

# The Effect of Interlocutor Status on Second Language Anxiety and Spoken French Proficiency

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This study examined the effect of interlocutor status on the second language anxiety (SLA), spoken French proficiency (spoken FP), and perceived French proficiency (perceived FP) of students with French as a second language. Participants were asked by a Francophone professor (high status) or a Francophone peer (low status) to complete an oral task in French. It was predicted that high status would cause higher SLA, lower spoken FP, and lower perceived FP in participants than low status. Although hypotheses were not supported, regression analysis revealed that perceived FP marginally moderates the relationship between status and SLA. Participants with low perceived FP were more anxious when speaking to the peer as opposed to the professor than participants with high perceived FP. This finding was further supported by a negative correlation between perceived FP and SLA. Results are discussed in the context of negative evaluation and self-confidence.

*Keywords:* second language anxiety, interlocutor status, language proficiency, negative evaluation

Cette étude a examiné l'effet du statut de l'interlocuteur sur l'anxiété de langue seconde (ALS), la maîtrise du français parlé (MF parlé) et la maîtrise du français perçue (MF perçue) d'élèves ayant le français comme langue seconde. Les participants furent évalués par un professeur (statut élevé) ou un collègue (statut faible) francophone sur une tâche de français oral. Il fut prévu qu'un statut élevé entraînerait une ALS supérieure et une MF parlée et perçue inférieures à celles entraînées par un statut faible. Bien que les hypothèses furent infirmées, une régression hiérarchique révéla que la MF perçue modère le lien entre le statut et l'ALS. Les participants ayant une faible MF perçue étaient plus anxieux lorsqu'évalué par un collègue que par un professeur. Ceci fut soutenu par une corrélation négative entre la MF perçue et l'ASF. Les résultats sont discutés dans un contexte d'évaluation négative et de confiance en soi.

*Mots-clés :* anxiété de langue seconde, statut de l'interlocuteur, maîtrise langagière, évaluation négative

Foreign language anxiety or second language anxiety (SLA), established as an independent construct distinct from other forms of anxiety, is defined as the anxiety an individual experiences in second language learning situations (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, 1992). Similar to test or public speaking anxiety, SLA is a situation-specific anxiety where the individual experiences a "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Horwitz,

2001, p.113) whenever engaging in second language activities (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1992). It is important to study second language constructs such as anxiety, because they involve interpersonal contacts related to the Canadian intergroup context (i.e., contact between Anglophones and Francophones). The present study, conducted in a Canadian context, was specifically interested in SLA and spoken proficiency for individuals with French as a second language.

In the literature, SLA is consistently negatively correlated with second language proficiency and achievement (Aida, 1994; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Horwitz, 1986, 2001; Kim, 1998; MacIntyre, 1992; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992). This association is present for

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many target languages and across various levels of language instruction (Horwitz, 2001; Tóth, 2009). More specifically, SLA has been associated with impairments in comprehension, lower word production, listening deficits in vocabulary learning, reduced course grades, and lower standardized test scores (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Past research suggests that of all the second language activities, tasks that measure spoken proficiency are associated with higher levels of SLA (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Kim, 1998; MacIntyre, 1992; Philips, 1992). One limitation of this correlational research is its inability to identify additional factors that may be influencing SLA and spoken proficiency. Establishing causation between a particular social factor and SLA or spoken proficiency will provide a clearer picture into the contexts in which anxiety develops and persists in second language communication.

One important social factor in need of investigation is that of interlocutor status. In other words, how does the identity of the native speaker (expertise, authority, and manner of communication) influence the SLA and spoken proficiency of the second language speaker? Because language learning often takes place in a social setting where communication with other individuals is required, interlocutor status is an important variable to study in second language interaction. Moreover, interlocutor status is important in contexts where interpersonal and intergroup communication between individuals of different status is necessary (i.e., proficiency at job interviews, or performance at public speaking forums such as public debates or conferences; see Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The relevance of studying interlocutor status in second language contexts can be understood by exploring two underlying conceptualizations of SLA. First, SLA has been viewed as a result of actual or perceived negative evaluation from the interlocutor (Horwitz et al., 1986). Second, high levels of SLA have been attributed to low levels of self-confidence (Clément, Major, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977).

