and her extensive background knowledge about the topic. Furthermore, she knew that only three topics must be elaborated on during the session; therefore, she could exclusively focus on the final task and this helped her to produce grammatically correct sentences more quickly and without significant hesitations. Finally, BB explained that even though these factors helped her to stay self-confident and talk more, her anxiety level increased very easily, when she realized that she made a mistake and said something incorrect or “dumb”, as she reported. Visible signs of anxiety appeared on her while talking about these reasons; she bit her lips and struggled with finding the words, even though this part of the conversation was in Hungarian. As she explicated, her anxiety and dissatisfaction with her own language performance comes from her high expectations of herself. As BB pointed out, she believes that as a second-year English major, she should talk about these topics in a more sophisticated manner, without word repetitions and grammar errors. As she summarized, “the main reason for me being anxious is that I have something really well organized and clever in my mind, but I cannot express myself as nicely as I would like to”.

**Giselle.** Among the participants, Giselle had the most interesting ratio of anxiety scores. With 36 points on the A-Trait scale, which is considerably lower than the average score of women (A-Trait = 45.37), she had the least proneness in the sample to be anxious in general. However, she had the second-highest value on the Speaking Anxiety Scale (FLA = 32). At the beginning of the session she seemed calm and cheerful, yet she became visibly anxious as the recording of the interview started. She was wringing her hands and used lots of hand gestures to support her speech while elaborating on the details of her flat. She rarely maintained eye contact and began to nervously fidget on her chair whenever she made a minor mistake or realized that she repeated the word “apartment” multiple times in all of her introductory sentences used in the first task.

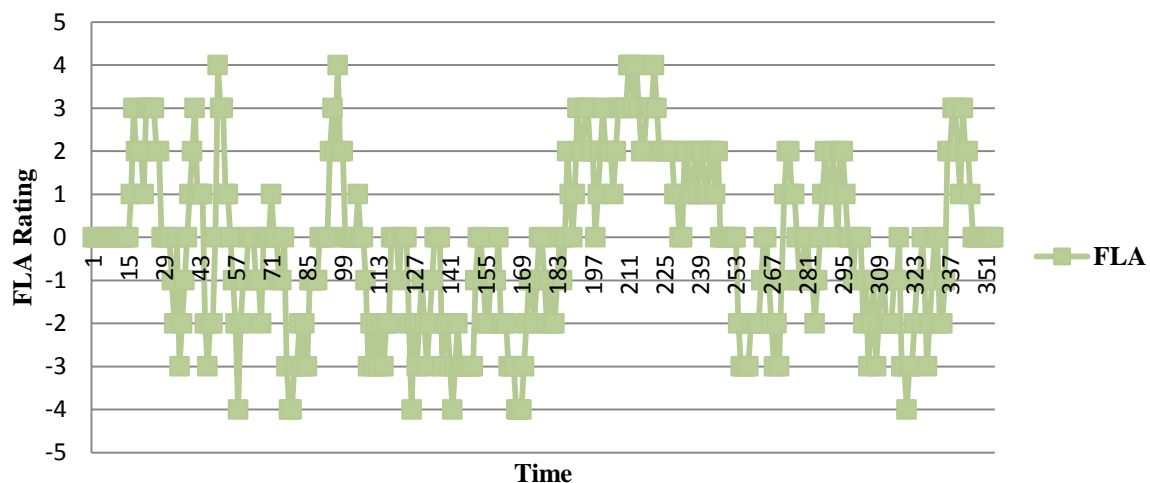


Figure 2. Giselle's idiodynamic FLA ratings. Speaking time is measured in seconds.

The FLA level of Giselle immediately increased (see Figure 2; 16s) as she started her presentation on the first topic. The reason for this, as she highlighted, is that she did not have any preconceived ideas and “plans” about how to approach this broad topic; thus, she suddenly became anxious. Furthermore, she was mixing the words “apartment”, “house”, and “flat” instead of using one term consistently and this, as she later explained caused bafflement in her mind. Then, she managed to come up with a plan for the presentation while talking and decided to simply enumerate pieces of furniture and rooms in her flat; therefore,

FLA significantly decreased (see Figure 2) in the middle of the first task (from 50s to 67s). However, this technique seemed to be problematic, since Giselle could not retrieve all of the words she wanted to and when she failed to provide the word “built-in balcony” her self-reported level of anxiety immediately jumped to (+4) from (0). After completing the first task, Giselle was talking freely about music and her favourite bands. Seemingly, she enjoyed this topic very much; she established eye contact and smiled. Her self-rating was in negative and neutral trajectory (from 105s to 185s) but surprisingly she sighed loudly at the end of her sentences and stopped her speech only for some moments, when she said “umm” (125s; -2). Apart from 10 seconds her FLA ratings were in negative trajectory from 125s to 185s, which indicates that she felt safe during the second task. Giselle pointed out, that she used to talk a lot about this topic, and hence she provided her presentation automatically, without stressful planning or thinking.

