УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ „ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ“ - ШТИП
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

UDC 81
UDC 82
UDC 008

ISSN: 2545-3998
DOI: 10.46763/palim

ПАЛИМПСЕСТ

МЕЃУНАРОДНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА ЛИНГВИСТИЧКИ, КНИЖЕВНИ И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

PALIMPSEST

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LINGUISTIC, LITERARY AND CULTURAL RESEARCH

PALMK, VOL 8, NO 15, STIP, 2023

ГОД. VIII, БР. 15
ШТИП, 2023

VOL. VIII, NO 15
STIP, 2023

П А Л И М П С Е С Т

Меѓународно списание за лингвистички, книжевни и културолошки истражувања

P A L I M P S E S T

International Journal for Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Research

Год. 8, Бр. 15
Штип, 2023

Vol. 8, No 15
Stip, 2023

PALMK, VOL 8, NO 15, STIP, 2023

DOI: https://doi.org/10.46763/PALIM23815

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Меѓународно списание за лингвистички, книжевни
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The International Scientific Journal "Palimpsest" is issued twice a year in printed form and online at the following website of the web portal of Goce Delcev University in Stip:
http://js.ugd.edu.mk/index.php/PAL

Papers can be submitted and published in the following languages: Macedonian, English, German, French, Russian, Turkish and Italian language.

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СОДРЖИНА / TABLE OF CONTENTS

11 **ПРЕДГОВОР**
Оливер Хербст, член на Уредувачкиот одбор
FOREWORD
Oliver Herbst, member of the Editorial Board

ЈАЗИК / LANGUAGE

15 **Февзудина Сарачевиќ, Лилјана Митковска**
ИНТЕРАКТИВНИОТ ДИСКУРС ВО ГРАМАТИКИТЕ НА КОНЕСКИ И НА ЛАНТ: ВКЛУЧУВАЊЕ НА ЧИТАТЕЛИТЕ
Fevzudina Saračević, Liljana Mitkovska
INTERACTIVE DISCOURSE IN KONESKI'S AND LUNT'S GRAMMARS: READER ENGAGEMENT

27 **Milica Bogdanović**
CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN ECONOMIC DISCOURSE OF SERBIAN AND BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

39 **Sanja M. Maglov**
THE ROLE OF CONJUCTION IN THE COHESION OF ABSTRACTS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN

51 **Igor Rižnar, Armand Faganel**
THE DISCOURSE OF MISSION STATEMENTS OF SOME SLOVENIAN AND AUSTRIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

61 **Kadri Krasniqi, Besarta Krasniqi**
PHRASEOLOGY AS A TRANSLATION PROBLEM AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN KOSOVO

75 **Ergys Prifti**
GESCHICHTLICHE ENTWICKLUNG DES PASSIVS IM DEUTSCHEN UND ALBANISCHEN
Ergys Prifti
DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSIVE VOICE IN GERMAN AND ALBANIAN

85 **Doris Sava**
RUMÄNIENDEUTSCH ALS STANDARDVARIETÄT AUS HISTORISCHER UND AKTUELLER SICHT
Doris Sava
ROMANIAN GERMAN AS A STANDARD VARIETY FROM A HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

95 **Марија Стојаноска, Виолета Јанушева**
МАКЕДОНСКИ РОДОВО ЧУВСТВИТЕЛЕН ЈАЗИК
Marija Stojanoska, Violeta Janusheva
MACEDONIAN GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

107 **Марија Леонтиќ**
СИНТАГМИ СО СВРЗНИК ВО ТУРСКИОТ ЈАЗИК И НИВНОТО ПРЕДАВАЊЕ ВО МАКЕДОНСКИОТ ЈАЗИК
Marija Leontik
WORD GROUPS WITH A CONJUNCTION IN TURKISH LANGUAGE AND THEIR EQUIVALENCE IN MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE

119 **Александра Гецовска**
ЕТИМОЛОГИЈА НА ФИТОНИМОТ БОСИЛЕК
Aleksandra Gecovska
ETYMOLOGY OF THE PHYTONYME BASIL