### **Negative Evaluation**

Horwitz et al. (1986) have attributed SLA to a fear of negative evaluation. Whether perceived or real, evaluation puts pressure on the individual to perform well and avoid errors. The underlying assumption is that performance mistakes will result in negative evaluation. Students report that language learning courses are among the most anxiety-provoking

learning situations (MacIntyre, 1992), which makes sense when one considers the emphasis on evaluation in second language classes (i.e., testing, oral exams, and ongoing participation).

Palacios (1998) found that students felt more comfortable speaking their second language outside of class than they did in class. Students stated that SLA in class was due to the fact that they were being evaluated. One assumption in this past finding is that the relationship between the second language speaker and the interlocutor differs in a classroom setting compared to a natural setting. In class, communication is based on evaluation and performance. In contrast, outside the classroom, communication is based on the need or the desire to converse with someone who is typically a native speaker.

### **Self-Confidence**

Researchers have also explored the relationship between self-confidence and SLA. Second language self-confidence has been defined as a combination of high perceived language proficiency and low levels of language anxiety (Clément et al., 1977). A model by Clément (1986) proposes that self-confidence in one's second language is associated with the frequency and the quality of contact with native speakers. Contact that is pleasant and laid back increases an individual's perception of his or her second language ability, thus improving second language self-confidence. Contact that is disagreeable and anxiety-provoking has the opposite effect. On a conceptual level, it could be that a positive interaction with the interlocutor boosts participants' self-confidence, resulting in lower levels of SLA and higher levels of spoken proficiency.

In spite of the conceptual foundation for studying interlocutor status' effect on SLA, previous research on status is preliminary and inconclusive at best. To our knowledge, only two studies exploring the effect of interlocutor status on language anxiety (native or foreign) or spoken proficiency exist in the literature.

Hilmert, Christenfeld and Kulik (2002) studied the effect of interlocutor status, as defined by expertise in native language public speaking, on cardiovascular reactivity. Results showed higher levels of cardiovascular reactivity for participants giving a speech to expert judges than for participants giving a speech to novice judges. One limitation of this study is that the researchers only measured physiological reactions to stress, which is not

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necessarily synonymous with other methods of measuring SLA. Furthermore, they did not measure the proficiency or quality of the participants' speech.

The second study (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986) examined the effect of interlocutor status, as defined by the interlocutor's manner of communication, on second language spoken proficiency. The experimenter either treated participants in a friendly or an unfriendly manner. The task involved describing three ambiguous pictures in the participant's second language. Participants in the unfriendly condition gave less interactive and elaborate descriptions of the ambiguous images than participants in the friendly condition. This study is limited because it measures the impact of interlocutor status on spoken proficiency, but not SLA.

### The Current Study

In order to examine the ways in which interlocutor status predicts SLA and spoken French proficiency (spoken FP), the present study established SLA and spoken FP as outcome variables of status rather than simply focusing on the relationship between them, as past correlational research has done. Perceived French proficiency (perceived FP) was also established as an outcome variable in order to link results to Clément et al.'s (1977) construct of self-confidence, which is theoretically higher when participants have high perceived FP and low SLA. To distinguish between spoken FP and perceived FP, spoken FP refers to actual speaking ability when communicating in French (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and fluency), whereas perceived FP refers to beliefs about communicative ability regardless of actual ability.

A better understanding of the influence of interlocutor status on SLA and spoken and perceived second language ability is important for second language learning contexts in and out of the classroom. This understanding could lead to the development of strategies that improve academic evaluation and language learning by diminishing the salience of anxiety-provoking factors, or by compensating for these factors by adding elements that reduce SLA and improve language proficiency.

Due to the differing definitions in past research, it is important to clearly define interlocutor status. In the current study, interlocutor status was defined as the interpersonal communication (distant versus friendly) between the interviewer (professor versus peer) and

the interviewee (student). The professor interlocutor represented high status. This was due to a higher level of education, elevated authority in the academic milieu, and expertise on the topic of conversation compared to the student. Furthermore, using professional language established a level of distance between the professor and the student. In contrast, the peer interlocutor represented equal status to the student given the similar level of education, authority, and expertise. The peer also communicated in a colloquial and a friendly manner.

The purpose of the study was twofold. The first goal was to examine how interlocutor status influences the spoken FP and the perceived FP of a second language speaker. More specifically, does speaking with a Francophone professor (high status) cause detriments to spoken FP and perceived FP compared to speaking with a Francophone peer (equal status)? The second goal was to explore whether interlocutor status causes differences in the level of SLA. In other words, does high versus low status cause SLA to increase and decrease respectively?

