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SITUATIONAL PROFILES OF SPEAKING ANXIETY AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AMONG ADULT UZBEK LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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Foreign language speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate are among the most extensively investigated affective constructs in language education. The empirical base, however, is drawn almost entirely from East Asian, Middle Eastern and European learner populations, and reports global scale scores rather than situational detail. Neither limitation serves the methodologist: a global anxiety score establishes that a learner is anxious without establishing when, and therefore cannot inform the design of targeted instruction. This article reports a diagnostic study of 160 adult learners of English at private language centres in Tashkent. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was adapted into Uzbek through back-translation and expert review and administered alongside a purpose-built inventory of eighteen speaking situations, selected to sample the interlocutor and status configurations characteristic of this setting. Results indicate a moderate, marginally sub-midpoint overall level of speaking anxiety (mean item score = 2.93). While rating scale data did not differentiate meaningfully between situational contexts, direct nomination revealed that job interviews and admitting a lack of comprehension to the group represent the most acute communication barriers. The resulting situational profile provides an empirically grounded basis for designing instruction addressed to the specific configurations that suppress communication in this population.

Keywords: *foreign language speaking anxiety, willingness to communicate, adult learners, Uzbek learners of English, FLCAS, instrument adaptation, situational profile, linguodidactics, diagnostic study, English language teaching.*

INGLIZ TILINI O‘RGANUVCHI KATTA YOSHLI O‘ZBEK TILLI TALABALARDA NUTQIY XAVOTIR VA MULOQOTGA TAYYORLIKNING SITUATIV PROFILLARI

Chet tilida gapirishdagi xavotir va muloqotga tayyorlik til ta’limida eng ko‘p o‘rganilgan affektiv konstruktlar qatoriga kiradi. Biroq empirik baza deyarli butunlay Sharqiy Osiyo, Yaqin Sharq va Yevropa kontingentlari asosida shakllangan hamda situativ ma’lumotlar o‘rniga umumlashgan shkala ko‘rsatkichlarini taqdim etadi. Umumlashgan ko‘rsatkich o‘rganuvchida xavotir borligini qayd etadi, lekin u qaysi vaziyatlarda yuzaga kelishini ko‘rsatmaydi va shu bois maqsadli ta'limni loyihalash uchun asos bo‘la olmaydi. Maqolada Toshkent shahridagi xususiy til markazlarida ingliz tilini o‘rganayotgan 160 nafar katta yoshli ta’lim oluvchi ishtirokidagi diagnostik tadqiqot natijalari keltiriladi. Chet tili mashg‘ulotlaridagi xavotir shkalasi (FLCAS) o‘zbek tiliga moslashtirildi va o‘n sakkiz nutqiy vaziyatdan iborat maxsus ishlab chiqilgan ro‘yxat bilan birga taqdim etildi. Xavotir darajasi o‘rtacha, shkala o‘rtasidan bir oz past bo‘lib chiqdi (bandlar bo‘yicha o‘rtacha ball – 2,93). Situativ baholar kontekstlar orasida *sezilarli farqni ko‘rsatmadi; shu bilan birga bevosita tanlov ishga qabul qilish suhbati va guruh oldida tushunmaganini tan olish eng keskin to‘siqlar ekanini aniqladi. Bu tafovut Likert shkalasi farqlay olmagan holatda bevosita tanlov usuli farqlash qobiliyatiga ega ekanini ko‘rsatadi.*

Kalit so‘zlar**:** *chet tilida gapirish xavotiri, muloqotga tayyorlik, katta yoshli o‘rganuvchilar, ingliz tilini o‘rganayotgan o‘zbeklar, FLCAS, instrumentni moslashtirish, situativ profil, lingvodidaktika, diagnostik tadqiqot, ingliz tilini o‘qitish.*

СИТУАТИВНЫЕ ПРОФИЛИ ТРЕВОЖНОСТИ РЕЧИ И ГОТОВНОСТИ К ОБЩЕНИЮ У ВЗРОСЛЫХ УЗБЕКОЯЗЫЧНЫХ, ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК

Тревожность при устной иноязычной речи и готовность к общению относятся к наиболее изученным аффективным конструктам в языковом образовании. Однако эмпирическая база сформирована почти исключительно на материале восточноазиатских, ближневосточных и европейских контингентов и представляет обобщённые шкальные показатели вместо ситуативных