КНИЖЕВНОСТ / LITERATURE

131 **Antony Hoyte-West**
TRUE TO LIFE? SOME REMARKS ON A DUTCH TRANSLATION OF JERZY KOSINSKI'S THE PAINTED BIRD

139 **Luisa Emanuele**
«LA MEMORIA È LA PIETRA DI SISIFO. CHI SONO? AHMED O AMEDEO?» AMARA LAKHOUS: LA FRAMMENTAZIONE DELL'IO
Luisa Emanuele
«MEMORY IS THE STONE OF SISYPHUS. WHO AM I? AHMED OR AMEDEO?». AMARA LAKHOUS: THE SELF-FRAGMENTATION

151 **Dejan Malčić**
VISIONI POSTMODERNE DI ROMA IN LA GRANDE BELLEZZA, SUBURRA E LO CHIAMAVANO JEEG ROBOT
Dejan Malčić
POSTMODERN VISIONS OF ROME IN THE GREAT BEAUTY, SUBURRA AND THEY CALL ME JEEG

161 **Tunay Karakök**
HAJI BEKTASHI VELI'S VELÂYETNÂME AS A LITERARY SOURCE ABOUT MEDIEVAL ANATOLIA

171 **Ранко Младеноски**
ЧОВЕКОВИОТ ПАД ОД САКРАЛНОТО ДО ХТОНСКОТО ВО НАЈНОВИТЕ РАСКАЗИ ОД ВЕНКО АНДОНОВСКИ
Ranko Mladenoski
THE MAN'S FALL FROM THE SACRED TO THE CHTHONIC IN THE LATEST SHORT STORIES BY VENKO ANDONOVSKI

181 **Славчо Ковилоски**
СОВРЕМЕНИ БОГОМИЛСКИ ИЛИ НАРОДНО-БОГОМИЛСКИ АВТОРИ И ДЕЛА
Slavcho Koviloski
CONTEMPORARY BOGOMILAN OR FOLK-BOGOMILAN AUTHORS

193 **Marijana Gjorgjieva**
DIE AUSWIRKUNGEN DER KRISE IN „NOVELLE“ VON JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE
Marijana Gjorgjieva
THE INFLUENCES OF THE CRISIS IN THE „NOVELLE“ BY JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

201 **Melek Nuredini**
MEHMET AKİF ERSOY VE YAHYA KEMAL BEYATLI'YI BİRLEŞTİREN UNSUR OLARAK BALKANLAR
Melek Nuredini
THE BALKANS AS A UNIFYING ELEMENT FOR MEHMET AKIF ERSOY AND YAHYA KEMAL BEYATLI

213 **Osman Emin**
YASTIK ADAM OYUNUN İNCELENMESİ
Osman Emin
REVIEW OF PILLOWMAN THEATER

КУЛТУРА / CULTURE

225 **Екатерина Намичева-Тодоровска, Петар Намичев**
РУСКИТЕ АРХИТЕКТИ И ИНЖЕНЕРИ ОД ПОЧЕТОКОТ НА 20 ВЕК ВО СКОПЈЕ И НИВНОТО ВЛИЈАНИЕ ВРЗ УРБАНИОТ РАЗВОЈ
Ekaterina Namicheva-Todorovska, Petar Namichev
RUSSIAN ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN SKOPJE AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

МЕТОДИКА НА НАСТАВАТА / TEACHING METHODOLOGY

237 **Nurettin Cintemir, Gürkan Moralı**
NEW TOOLS FOR ETANDEM IN LANGUAGE LEARNING:
A THEORETICAL STUDY

249 **Brisida Sefa, Brikena Xhaferi**
ALBANIAN TEACHERS' AND LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES ON THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

261 **Vesna Prodanovska-Poposka, Marija Todorova**
AFFECTIVE VARIABLES IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

ПРИКАЗИ / BOOK REVIEWS

275 **Весна Мојсова-Чепишевска**
(КАКО) ДА СЕ СТИГНЕ КОНЕЧНО ДОМА?
Vesna Mojsova Chepishevska
(HOW) TO GET HOME FINALLY?