It was hypothesized that students who communicate with a Francophone professor would have higher SLA scores, lower spoken FP, and lower perceived FP compared to students who communicate with a Francophone peer. Furthermore, in line with the correlational research associating SLA with second language performance and achievement, it was predicted that SLA would be significantly negatively correlated with spoken FP and perceived FP. These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

## Method

### Participants

A final sample of 48 (43 female) undergraduate students,  $M_{age} = 20.52$ ,  $SD = 2.81$ , was used for the present study. Five participants were dropped from the sample due either to early withdrawal from the study or insufficient spoken French ability. All participants were recruited from Introduction to Psychology, French Studies courses, and discipline courses taught in French at York University. Students from Introduction to Psychology ( $n = 16$ ) received class credit for their participation. All other participants were entered into a draw to win a \$20 gift card. To take part in the study, participants needed to have a first language other than French and be able to speak French to the extent that they were willing to read

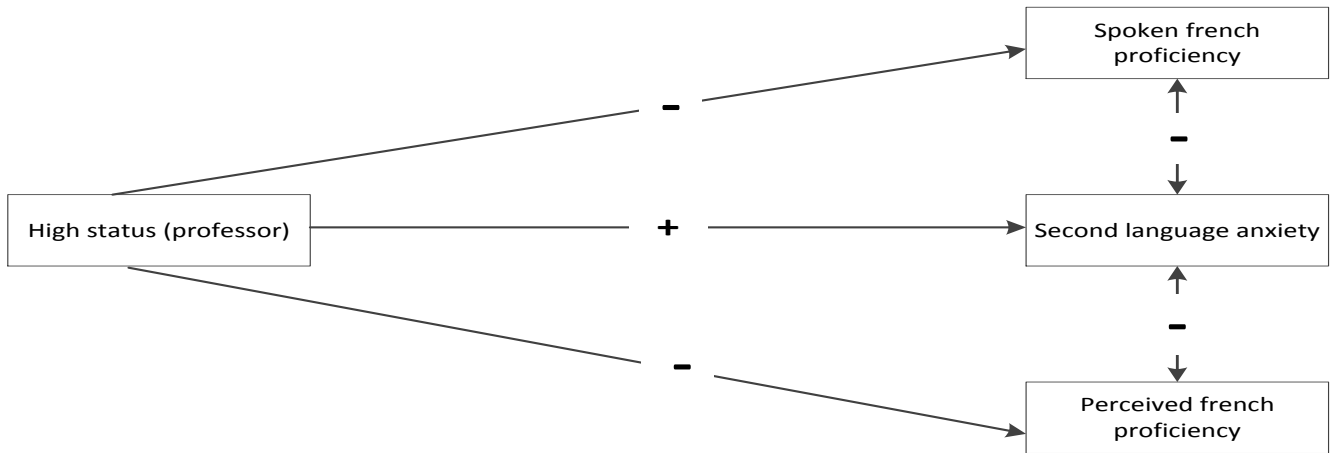


Figure 1. Illustration of experimental hypotheses. High status was expected to induce higher levels of SLA, lower spoken French proficiency, and lower perceived French proficiency.

aloud and communicate orally in French. In other words, participants could not be Francophone, but did not need to have English as their native tongue. Anglophone participants represented 71% ( $n = 34$ ) of the final sample. Half of these anglophones ( $n = 17$ ) spoke at least one other language in addition to French and English. First languages other than English included Spanish ( $n = 3$ ), Pashto ( $n = 2$ ), Arabic ( $n = 1$ ), Bengali ( $n = 1$ ), Greek ( $n = 1$ ), Hebrew ( $n = 1$ ), Hindi ( $n = 1$ ), Polish ( $n = 1$ ), Russian ( $n = 1$ ), Romanian ( $n = 1$ ), and Serbian ( $n = 1$ ).

### Procedure and Measures

The current study used a between-subjects experimental design to examine the effects of interlocutor status on SLA, spoken FP, and perceived FP. Interlocutor status, the independent variable, was manipulated by having participants with French as a second language watch a video of either a Francophone professor of high status or a Francophone peer of low status who asked participants to complete several communicative tasks in French. The same confederate was used for both professor and peer conditions, and was videotaped to control for extraneous differences between conditions.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the professor condition or the peer condition, and were individually tested. Participants were told that the study was about learning a second language in different contexts, and that it was being conducted in collaboration with a Francophone professor or a Francophone peer at the University of Nice, depending on the experimental condition. For the peer

condition, the participants were told that the Francophone peer was a good friend; someone the experimenter had met the previous year during a study abroad program. This was done to establish that the Francophone peer was (1) friendly, and (2) able and willing to interact with an anglophone (the experimenter). For the professor condition, no elaboration was given on the nature of the relationship. This was done to establish a level of professional distance between the Francophone professor and the participants. Next, participants were informed that the Francophone professor or Francophone peer was unable to meet with them in person, but that he had recorded a video explaining the project. All interaction with the experimenter was scripted and conducted in English. When needed, the experimenter answered any procedural or technical questions from the participants. Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of each session.

