Shame and SLA

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The present article addresses the question of foreign language classroom shame (FLCS) in France. As a first step to collecting data, thirty participants were asked to narrate their language learning experiences in the context of the foreign language classroom by being interviewed individually and in depth. The two following questions were in focus: firstly, how does shame impact FL learners' vision of themselves as English-learners/users? Secondly, why do some learners manage to overcome shame experiences while others seem to be particularly affected? The respondents' narratives suggest that shame may impact not only L2 learners' linguistic confidence but also their sense of identity, self-worth and self-esteem. Interestingly, some learners reported having developed strategies of resilience. The data also revealed that FLCS may direct learners to certain types of behaviours like avoiding interaction and speaking activities, ruminating over failure, or withdrawing from L2 learning, and lead to enduring L2-related anxiety due to fear of future shame-inducing situations. It is maintained here that taking this phenomenon into consideration in the language learning process could contribute to a better and more complete understanding of the psychology of language learners and help them develop a more positive self-regard, promote their willingness to participate in communicative tasks and may eventually enable them to reach an increased level of proficiency. The findings offer therefore strong support for the need to focus on developing a deep understanding of the role of shame in French FLL contexts and elsewhere.

Keywords: shame, second language acquisition, willingness to communicate, linguistic self, identity, vision of the self

> "Shame is like a subatomic particle. One's knowledge of shame is often limited to the trace it leaves" (Lewis, 1992, p. 34).

1 Introduction

Research has abundantly shown that the acquisition of a new language is a unique learning experience, and a highly complex, dynamic, emotional and psychological undertaking, and that learners' feelings are key predictors of their success and failure during the long and often tedious journey of learning a L2 (Dewaele, 2011; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, 2002).

Although a rich and varied literature emanating from social, developmental and clinical psychology has made obvious the role of the self-conscious emotion of shame in a number of psychiatric syndromes as well as in a wide range of psychological disorders, psychopathologies and dysfunctioning of the self (Miller, 1996; Tangney, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007a, 2007b), shame issues in relation with foreign language learning and use have received little, if any, attention from applied linguists.

The present study sought to fill this gap and to further our understanding of the language learner psychology through a consideration of the role of shame in L2 learning and use. It was hypothesised that this emotion may interfere with L2 learning, impact on the cognitive processes and in-class behaviours of students, and hinder their ultimate achievement. It should be noted that, to the author's knowledge, the present study is one of the rare empirical studies devoted to shame in SLA and the only one so far to investigate this phenomenon in the context of the French language classroom. The ultimate goals of the present research project are therefore to make a contribution to the clarification of some still unresolved issues in SLA research, and stimulate research into shame within the FLL domain by providing a starting point for future studies.

2 Shame as a psychological phenomenon

Given the dearth of research examining the relationships between shame and SLA, the purpose of this section is to explore definitional issues, provide the reader with the key insights to date from psychology and psychoanalysis, and explain the differences and similarities between shame and one of its cognates, anxiety.

2.1 Definitions

Theorists and scholars embrace different views on how to define the concept of 'shame', referring to feeling states, personality traits, and cultural standards. Yet psychologists are unanimous in saying that shame experiences englobe a wide range of emotions and cognitions, as expressed in the following definitions provided by dictionaries: the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015) defines shame as "the feeling of humiliation or distress arising from the consciousness of something dishonourable or ridiculous in one's own or another's behaviour or circumstances, or from a situation offensive to one's own or another's sense of propriety or decency", while *Merriam-Webster* (2015) defines shame as "a feeling of guilt, regret, or sadness that one has because they have done something wrong, the ability to feel guilt, regret, or embarrassment, dishonour or disgrace".

The various shadings of meaning and such heavily loaded words as 'humiliation', 'distress', 'sadness', 'dishonour' and 'disgrace' proposed in the definitions above clearly show that shame is a multifaceted, negatively valenced and pathogenic phenomenon. They also reveal the kaleidoscopic nature of shame which encompasses a range of different concepts and a wide array of different meanings.

It is noteworthy that often, no clear-cut distinctions are made between shame and other related constructs like guilt, embarrassment, humiliation, and anxiety, and that the American Psychological Association (APA) proposes no definition of shame.

2.2 Shame in psychology and psychoanalysis

After a perusal of the literature on shame in psychology and psychoanalysis, this self-conscious emotion appears as a multifaceted, elusive and hard to define psychological experience, a complex of cognitive, emotional, behavioural and bodily reactions (Kaufman, 1992; Lewis, 1992; Nathanson, 1987; Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and research in mainstream psychology has revealed profound implications of this phenomenon on individuals' motivation and interpersonal behaviour (Stiles, 2008).