281 **Марија Гркова-Беадер**
ВРЕДЕН И ПОЛЕЗЕН УЧЕБНИК ЗА МЕТОДИКА НА НАСТАВАТА ПО АНГЛИСКИ ЈАЗИК
Marija Grkova-Beader
VALUABLE AND USEFUL TEXTBOOK ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

ДОДАТОК / APPENDIX

289 ПОВИК ЗА ОБЈАВУВАЊЕ ТРУДОВИ
ВО МЕЃУНАРОДНОТО НАУЧНО СПИСАНИЕ „ПАЛИМПСЕСТ“
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UDC 811.111'243:159.942
DOI: https://doi.org/10.46763/PALIM23815261pp

Original research paper

AFFECTIVE VARIABLES IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

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Abstract: Emotions significantly affect the process of foreign language teaching and learning. Some of them have a positive impact and facilitate the learning and the ability to memorize, and others have a negative impact and 'block' or debilitate the learning process. Native language proficiency, language aptitude, attitudes and beliefs, affective variables, demographic features (age, gender), etc., are already well-established influential factors related to foreign language learning. The authors of this paper actually attempt to scrutinize the affective variables i.e. anxiety, motivation and self-esteem among university students-learners of English and Spanish as foreign languages. The paper presents testing of the Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis by surveying a group of students in order to determine the presence of anxiety, to evaluate the level of motivation and self-esteem, thus confirming or refuting Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. According to the obtained results of the aforementioned analysis of both groups of FL students, it is well established that the Affective Filter Hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Keywords: *Affective variables; Foreign language learning; Affective Filter Hypothesis*.

1. Introduction

Emotions appear in all phases of foreign language learning and although on the one hand, they help learning and acquiring a foreign language, on the other hand, if they are unpleasant, they can jeopardize the whole process since they reduce the brain's capacity to understand, perceive meaning and remember. From the neurological point of view, the fact that analytical thinking is almost always influenced by emotions is supported by Tyng et al. (2017). According to Tyng et al. (2017) emotion has a substantial influence on the cognitive processes in humans, including perception, attention, learning, memory, reasoning, and problem solving. Therefore, it seems difficult for students who are chronically sad, angry, worried or scared to concentrate and thus to learn. The affective domain is said to represent the "emotional side of human behavior" (Brown, 1994, p. 135).

Therefore, the affective domain is essentially a general emotional state that affects the perception and production of foreign language learners and such emotions can create a filter for learning a foreign language, which is called an **affective filter.** Affective filter is defined as "an imaginary barrier which prevents learners from acquiring language from the available input" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 39). It is basically a theoretical assumption about the acquisition of a foreign language in an attempt to explain the emotional variables that affect the success, i.e. failure to master it. Stephen Krashen employs these factors i.e. variables in the so-called Affective Filter and proposes an Affective Filter Hypothesis according to which affective variables such as motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety can play a facilitative role in successful second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and anxiety, on the other hand, can work together to 'raise' an affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition (De Bot et al., 2005, p. 36). As previously cited, an affective filter is essentially an invisible psychological filter that can facilitate or debilitate foreign language acquisition. When the affective filter is strong, there is stress, feelings of nervousness, anxiety and lack of self-confidence, and all this has a great impact on the process of learning and acquiring a foreign language. When the affective filter is weak, learners are more courageous, they are not afraid of unknown tasks and do not have problems with lack of self-confidence. The affective filter can be stronger or weaker depending on the learner's environment, interactions with peers or superiors, but also depending on a person's personal factors such as insecurity or feelings of anxiety. According to Krashen (1982), the affective filter will be the most favorable for language acquisition in a surrounding free of uneasiness and unrest where learners are not afraid of name-calling, ridicule of friends and criticism of teachers, moreover in situations where the affective filter is weak. If the affective filter is strong, the learner will not be open and eager to learning. Krashen (1982) also claims that people are capable to learn a foreign language only if they get understandable input and if their affective filter is weak enough to allow this input to pass. He proposes an Affective Filter Hypothesis according to which, affective variables such as motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety can play a facilitative role in successful second language acquisition (De Bot et al., 2005, p. 36). The Affective Filter Hypothesis set up in the 1970s by Dulay & Burt (1977), later elaborated by Krashen (1982) is mainly based on the explanation of the influence of affective factors on foreign language learning.

2. Affective variables influencing students' learning and acquisition of foreign languages

Teacher's focus during the teaching process is generally set towards the emotional state of the learners along with their success in the acquisition of the foreign language. As part of the process, the answer of the question why some students are more successful than others, appears to be due to many factors that directly affect the learning and acquisition of foreign languages. Hence, the authors will single out only the affective variables that are included in the Affective Filter Hypothesis, namely: anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence.