After agreeing to take part in the study, participants in both conditions were required to complete an online questionnaire, watch the interlocutor status manipulation video (professor or peer), read an article aloud, summarize the article in their own words, and respond to a question related to the article. Each part of the procedure was completed consecutively without time breaks. The experimenter remained in the room for the duration of the experiment to facilitate each task (i.e., start and stop the manipulation video, open and close the online questionnaire). All tasks, except for the online questionnaire, were performed in French. The following is a description of each component of the study.

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**Questionnaire part 1.** In addition to collecting information about academic and social French experience, the online questionnaire measured perceived FP using two self-report measures. First, the Global French Proficiency Scale, created for the present study, was a 4-item measure ( $\alpha = .88$ ) that asked participants to rate their perceived ability to speak, read, write, and understand French as either *excellent*, *very good*, *good*, *competent*, or *poor*. Second, a modified version of the Can-Do Scale, as used by Lalonde and Gardner (1984), and MacIntyre, Noels and Clément (1997) asked participants to report the difficulty level of several speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension tasks in French (i.e., the ability to understand French movies without subtitles). This modified measure is a 16-item, 7-point scale (1 = *very easy* to 7 = *very difficult*). This scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Manipulation video.** Next, participants were either shown the video of the Francophone professor or the Francophone peer. Both videos used the same confederate. In the Francophone professor video, the confederate was dressed in a suit, spoke in an authoritative tone of voice, and used the respectful French pronoun “*vous*” typically employed in an academic professor-student relationship. He spoke exclusively in French. The confederate introduced himself as a professor at the University of Nice, France with a doctorate in Linguistics. He shared several accomplishments including his presidency in the Association of Bilingualism and the publication of several academic articles. Next, he described the present study as a collaborative project committed to the advancement of bilingualism in Canada that he was working on in conjunction with several Canadian universities. All of these elements were meant to convey high interlocutor status.

In the Francophone peer video, the confederate was casually dressed, spoke in a colloquial and relaxed tone of voice, and used the French pronoun “*tu*” commonly used in peer relationships. Likewise, he spoke exclusively in French. The confederate introduced himself as an undergraduate Linguistics student at the University of Nice, France. He explained his involvement in the bilingual club on campus, which gave him the opportunity to practice his English. Next, he shared that he had decided to complete his thesis on bilingualism in collaboration with the experimenter of the present study, his friend and colleague. All of these elements were meant to convey low interlocutor status.

**Experimental task.** The experimental task was made up of three oral French tasks: reading an article, summarizing the article in one’s own words, and responding to a question about the article. The French article reported the tragic story of a teen suicide resulting from cyberbullying as well as from physical and sexual harassment. This controversial topic was chosen to facilitate participants’ formulation of opinionated responses.

After being asked to read and summarize the article aloud, the confederate asked participants whether or not one can attribute the responsibility of a cyberbullying incident like this to a particular person or source (i.e., the society, the child’s parents, the child him or herself, or the child’s classmates). To facilitate completion of the experimental task, all instructions were also displayed on a laptop following the video. Participants were video recorded while providing their responses.

**Spoken FP.** The spoken FP of each participant, identified by the recorded video responses, was scored by both the experimenter and a Francophone judge (a second year Psychology student) using the Spoken French Proficiency Scale, a collection of modified rating scales from the French version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). This framework provides an explanation of the knowledge and skills needed to effectively communicate in French and defines progressive levels of proficiency in second language communication. Using a 5-point scale with corresponding descriptors of increasing proficiency, four elements of spoken FP were measured: general linguistic range (*étendue linguistique générale*), verbal fluency (*aisance à l’oral*), vocabulary control (*maîtrise du vocabulaire*), and grammatical accuracy (*correction grammaticale*) for a total score of 20. These four measures referred to the participants’ summary and opinion of the article. The scale received excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .96$ ). In order to assess the efficacy of the coding system, the experimenter’s ratings of spoken FP, which were used in the subsequent analyses, were examined in relation to the Francophone judge’s assessment of responses. The inter-rater reliability for the mean of all four measures combined achieved a strong agreement, average measures ICC = .79, 95% CI [.62, .88].