Furthermore, links have been established between shame and self-blame (Gilbert, 1998, 2000), feelings of inferiority (Allan & Gilbert, 1997; Swallow & Kuiper, 1988), powerlessness, helplessness, self-consciousness (Gilbert, Pehl, & Allan, 1994), feeling of unworthiness (Cooley, 1964), and intrusive thoughts (Jeynes, Chung, & Challenor, 2009).

There is broad consensus in the field of psychology about the distinction between two categories of shame. One category of shame refers to a general tendency for an individual to feel shame at *any* moment and in *any* situation. In this case, shame is a personality trait, a part of one's identity. It refers to a stable predisposition to feel ashamed in a diversity of situations. This shame is called trait shame, and it is a personality-related characteristic and an individual difference (ID) or trait variable. Another category of shame refers to the occurrence of shame in *particular* situations. In this case, the feeling of shame is a transitory, moment-to-moment psychological state, and an immediate response to a shame-eliciting situation.

The aim of my study is to investigate one *specific* shame, i.e. the shame occurring during the language learning process and more precisely in the instructional setting of the FL classroom.

2.3 The phenomenology of shame

The Greek philosopher Aristotle remarked that emotions entail certain types of bodily reactions. Shame is no exception and its phenomenology is extremely distinctive and rich, and there is a set of physical/physiological as well as psychological basic symptoms and characteristic cognitive behavioural responses associated with the construct.

2.3.1 Physiological manifestations

The most widely acknowledged and most salient feature of shame is blushing (Cozolino, 2006; Nathanson, 1987; Potter-Efron & Potter-Efron, 1989; Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2005). Another typical manifestation of shame is the avoidance behaviours such as lowering the head, downcasting the eyes, covering head and face, or 'burying' them in both hands. In some cases, increases in heart rate are also reported (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

2.3.2 Psychological manifestations

In 1992, psychologist Michael Lewis identified the psychological characteristics of shame: an acute feeling of discomfort, and a general sense of inadequacy and

defectiveness. Other studies (Brown, 2008; Tomkins, 1963; Young & Klosko, 1994) revealed that shame was associated with self-absorption/self-focus. Finally, the self-damaging characteristics were confirmed by a number of scholars (Kaufman, 1992; Nathanson, 1987; Parker, 1998), who found that shame was accompanied with a sense of shrinking or of 'being/feeling small' and a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness.

3 Differences between shame and anxiety

In order to further understand the sense in which the term 'shame' is used in this article and to give value to the claims that are made, it is important to understand the nature of the relationships between shame and its cognate, anxiety, and see in what ways they are similar or different.

3.1 Shame and anxiety in psychology

The APA defines anxiety as follows:

> Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat. (American Psychological Association, 2014)

This definition is interesting as it shows the closeness of the two emotions as far as their cognitive and physical reactions are concerned. However, the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis were traditionally interested in 'anxiety' to a far greater extent than in 'shame'. Shame was long regarded as the 'sleeper' emotion, the 'villain' in the psychotherapy room (Lewis, 1971), an ignored or neglected affect, while anxiety was seen as an essential emotion in the psychological apparatus, and at the origin of a number of psychological and emotional diseases and disturbances.

Freud (1962), for instance, saw anxiety as 'the master emotion' and contended that shame and guilt derived from it. Likewise, Mead (1950), an American anthropologist, characterized it as a form of anxiety. In the seventies, shame was rehabilitated as one of the most significant constructs in psychotherapy, seen as the "quintessential human emotion" (Lewis, 1992), or the "master emotion" (Scheff, 1994), and Lewis (1971) demonstrated that patients' therapy stagnated when shame was unacknowledged. In 1987, Harder and Lewis, using the Personal Feelings Questionnaire, a self-report measure, found that shame was associated with depression, anxiety, hostility and low self-esteem.

What is to be retained is that there exist close relationships between the two phenomena, and Wurmser (1997, p. 17) interestingly, yet rather enigmatically, illustrates the intertwining of shame and anxiety: "[...] it is clear that anxiety is a cardinal part of it. Yet evidently shame is more than anxiety, and anxiety is more than shame." He further suggests (p. 49) that 'shame anxiety', a particular form of anxiety, arises from the "imminent danger of unexpected exposure, humiliation, and rejection".