Later, Giselle also added that the second topic is absolutely her cup of tea and she could talk about it for hours, since music is part of her life. Another reason why her response was clearly confident, and her FLA level remained under (0), is that she usually talks about her favourite bands in English. As she reported, she is fond of certain Japanese performers and musicians. Giselle explained that many of her friends who like the same music are from foreign countries; hence, they use English as a contact language to talk about this topic. She said that “obviously this topic is easy for me for two reasons: I’m familiar with it, plus usually I have to talk about it in English”. Next, she also added that it would be more demanding for her to elaborate on this theme in her mother tongue because there are certain words that she could only provide in Hungarian by using the word-for-word translation technique. In the middle of the second task after discussing the details that she found the most important in connection with the topic, Giselle had difficulties because she finished her monologue and no new content came to her mind, but she knew that she still had enough time



to talk about the music, albums or lyrics. This resulted in her FLA level increasing from (-1) to consistently positive trajectory (see Figure 2; from 185s to 246s).

Although she broke eye contact and stared at the desk in front of her for some seconds and seemed considerably anxious, she did not revert to Hungarian, but instead she asked in English how much time she had for finishing the topic. After she was informed, she loudly exhaled, and then leaned on her elbow and asked “what shall I say about it?” (223s; +2). Interestingly, as she indicated, after asking this question and thinking about the subsequent content points, her FLA level, based on her retrospective self-rating moderately decreased and she was able to link her previous ideas to new ones. During the preparation time which was provided before the last task Giselle was completely calm, she was reading the information on the sheet in front of her and started the final task with negative FLA. During this task, Giselle’s self-reported anxiety level alternated quickly and moved sharply from (-4) to (+3). Initial low anxiety levels (from 277s; 0) were the result of the available preparation time, whereas moderately increasing FLA (from 287; +1 to +3) values could be explained by Giselle’s fear that she may suddenly run out of content; therefore, she cannot talk about the topic for the required time.

Despite the fact that Giselle had the second-highest Speaking Anxiety Score (FLA= 32) among the participants, she seemingly remained mostly calm and self-confident during the session. Her FLA self-ratings, however, remained more in positive or neutral domain (197 seconds) than in negative one (148 seconds), thus her behaviour was not completely in line with her idiodynamic data. Furthermore, her self-rating shows that those few lexical mistakes that she made during the interview were potential sources of her increasing apprehension. Giselle explained that she always plans ahead while communicating in English, but this strategy can be really troublesome because sometimes she utters thoughts that were not planned at all before the conversation and this failure of thinking ahead provokes more

anxiety. She also added when was asked about the reasons for the fluctuations in the last task, that she instinctively repeats herself when she speaks in English in order to “make it more clear what I’m saying” during a conversation.

Giselle reported that her familiarity with these topics is a factor which can easily depress the level of her FLA; however, she admitted that she had difficulties with narrowing down the second, her favourite, topic or evoke specific lyrics and songs to talk about; therefore, her inability to make a well-organised presentation about a topic she is familiar with triggered intermediate level of anxiety. Finally, Giselle summarised how she felt during the session, comparing the tasks and her emotions towards them. Even if she considered the first topic relatively easy, Giselle reported that she was relatively anxious while talking about that, since she is always anxious at the beginning of every conversation and she needs some time to warm up and calm down. She explained that during the second task she felt relaxed and balanced when started to talk about the topic but suddenly became anxious after she had realised that it is demanding to spontaneously talk about even a well-known, everyday topic. Giselle also added that after finishing a presentation she always became calm. In addition, she felt relief before the third task because she was aware that the session would end soon.

**Erica.** The next participant in the interview phase of the study was Erica whose A-Trait score (A-Trait = 44) approximated the standardised anxiety score of females (A-Trait = 45.37; Sipos et al., 1983). Her Speaking Anxiety score was, however lower (FLA = 29) than that of the previous participants, but this score is still considerably higher than the mean score of the sample on this scale (FLA = 19.13). During the 6-minute presentation segment of the conversation Erica seemed considerably anxious and frustrated. This is in line with her idiodynamic self-evaluation since she rated her FLA level in positive or neutral trajectory for 313 seconds; whereas, she reported to have felt calm for only 30 seconds. Physical symptoms of anxiety appeared on her even before she started to talk about the first topic. Erica was

continuously playing with her ring and sometimes put her hands into her pocket. Furthermore, she anxiously twisted her hair around her forefinger while looking at her task sheet. When she froze up during a presentation, she covered her face and awkwardly chuckled or started to scratch her head and used lots of hesitation devices such as “umm” and “ahh”. She did not establish permanent eye contact and looked at mostly on the table and the presentation topics written on the guideline sheet. She kept her legs crossed throughout the whole session and never leaned back in her chair. Erica tended to forget words in the middle of her presentations and covered her face quite a few times. Moreover, her face became pale after she was asked to elaborate on the first topic.

