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FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY RESEARCH IN THE CROATIAN CONTEXT

Završni rad

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BA Thesis

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1. Introduction

For the last 30 years or so, researchers such as R.C. Gardner and P. D. MacIntyre (1994), C. Spielberger (1966), E.K. Horwitz (1986), and M. L. Price (1991) have been increasingly interested in the issue of foreign language (FL) anxiety, also known as xenoglossophobia (Brookins, 2020). They have focused mainly on the causes and consequences of FL anxiety and its persistence and prevalence among FL learners. This thesis aims to provide an overview of the most important research in the Croatian context, the findings of which have contributed to a better understanding of this issue. A book by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović *Strah od stranoga jezika: Kako nastaje, kako se očituje i kako ga osloboditi* (2002) offers a rich insight into the “layers” of FL anxiety based on her studies of the FL anxiety among Croatian EFL (English as a foreign language) learners.

Unlike international studies conducted by, for instance, McCroskey et al. (1977), Horwitz et al. (1986), Alpert and Haber (1960), and Kleinmann (1977), which tend to connect FL anxiety solely to the process of learning a FL, the effect it has on the language learning, and the use of FL, research carried out in Croatia endeavored to connect FL anxiety with other important factors which affect the process of language learning, such as motivation, risk-taking behavior, and self-concept¹ (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). According to Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), FL anxiety is the most important emotion affecting foreign language acquisition. However, research on this relevant phenomenon is still full of uncertainties and unanswered questions (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002), which leaves plenty of room for further research on the issue.

2. Foreign Language Anxiety

2.1 Anxiety in General

Anxiety naturally lies at the core of FL anxiety, and therefore, it shall be defined and discussed as a general term. It is considered a universal phenomenon with a high prevalence among people across the world. Spielberger (1983, in Puškar, 2010) described general anxiety as “an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension,

¹ Self-concept is how we perceive our behaviors, abilities, and unique characteristics. It is important because it affects our motivations, attitudes, and behaviors. It also affects how we feel about the person we think we are, including whether we are competent or have self-worth (Cherry, 2015).

apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.” Furthermore, the American Psychological Association defined anxiety as an emotion accompanied by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes, such as increased blood pressure, sweating, trembling, and dizziness (Felman and Browne, 2018).

Swift et al. (2014) stated that anxiety was a familiar and common emotional state that could work for and against us, depending on how we perceived these feelings and how we responded to them. They argued that the “right” amount of anxiety could motivate us to try harder, achieve better results and encourage action and creativity. However, persistent anxiety could have a debilitating impact on people's lives and cause real emotional distress (Swift et al., 2014). Anxiety and fear are two different terms that are often used interchangeably, but these two emotions should be distinguished from one another (Swift et al., 2014). Accordingly, Piechurska-Kuciel (2008, in Čiček, 2014) claimed that fear has the role of moving the organism away from the danger, whereas anxiety tends to move the organism towards danger or prevents the organism from entering the dangerous situation.

From the psychological perspective, anxiety is often divided into three types: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (Spielberger, 1983, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Spielberger (1983, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019) suggested that trait anxiety referred to people who were usually nervous in various circumstances. Moreover, he claimed that it did not change over time or in different situations because it was considered every individual's personality trait. Next, state anxiety was described as an emotional reaction to a particular situation that was perceived as dangerous (Spielberger, 1983, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Young (1998, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019) claimed that it could change and fluctuate over time.

Finally, the situation-specific type of anxiety, also known as “trait anxiety limited to a given context,” was defined as a unique anxiety form that occurred over time within a given situation (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Although it was related to different specific situations, such as taking a test, public speaking, class participation, or talking with a foreigner in a foreign language, it was consistent over time (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Given that language learners experience anxiety in different aspects of the specific situation, which is, in this case, a language class, FL anxiety is considered typical situation-specific anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety

FL anxiety is a phenomenon that has gained a lot of attention in the scientific literature on second language acquisition (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999). In her paper *Uloga straha od jezika u učenju stranog jezika* (1999), Mihaljević Djigunović claimed that FL anxiety could affect many components of the learning process, including achieving success in language learning. FL anxiety is described as anxiety experienced in a situation requiring students to use a non-native language in which they have limited competence (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999). Moreover, Puškar (2010, p.1) pointed out that the Croatian term *strah od stranog jezika* was slightly different from the English one and, “if translated literally, would read as fear of foreign languages.” There is a wide range of definitions of FL anxiety which will be further addressed.

The FL anxiety construct was first proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) in their paper *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*, published in the *Modern Language Journal*. They defined FL anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning experience” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.128). According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1989, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999), FL anxiety results from repeated negative experiences associated with a second language. In other words, it is a learned emotional response (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999). The higher the linguistic competence is, the lower the FL anxiety is (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1989, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999). Gardner and MacIntyre (1994, in Puškar, 2010) described FL anxiety as the feeling of tension and apprehension experienced in all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Boekaerts (1987, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999) considered FL anxiety a personality trait or a state associated with a specific situation. Moreover, Šafranĳ and Zivlak (2019) studied the link between personality traits and FL anxiety and concluded that personality traits could be significant determinants of language anxiety. In addition, the significant finding of their research was that students low in emotional stability showed an inclination toward concern about their language performance while expecting a negative outcome. They concentrated on language presentation that could go wrong and, thus, generated a state of anxiety in a situation when they had to show confidence in mastering foreign language knowledge and fluency. Besides that, they also found that high emotional stability predicted lower FL anxiety, which could be explained by the calm and collected behavior of emotionally stable individuals that

made them less stressed when they faced the pressure of using a foreign language (Šafranĳ and Zivlak, 2019).