данных. Обобщённый показатель фиксирует наличие тревожности, но не указывает, в каких ситуациях она возникает, и потому не может служить основанием для целенаправленного обучения. В статье представлено диагностическое исследование 160 взрослых, изучающих английский язык в частных языковых центрах Ташкента. Шкала тревожности на занятиях по иностранному языку (FLCAS) была адаптирована на узбекский язык и предъявлена вместе с разработанным перечнем из восемнадцати речевых ситуаций. Уровень тревожности оказался умеренным, незначительно ниже середины шкалы (средний балл по пункту — 2,93). Ситуативные оценки не выявили значимых различий между контекстами; вместе с тем прямой выбор показал, что наиболее острыми барьерами являются собеседование при приёме на работу и признание непонимания перед группой. Расхождение свидетельствует о том, что процедура прямого выбора обладает различительной способностью там, где шкала Ликерта её не обнаруживает.

Ключевые слова: *тревожность при говорении на иностранном языке, готовность к общению, взрослые учащиеся, узбек язычные изучающие английский язык, FLCAS, адаптация инструмента, ситуативный профиль, лингводидактика, диагностическое исследование, преподавание английского языка.*

Introduction. Adult learners in Uzbekistan enrol in private language courses overwhelmingly for communicative purposes: professional advancement, preparation for study abroad, international examinations, and travel. Each of these outcomes depends on the ability to speak. Yet reluctance to speak is among the most persistent difficulties reported by teachers in these settings, and it is frequently observed in learners whose grammatical and lexical knowledge is demonstrably adequate to the task. The gap between what a learner knows and what a learner is prepared to say is not a gap in competence. It is precisely the phenomenon that the constructs of foreign language anxiety [1], [2] and willingness to communicate [3] were developed to explain.

The communicative orientation of foreign language education is established in national policy. The Law on Education and the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan to 2030 both identify practical command of foreign languages as a priority outcome. Realizing that priority requires understanding not only what learners know, but what prevents them from using it.

Two limitations in the existing evidence base constrain that understanding.

The first concerns population. Research on foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate has been conducted predominantly with Chinese [4], Japanese [5], Korean [6], Iranian [7], and Arabic-speaking [8] cohorts. Uzbek-L1 learners are effectively absent from this literature. This is not merely a question of representativeness. Willingness to communicate is theorised as sensitive to interlocutor identity and social context [9], and the norms governing age, status and face in Uzbek communicative practice differ from those obtaining in the populations so far studied. There is therefore no basis for assuming that findings transfer.

The second concerns granularity. The prevailing reporting convention is the global scale score [10]. A group mean on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale establishes that a cohort is moderately anxious; it does not establish whether that anxiety arises in unprepared classroom speech, in interaction with interlocutors of higher status, in mediated communication, or in evaluative encounters. For the methodologist this is the difference between a diagnosis and a description. Instruction cannot be designed against a global score, because there is no such thing as a lesson that reduces anxiety in general.

The present study addresses both limitations. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the construction of a situational profile of speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate for adult Uzbek-L1 learners of English, together with the adaptation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale into the Uzbek language, thereby providing methodologists with both an instrument and an evidence base for designing situationally targeted interventions in place of generalized affective support.

Literature Review.

Foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific construct

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope established foreign language anxiety as distinct from general trait anxiety — a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs and behaviours arising specifically from the language learning situation [1]. Their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale comprises 33 items across communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, with reported internal consistency of approximately 0.93 [1]. One feature of the original formulation deserves emphasis, because subsequent practice has obscured it: the construct was defined as situation-specific, and roughly twenty of the 33 items refer to speaking and listening. The convention of collapsing responses into a single total discards precisely the situational information the scale was built to capture. The instrument has been adapted and validated in

several languages [2], [8], establishing both the precedent and the expected standard for the adaptation reported here.

Willingness to communicate

MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels define willingness to communicate as readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, using the L2 [3]. Their heuristic model arranges some thirty variables across six layers, from stable social context at the base to behavioural intention at the apex. The model's structural claim is directly consequential for teaching: the lower layers are stable and largely beyond classroom reach, while the situated antecedents — state communicative self-confidence, desire to communicate with a particular interlocutor — are transient and therefore modifiable. Intervention can act only on these upper layers. Definitional precision matters here: willingness to communicate is not general talkativeness but readiness with respect to a particular interlocutor at a particular moment [11], [12], [13]. An instrument that does not specify to whom and under what conditions measures something other than the construct.