Before responding to the first task, Erica started to fidget convulsively while she was clearing her throat. She failed to utter the first word that she wanted, so she had to restart her sentence, but surprisingly her FLA level increased only moderately (from 16s ; +1 to +2). The reason for this minor rise, as she admitted, is that she knows multiple rehearsed introductory sentences that she can just simply evoke automatically when asked to talk about a topic like living environment. She explained that the theme was not demanding at all and she became anxious only at the moment when she realized that new ideas, which are not learned and rehearsed in advance, must be expressed in order to fill time and complete the task. As she reported, “I always have one or two introductory sentences that I know by heart, and then I know that I have to elaborate on the topic for which I have not prepared in advance and that’s why I became anxious”. She indicated that her FLA level jumped from (0) to (+5) and remained in the positive domain for approximately 30 seconds (from 28s to 56s) in the middle of the first task when she could not retrieve basic words such as “bathroom”. Erica attempted to diverge from the topic by talking about things that are only slightly related to the details of her house because, as she argued, talking about family is easier than about their house. As Erica added, “this house topic... I usually don’t talk about my house”.

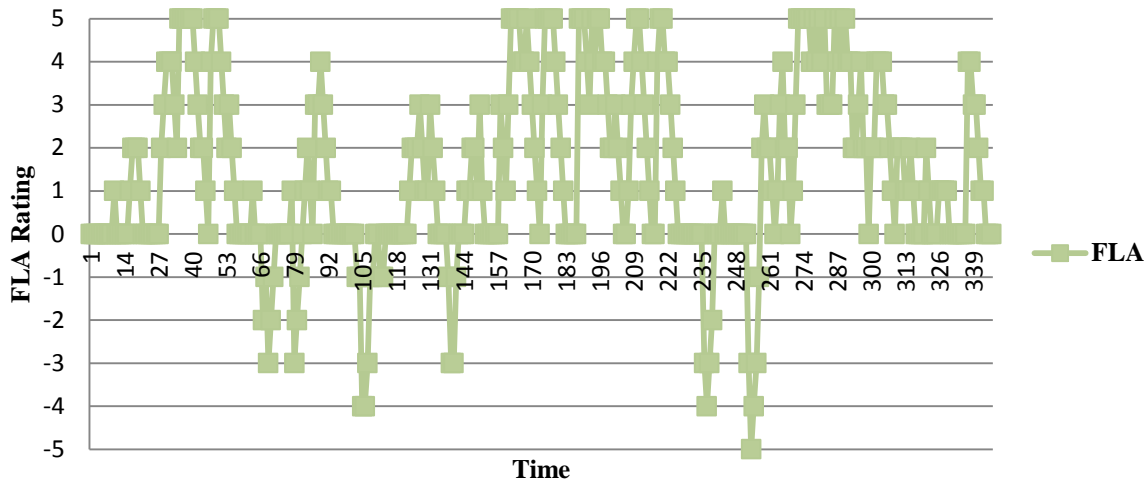


Figure 3. Erica's idiodynamic FLA ratings. Speaking time is measured in seconds.

As soon as she started to present ideas that were only slightly related to the assigned topic, her FLA dropped and remained under (0) for approximately 20 seconds. However, when she returned to the topic and started to describe their house again, she became anxious since she repeatedly had trouble with finding the proper terms (see Figure 3 from 83s to 93s) after explain that they had a garage in the house as well. When she was asked to move on to the second task, music, Erica laughed awkwardly and started to wring her hands again. In spite of this, her FLA level moved to negative domain, and remained there for another 20 seconds due to two main reasons. Firstly, Erica simply read out the topic loud, which does not require any thinking or planning thus she could remain relaxed and calm, as she reported. Secondly, instead of directly responding to the question, Erica started to criticise the second topic (from 103s; -1), stating that she hates this subject, because it is not an easy issue to talk about. Throughout the rest of the second task, she felt easy and seemed cheerful; however, she became anxious and confused when she was not sure if the words she used in certain environments make sense or not. For instance, she used the word “mood” then froze up, then used many hand gestures and said “umm, or I don’t know”. When she was looking for new content to tell, she frequently asked “what else?” while her FLA level continuously increased. When she was not sure whether her pronunciation of some words was correct or improper,

she tried to utter those word using two different variants, such as in the case, when she said “lyrics” well, then uttered is as “*lairics*” (201s; +2).