Since FL anxiety has been considered and classified as typical situation-specific anxiety, it revolves around a specific situation of learning a foreign language. Thus, learners react differently in the same learning environment, depending on their individual differences² (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993, in Čiček, 2014).

Furthermore, Schwarzer (1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999) introduced four components of FL anxiety: cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical. While the cognitive component refers to negative self-evaluation and worries about self-concept, the emotional one implies feelings of tension and discomfort. Moreover, the behavioral component is associated with clumsiness, speech impediments, and withdrawn behaviors, whereas the physical one refers to physical reactions, such as trembling and hand sweating.

In addition, Tobias (1979, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) provided a FL anxiety impact model to explain the cognitive effects of FL anxiety on learning from instruction. Tobias (1979, 1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) postulated three levels at which anxiety might influence learning: input, processing, and output. The role of those three closely relevant levels has gradually been acknowledged in second language learning (Zhang, 2009). During the input stage, learners receive an external linguistic stimulus, and at the same time, attention, concentration, and encoding of information are activated. Therefore, learners who experience anxiety during this stage usually need to listen to or read the linguistic item several times. Next, the processing stage refers to the organization, storage, and assimilation of the previously received linguistic item. If FL anxiety occurs at this stage, it could make accomplishing complicated linguistic tasks more difficult. The output stage enables the learner to show to what extent they could use the foreign language.

2.3 Types of Foreign Language Anxiety

In respect of the effect FL anxiety has on the learning process, and the use of language, Alpert and Haber (1960, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) distinguished between facilitating or helpful anxiety and debilitating or harmful anxiety. Furthermore, when it comes to a low level of FL

² Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, in Čiček, 2014) classified individual differences, which affect the process of second language acquisition, into two categories: cognitive and affective. Whereas the cognitive variables include intelligence, language aptitude, and language-learning strategies, affective variables refer to learning styles, motivation, personality, attitude, and certainly language anxiety.

anxiety, it can have a motivating effect (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). A low level of FL anxiety often pushes us forward and motivates us to deal with a demanding task (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi (2019) suggested that facilitating anxiety helped FL learners perform better in the language. In addition, Kleinmann (1977, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) established that the students who experienced a low level of FL anxiety were encouraged to use more complex and demanding language structures, unlike the students who did not experience FL anxiety at all. Still, a high level of FL anxiety can have an inhibiting effect that induces learners to evade class participation and provokes frustration, fear, and worry (Oxford, 1999, in Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019).

2.4 Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz et al. (1986) described three related FL performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Although Horwitz et al. (1991) pointed out that FL anxiety was not a sum of these performance anxieties, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) argued that it was important to understand and distinguish these anxiety types that are formed within the processes of language learning and language use.

2.4.1 Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension, also known as communication anxiety, refers to a type of shyness associated with the fear of communicating with people and experienced during real or anticipated oral communication acts or public appearances (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). According to Hurt et al. (1976, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002), oral communication plays an important role in the educational system, especially in the Croatian system, as Croatian culture is particularly oral (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Furthermore, FL anxiety occurs due to classroom communication that is out of the learner's control and the learner's linguistic performance constantly being observed and evaluated (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

Given that communication anxiety is often experienced in the classroom context where learners are usually compelled to communicate, Krashen (1981, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) pointed out that pressured participation in communication could actually intensify communication apprehension, lower learning motivation, and consequently, cause failure in the learning process. Moreover, Mejias et al. (1991, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) noticed that learners with high levels of communication apprehension acquired negative feelings towards oral communication. Therefore, they generally eschewed communication by keeping silent in class (Mejias, 1991, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

McCroskey (1997) specified four types of communication apprehension: trait anxiety, context anxiety, audience anxiety, and situation anxiety. Trait anxiety is associated with the particular way people communicate in different contexts. It is subject to change and includes communication anxiety, writing anxiety, and performance anxiety. Next, context anxiety refers to communication apprehension in a specific context, such as in class and during public speaking or short dialogues. Audience anxiety was defined as a reaction to a barrier in communication caused by another person. Situation anxiety is, again, a result of a situational barrier in communication prompted by some other person or group of people (McCroskey, 1997).

Communication apprehension, as a trait-like personality characteristic, was claimed to be caused by heredity or environment or by a combination of both (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Regarding the environmental impact on communication apprehension, children communicate less if their communication acts are not acknowledged (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). In addition, children observe the people's communication behaviors in their surroundings and tend to imitate them. However, if the imitations of those communication behaviors are not acknowledged, children usually change their behavior (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Moreover, McCroskey (1997, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) suggested that situation anxiety was caused by formality, novelty, subordinate status, obscurity, and the level of attention given by other people. In fact, situation anxiety is caused by a personality predisposition to perceive situations differently; therefore, McCroskey (1977, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) supports an approach based on expectancies. For instance, if a person cannot create appropriate expectancies regarding other people, situations, and potential communication behavior outcomes, or if those created expectancies lead to negative outcomes, communication apprehension occurs. On the other hand, fulfilled expectations lead to self-confidence.

Regarding the consequences of communication apprehension, the most frequent one is communication avoidance (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990). However, as McCroskey and Richmond (1990) suggested, if people cannot evade communication, they will attempt to withdraw from it and speak only if necessary. Furthermore, one of the possible outcomes is communication disruption, in which a person "may have disfluencies in verbal presentation or unnatural nonverbal behaviors" (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990, p.30). Excessive communication is another consequence of communication apprehension in which a person will tend to "communicate in spite of the presence of high apprehension" (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990, p.30).