Anxiety is a psychological concept explored by a lot of researchers. Spielberger (1966) and McIntyre and Gardner (1994) implied that anxiety is subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension, apprehension nervousness, and worry, accompanied by or associated with activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system. According to Scovel (as cited in Todorova & Koceva, 2015), anxiety is a condition of a person when he or she feels restlessness, frustration, self-doubt, anxiety or worry. In terms of foreign language learning it is called "language anxiety" which is actually a new area of research that deserves special attention. MacIntyre (1998) defined the language anxiety as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27). Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

Motivation and anxiety are two opposite sides of the same dimension as proposed by Gardner et al. (1992). Motivation is closely related to the desire and "urge" to achieve a goal, however, what is the effect of motivation for language learning and how it can be measured, is a rather delicate concept. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguish between *integrative* motivation and *instrumental* motivation. Integrative motivation is based on an interest in the second language and its culture and refers to the intention to become part of that culture. Instrumental motivation is based on a more practical need to communicate in the second language. In its purest form, this type of motivation is sometimes referred to as the "Carrot and Stick" type: the learner wants to learn the second language to gain something "now" from it (De Bot et al., 2005, p. 72). Even though that there are different types of motivation, yet it's impossible to be singled out as separate types, due to the fact that when students learn foreign languages in the classroom, they might be integratively motivated, but at the same time instrumentally motivated for getting high grades. In addition to these so-called external types of motivation, a learner may also be intrinsically motivated. Many studies have shown that, whatever the nature of motivation is, there is a connection and a significant impact on the success in foreign language learning and acquisition. Therefore, motivation is an inevitable segment of the affective factors i.e. variables that affect second / foreign language acquisition and are generally responsible for individual variations and learning preferences of the learners.

Self-confidence is an affective factor that also influences foreign language learning. There is a significant correlation between self-confidence and both motivation and anxiety. The concept of self-confidence is conceptually related to that of language anxiety, except that it emphasizes a positive as opposed to a negative component. Clément (1980) proposed that self-confidence was an important determinant of the motivation to learn a L2, and that this self-confidence developes in multicultural contexts as a function of the frequency and quality of the contact with members of the L2 community.

Motivation, anxiety and self-confidence show strong correlation with language achievement. Low anxiety and high self-confidence increase student motivation to learn and to make it more likely that they will use the FL outside of

the classroom setting. It is therefore not clear whether more successful learning is directly due to lower anxiety, or to a higher level of motivation and more social interaction (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 90). This paper assesses and determines the degree of anxiety, motivation and self-confidence, which may affect the students' achievement, i.e. their success in learning English and Spanish as foreign languages. Additionally, the authors provide detailed analysis regarding the methodology and the results obtained from the research.

3. The significance of anxiety, motivation and self-confidence in FLL

These three affective variables have been discussed and approached in many separate studies by number of authors and researchers. Namely, Ellis (2008, as cited in Zareian & Jodaei, 2015) states that no single individual differences factor in language learning has received as much attention as motivation. According to Gardner (1985) motivation is the most influential factor in learning a new language and it is of great interest for researchers. Dörnyei (2005), who claims that there have been almost 100 studies published in 1990s regarding the motivation and its significance, also supports this statement. Masgoret and Gardner (2003, as cited in Zareian & Jodaei, 2015) cited 75 independent studies involving more than 10,000 participants regarding the role of attitude and motivation in second language acquisition. Self-confidence as another positive emotion next to the motivation has been analyzed by numbers of authors such as Clement, Gregeresen and Horowitz and Molberg (Clément, 1986; Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002; Molberg, 2010) who have conducted studies on the effects of self-confidence on foreign language learners. According to these studies it is confirmed that self-confident learners usually take risks at speaking in the second language even if they do commit mistakes. Regarding the anxiety in foreign language learning studies, most of the contribution apart from Krashen, is owed to Scovel (1978), and Horowitz & Cope (1986) pioneering in the thorough approach of the foreign language anxiety as well as setting tools i.e. measuring the anxiety via Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed in 1986.

4. Methodology

Participants

The survey involves a total of 47 university students, students of English of the Faculty of Biotechnical Sciences, St. Kliment Ohridski University-Bitola, and students of Spanish of the Faculty of Philology, "Goce Delchev" University – Shtip, N. Macedonia. The respondents are aged 18-22 - learners of English and Spanish as a foreign language as a mandatory and an elective course on their undergraduate curricula.

Research method

For the purposes of this study, in order to detect and assess anxiety in foreign language teaching, the authors of this paper used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), and additionally, motivation and self-esteem were determined and assessed through student interviews.