In the retrospective interview, Erica explained that while she used phrases like “what else” and “I don’t know” she remained considerably anxious despite the fact that she gained some seconds to think more about the topic by including these elements of hesitation in her presentations. As reported, she felt extremely tense while she was thinking about what to say in the remaining time; nevertheless, she could use fillers subconsciously which positively surprised her. While hesitating in the second task, her reported FLA level jumped up to the maximum value (+5), several times. When was told to move on to the final presentation, getting a job abroad, she laughed loud and crouched in her chair then finally took an unnatural posture while she prepared for the third task. Erica started the last (from 270s) task with positive FLA (+1) which again suddenly increased up to (+5) and fluctuated around that value. The reason for this was that Erica initially did not manage to mention any positive and negative aspects of getting a job abroad. First, she just quickly mentioned these keywords and then unexpectedly froze up for multiple seconds.

Then, she experimented with listing positive aspects, but after saying the phrase “for example, if you have a job abroad” she was not able to continue the presentation fluently. From this point in the communication event (from 279s to 315s), her FLA remained continuously in positive trajectory. Erica was rolling her eyes and pulled faces, but finally she managed to come up with ideas and as she progressed toward the end of the last topic, her anxiety level constantly decreased. There was, however, one exception when she felt particularly anxious, since she could not say the proper idiom “make friends”; thus, she used an incorrect form, “*get friends*”, which was accompanied with fast hand gestures and hesitation markers like “umm” and “err”. As Erica summarised, she was the most anxious during the second task because she felt that she completely “messed up” the first presentation

and this influenced her performance of the second task. She expressed, that she liked the third topic that she considered a routine presentation, which she used to practice a lot. Erica also claimed that by the time she started the last topic, she felt self-confident and warmed up because of her experiences with the previous two tasks.

After discussing the reasons for changes in her FLA level, Erica explained that there is a general basis behind the presence of her language anxiety in L2 communication situations. She explained that she has only one language development seminar in the current semester where they do not practice and speak as much as she would like to. They watch movies and have brief discussion about them, as she reported. Erica reported that “lately, at the university we are not required to speak English intensively on language development seminars, we just watch films so that’s why I’m not experienced in speaking English”. As she pointed out, daily practice and L2 conversations would be essential for foreign language majors in order to become experienced speakers of the target language that they learn. Erica also mentioned that her mood and emotions changed from sentence-to-sentence during the session. In cases where she was able to speak coherently, without any mistakes, she remained calm. As opposed to this, she immediately became anxious when she made a lexical or grammatical mistake. Because of her anxiety she claimed to lose focus and provide less accurate sentences which also had further anxiety provoking potential. This is illustrated on Figure 3 from 185s to 204s, where Erica reported to have been considerably anxious.

**Jane.** Jane who was the last participant of the study provided interesting qualitative data which is relatively different from the other three datasets collected during the second phase of this study. She had a score on the A-Trait scale (A-Trait = 45) which was the closest to the standardized score for females (A-Trait = 45.37; Sipos et al., 1983), but a lower score (FLA = 29) on the Speaking Anxiety scale as opposed to the first two participants, BB and Giselle. What made Jane’s data special is that she never rated her FLA level in the negative

domain but she showed only minimal visible signs of communication apprehension despite the fact that her score on the second anxiety measure (FLA = 29) was considerably higher than the mean Speaking Anxiety score (FLA = 19.13) of the observed sample. Jane seemed very calm while she presented the assigned topics and did not use any hand gestures. She only crossed her leg and fixed her palms on her knees during the three presentations. She maintained stable eye contact and only broke it, when she moved on to the next theme and quickly read the instructions before starting.

Based on recorded video data and the notes taken during the interview, Jane was speaking fluently and made only negligible amount of mistakes which were rather random slips of tongue and not systematic deviations from rules. Jane used cohesive, long sentences and advanced vocabulary. She talked about all of the three topics coherently, applied lots of linking words and coordinators (“I’d like to mention a few; as far as I know”), and started her presentations with useful introductory phrases. Hesitation devices only minimally occurred in her speech. Jane started to respond to the first task with neutral level (0) of FLA and seemingly the house/flat topic was not demanding for her, because she gave herself only moderate ratings for this task with the maximum value (+3) which occurred only once during this theme (58s). This rating is even more interesting if the speaking sample is reviewed once again because no mistakes were made at the time when the rating was (+3) and Jane seemed as relaxed as during the neutral FLA rating periods. In the beginning of the second topic, which was music, her language anxiety level remained at zero for more than 20 seconds (from 120s to 136s), and only increased until (+4) towards the end of the task where Jane seemingly ran out of content. At this point she minimally shrugged her shoulders and shook her head, then continued her presentation by mentioning further examples of her favourite bands and musicians. When asked about this increase Jane simply stated that she did not have any ideas about how to continue the topic.