The correlation between FL anxiety and communication apprehension is based on self-perception's crucial role in the language-learning process. In fact, Foss and Reitzel (1991, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) explained that people who experienced both FL anxiety and communication apprehension tended to have a rather poor self-esteem and constantly expected failure. Additionally, FL anxiety is reinforced by the feelings of linguistic incompetence and inability to present ourselves according to our self-concept (Foss and Reitzel, 1991, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). On the other hand, Horwitz et al. (1986) argued that communication apprehension and FL anxiety were not the same phenomena because FL anxiety was a concept described as the unique anxiety that arose in a foreign language learning situation.

2.4.2 Test Anxiety

FL classes usually include constant written and oral assessments of learners' linguistic performance, meaning that learners often struggle with test anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Sarason (1980, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) stated that the fear of failure caused test anxiety. Although mistakes are considered natural and inevitable in the learning process, most students consider them indicators of incompetence (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Test anxiety is most commonly recognized in students who completed their tests poorly and consequently developed negative attitudes towards evaluation (Sarason, 1984, in Šafranĳ and Zivlak, 2019). They often set unrealistic demands for themselves, considering all but perfect results a failure (Horwitz et al., 1986). Shohamy (1982), Madsen (1982), and Putwain (2007, in Šafranĳ and Zivlak, 2019) found that test anxiety appeared as a consequence of several factors, such as students' attitudes toward language learning and study skills, time limits, personal variables, such as gender, age, educational and economic background.

It is assumed that oral examinations usually cause greater test anxiety than written examinations (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). However, Scott (1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) found that there was no link between test anxiety and the difference between oral and written examinations, while Jones (1985, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) noticed greater test anxiety during written examinations.

2.4.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is a broad concept because it is not limited to a particular situation (Horwitz et al., 1986). In fact, it can occur in any social, evaluative context, such as oral communication in foreign language classrooms. Generally, students are afraid of making mistakes, particularly during oral communication, because they fear being negatively evaluated

by their teachers or peers and losing their public image (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition, students often perceive their language performance as unsatisfying since they are surrounded by other language learners (Horwitz et al., 1986). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991, in Šafranĵ and Zivlak, 2019, p.276) suggested that students who experienced fear of negative evaluation tended to react passively, avoid all evaluative situations or at least reduce them to a minimum, and skip foreign language classes to “avoid unpleasant situations that make them feel they are lagging behind others.”

3. Foreign Language Anxiety Research

3.1 Foreign Language Anxiety Research Abroad

Foreign language teachers have long since noticed the impact of foreign language anxiety on the learning and teaching process (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2013). Although Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) considered FL anxiety research results inconsistent and contradictory, they were described as significant because they contributed to the comprehension of the FL learning process. Besides that, the research results helped students understand why FL anxiety occurred, realize that other students also dealt with it, and become familiar with certain strategies to reduce and overcome FL anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

Systematic research on FL anxiety began approximately 40 years ago. In 1983 at the University of Texas, Horwitz et al. investigated whether students experienced FL anxiety. As she described, those students were invited to join a “Support Group for Foreign Language Learning,” where they shared and discussed concerns and difficulties they found in language learning, listened to didactic presentations on effective language learning strategies, and participated in the anxiety management exercise (Horwitz et al., 1986). Based on the findings of group discussions and other activities, Horwitz et al. (1986) contributed significantly to the theory and the measurement of FL anxiety through their milestone paper “Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Language Anxiety: From Theory and Research to Classroom Implications.”

Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the first foreign language anxiety measure called *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS). It established FL anxiety as a phenomenon related to but distinct from other specific anxieties (Horwitz et al., 1986). The structure of FLCAS was developed from foreign language students’ reports, the authors’ clinical experiences, and a review of related instruments, e.g., *Personal Report of*

Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1984, in Kralova, 2016). FLCAS assesses a student's level of FL anxiety as indicated by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviors (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Furthermore, Mihaljević Djigunović (2013) pointed out that Horwitz's definition of FL anxiety (see subchapter 2.2) was reflected in FLCAS. As Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) indicated, the scale was designed to comprise the underlying components of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

FLCAS consists of 33 items accompanied by a 5-point self-report Likert-type scale of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) requesting the students to assess how they felt in different situations in which they were required to use a foreign language (Puškar, 2010). Out of 33 FLCAS items, 16 refer to the output stage, 10 to attitudes toward FL study, four items measure input anxiety (see subchapter 2.2), and three items are related to processing anxiety (Puškar, 2010).

Horwitz et al. (1986) tested FLCAS with 75 university students (ranging in age from 18 to 27) from 4 intact introductory Spanish classes. In their research, students who tested high on anxiety endorsed FLCAS items such as “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class”; “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class”; “I keep thinking that other students are better at languages than I am”; “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.” Moreover, they rejected statements like “I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class” and “I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.” Horwitz et al. (1986) reported that most of the statements reflective of FL anxiety were supported by a third or more of the students surveyed, and over half the students supported seven statements. Due to its high validity and reliability, the scale became the most frequently used and adopted self-report tool to measure FL anxiety in a classroom setting (Kralova, 2016).

Most FL anxiety research abroad established a negative correlation between anxiety and successful academic performance. In other words, increased anxiety leads to poor academic achievement (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). For instance, Young (1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) established that students who experienced a high level of FL anxiety scored low in oral examinations. Next, Daly (1977, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) found that students who dealt with FL writing anxiety tended to produce shorter compositions. Furthermore, Ely (1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) found that students with a high level

of discomfort during FL classes were less likely to take linguistic risks in class. However, Ely (1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) found no connection between FL anxiety and students' level of participation in FL class. Moreover, Chastain (1975, in Williams, 1991) established a negative relationship between test scores and FL anxiety in an audiolingual French course. On the other hand, he found a link between the high level of FL anxiety and high test scores in regular French or German courses (Chastain, 1975, in Williams, 1991). Chastain (1975, p.160, in Williams, 1991) explained these contradictory results by saying, “perhaps some concern about a test is a plus, while too much anxiety can produce negative results.”