The anxiety–WTC relationship and the research gap

Anxiety is consistently among the strongest negative predictors of willingness to communicate, typically operating through perceived communicative competence rather than directly [4], [9], [10]. Within the national methodological tradition, the development of oral communicative competence has been addressed principally through task design and intercultural preparation [16], [17], [18], without diagnostic attention to the affective conditions under which learners decline to speak.

No published study provides a situational profile of these constructs for adult Uzbek learners of English, and no Uzbek adaptation of the FLCAS has been reported. Three expectations follow from the framework. Because the pyramid model treats interlocutor status as a situated antecedent, willingness is expected to be depressed with older or higher-status interlocutors. Because English between two Uzbek speakers may be perceived as marked, willingness in that configuration is expected to be lower than with a foreign interlocutor — inverting the assumption, implicit in much of the literature, that unfamiliar foreign interlocutors are the more threatening condition. Speaking before family members is expected to attract similarly low willingness. These are stated in advance so that the results in §4.3 constitute tested predictions.

Research Methodology.

Design and participants

The study employs a cross-sectional diagnostic survey design, constituting the ascertaining stage of pedagogical experiment: its purpose is to establish the current state of the phenomenon prior to any intervention. No instructional treatment was administered.

Participants were 160 adult learners of English at private language centres in Tashkent, across two branches (Chilonzor 55.0%, Yunusobod 45.0%) and three proficiency levels (Pre-Intermediate 40.0%, Intermediate 44.4%, Upper-Intermediate 15.6%). The sample comprised 85 women (53.1%) and 75 men (46.9%), predominantly aged 18–24 (51.9%) and 25–34 (36.2%). Purposes for study were work (22.5%), personal development (21.9%), study abroad (20.0%), travel (19.4%) and examinations (16.2%). Regarding intercultural contact, 40.0% had never spoken with a foreigner and 84.4% had never been abroad. Recruitment was by convenience sampling from intact class groups; 85.0% completed paper questionnaires in class and 15.0% digital forms.

Instruments

The questionnaire comprised four parts. Part A collected background information; no personally identifying data were recorded. Part B consisted of the thirty-three FLCAS items [1], adapted into Uzbek, rated from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with the nine positively worded items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32) reverse-scored so that higher totals indicate greater anxiety. Part C was a purpose-built inventory of eighteen speaking situations, each rated from *not at all willing* to *completely willing*, sampling the situated-antecedent dimensions of the model of MacIntyre et al. [3]: public exposure, interlocutor familiarity and status, preparation, evaluative stakes, medium, and topic control. Items 9, 11 and 16 operationalise the expectations stated in §2.3; instruments developed for other populations do not systematically address in-group second-language use, status asymmetry, or family observation. Part D asked participants to nominate the three situations making them most nervous, yielding a ranking independent of the ratings.

Adaptation, procedure and analysis

The English originals were translated into Uzbek and independently back-translated by a translator blind to the source. Discrepancies, chiefly concerning idioms and nuanced affective states, were resolved by prioritising pragmatic over literal equivalence [14], [15]. Three specialists in foreign language teaching methodology reviewed the reconciled version; revisions principally adjusted phrasing to reflect adult private-

course settings rather than university classrooms. Piloting with 15 learners outside the main sample established a completion time of 15–20 minutes and confirmed item comprehension.

Written permission was obtained from centre management prior to contact with learners. Administration took place in August 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with written consent collected separately from response sheets. Because the researcher teaches within the participating institution, all groups were administered the questionnaire by another person, with the researcher absent, so that participation could carry no implication for the learner's relationship with their teacher.

Responses were entered in raw form with reverse-scored items computed separately; ten per cent of paper responses were independently re-entered and checked. Analysis comprised Cronbach's alpha for the FLCAS, its subscales and the situational inventory; descriptive statistics for anxiety; ranked situational means with nomination frequencies; Pearson correlation between anxiety and willingness; and comparison across demographic categories.

Analysis and Results.

Internal Consistency and Overall Anxiety Levels

The adapted instruments demonstrated strong internal consistency. The full 33-item FLCAS yielded $\alpha = 0.955$; while confirming the reliability of the Uzbek adaptation, an alpha above 0.95 conventionally indicates item redundancy rather than superior scale quality. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.958.

Contrary to generalised assumptions of high learner apprehension, the sample reported moderate anxiety, marginally below the scale midpoint: an FLCAS total mean of 96.59 against a midpoint of 99, giving a mean item score of 2.93 (Table 1).