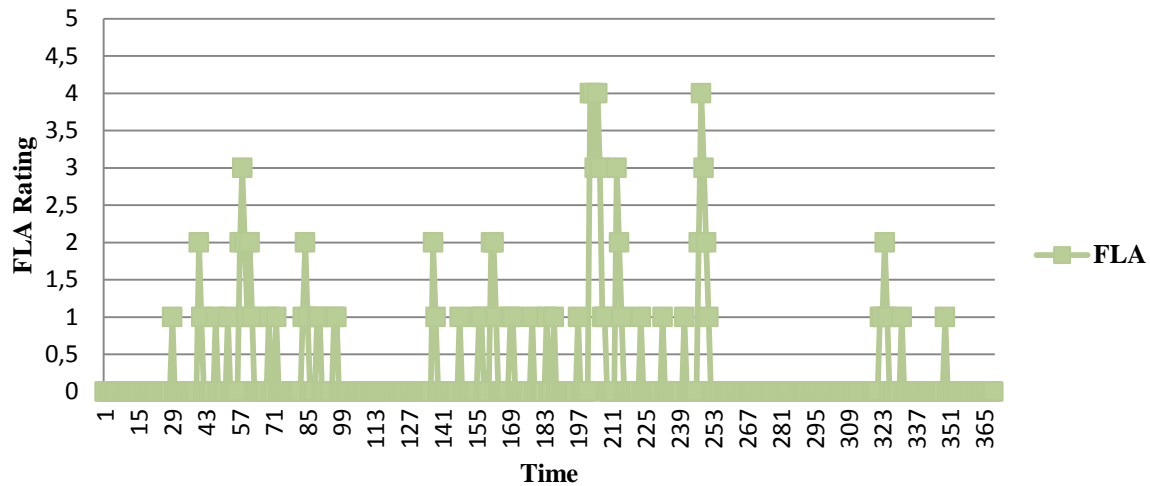


Figure 4. Jane's idiodynamic FLA ratings. Speaking time is measured in seconds.

During the preparation time (from 270s to 285s) preceding the “getting a job abroad” topic, Jane remained calm (0) and she read the instructions carefully. She started the third task with neutral FLA level (0) and she almost completed the whole task without indicating a higher FLA rating than zero. Her anxiety level increased only by the end of the task where she stopped for a second, broke eye contact, pulled some struggling faces, and then continued the presentation. This situation was very similar to the one which occurred during the second task; however, in this moment Jane rated her FLA level only with (+2), while in the former situation it increased until (+4) according to her rating. Her self-rating indicates that she was the least anxious participant of the interview phase, which is also supported by her Speaking Anxiety score (FLA = 29). Taking these data into consideration, her verbal evaluation of her language performance, elaborated on in the next paragraph, and anxiety levels is surprising.

After completing the three tasks and the idiodynamic rating part of the session, Jane stated that she considered the short silent periods really awkward even if her highest self-rating point was not higher than (+4). She said that “those situations are really bad and tense when there is silence and I don't know how I should compose my next sentences, but it is even worse when I have no clue what to talk about next”. Jane added that being unable to retrieve a basic word such as “virtuoso” or “window” made her anxious, but looking for a



certain term caused her less anxiety than “trying to find the topic itself”. When asked why she did not rate her FLA level in a negative domain, Jane stated that she does not like speaking in general, which is not an exclusively L2 specific issue, but it applies to Hungarian communication situations as well. In line with her anxiety scores (A-Trait = 45), she argued that being a bit anxious all the time is her personal trait; therefore, during this presentation she did not feel more comfortable than usually. Jane also argued that she constantly felt certain amount of anxiety, thus when she was not especially anxious she did not rate her FLA level in the negative domain but instead, she let the software set the level back to default (0).

### **Discussion**

The first research question of the study addressed the sources of language anxiety experienced by advanced-level language students who are not anxious in general everyday situations. Results of the quantitative analysis showed that trait anxiety and foreign language anxiety are two constructs which were not correlated significantly. This indicated that the stable tendency to experience apprehension (Spielberger et al., 1970) or low levels of trait anxiety was not linked to the FLA levels perceived by language learners and users. This result is in agreement with the findings of MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) who pointed out that trait anxiety has a limited role in determining L2-related variables. However, the final account of Jane, provided during the qualitative data collection procedures suggested that for some individuals trait anxiety can still have an effect on their foreign language anxiety. As she reported, “I don’t like speaking that much because of my personality”, which indicated that this personal attribute of Jane was relevant to general and L2 communication situations, as well. Based on the contradictory findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study could not provide a convincing body of evidence to show whether trait anxiety was a potential source of foreign language anxiety of advanced learners or it was not related to it.