Therefore, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) pointed out that it was difficult to confidently estimate the relationship between FL anxiety and the successful FL learning process. She specified two reasons for that. Firstly, she suggested that the FL learning process was a complex and multidimensional process affected by many variables such as motivation, attitude, learning strategies, aptitude, and teaching strategies. Consequently, it was difficult to determine the importance of a single variable. For instance, FL anxiety could affect the student's achievement only when their learning aptitude is low, or the impact of FL anxiety reverses in case of a high level of motivation. Secondly, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) suggested that different researchers used different measuring instruments as there was still no generally accepted instrument for measuring FL anxiety.

3.2 Foreign Language Anxiety Research in the Croatian Context

In Croatia, foreign language acquisition researchers, such as Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), Legac (2007), and Puškar (2010), dealt with the phenomenon of FL anxiety. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) concluded that some part of FL anxiety was related to the self-perception of an individual as an English language learner, some to the perception of language features, such as language complexity, and some to the classroom context features, such as assessment or the teacher's characteristics. On the other hand, she also concluded that some part of FL anxiety was connected to the learners' negative experiences in the use of English outside the class.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) stated that there was a lack of FL anxiety research in Croatia. Nevertheless, the research findings have made a valuable contribution to the comprehension of this concept. However, the impact FL anxiety has on the learning process is still unclear – some people consider FL anxiety a cause, while others consider it a result of failure (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

FL anxiety research studies that will be addressed and looked into in the following segment have been carried out in Croatia over the last two decades. Therefore, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) referred to these studies as frontier research. She claimed that it was important to examine this particular phenomenon in different social and cultural contexts due to its complexity. According to Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), what distinguishes Croatian research from FL anxiety research abroad is the connection of FL to other relevant factors such as motivation, intelligence, attitude, and learning strategies. She assumed that no factor had a linear and isolated effect on the FL anxiety because it was accompanied by and interacted with other factors.

3.2.1 Research Findings by Mihaljević Djigunović (1999, 2002)

Mihaljević Djigunović (1999) carried out research by which she wanted to investigate the presence of FL anxiety among Croatian learners of English as a foreign language. The author also wanted to establish whether there were variations in the intensity of the FL anxiety between male and female learners. Furthermore, she wanted to examine the relationship between FL anxiety and academic achievement, self-concept, motivation, and attributions of success and failure. The research sample consisted of 169 secondary school learners. Mihaljević Djigunović (1999) used one part of Gardner's (1985) questionnaire called *Attitude/Motivation Test Battery* (AMTB). Gardner's AMTB (1985) included 109 items with a Likert-type scale. This questionnaire aimed to analyze linguistic and non-linguistic goals people tried to accomplish by learning a FL. The part Mihaljević Djigunović (1999) used consisted of 5 items (1. "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class", 2. "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class", 3. "I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do", 4. "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class", 5. "I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English") dealing with the feelings of discomfort and anxiety while speaking English in class and the feeling of insecurity caused by the fear of being laughed at and humiliated by other students.

The research findings proved the presence of FL anxiety and showed that girls experienced FL anxiety more intensely than boys (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999). Moreover, the study reported that the high level of FL anxiety lowered the students' academic achievement. However, Mihaljević Djigunović (1999) argued that it was not clear if FL anxiety caused low academic achievement because of the possibility that the relationship of the variables mentioned above was under the influence of some other factors. According to the results, learners who experienced FL anxiety attributed their failure to the lack of knowledge,

task difficulty, and reduced interest in completing tasks. On the other hand, these learners attributed their success in FL learning to their perseverance. Furthermore, learners who dealt with FL anxiety experienced decreased motivation for studying. Based on her research findings, Mihaljević Djigunović (1999) concluded that the consequence of FL anxiety was certainly the recognizable lack of effort.

Research that will be further addressed has been put together in the previously mentioned book by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović (*Strah od stranoga jezika: Kako nastaje, kako se očituje i kako ga osloboditi*, 2002). The author carried out a number of studies, summed them up, and presented them in her book in order to show a broader and more comprehensive picture of FL anxiety in the Croatian context. The goal of her research was to establish the causes of FL anxiety among Croatian learners of English as a foreign language (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Assuming that FL anxiety was related to or caused by other individual learner factors, such as academic achievement, motivation, and linguistic risk-taking, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) also examined the relationship between FL anxiety and some of those factors.

Firstly, she examined the connection between FL anxiety and self-concept. In this study, the author used MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) questionnaire, which determined whether FL anxiety occurred in the input, processing, or output stage of the reception of linguistic information. Moreover, self-concept was measured by a shortened version of Laine's (1987) questionnaire, which examined learner's self-image, self-concept from the teacher and other students' perception, and learner's satisfaction with their academic achievement (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). By questioning 60 learners of different ages and different English language levels³, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) found that learners with less positive self-concept as English language learners experienced a higher level of FL anxiety. Furthermore, she wanted to establish the relationship between the abovementioned variables and academic achievement. The results showed that learners with positive and healthy self-concept achieved academic success; they were reported to be responsible and disciplined and had good grades and class attendance. In other words, less academically successful learners experienced a higher level of FL anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). In conclusion, FL anxiety affected academic achievement through the learners' self-concept. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) suggested that

³ English language levels are used to describe learners' language skills and include: A0/A1 (Beginner/Elementary), A2 (Pre Intermediate), B1 (Intermediate), B2 (Upper Intermediate), C1 (Advanced) and C2 (Proficient) (British Council, 2022).

teachers should avoid excessive criticism, especially in front of other students, and notice and evaluate students' abilities and qualities to help them create a positive self-concept.