**Questionnaire part 2.** Following the completion of the experimental task, participants completed the following measures online.

**SLA.** The SLA Scale used for the present study was an 8-item modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) meant to measure the amount of anxiety felt in language learning situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). The FLCAS has been used in a variety of studies (Aida, 1994; Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Horwitz, 1986; Horwitz et al., 1986; Kim, 1998; MacIntyre, 1992; Palacios, 1998; Phillips, 1992; Tóth, 2009). Original scale items reflect the test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation experienced in the context of the foreign or second language classroom. The modified SLA Scale asked participants to identify, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements (i.e., I feel very self-conscious about my language performance). Each statement referred to the level of comfort or anxiety the participant felt when completing the experimental tasks. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

**Open-ended question.** Acting as a qualitative measure, an open-ended question asked participants to identify the extent to which they felt their performance in the session accurately reflected their ability to speak French.

**Manipulation check.** One 7-point item asked participants to identify the extent to which the Francophone interviewer came across as an authority figure (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*). This question was meant to determine how well participants perceived the differential interlocutor status across the professor

and peer conditions. Participants were also asked to explain what they thought the present study was about.

Participants were provided with the experimenter's email in the event of further questions or concerns, and were thanked for their participation. Debriefing took place via email, where participants were informed of all minor deception used in the study as well as the study's real purpose.

## Results

### Manipulation Check

An independent samples t-test was conducted on the manipulation check question to determine whether the experimental manipulation of interlocutor status had the intended effect across conditions. As planned, participants viewed the Francophone professor as having more authority ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ) than the Francophone peer ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ),  $t(46) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = .84$ .

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all primary measures across conditions can be found in Table 1. As can be seen from this table, there was no concern for floor or ceiling effect for any of the measures. All of the measures were also checked for normality, skewness, kurtosis as well as for outliers. All statistics indicated that there were no problems with the data.

### Testing for Condition Effect

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to test the hypotheses that participants in the professor condition would have higher scores on the SLA Scale,

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics for all Primary Measures Across Conditions*

Variables	Professor ( $n = 24$ )		Peer ( $n = 24$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Global French Proficiency Scale	3.30	0.80	3.49	0.70
2. Can-Do Scale	4.70	0.87	4.81	0.82
3. SLA Scale	4.06	1.09	4.35	1.11
4. Spoken French Proficiency Scale	3.13	1.16	3.44	0.98

*Note.*  $N = 48$ . SLA = second language anxiety.

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Table 2

*Zero-Order Bivariate Correlations Between Primary Measures*

Measures	1	2	3	4
1. Global French Proficiency Scale	-	.66**	-.45**	.42**
2. Can-Do Scale		-	-.44*	.37**
3. SLA Scale			-	-.08
4. Spoken French Proficiency Scale				-

Note. \*\*  $p < .001$ , SLA = Second Language Anxiety.

and lower scores in the Global French Proficiency Scale or the Can-Do Scale than participants in the peer condition. No condition effects were found for the SLA Scale,  $t(46) = 0.94$ ,  $p = .354$ ,  $d = .27$ , for the Spoken French Proficiency Scale,  $t(46) = 1.00$ ,  $p = .324$ ,  $d = .29$  for the Global French Proficiency Scale,  $t(46) = 1.87$ ,  $p = .390$ ,  $d = .25$ , and for the Can-Do Scale,  $t(46) = .46$ ,  $p = .646$ ,  $d = .13$ .

**Correlational Analyses**

Correlations between the primary measures are summarized in Table 2. Scores on the Spoken French Proficiency Scale were positively correlated with both measures of perceived FP (Global French Proficiency Scale and Can-Do Scale), where the greater the perceived FP of participants, the better their spoken FP. Confirming the hypothesis that SLA would be negatively correlated with perceived FP, it can be seen that both the Global French Proficiency Scale and the Can-Do Scale were negatively correlated with the

SLA Scale. The higher the perceived FP of participants, the lower their SLA. However, the hypothesis that SLA would be negatively correlated with spoken FP was not supported.