In the same vein, British clinical psychologist Gilbert (1998, 2000) holds the view that anxiety arising from the evaluation by others is a key factor in the

experience of shame. He notes that a particular kind of anxiety, social anxiety, which is the fear of being scrutinized by others, has features that are closely related to the concept of shame, and he highlights the similarity between descriptions in the psychological literature of social anxiety, shyness and shame.

3.2 Anxiety and SLA

Certainly the closest construct to shame which has been extensively investigated in the domain of SLA is anxiety. Providing a comprehensive review of the literature on anxiety in SLA is impossible. The studies discussed below, although they are a subjective selection as appropriate for the research focus, will help us circumscribe the use of the two terms in the participants' narratives.

Attention to L2-related anxiety flourished in the 1970s. The focus on the construct was due to an increased interest in learner characteristics which would explain differential success in L2 learning and influence achievement, like language aptitude, motivation, and personality. This construct has been extensively researched in the field of SLA.

However, earlier studies led to contradictory and inconsistent findings. While certain findings revealed harmful and debilitative impacts of anxiety on L2 learning, influencing cognitive processes, willingness to communicate, FL use (Horwitz et al., 1986), motivational behaviours, and ultimate achievement (Aida, 1994; Gardner, Smythe, Clément, & Gliksman, 1976; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1986), other studies suggested that this construct may be facilitative for some learners and detrimental for others (Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977). Yet, it is generally accepted that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is unique and differs from other types of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), and is detrimental to FL learning and use.

In 2014, Dewaele and MacIntyre initiated a significant re-evaluation of the conceptualisation of anxiety, emphasising the need to think about the *functions* of emotions rather than distinguishing them as either negative or positive. More recently, a new shift in the research into L2-related emotions saw some scholars recommend a more holistic view of language learners by including positive emotions, like enjoyment, in SLA research (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2017; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016). Yet, in their article, Şimşek and Dörnyei (2017, p. 51) wonder that: "Given the phenomenological saliency of anxiety, it may be surprising to many that there is no generally accepted definition of the construct, making it one of the most elusive concepts amongst individual difference characteristics" (e.g. Eysenck, 1979; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995; Scovel, 1978; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001; Young, 1991).

The two authors notice that interest in this construct has declined, and propose fresh perspectives for research on anxiety by offering a new conceptual framework, the 'anxious self', based on McAdams and Pals' (2006) New Big Five model, and by adding a narrative component to the understanding of FLA.

4 Shame in education

Shame has attracted the attention of a number of researchers, who explored its particular role in the fields of sports and mathematics. The effects of fear of

failure in young elite athletes were researched in the field of sports, and the intertwining of mathematics and the self were explored in the field of mathematics.

Shame and sports

Sport being regarded as an essentially social activity and achievement domain, since it involves the adherence to social norms and demands for success, there is no wonder that the relationship between sport, fear of failure and shame should have attracted the attention of researchers. Recent years have seen a rising interest in the consequences of failure in young athletes.

In 2009, two studies, by Sagar and Stoeber, and Lavallee, Sagar, and Spray revealed the existence of links between shame, fear of failure and perfectionism, confirming the contention by Tangney and Dearing (2002) that shame is frequent among individuals with high levels of evaluative concerns and perfectionism. In the same vein, Rose's (2008) Master's study researched the self-objectification and body shame as predictors of sport participation.

Shame and mathematics

In the field of mathematics, one study stands out: Vierling-Claassen (2012), a mathematics Professor at Lesley University, Massachusetts, investigated anxiety and shame in mathematics, and she highlights the particular role of shame in the learning of this school subject as follows:

> In addition to anxiety, many other emotions play a role in math avoidance and negative mathematical identities, and these emotions are linked to learning difficulties. Over the past year, I have become increasingly convinced that shame is a primary emotion that negatively impacts mathematical identity, and that it is shame that gives rise to anxiety about, avoidance of, and disinterest in mathematics. (Vierling-Claassen, 2012, n.p.)

Vierling-Claassen further argues that the phenomenon of shame should be addressed by a number of people: "Because shame is a relational emotion, considering the role of shame in mathematics places mathematical difficulties in a larger context which includes not only the learner, but also parents, teachers, administrators, and the entire society surrounding the learner" (2012, n.p.). What is interesting in her study is her insistence that mathematical competence be viewed as a reflection of overall intelligence and ability, and she underlines the particularity of maths in generating the feeling of vulnerability in learners:

> Shaming experiences can happen in all school learning, but students learning mathematics may be particularly vulnerable to such experiences. In a traditional mathematics classroom there is little ambiguity or room for interpretation in problems, and the learning is focused on products, procedures, and algorithms. (Vierling-Claassen, 2012, n.p.)