Secondly, the author wanted to explore the relationship between FL anxiety and three factors important for FL acquisition: cooperativeness, risk-taking, and motivation. As Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) explained, cooperativeness referred to the tendency toward group work, cooperativeness with teachers and other students, and the need for belonging, while risk-taking behavior was defined as the willingness “to try out hunches about the new language and take the risk of being wrong” (Richards, Platt and Platt., 1992, p.317, in Majidifard et al., 2014). FLCAS (1986) was used to measure FL anxiety, while cooperativeness, risk-taking, and motivation were measured by Ely's (1986) questionnaires accompanied by a Likert-type scale. The risk-taking and motivation questionnaire contained six items, whereas the cooperativeness questionnaire consisted of 5 items (Ely, 1986, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). The study included 102 primary school learners, and those who experienced a high level of FL anxiety showed a lack of motivation and a low level of risk-taking. The author pointed out that teachers should help students overcome FL anxiety in the classroom environment so that they could become ready to take linguistic risks and actively participate in class.

Thirdly, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) wanted to determine the intensity of FL listening anxiety and its relationship with general FL anxiety. Moreover, she wanted to look into the connection between FL listening anxiety, self-concept, and academic achievement. Rost and Ross's (1991) 20-item questionnaire was used to examine 21 students of EFL who studied English as a compulsory course at college. This particular instrument was used to examine students' feelings of pleasure or anxiety, which accompany the listening process, and students' attitudes toward listening in general. Surprisingly, no relationship was found between FL listening anxiety and the academic achievement in the English language measured by final grade students received in English at the end of the school year (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). However, the author found that learners with a high level of FL listening anxiety had negative self-concepts. Furthermore, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) claimed that anxiety could act as a cause and a consequence of the difficulties during FL listening performance. As a consequence of the difficulties, anxiety requires focusing on effective listening strategies and conducting teaching activities to improve listening skills. For instance, the author suggested that students, as listeners, should ask questions in order to get an explanation for what they did not understand. On the other hand, anxiety as a cause of the difficulties during FL listening performance required direct actions such as encouraging a positive attitude towards themselves as FL

learners. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) indicated that teachers could help by providing effective feedback on students' progress and building friendly relationships with students.

Next, the author questioned 50 secondary-school English language learners to look into FL reading anxiety and its relationship with general FL anxiety, academic achievement, motivation, linguistic risk-taking, and self-concept. As a FL anxiety measuring instrument, she used MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) questionnaire, Laine's (1987) questionnaire measured self-concept, Ely's (1986) questionnaire was used to measure risk-taking and motivation, and the final grade in English served as a measure of the academic success. Moreover, *Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale* (FLRAS) by Saito et al. (1999, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) was used to measure FL reading anxiety. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) found a strong relationship between the variables mentioned above. In other words, the higher the level of FL reading anxiety, the higher the general FL anxiety. Accordingly, learners with a positive self-concept and strong motivation experienced a lower level of FL reading anxiety. Surprisingly, FL reading anxiety also proved to be related to the student's behavior in class; that is, students who experienced a low level of FL reading were risk-takers (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Furthermore, the author stressed the key importance of early identification of this type of anxiety among students and suggested that teachers should teach effective reading strategies, choose adequate reading texts and avoid reading an unknown text out loud.

Then, by questioning 50 Croatian secondary-school EFL learners, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) examined the relationship between FL writing anxiety and FL reading anxiety, general FL anxiety, and academic achievement. The author used a 26-item instrument called *The Second Language Writing Apprehension Test* (SLWAT) by Daly and Miller (1975, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002), which was related to the feelings experienced when writing essays in FL. Furthermore, she used MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) questionnaire to examine FL anxiety and the final grade in English to measure academic achievement. She concluded that learners who experienced FL writing anxiety along with general FL anxiety showed low levels of educational achievement. However, the study showed no connection between FL reading and writing anxiety. In addition, the author stated that teachers should teach effective writing strategies and develop “proper” writing topics and activities to motivate their students.

The results of the next study indicated different causes of FL anxiety among Croatian EFL learners: negative self-concept, language features, the teacher, objective circumstances, the use of language in and out of class, mistakes, comprehension difficulties, classroom assessment, and general FL anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). The study involved 392

learners divided into four groups (7-10-year-olds, 11-14-year-olds, 15-18-year-olds, and 18 years of age or older) attending different schools. As this study was qualitative, the participants were asked to describe in detail their anxiety during learning or using English. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) established the use of the English language in class as the most common source of FL anxiety. In fact, most students reported that they perceived their class participation as some public appearance accompanied by communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation and classroom assessment. Therefore, students felt uncomfortable expressing their views and feelings in class (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Besides the use of English in class, classroom assessment and negative self-concept proved to be common FL anxiety sources, too. On the other hand, objective circumstances, such as the lack of time for studying or lack of opportunities to use English in real-life situations, and comprehension difficulties during listening or speaking in FL were less common among Croatian EFL learners (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). All in all, the author pointed out that it was critical to recognize these FL anxiety sources so that prompt actions could be taken.