The questionnaire consists of 33 questions that highlight the main causes of anxiety: anxiety or fear of communication, anxiety or fear of testing, fear of negative assessment, and fear of foreign language classes. The survey, in its original form, was conducted online through Google Docs, in order to cover all students - learners of English and Spanish, including those absent from class. The student survey was conducted during the fall semester. They were given a time frame of 1 week to complete the survey, however, certain number of students did not complete the questionnaires. All samples that were submitted on time were fully summarized and properly analyzed.

Respondents of the questionnaire were contacted for an interview, in order to determine and assess their motivation and level of self-confidence. The interview questions are a set of questions combined from two separate standardized questionnaires such as *Part 1. Affective variables* of the five-point Likert scale *WTC (Willingness to Communicate) questionnaire* proposed by Lee and Hsieh (2019) and *The Foreign Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire (FLLMQ-6)*, proposed by Gonzales & Lopez (2016), supplemented with additional questions from the authors' personal experience. The interview was conducted in Macedonian, after the end of the fall semester, as part of the final exams. It included a total of 28 questions, out of which 15 for determining the students' level of motivation and 13 for determining the level of self-confidence. The interview consists of interview questionnaire containing a list of 23 pre-prepared scaled questions and 5 open- ended questions that provide an opportunity for students to freely express and explain their feelings, experiences, reflections, concerns, agreements or disagreements and their attitudes, as well as why they think they are (not) willing to learn a foreign language of their choice. In addition, prior to the main questions, some demographic questions such as gender, age, level of education were added as well.

Additionally, the results of the research are presented and analyzed along with a detailed discussion bellow.

Data analysis and research results

Anxiety

The data analyses from the questionnaire presents whether the students appear to be anxious, pointing out the particular fears and worries.

The most common feelings registered among students are the fear of communication (9, 18, 29), fear of negative assessment (33, 25, 20), as well as the fear of failure. As for the question (10) "I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class", 13 out of 47 students "strongly agree", 31 respondents "agree", 2 are neutral and 1 "disagree". The results also indicate that the students firmly and confidently answer the questions related to the behavior of the teachers during the class and their own readiness for class. The following are only the statements claiming what the respondents agreed on (for which questions they provided answers "agree" or "strongly agree"), which is about 63% of the total number or more than 30 students out of a total of 47.

(4) *"It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language."* Approximately 64% or 30 respondents agree with this statement (9-strongly agree, 21-agree) and 17 students-disagree.

(15) *"I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting."* About 91 % of the respondents agree with this statement (41-agree, 2-strongly agree) and 4 students-disagree.

(29) "*I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says."* 35 students agree and only 12 students disagree.

(33) *"I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance."* About 93% i.e. 44 students agree or strongly agree, 2 are neutral and only 1 disagree.

(9) *"I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class."* 37 students agree (13 strongly agree, 24 agree) and 5 are neutral, 3 students disagree and 2 strongly disagree.

(16) *"Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it."* 40 students agree or strongly agree, 3 are neutral and 4 disagree.

(20) *"I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class."* 36 students agree and 11 disagree.

(25) *"Language class move so quickly I worry about getting left behind."* 4 students strongly agree, 31 agree, 10 are neutral and 2 disagree.

In regard to statements 23 and 7, it is clear that students are anxious due to excessive expectations from themselves and unpleasant experiences in the past or because of the feeling that they are less competent than their colleagues. It actually confirms that students that are not confident in their abilities feel more anxious and have a fear of testing and fear of being negatively evaluated by others. High levels of anxiety, fear of making mistakes, inhibition and discomfort also occur when students have a task to speak in foreign language in front of others or with native speakers (14, 31, 32).

From the results provided from the survey it is clearly noticeable that anxiety is significantly present and is mostly affected by the teachers' huge influence on learners' behavior, attitude towards the subject, the desire to learn, etc. The analysis clearly indicates that the respondents' expressed feelings of worry, which accompanied with the anxiety leads to unfavorable effect not only on the learning process but on the previously acquired knowledge as well. Thus, this state leads to a development of insecurity, distraction and aversion to attend FL classes and no willingness to learn the language. Therefore, it is clearly conclusive that the presence of anxiety has quite an intense but a fully adverse effect on the foreign language learning process which further leads to learners' debilitative academic achievement and overall success.