However, explicit sources of FLA were identified with the help of the idiodynamic method and participants' report on their linguistic performance. In agreement with the study of Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), this thesis found that perfectionism may be a primary source of language anxiety for advanced learners. This finding is supported by the report of BB, who expressed that she could not elaborate on the topics "as nicely as" she wanted to. Furthermore, Giselle also added that she wanted to give a "well-organised presentation" which she failed to do, according to her self-evaluation. Additional results showed that FLA level increased when respondents had to speak spontaneously, without preparation time and planning. For instance, Jane reported that she needed "a little pause" while talking about the second topic because she could not elaborate on the topic fluently since she did not have the opportunity to plan in advance.

As respondents had to give presentations for a determined time period, their anxiety level increased when they felt that they "ran out of things to say", Jane explained. Giselle, for example, suddenly stopped towards the end of the second task and seemed considerably anxious while she tried to find new content to express. At this period, she gave herself the highest FLA rating (+4) of the whole session; therefore, based on this result it may be stated that having no concept of what to say during an L2 related communication situation triggered anxiety even for advanced learners. Erica also had difficulties with talking about music for 2 1/2 minutes and her FLA level increased as she presented all of her ideas and realised that there is still time to present further details. Subsequent results of the study suggested that silent periods during the interviews triggered anxiety within the participants. Erica stated that while she stopped and remained silent she could not calm down and felt really awkward. Jane also explained that during these stops she could only think about the fact that she had to give a presentation for a specified time interval. She reported that "I tried to talk about different songs in order to fill time, but music is a topic I can talk about only for a limited time".

The idiodynamic approach also made it possible to identify numerous factors that reduced the FLA level of respondents. In line with MacIntyre and Legatto (2011), further results of the qualitative part of the study indicated that participants' familiarity with the presentation topics made their anxiety levels decrease. BB and Erica explained that they have encountered the third topic, getting a job abroad, on exams several times, while Giselle and Jane claimed that this was an everyday conversation topic; thus, having background knowledge about a topic resulted in participants' lower levels of self-reported FLA. Giselle also reported that her FLA levels always decreased as she managed to finish a presentation. Consistent foreign language anxiety patterns related to certain tasks (see MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011) were not identified, but participants reported that they felt relatively calm during the third task because they knew that they were not required to talk about a fourth presentation topic. Erica also explained that she used rehearsed introductory sentences during the interview which contributed to her initially low levels of anxiety. A further finding of the study was that preparation time turned out to be a factor which decreased FLA levels for three out of the four participants; BB remained moderately anxious even during that interval.

Preparation time was provided before the last task, which theoretically was the most demanding, advanced-level presentation topic; however, respondents' self-ratings showed that, surprisingly, theoretical task difficulty did not affect FLA levels. What contributed to the alternations of language anxiety perceived by participants was the position of the task within the interview. The more respondents spoke, the more relaxed they became; therefore, in the beginning they were anxious while talking about the intermediate level task, details of flat or house, but they seemed calm during the third presentation which should have been the most difficult task. This was supported by their FLA self-ratings (see Figure 1). Hence, based on these results, speaking time is inversely proportional to the amount of foreign language anxiety, while theoretical task difficulty proved to be a factor that does not affect FLA levels.

Although BB was not asked to elaborate on whether peers or teachers are possible sources of anxiety, the role of other students in triggering FLA within the classroom was one emerging theme during the her session. The literature on this issue has various results. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that the highly-anxious participants in their study usually “tended to fear the evaluation of their peers and the subsequent possibility of appearing foolish” (p. 567). In other words, the criticism that their peers may have on their performance made them feel more apprehensive and; therefore, less self-confident. In contrast to this finding, Ewald (2007) reported that peers were not sources of anxiety for participants, because, as it was explained by them they were “on the same page” (p. 130). However, the study highlighted the primary role of the teacher in creating an unpleasant atmosphere and anxiety within learners. These findings mentioned above are partially supported by Tóth (2011) who also pointed out that “embarrassing and frustrating as teachers’ corrections and negative remarks may have been, the five anxious interviewees did not attach as much importance to teachers in creating anxiety as to their fellow classmates” (p. 48). Therefore, peers were considered to have been sources of harsher criticism, thus they had higher anxiety provoking potential than the teacher.