3.2.2 Other Significant Croatian Research Studies

Besides the research by Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), there are other research findings that significantly contributed to a better understanding of FL anxiety. For instance, in his master thesis *Foreign-language Anxiety and Listening Skill in Croatian Monolingual and Bilingual Students of EFL*, published in *UPRT 2007: Empirical Studies in English Applied Linguistics*, Legac (2007) examined FL listening anxiety among monolingual and bilingual learners of English as a foreign language. A total of 112 learners with an equal number of boys and girls participated in the study, and each of these groups was divided into a group of equal size: monolingual and bilingual. Moreover, the participants were of the same age (approximately 14 year old), and they were either finishing Grade 7 or beginning Grade 8 in Croatian primary schools (Legac, 2007). They all started learning English as a FL in Grade 4 and had been equally exposed to English. In Legac's (2007) study, the bilingual group involved learners with the knowledge of two languages: Croatian and an additional one; in this case, the additional language was Albanian, Czech, or Italian. The author used ten instruments: eight questionnaires (FLCAS (1986), MacIntyre and Gardner's Anxiety Scale (1994), a Croatian translation of Rost and Ross's Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (1991), a Croatian translation of the shortened version of Laine's (1987) questionnaire, McCroskey's Shyness Scale (1997), a Croatian translation of McCroskey and Richmond's Willingness to Communicate scale (1987),

McCroskey and Beatty's PRCA-24⁴ (1984) and Ely's Intensity of Motivation Scale (1986)), a listening comprehension test and final school grades in EFL from the previous school year.

The data were analyzed using inferential statistics, and the results showed that monolingual learners experienced significantly higher listening anxiety than bilinguals (Legac, 2007). Furthermore, the author investigated the relationship between FL anxiety, motivation, and self-concept. Accordingly, his findings showed that motivation and self-concept positively correlated with language achievement but negatively with both FL listening anxiety and general FL anxiety. Legac (2007) found that the level of general FL anxiety experienced by bilingual students was lower than the level of the same anxiety experienced by monolingual students. In comparison to monolinguals, bilingual students showed a lower presence of shyness and a higher willingness to communicate. What is more, Legac (2007) noticed a higher intensity of motivation among bilingual students.

Legac (2007) found that FL anxiety dominated among monolingual learners rather than bilingual learners in all three stages of the FL learning process (input, processing and output stage). The same results were obtained when Legac and Mihaljević Djigunović (2008) investigated the relationship between FL anxiety and listening comprehension among 56 monolingual and 56 bilingual Croatian learners of EFL. Legac and Mihaljević Djigunović (2008) argued that bilingual learners, compared to monolinguals, were at an advantage as they were exposed to more languages. The authors assumed that learners' extensive experience in using two languages in everyday life could prevent or reduce FL anxiety and contribute to the development of linguistic self-confidence.

Puškar (2010) was motivated to conduct a study due to the lack of literature on comparative studies of FL anxiety among learners studying two FLs simultaneously. In his graduate thesis, *A Comparative Study of Foreign Language Anxiety Among Majors of English and German*, Puškar (2010) wanted to investigate if FL anxiety transferred from one FL to another, get an insight into the relationship between FL anxiety and gender, age, place of residence, FL achievement and FL exposure and look into the relationship between FL anxiety and student motivation for studying those languages, and their classroom experience. The study included 270 English and 116 German majors from all three years of undergraduate programs in English and German who voluntarily participated in the study. Most participants were in the 18-22 age range, while the rest were in the 23-31 age range. Furthermore, the author used a

⁴ The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension scale

questionnaire requesting the participants to provide information on their age, gender, place of residence, the number of years of experience with the FLs, the time spent in a country where the FL they were studying was spoken as a native language, etc. Other than that, Puškar (2010) used FLCAS (see subchapter 3.1.) to examine the presence (or absence) of language anxiety.

This particular research study proved that German majors experienced higher levels of FL anxiety than English majors. Moreover, by analyzing quantitative data, Puškar (2010, p.34) concluded that “the higher the levels of FL anxiety students experienced in their first FL, the greater the chances were that they would experience higher anxiety in their second FL.” In addition, failing language exams and making mistakes during FL classes proved to be the most frequent sources of anxiety (Puškar, 2010). Furthermore, no statistically significant difference was found between FL anxiety experienced by English majors who were and those who were not exposed to English by living in an English-speaking country (Puškar, 2010). Contrary to the results of English majors, the author found a significant difference in FL anxiety between German majors who had lived in a German-speaking country and majors who had not. In other words, majors without experience of living in a German-speaking country had significantly higher anxiety (Puškar, 2010). Puškar (2010, p.35) explained that it resulted from “important differences in language status.” While English is a *lingua franca* and ubiquitous in everyday Croatian life, German is considered a “real” FL for most students.

Puškar (2010) confirmed his assumption that students who had not learned English or German longer and had poorer language skills experienced significantly higher levels of FL anxiety than students who learned these languages for a longer period of time and had better language skills. No significant correlation was found between FL anxiety and the number of FLs learned. Moreover, the study showed that female students displayed higher levels of FL anxiety (Puškar, 2010). As for the role of students' place of residence, participants from villages or towns reported higher levels of language anxiety than students from cities. Puškar (2010) explained that participants who were studying outside their original place of residence considered their first major, either English or German, more important in their life and consequently perceived it as more stressful. Finally, students with high levels of FL anxiety highlighted exams that were too difficult, lack of language test-taking opportunities, pressure, classes that were too tense, inadequately educated language instructors, and lack of student-instructor interaction outside the class. On the whole, Puškar (2010, p.9) carried out a study, the findings of which proved extremely valuable as they contributed to a “better understanding

of the role of FL anxiety in advanced FL learners who had chosen an FL as the focus of their studies and future career.”