Vierling-Claassen interestingly emphasizes the negative consequences of maths-related shame on the student's sense of self: "This "right or wrong" nature of mathematics can prevent students from saving face, or otherwise deflecting shame experiences, and can trap students who are struggling in a repeated cycle of negative experiences that are eventually felt as a flawed self" (2012, n.p.). Finally, she points out the importance of success in maths since "mathematical competence is seen as a stand-in for overall intelligence and ability" (Vierling-Claassen, 2012, n.p.).

5 Methodology

Given the dearth of research examining the relationships between shame and SLA, the study reported on here was specifically designed to reflect my own interests as a teacher and researcher and take into consideration the specific nature of the field of FLL. The aims were to explore the construct in detail, generate context-sensitive insights about its nature, and open up pathways for future work. This meant that the research aimed first at creating boundaries in order to gain depth, rather than breadth, of understandings. I therefore decided to work within a qualitative paradigm, and more specifically, I opted for a contextually-grounded, interview-based study, which has the merit to provide an emic perspective on French learners' FLCS.

5.1 Initial research questions

The main aim of my research is to explore the possible effects of shame on learners' construction of L2 identity. In order to do that, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1) How pervasive is shame in the French FL classroom? What are its main sources and manifestations, and the reasons for its development?
2) Does shame impact learners' sense of self, their vision of themselves as users of the target language (TL), and their motivational behaviour?
3) Is shame to be found at all levels of proficiency?

5.2 Qualitative interviews

Shame being an abstract concept and being not easily observable for ethical reasons, the research methodology that was used to collect data in the present study is qualitative data collection, by the means of in-depth, face to face interviews, in order to explore the impact of past shame experiences on the current L2 selves of learners of English and other FLs, and to gain insight into the process of shame formation in the language classroom. Although time-consuming, interviewing provides insight into L2-related shame from the learners' own perspectives, enables to understand them as unique emotional beings, and to explore the complexity and kaleidoscopic nature of this phenomenon.

Attention in the present study was focused on the participants' recounting of their retrospective, as well as their ongoing experiences, beliefs and feelings about FLL, with an aim to identify the factors that may contribute to FLCS and those that may reduce it. The aim of qualitative research is illustrated in Maxwell's (1996) illuminating quote:

> Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations and actions they are involved in and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences. I am using 'meaning' here in a broad sense to include cognition, affect, intentions, and anything else that can be included in what qualitative researchers often refer to as the 'participants' perspective (...) In a qualitative study, you are interested not only in the physical events and behaviours that are taking place, but also in how your participants in your study make sense of this and how their understanding influences their behavior (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17, original italics).

6 Research context

6.1 The settings

The interviews took place in two different settings: first, at an Apprentice Training Centre (*CFA*) situated in the North East of France. The population is composed of apprentices – aged 16 and over – who combine on-the-job training and off-the-job acquisition of skills and knowledge. The Centre works in partnership with local companies and apprentices obtain recognised qualifications. They are bakers, chocolatiers, butchers, pastry chefs, hairdressers, beauticians, and dental technicians. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), the students' level of proficiency ranged from A1 (Breakthrough, i.e. basic user) to C2 (Complete mastery, i.e. proficient user).

The second setting was a Training Centre for adults (*Greta*) situated in the North East of France. The population is mainly composed of pensioners, unemployed people and job seekers – aged 20 to 49 – of diverse educational and social backgrounds. It is to be noted that a few of them come from foreign countries and have another language than French as their mother tongue. The students' level of English is between B1 and B2.

6.2 The participants

The first step in carrying out my research was to recruit participants. During the third week of October 2013, that is, about 2 months after the start of the academic year in France, I asked students in a vocational school and at a *Greta* if they would be interested in participating in a study on FLL.

The research settings were chosen for practical reasons, since most of the prospective participants came from my own teaching environment, but also because I wanted to understand better the way my students approached FLL, and to assess the way their possible experience of shame might have affected their attitudes, motivation and engagement in FLL, and impacted their language learner identity.

This particular student population was also selected as it was anticipated that, given their age, (sixteen and over) these students would have had a variety of L2-related experiences, possibly including shame experiences, to report upon. They were regarded as "good sources of information" since they would allow me to "advance [me] toward an analytical goal" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180).