Table 1. FLCAS Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Component[1]	Items	Total M	Mean Item Score	SD	Min	Max	α
Overall (FLCAS)	33	96.59	2.93	22.93	46	159	0.955
Communication apprehension	11	32.27	2.93	7.12	17	52	0.817
Fear of negative evaluation	6	17.41	2.90	4.81	6	28	0.819
Test anxiety	5	14.88	2.98	3.88	5	25	0.803

[1]Note: The three subscales account for 22 of the 33 FLCAS items. The remaining 11 items do not load onto a named theoretical component.

Situational profiles of willingness to communicate

The most striking feature of the rating scale data is its flatness. The total spread across all eighteen situations was 0.19, from 3.42 (disagreeing with a classmate) to 3.61 (a prepared presentation), with all means clustered around 3.50. The honest interpretation is that the five-point instrument did not meaningfully differentiate between situations for this cohort.

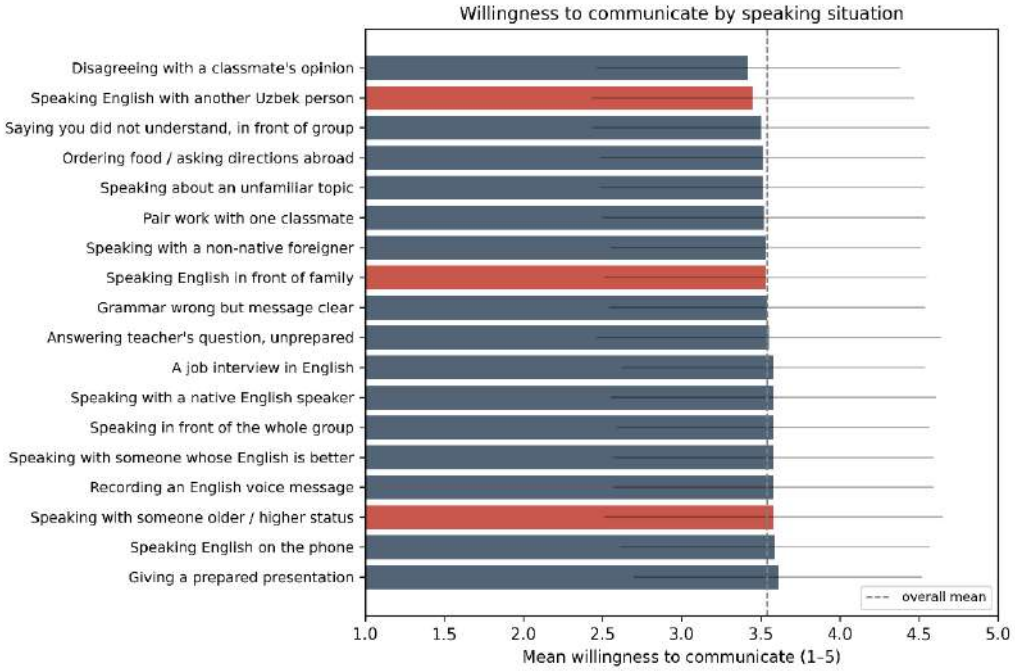


Figure 1. Mean willingness to communicate by speaking situation

Forced-choice nomination, by contrast, differentiated sharply. Asked to select the three situations making them most nervous, participants identified a job interview in English as the dominant trigger (24.4%), followed by admitting a lack of comprehension before the group (20.0%). High-stakes evaluative encounters and face-threatening admissions therefore suppress communication more acutely than the Likert ratings were able to register. This divergence between the two elicitation formats is itself a methodological result: forced choice discriminates where scalar rating does not, and situational diagnosis should not rely on rating scales alone.

The data indicates that the situations suppressing communication the most are not encounters with foreign native speakers, but rather face-threatening peer interactions within the classroom. Disagreeing with a classmate (M = 3.42) and admitting a lack of understanding to the group (M = 3.50) ranked as the most restrictive situations for learners. Notably, when asked to explicitly nominate the single situation that made them “most nervous”, a job interview in English (24.4%) and admitting lack of understanding (20.0%) were the most frequent selections.