**The Interaction of Status with Perceived FP in Predicting Spoken FP and SLA**

Given that no main effects of condition were found, the possibility that interlocutor status may have been interacting with perceived FP to predict spoken FP and SLA differentially was explored using hierarchical regression analyses. Status and perceived FP (centered) were entered as predictors in Step 1, their interaction term (status X perceived FP) was entered as a predictor in Step 2, and spoken FP (or SLA) was entered as the outcome variable. For spoken FP, the interaction effect of status and perceived FP was not statistically significant. For SLA, the interaction of status and perceived FP was marginally significant,  $F(1, 44) = 2.88$ ,  $p = .097$  (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses Testing Condition Effects*

Predictors	Outcome variables							
	SLA				Spoken FP			
	$R^2$	$b$	$SE b$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$b$	$SE b$	$\beta$
Step 1	.22				.15			
Status		.36	.29	.17		.26	.29	.12
Percieved FP		-.59***	.17	-.45***		.46**	.18	.36**
Step 2	.27				.15			
Status		.36	.28	.17		.26	.30	.12
Percieved FP		.26	.53	.20		.47	.55	.37
Status X Percieved FP		-.58*	.34	-.68*		-.01	.36	-.01

Note. \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; SLA: For Step 2,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$  ( $p < .05$ ); Spoken FP: For Step 2,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ , *ns*; SLA = Second Language Anxiety, FP = French Proficiency.

This interaction effect is plotted in Figure 2, where high perceived FP was set at 1 standard deviation above the mean, and low perceived FP was set at 1 standard deviation below the mean. The slopes were tested using simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). For participants who reported having high perceived FP, the experimental manipulation did not influence their SLA ( $b = -.12, t = -0.30, p = .766$ ). Contrary to hypotheses, for participants who reported having low perceived FP, those in the peer condition experienced more SLA than those in the professor condition ( $b = .85, t = 2.11, p = .040$ ).

### Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the impact of high and low interlocutor status on SLA, spoken FP, and perceived FP. Spoken interpersonal communication is at the core of SLA and second language learning, where research shows that second language speaking tasks are associated with higher levels of SLA than other second language tasks (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Kim, 1998; MacIntyre, 1992; Philips, 1992). Given the correlational nature of previous research, it is important to better understand the contextual factors that play a role in the level of SLA and language proficiency in second language speaking tasks. Focusing on one contextual factor, the present study attempted to further the preliminary

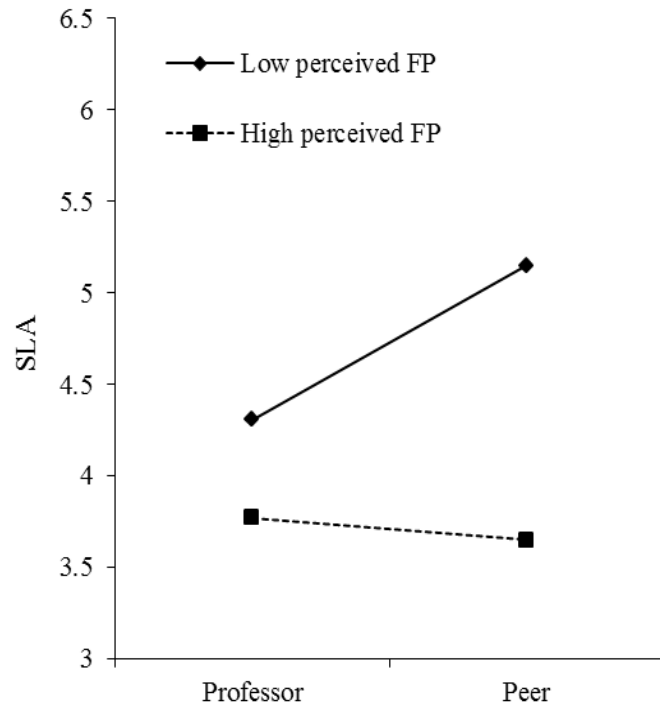


Figure 2. Simple slopes analysis for SLA across condition as moderated by perceived FP.

research on interlocutor status by asking participants to perform a number of spoken French tasks for either a Francophone professor of high status or a Francophone peer of low status.

It was predicted that SLA would be negatively correlated with both spoken FP and perceived FP. Partially in line with the correlational hypotheses, SLA was negatively correlated with perceived FP. However, there was no significant association between SLA and spoken FP. This pattern of findings suggests that higher SLA was related to the perception of diminished ability, but unrelated to actual performance.