Motivation

The first part of the interview is intended to determine the level of motivation of students for foreign language learning. The first section of it i.e. the interview questionnaire includes 13 scaled questions (see Appendix A) and the second section contains 2 open-ended questions. In addition, Figure 1 presents the data

from the analysis indicating the number of respondents who agree or disagree with each of the statements individually.

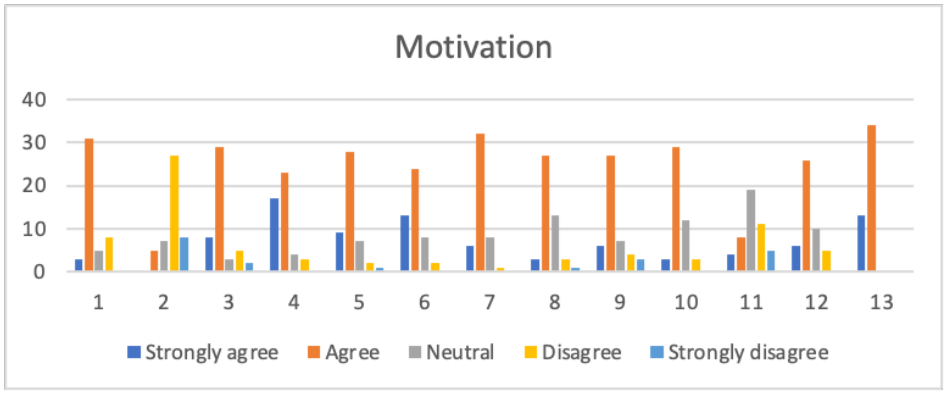

Figure 1: Scale for motivation assessment

According to Figure 1 it is evident that almost in each statement the options "strongly agree" or "agree" are predominant, which demonstrates high level of motivation and willingness to learn. Even though about 35 students out of 47 disagree with the statement no. 2 "I do not really have a great desire to learn foreign language", it still indicates increased motivation. In terms of the additional open-ended questions such as: "1. What motivates you the most when you learn foreign language? and 2. Does your teacher's attitude motivate you to learn FL?" students list several key factors that affect their motivation and predominantly emphasize the teachers' enthusiasm in class, which is actually a complete answer to the second question. They are motivated by the teachers' approach, their ability to organize and conduct the lesson successfully, due to the pleasant atmosphere and the use of appropriate, concrete and clear examples, as well as various activities and methodology that suits the complexity of the learning material.

The respondents also point out that the teacher-student connection is of a great importance as well as the teachers' ability to stimulate learners' desire and motivation and to encourage them to participate in the class, all that in the absence of stress and anxiety. Additionally, in regard to the motivating factors as expressed by the students, the authors singled out only those that were revealed as the most important in more than 50% of the respondents, such as: to be able to travel abroad freely, to meet new cultures and new people without a language barrier meaning to be able to communicate and socialize with foreigners freely and easily and to be able to effortlessly socialize in a foreign country. The respondents further state that they would like to have access to information as much as possible, available in a different language from the mother tongue, to be able to read books, watch movies and various TV shows, listen to music or browse the internet in the foreign language they are learning. Many of them feel motivated by their own success and the potential they have for learning a foreign language. They simply believe they have the ability to learn the FL, they enjoy learning it, feel comfortable speaking it, and feel satisfied with their progress and their final results.

Self-confidence

The second part of the interview specifically the interview questionnaire containing 10 scaled questions (see Appendix B) and the additional 3 open-questions determine learners' level of self-confidence. The data analysis is presented in Figure 2.