Based on the interview data collected during the session of BB, the current observation suggest that in the case of advanced-level students, peers indeed have a role in causing apprehension; however, it must be noted that only one interview participant out of the four presented her feelings in connection with this topic. Supporting the findings of Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), BB reported that compared to other students’ proficiency level on her language development course, her language skills are poorer and she claimed that others were “much better” than her. However, she also added that she “really liked the teacher”, who was “really good”. Therefore, her account of this theme is in line with the findings of Tóth (2011); teachers’ comments are less anxiety provoking than those of peers.

The second research question addressed the characteristics of the dynamic changes of foreign language anxiety. As the discussion showed, respondent's familiarity with the presentation topic was a factor that initially contributed to lower levels of FLA. However, as the results suggested, rapid changes within an individual's emotional state can occur regardless of one's knowledge about the topic. For instance, Giselle started the second task, talking about music, with FLA rating consistently in the negative domain, but despite the fact that she liked the topic and knew a lot about it, she ran out of content and was stuck in the middle of her presentation. This made her FLA level increase immediately. Further results suggested that fluctuations in the FLA level of the respondents were caused by the inability to retrieve a basic word during the presentation. While discussing the topics, all of the participants had difficulties finding certain lexical items which were major sources of their suddenly rising anxiety levels. Furthermore, respondents reported that making mistakes made them lose their self-confidence and resulted in growing FLA levels. This finding corresponds to the results of Tóth (2011) and Ewald (2007) who pointed out that advanced students' realisation of their own language mistakes has a large anxiety provoking potential.

The qualitative results also support the findings of deBot et al. (2007) who proposed that dynamic system are in *complete interconnectedness*, which means that a subtle change in the system may have even a much bigger effect in other parts of the system. This is indicated by the report of Erica, who expressed that she carried over her negative feelings that she experienced during the first task to the second task and this made her performance on that presentation worse. Erica claimed that "the second task was the worst because of the topic and I also felt that the first task I couldn't complete well and this had an impact on the second as well". The same phenomenon was recorded by MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) who reported that "carry-over effects" (p. 159) were described by participants of their study. In other words, poor performance of a certain task had an impact on further accomplishment.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the sources and rapid changes of foreign language anxiety experienced by advanced language learners by using an idiodynamic method, a relatively novel approach in the examination of individual differences in language learning. The quantitative results suggested that participants' trait anxiety was not explicitly correlated with their FLA, but numerous other factors that have anxiety provoking potential were identified in the qualitative phase of the study. For instance, students' dissatisfaction with their own performance, speaking without given preparation time for a specified interval, running out of content during a presentation, and the inability to evoke certain lexical elements were sources of language anxiety for advanced learners. Whereas, the opportunity to plan ahead, familiarity with the topic to be presented, and using rehearsed sentences made the anxiety levels of respondents decrease.

Peers' behaviour and differences between students in terms of language skills also turned out to have been a factor which might create apprehensive atmosphere within the classroom. The teachers' role in triggering anxiety was only partially discussed; however, findings suggest that the attitude of the course instructor may have an anxiety decreasing effect within the classroom in advanced-level context. Results also indicated that the idiodynamic methodology was an effective approach to the observation of the subtle changes that occur within the emotional state of language learners. This method also highlighted that within a communication episode, every alternation of the FLA levels is the result of a previous event. Therefore, as it has been presented in the discussion, familiarity with a presentation topic was only of secondary importance for the participants, since when they made minor mistakes during a presentation or ran out of content, their initial lower levels of FLA suddenly increased and remained in a positive domain influencing their performance.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Since results show that advanced language learners, similarly to students with lower levels of language proficiency, also experience foreign language anxiety deriving from multiple sources, teachers of foreign languages should consider that affective factors have an effect on L2 achievement even in the higher level language classrooms. Teachers need to emphasise that most of the sources of FLA that appeared in this research are minor issues and making mistakes while talking is a natural act and; therefore, it should be handled more flexibly by speakers. Language instructors in university context need to acknowledge the importance of supporting atmosphere, which facilitates in class learning. Teachers should also raise awareness of students' strengths with regard to their language skills and pay attention to the competence areas that individuals need to develop. Language teachers have to take into consideration that students' low self-esteem and irrationally high linguistic expectations of themselves may be a primary source of their foreign language anxiety.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

The limitations of this study include the relatively small scale of participants ( $n = 45$ ) in the first phase and the fact that only four female respondents were chosen for the interviews in the first phase. In the future, a larger scale study, with a qualitative part that includes male participants as well would be beneficial to further describe the potential sources of language anxiety of advanced learners. In a subsequent idiodynamic study, interview tasks should be arranged in changing difficulty level in order to identify the effect of theoretical task difficulty on FLA levels. Since this study could not find conclusive evidence for the possible interplay between trait anxiety and foreign language anxiety further research should be devoted to this issue in order to clarify how the general tendency to experience apprehension is related to the anxiety that is perceived by individuals in L2-related communication events.