It was also predicted that high interlocutor status would result in higher SLA, lower spoken FP, and lower perceived FP than low interlocutor status. Contrary to this hypothesis, results revealed no effect of status manipulation on SLA, spoken FP, or perceived FP. Clément et al.'s (1977) model of self-confidence in second language use emphasizes the importance of perceived proficiency when interacting with members of the second language community. Given this model, an exploratory analysis examining the moderating effect of perceived FP was justified in the present study. Indeed, the exploratory analysis showed that perceived FP marginally moderated the relationship between status and SLA. When participants believed that they were less competent in French, they were more anxious when speaking to a Francophone peer of equal status than when speaking to a Francophone professor of high status. The direction of this interaction was opposite to the original hypotheses. Conversely, when participants believed they were highly competent in French, status had no effect across conditions.

### SLA with Low Perceived FP

The fact that participants with low perceived FP found a Francophone peer of equal status more anxiety-inducing than a Francophone professor is an element that deserves attention. Although results indicated that participants perceived the Francophone professor as having more authority than the Francophone peer, authority represented only one aspect of interlocutor status in the present study. Lower status was also established by stressing the friendliness and support of the Francophone peer in contrast to the Francophone professor. This was done because Clément et al. (1977) and Palacios (1998)



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found that students felt more comfortable speaking their second language outside the classroom with friends or at home than they did in the classroom. The experimenters explained that the Francophone peer was a close friend and was interested in learning English. The Francophone peer also spoke in a more relaxed and friendly tone of voice than the Francophone professor. However, because participants had never met the Francophone peer, it may be that these elements were too impersonal to resemble a true friendship. This could explain why no experimental effects were found across conditions.

It may be that other elements of interlocutor status were at play in the present study, including the possibility of negative evaluation from the interlocutor. The fact that participants with low perceived FP found a Francophone peer of equal status more anxiety-inducing than a Francophone professor suggests that status had some effect on SLA, even if it was opposite to the expected direction. In addition to the fact that participants had never met the Francophone peer before, the experimental task was one-sided, video recorded, and fixed on a certain topic. Given these elements, it is likely that they did not interpret the experimental task as having a conversation with a friend outside of class. Rather than creating the intended distinction between the peer condition (low status, relaxed and friendly conversational French in a natural setting) and the professor condition (high status, formal and evaluated conversational French in a classroom), the interaction in both conditions resembled a classroom-type evaluation.

Horwitz et al. (1986) have suggested that SLA results from a fear of negative evaluation. Palacios (1998) stated that students reported feeling more comfortable speaking a second language outside of class, because they were removed from the possibility of evaluation. While interlocutor status and evaluative consequences represent two separate concepts, they are closely related to each other in that the level of perceived negative evaluation by the student may depend on his or her relationship to the interlocutor. For example, just because a peer has less authority, does not mean that he or she will evaluate the student less negatively. This may be particularly true if the peer has no friendship connection with the student, and if the interaction takes place in a classroom-type setting, which was the case in the present study.

It may be that participants considered being evaluated by the Francophone peer as worse than being evaluated by the Francophone professor. One participant, exposed to the Francophone peer, explained that her fluency increases when speaking with a native-speaker friend who establishes a safe learning environment by providing correction and support. However, this participant did not report experiencing the same level of support from the Francophone peer as she would have experienced from a native-speaker friend, and instead she expressed having the “constant thought of ‘you said something wrong’ in the back of [her] head.”

Classroom-type oral tasks, such as the one in the current study, are often performed for a professor rather than a peer. A professor hears second language speakers on a regular basis and is familiar with the process of teaching a second language. What happens within the classroom has no serious repercussions on one’s social life outside of the classroom. Conversely, when speaking to a peer, there is the possibility of communication and friendship outside the classroom that does not exist with a professor. Therefore, the evaluative consequences of making performance errors in front of a peer in a classroom or formal setting are more varied than when making those errors in front of a professor. This is due to the underlying need to impress the peer, avoid judgment, or present oneself as cool, friendly, or interesting. This interpretation could explain why participants with low perceived FP had a higher level of SLA when speaking to the Francophone peer compared to the Francophone professor.

In future, all elements of interlocutor status should be measured to assess the impact of status manipulation. It would also be beneficial to measure perceived negative evaluation in order to strengthen the theoretical link between interlocutor status and evaluative consequences. To understand the role of peer evaluation on SLA and language proficiency, future avenues of research should explore the impact of communication with a peer inside and outside of the classroom, or with a stranger and a friend.