Testing the Situational Expectations

Section 2.3 stated three expectations: that speaking with another Uzbek person (Item 9), with someone older or of higher status (Item 11), and before family (Item 16) would depress willingness under local norms of face and status asymmetry. The data did not support them. Although speaking with another Uzbek person ranked second lowest (M = 3.45), the difference from the overall mean was not significant (p = .261); higher-status interlocutors (M = 3.58, p = .633) and family observation (M = 3.53, p = .904) attracted average willingness. For adult learners in these settings, general evaluative threat appears to supersede status asymmetry.

Demographic Variance and Correlational Analysis

A strong negative correlation was found between overall anxiety and situational willingness to communicate (r = −.600, p < .001; Figure 2). Demographic patterns were counter-intuitive. Anxiety did not decline with proficiency: the Upper-Intermediate cohort (n = 25) reported descriptively higher anxiety (M = 108.1) than Pre-Intermediate (M = 92.4) and Intermediate (M = 96.3) groups. Anxiety also varied by purpose, with learners studying for work (M = 104.9) and study abroad (M = 100.0) reporting higher levels than those studying for travel (M = 89.8). Given subgroup sizes, these differences are reported descriptively and were not tested for significance.

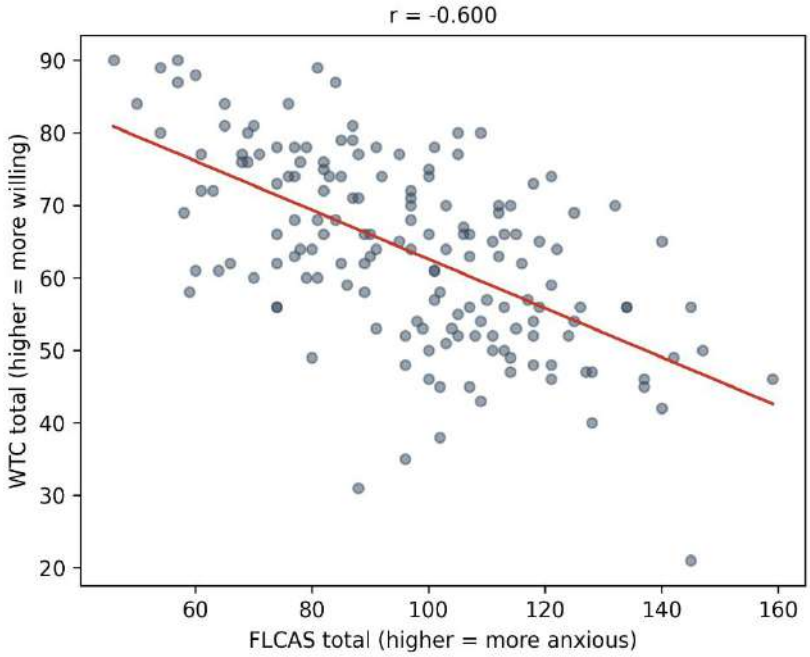


Figure 2. **Scatterplot of total speaking anxiety against total willingness to communicate**

Conclusion. This study provides a diagnostic situational profile of speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate among adult Uzbek-L1 learners of English. The Uzbek adaptation of the FLCAS demonstrated high internal consistency in this sample, and is offered for further validation on other Uzbek learner populations.

Three findings invite methodologists to reconsider standard assumptions about learner hesitation. First, the cohort reported moderate anxiety, marginally below the scale midpoint, rather than the severe

apprehension often assumed. Second, although the five-point rating scale did not differentiate between communicative contexts, direct nomination revealed a sharp hierarchy: high-stakes evaluative encounters and face-threatening classroom admissions emerged as the principal barriers to speech. Third, the predicted cultural inhibitors — status asymmetry and in-group L2 use — were not supported as distinct suppressants, suggesting that general evaluative threat supersedes them in this setting.

For instructional design, this indicates a structural rather than affective response. Since anxiety was most pronounced in the upper-intermediate and career-driven subgroups, generalised confidence-building activity is unlikely to be sufficient. What the profile points to is the deliberate management of classroom stakes: establishing low-consequence conditions for disagreement, and explicitly normalising the admission of non-comprehension.

Limitations. Data were collected by convenience sampling from a single city, in private-course settings, using cross-sectional self-report measures. The small Upper-Intermediate subgroup (n = 25) limits confidence in proficiency-based comparisons, which are reported descriptively. The divergence between rating and nomination formats also suggests that scalar instruments alone may be insufficient for situational diagnosis — a question worth addressing directly in future work, alongside longitudinal designs and probability sampling.

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