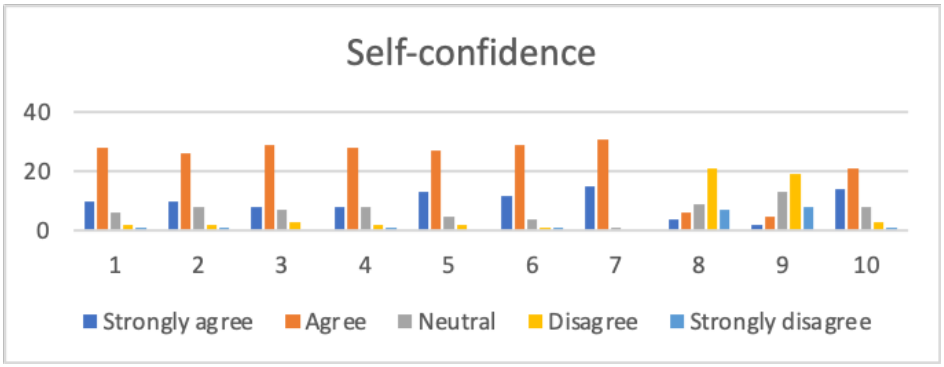

Figure 2: Scale for self-confidence assessment

According to the results presented in Figure 2 it is clearly indicated that the respondents demonstrate a high level of self-confidence. More than 35 students answered positively to all statements, which demonstrate that 75% of learners are confident to discuss about themselves or about what they have been doing the previous weekend in using FL sentences and phrases, they can use FL vocabulary and expressions that they have learned to interact with their teacher or friends. They also feel confident being able to order a meal or ask and give directions for location in FL. They do not feel shy speaking FL to their classmates or to their teacher. They feel assured that they will learn the FL and speak it perfect someday.

Students answered the open-ended questions such as:

1. Do you feel comfortable when you speak FL in front of the class?
2. How do you feel when you have an oral language activity in the classroom?
3. Do you think that you are good in FL; are you confident of your ability?

In general, the respondents provided similar but broadened responses. Namely, they affirmed that they feel comfortable when they speak FL; they think they are good or will improve at using the FL; they are confident in their abilities and believe that with their teachers' support they are able to participate in the oral language activities and everyday conversations efficiently.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the affective variables particularly the anxiety, motivation and self-esteem of undergraduate students - learners of English as a second language (L2) and learners of Spanish as a third language (L3) through Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. The analysis was conducted through surveying and interviewing the respondents in order to identify and assess the

presence as well as the level of anxiety and to determine the level of motivation and self-confidence in foreign language learning and acquisition. The research was conducted by surveying 47 students whereas the results demonstrate that all three variables significantly affect the learning process and foreign language acquisition, thus effecting learners' overall success. The results also indicate that Spanish and English learners marked high level of anxiety, but a high level of motivation and self-confidence as well. High level of anxiety is unfavorably affecting the students' achievement. According to the respondents, anxiety is mostly caused by the teachers' huge influence on learners' behavior, their attitude towards the subject, their desire to learn, etc. On the other hand, the respondents point out that the teachers' approach and their methodology are of a great importance, because they directly affect their desire and motivation to learn foreign languages that will further lead to success and excel. These results would encourage and alert us as teachers to be aware of the anxiety in foreign language classroom to strive to reduce that discomfort as much as possible, cautiously handling and resolving situations that can and may cause anxiety, to instill self-confidence in students, to encourage, stimulate and motivate them, which would definitely lead to greater individual and collective success. The obtained results of the analysis of both groups of FL students partially confirmed the Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Overcoming anxiety in the FL classroom should be a goal of all current and future FL teachers and if they manage to lower the anxiety in the FL classroom, then the Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis would be fully confirmed.

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Appendix A: Motivation questionnaire

1. I actively think about what I have learned in my FL class.
2. I don't really have a great desire to learn Foreign language.
3. I find learning Foreign language very enjoyable.
4. Foreign language is an important subject to me in my college program.
5. I enjoy communicating with foreigners in their native language.

6. I find it is easier for me to relate with foreigners.
7. I enjoy browsing websites that deal with FL on the Internet.
8. I can relate well in my FL class.
9. I enjoy learning an FL because I feel I am good at it.
10. I feel comfortable speaking in my FL classes.
11. I enjoy learning an FL even if it is difficult.
12. I believe I have the ability in learning it.
13. I want to be able to interact with foreigners well.

Appendix B: Self-confidence questionnaire

1. I am confident I can use FL vocabulary and expressions that I learned to interact with my teacher or friends.
2. I am confident I can talk about myself in FL using sentences.
3. I am confident I can talk about what I did last weekend using FL sentences.
4. I am confident I can do well in oral presentation in FL.
5. I am confident I can order a meal in FL at a restaurant.
6. I am confident I can ask for and give directions for location in FL.
7. I am confident to learn to speak FL.
8. I feel shy speaking FL to my classmates.
9. I feel shy speaking FL to my teacher.
10. I think that I will speak perfect FL someday.

ГОД. VIII
БР. 15

ПАЛИМПСЕСТ

PALIMPSEST

VOL. VIII
NO 15