Next, Čiček (2014), in her graduate thesis titled *Language Anxiety – Causes and Consequences* examined the sources of FL anxiety among young learners. She wanted to find out whether young learners experienced FL anxiety at the beginning of their language learning. The participants were 56 fourth-grade students (9-11 age range) from two different primary schools. They were divided into three groups; the first two groups consisted of learners who had just started learning English as a FL, while the third one consisted of learners who had started learning English in grade 1 and had been learning it for four years. Furthermore, the first part of the questionnaire requested learners to fill in information such as age, gender, and FL final grades. Then, they had to complete a 14-item questionnaire accompanied by a five-point scale in the form of smiley faces (the blank smiley face was labeled "I have never felt anxious", while four smiley faces presented the maximal level of anxiety). The questionnaire covered the main causes of FL anxiety, such as bad grades, oral and written tests, reading out loud, fear of negative evaluation, and teachers' reactions to students' mistakes. Moreover, she wanted to investigate if young learners experienced FL anxiety at any level, whether there was a difference between male and female learners, the relationship between FL anxiety, learning achievement, and motivation, and whether there was a difference in FL anxiety between learners who had just started English in grade 1 and those who started in grade 4.

Using descriptive statistics, the author concluded that young learners experienced little anxiety in their language learning process. Čiček (2014) explained that young learners were unaware of the difficulties in learning a FL and assumed they had not yet gathered sufficient experiences with the FL. Therefore, FL anxiety could not significantly affect their language performance (Čiček, 2014). Furthermore, the author found that the female participants experienced a higher FL anxiety when their colleagues mocked their mistakes or when they had to read new words out loud. In addition, a negative correlation was found between FL anxiety and academic achievement and between FL anxiety and motivation (Čiček, 2014). What is more, learners who had been learning English for four years experienced a higher FL anxiety than the ones who had just started learning English. All things considered, the study suggested that young learners experienced FL anxiety at some level (Čiček, 2014). The author argued that young learners were still not afraid of making mistakes. However, children reported being focused on negative evaluations, grades, oral or written exams, and other sources of anxiety

(Čiček, 2014). The author also stressed the importance of teaching young learners how to deal with anxiety in order to motivate them to learn a FL.

In her graduate thesis, *Listening and Speaking Anxiety in Croatian EFL Learners*, Buben (2018) aimed to examine the FL anxiety levels among 90 undergraduate and graduate non-English majors at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. In addition, Buben (2018) wanted to examine the relationship between FL listening and speaking anxiety as well as the relationship between FL anxiety in those two skills and self-perception of competence, self-assessment of proficiency in the English language and length of study, which refers to the time spent learning English as a FL. The instrument used was a questionnaire translated into Croatian and consisted of four sections. The first section of the questionnaire requested the participants to provide general information such as age, gender, year of study, and the academic department they were enrolled. In the second section, the participants were required to provide information about how long they had been studying English, i.e., the length of study, how often they used English for non-academic purposes, and to self-assess their proficiency in English (by determining on their own whether they were beginner, intermediate, advanced or proficient English users) and their competence in the listening and speaking skills in English. The third section measured speaking anxiety using FLCAS (1986), which was modified by Heng et al. (2012, in Buben, 2018).⁵ The fourth section measured listening anxiety using Kim's (2002, in Buben, 2018) 33-item *Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale* (FLLAS).

In addition, descriptive statistics was used to analyse the results (Buben, 2018). The research findings indicated that higher levels of FL listening anxiety correlate with higher levels of FL speaking anxiety. However, the author found that Croatian learners generally experienced slightly higher levels of FL speaking anxiety than FL listening anxiety (Buben, 2018). Furthermore, learners who perceived their listening and speaking competence as lower dealt with higher levels of FL listening and speaking anxiety. Moreover, the author proved that students who learned English for less than ten years experienced higher FL speaking anxiety than those who learned English for more than ten years. However, no correlation was found between levels of FL listening anxiety and the length of study. What is more, intermediate learners reported experiencing the highest levels of FL speaking and listening anxiety (Buben, 2018).

⁵ Heng et al. (2012, in Buben, 2018) changed the term “foreign language” from the original scale to “English” so it could suit their study.

All things considered, the conclusion is that FL anxiety is a phenomenon commonly occurring among Croatian learners and learners worldwide and, consequently, is worth researching. Research findings, which were previously described, showed that FL anxiety plays an important role in the FL learning process, and are extremely valuable for the comprehension of FL anxiety. Besides that, Croatian anxiety researchers have also contributed to the field by designing a new measuring instrument (Puškar, 2010). Mihaljević Djigunović (2004, in Puškar, 2010, p.9) thought of FL anxiety as a “culturally and educationally dependent phenomenon.” Therefore, their key priority was to design an instrument that “could be valid specifically for the Croatian context of learning English as a FL” (Puškar, 2010, p.9). They named this instrument CROEFLA, and it was described as a 24-item questionnaire that proved to be reliable means of measuring FL anxiety among Croatian learners of English as a FL (Puškar, 2010). According to Piechurska-Kuciel (2008, in Čiček, 2014), the difference between the CROEFLA and FLCAS was that in the CROEFLA, self-perception and evaluation were more prominent, whereas, in FLCAS, competitiveness was more important.