### **SLA with High Perceived FP**

Compared to participants with low perceived FP, Clément et al.’s (1977) model of self-confidence can explain why participants with high perceived FP had similar levels of SLA across both conditions. He proposed that individuals with low language anxiety

and high perceived proficiency are confident in speaking their second language. In the present study, participants with high perceived FP fit this description and were likely confident of their ability to present themselves in an intelligent manner for both the Francophone peer and the Francophone professor.

### Status and Spoken FP

Contrary to original hypotheses, the present study revealed no effect of status on spoken FP and no correlation between SLA and spoken FP. These findings are interesting in light of the numerous studies that have established a significant negative association between SLA and second language proficiency tasks (Horwitz, 1986, 2001; MacIntyre, 1992; Phillips, 1992). Steinberg and Horwitz (1986) even managed to experimentally show that inducing anxiety in participants by treating them in an unfriendly manner resulted in less elaborate oral explanations of ambiguous images.

The lack of association between SLA and spoken FP can be interpreted in two ways. First, feeling anxious does not actually influence individuals' performance, even when they believe they are performing badly or are incompetent in the language. In this sense, it is simply the perception of low proficiency that is associated with feeling anxious, where in reality the individual is performing to his or her skill level. Second, the lack of significant findings could be due to measurement error. The Spoken French Proficiency Scale used in the present study was a modified version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR is meant to be a descriptive scale that measures language proficiency, and has yet to establish strong reliability and validity. The lack of standardization for the Spoken French Proficiency Scale is a limitation when interpreting the effect of status on spoken FP. However, its use highlights the need to develop standardized scales measuring second language proficiency that can be easily scored by native-speaker judges. Available scales in the literature are either too broad (i.e., only measuring fluency) or too cumbersome (i.e., require extensive training to administer). The Spoken French Proficiency Scale was a preliminary attempt at using a modified scale that can be employed by any native or proficient speaker of the language in question. It should not be discarded, but developed by using it alongside other measures in future studies in order to ascertain its reliability and validity.

Certain limitations and recommendations should be highlighted with regard to the unconfirmed hypotheses. First, a lack of effect for interlocutor status across condition could be due to a small sample size. In order to increase power, future studies would benefit from testing a larger participant pool. Future studies should also aim to get an equal distribution between men and women in order to extend generalizability.

Second, it may be beneficial to control for demographic and personal information, such as the similarity between the participants' first language and the target language (French), exposure to second language speaking, or presence of an anxiety disorder. Although any differences across condition should have been eliminated through random assignment, these variables may influence self-confidence and motivation in speaking a second language. Furthermore, this information would shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of interlocutor status.

Third, having participants reflect on second language experience and perceived FP before completing the experimental task could have had a priming effect on their level of self-confidence in speaking French. For example, completing the Can-Do Scale prior to watching the video reminds participants of their beliefs regarding proficiency. Future studies could collect this information during a pre-test at a different time as opposed to doing it directly before exposure to the interlocutor.

Fourth, it could be that no condition effects were found because both the professor and the peer were from France. Canadian students likely have more exposure to French Canadian accents than to accents from France. What effect would status have if the interlocutor was Quebecer or Franco-Ontarian? Perhaps a true representation of equal status can only be established between the interlocutor and the participant if the peer is also a second language speaker. These are all relevant questions that can be answered through further research in the area of interlocutor status.

Finally, the lack of condition effect could be due to the use of video footage to manipulate interlocutor status in lieu of live interviews. On one hand, video footage is advantageous because it allows for greater control of extraneous factors by using the same confederate. On the other hand, it removes the participant from a fluid conversation and from

immediate evaluation. Future studies should explore the effect of interlocutor status on SLA and spoken FP using live interviews.

Even with these limitations, the current study was an important step for future research on interlocutor status, spoken FP, perceived FP, and SLA for several reasons. It was one of the first studies, other than the study by Steinberg and Horwitz (1986), to experimentally explore interlocutor characteristics in a second language context. It also presented a feasible way of measuring spoken FP using native-speaker judges. This scale should be replicated and developed in future research. Most importantly, it confirmed that beliefs about language proficiency are associated with SLA, and that when perceived FP is low, the evaluative consequences of interlocutor status influence the level of SLA. The link between interlocutor status and negative evaluation as well as their combined effect on SLA and language proficiency should be explored in future studies.

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