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## Appendix A

**Vonás Szorongás Kérdőív (önértékelési lap)**

Sipos, K., & Sipos, M. (1983). The development and validation of the Hungarian form of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. In C. D. Spielberger & R. Diaz-Guerrero (Eds.), *Cross-cultural anxiety* (Vol. 2) (pp. 27-39). Washington, D. C.: Hemisphere.

Néhány olyan megállapítást olvashatsz az alábbiakban, amelyekkel az emberek önmagukat szokták jellemezni. Figyelmesen olvasd el valamennyit és az alábbi táblázatban karikázd be a megfelelő számot attól függően, hogy

**ÁLTALÁBAN HOGYAN ÉRZED MAGADAT**

Nincsenek helyes, vagy helytelen válaszok. Ne gondolkodj túl sokat, hanem azt a választ jelöld meg, amely általában jellemző rád.

	soha	néha	gyakran	mindig
1. Jól érzem magam.	1	2	3	4
2. Gyorsan elfáradok.	1	2	3	4
3. Könnyen elsirom magam.	1	2	3	4
4. Szeretnék olyan boldog lenni, mint amilyennek mások látszanak.	1	2	3	4
5. Sokszor hátrányos helyzetbe kerülök, mert nem tudom elég gyorsan elhatározni magam.	1	2	3	4
6. Kipihentnek érzem magam.	1	2	3	4
7. Nyugodt, megfontolt és tettekész vagyok.	1	2	3	4
8. Úgy érzem, hogy annyi megoldatlan problémám van, hogy nem tudok úrrá lenni rajtuk.	1	2	3	4
9. A semmiségeket is túlzottan a szívemre veszem.	1	2	3	4
10. Boldog vagyok.	1	2	3	4
11. Hajlamos vagyok túlságosan komolyan venni a dolgokat.	1	2	3	4
12. Kevés az önbizalmam.	1	2	3	4
13. Biztonságban érzem magam.	1	2	3	4
14. A kritikus helyzetekkel és nehézségekkel való szembenézést igyekszem elkerülni.	1	2	3	4
15. Csüggedtnek érzem magam.	1	2	3	4
16. Elégedett vagyok.	1	2	3	4
17. Lényegtelen dolgok is sokáig foglalkoztatnak, és nem hagynak nyugodni.	1	2	3	4
18. A csalódások annyira megviselnek, hogy nem tudom a fejemből kiverni őket.	1	2	3	4
19. Kiegyensúlyozott vagyok.	1	2	3	4
20. Feszült lelkiállapotba jutok és izgatott leszek, ha az utóbbi időszak gondjaira, bajaira gondolok.	1	2	3	4

## Appendix B

Speaking Tasks Adopted from “The European Language Certificates” Practice Exam Books

B1 – intermediate (TELC)

Please, describe the details of your house/flat in 1 1/2 minutes.

B2 – upper intermediate (TELC)

Give a short presentation (2 1/2 minutes) on the following topic:

- A song or album you have listened to (music, style, lyrics, etc.)

C1 – advanced (TELC)

Give a presentation (1 1/2 minutes) on the following topic. You have a short time (max. 15 seconds) to prepare a presentation on the following topics.

- The positive and negative aspects of getting a job abroad.

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide for the Last Phase of the Idiodynamic Data Collection Procedure

The following questions were asked during the discussion of changes in FLA self-ratings provided by interview participants:

- Mi okozta a szorongási szinted csökkenését az egyes feladatok alatt?
- Mi okozta a szorongási szinted növekedését az egyes feladatok alatt?
- Hogy érezted magad az egyes feladatok alatt és miért érezted magad úgy?
- Hogy érezted magad az egyes feladatok végén és miért érezted magad úgy?
- Ha ideges voltál, annak mi volt az oka?
- Ha nyugodt voltál, annak mi volt az oka?
- Ha összehasonlítod az egyes feladatok alatt megélt szorongási szintjeidet, akkor milyennek ítéled meg őket egymáshoz viszonyítva?
- Nehéznek találtad az első / második / harmadik feladatot?
- Könnyűnek találtad az első / második / harmadik feladatot?
- Elégedett voltál a válaszaiddal az első / második / harmadik feladat alatt?
- Ha nem voltál elégedett a válaszaiddal az első / második / harmadik feladat alatt, annak mi volt az oka?