4. Strategies to Reduce and Overcome Foreign Language Anxiety

The first step in treating and coping with FL anxiety would be the recognition of FL anxiety and, consequently, the understanding of the factors affecting FL anxiety, such as the level of shyness, communication apprehension, or tendency to avoid communication (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Since FL anxiety is a complex phenomenon, there are many ways to get to grips with it. However, treating anxiety depends on the individual; therefore, there is no correct way of facing it. In other words, everyone needs to find a method that works best for themselves. (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002)

Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) mentioned self-knowledge, the development of a positive attitude and awareness-raising of different aspects of learning, and the use of a FL as significant steps in facing FL anxiety. In addition, the author specified the features of an ideal and positive student: intelligence, cooperation, motivation, self-discipline, risk-taking, learning strategies, positive attitude towards problem-solving, extraversion, etc. Next, the author stressed the importance of keeping a learning journal where learners would write about their feelings and thoughts related to FL learning. What is more, teachers and other learners should read those learning journals in order to support anxious learners and help them find a way to overcome FL

anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). According to Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), releasing “misleading thoughts” about learning and the use of a FL could be helpful in dealing with FL anxiety. For instance, one of the most common misconceptions would be the learners' belief that it was impossible to understand something in FL if they did not understand every single word they read or hear. On the contrary, the author claimed that particular words, which learners did not understand, could be ignored and left misunderstood so that the learners could focus on the full meaning of a given text.

Next, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) suggested that learners should strive to develop a positive self-concept by believing in their ability to succeed in learning a FL. Moreover, learners should become masters of effective learning strategies. Oxford (1990, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002) defines effective learning strategies as activities that make learning easier, faster, and pleasurable, enabling learners to apply what they have learned in a new context. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) stressed the importance of teaching the strategies that were unknown to the learners but which were effective and useful to other academically successful FL learners. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) stated that teachers could significantly contribute to the reduction of FL anxiety in the classroom context. For example, the teacher should create a friendly and relaxed classroom atmosphere and develop activities that would motivate and support learners in the learning process. Finally, some of the institutional forms of treating FL anxiety include special support groups in which students would be taught effective learning strategies and relaxation techniques, additional classes led by a learning specialist, and integration of teaching effective learning strategies into the regular FL class program (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

5. Conclusion

Learning a foreign language is a unique experience for every learner (Čiček, 2014). Considering the comprehensive research into FL anxiety, it is important to mention a significant Croatian contribution to FL anxiety research. Over the last two decades, a substantial number of studies have examined mostly English learners' FL anxiety. The Croatian researchers focused on sources of FL anxiety (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002), the relationship between FL anxiety and other individual factors, such as motivation, academic achievement, and self-concept (Mihaljević Djigunović, 1999, and Legac, 2007), gender, age and place of residence (Puškar, 2010), the relationship between FL anxiety and listening comprehension among monolingual and bilingual learners of English (Mihaljević Djigunović and Legac, 2008), the presence of FL

anxiety and its causes among young learners (Čiček, 2014), the relationship between FL listening and speaking anxiety and self-perception of proficiency and competence and length of study (Buben, 2018), etc. Based on the study findings described in this thesis, it can be concluded that FL anxiety is indeed a very interesting phenomenon worth researching. With respect to the growing need for learning a foreign language and dissatisfaction with the academic results achieved by the increasing number of students, the research findings described in this paper stress the crucial need for taking into account the affective factors which could influence the process of FL learning as well as the classroom efficacy. Nevertheless, the various uncertainties and unanswered questions regarding FL anxiety indicate the need for a more thorough examination of FL anxiety. Anxiety is an emotion people usually feel and go through on their own and in private. In addition, the release of anxiety usually presupposes people's willingness to help themselves and to accept other people's help (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002). Anxious individuals are not happy individuals, so any kind of help would be extremely valuable.

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Summary

This thesis deals with foreign language (FL) anxiety as a complex phenomenon specific to the context of language learning and one of the most powerful emotions affecting the FL learning process. FL anxiety has been extensively researched among FL learners over the past 40 years; however, more often on a global scale than in Croatia. After a theoretical introduction that deals with definitions of anxiety and foreign language anxiety, the author described and discussed the findings of some of the FL anxiety research studies, with the emphasis on the research studies conducted in the Croatian context. Research studies described in this thesis showed that FL anxiety was closely related to the learner's self-perception as an EFL learner, classroom contextual factors, such as teacher's perception, linguistic error treatment and assessment, and negative experiences with the use of FL. In the final part of the thesis, strategies for treating and overcoming FL anxiety are described. Overall, this thesis aimed to provide an overview of the most important studies of FL anxiety in the Croatian context while touching on the layers of this complex phenomenon based on the research findings.

Key words: FL anxiety, English as a foreign language, FL learners, research in the Croatian context

Sažetak

U ovom radu govori se o strahu od stranog jezika kao složenoj pojavi u kontekstu učenja jezika i kao jednoj od najvažnijih emocija koja utječe na proces učenja stranog jezika. Posljednjih 40 godina strah od stranog jezika predmet je mnogih istraživanja, uglavnom svjetskih, dok je mali broj istraživanja provedeno u Hrvatskoj. Nakon teorijskog uvoda koji predstavlja različite definicije anksioznosti i straha od stranog jezika, autorica opisuje rezultate različitih svjetskih i hrvatskih istraživanja, uglavnom provedenih među učenicima engleskog kao stranog jezika. Završni dio prikazuje preporučene korake ključne za umanjivanje straha od stranog jezika. Ukupno gledajući, glavni je cilj ovog rada bio dati pregled najvažnijih i najznačajnijih istraživanja straha od stranog jezika u hrvatskom kontekstu, dotičući se slojeva tog kompleksnog fenomena na temelju rezultata opisanih istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: strah od stranog jezika, Engleski kao strani jezik, učenici stranog jezika, istraživanja u hrvatskom kontekstu

Obrazac A.Č.

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