There were 30 participants in the study, nineteen females, and eleven males, aged 13 to 49 – one of the interviewees being under sixteen, her parents' consent was asked. They had been studying English for 4 to 10 years at the time of the interviews. According to the CEFR, their level of competence ranged from A1 to C2.

Most of the participants had French as their native tongue and some of them also spoke an additional mother tongue (e.g. Arabic, Turkish, German, Italian or Spanish) and had gone through the French educational system. Some of them had the *Baccalauréat* (i.e. the French national school-leaving certificate, usually taken at age 18), some others had lower rank certificates than the *Baccalauréat*, and a few of them had higher rank certificates (e.g. Bachelors, Masters Degrees or Doctorates).

The sample that was interviewed in the present study was composed of miscellaneous participants, most of them apprentices in a vocational school from

various stages of their studies, but also college, university students, a school principal, working mothers, unemployed people, and a football player. Out of the 30 participants, 27 were my students.

In this article, I deal mainly with the data coming from six of the 30 interviews, on the grounds that they were rich, detailed, and yielded particularly interesting insights into the topic of shame in relation with L2 learning. However, useful data were also generated from the other participants. The article therefore also includes excerpts which complement and extend the insights gained from the six focal participants. Please refer to Table 1 and Table 2 below for more information about the background of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' characteristics.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years of English study	Level of proficiency	Place of interview(s)
Jacques	17	M	6	Low	*CFA*
Lucie	42	F	7	Intermediate	Home
Paul	20	M	9	Low	*Greta*
Axel	21	M	8	Low	*CFA*
Maria	20	F	8	Low	*CFA*
Emilie	22	F	10	Intermediate	*Greta*
Claire	13	F	4	Intermediate	Home
Pierre	20	M	8	High	*CFA*
Mélanie	34	F	8	Intermediate	Home
Elodie	17	F	5	Intermediate	Home
Annelise	23	F	8	Intermediate	*CFA*
Gabriel	20	M	8	Intermediate	*CFA*
Jean-Claude	42	M	10	High	School
Maximilien	20	M	7	Low	*CFA*
Charlotte	22	F	7	Low	*CFA*
Clémence	21	F	9	Intermediate	*CFA*
Marc	21	M	7	Low	*CFA*
Nadia	39	F	7	Intermediate	Public Place
Fernando	49	M	6	High	Skype
Linda	15	F	Native speaker	High	Home
Robert	19	M	6	High	*CFA*
Ferenç	29	M	4	Intermediate	*CFA*

Table 2. The six focal interviewees' characteristics.

Focal participant pseudonym	Age	Gender	Background	Shame-related episodes
Linda	15	F	A college girl. L2 English, L3 German, L4 Spanish. Her first years of life spent in the US.	Strong L2 self. One single acute episode of shame in L2 classroom which she overcame through visualisation of her past and future successful L2 self.
Lucie	42	F	A working mum who has been dreaming of going to Australia since her childhood, and is actively planning to go to Australia on a family trip soon. Committed to re-learning English to go to Australia. L2 English.	Used to be humiliated and to feel shame at school/college. Powerful vision of her future successful English-using self abroad.
Maria	20	F	A dental technician trainee. L2 German, L3 English.	An unsuccessful female learner, who shows lack of self-confidence and a general feeling of worthlessness. A history full of humiliation and repeated shame episodes. Shame-based personality.
Fernando	49	M	A French football player of Spanish origins. L2 Spanish, L3 English.	Reports no feeling of shame in English but in Spanish, his grandmother's tongue. Introduced the concept of 'complex' in my data. Very enlightening account of his FLL journey. Strong self-efficacy beliefs.
Ferenç	29	M	A pastry chef and chocolatier who left Hungary to study pastry in France. An exceptionally gifted student in the pastry domain, shows a very high level of motivation to learn French and English. Native tongue Hungarian, L2 German, L3 French, L4 English.	No episode of shame in either language. Exceptional trajectory of learning French with very active self-regulatory mechanisms. Strong vision of his future L3 self.
Annelise	23	F	A pastry chef and chocolatier. Very desirous to progress. L2 German, L3 English.	Many instances of shame in her narrative.

7 Procedures: data collection, ethical considerations, and processing

To get an insight into the workings of FL-related shame as it is experienced and seen by learners themselves, its sources, manifestations, and effects on students' FLL experiences, I used in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews that were conducted over two academic years. These were complemented by the participants' spontaneous reflections, field notes from my research journal, and close observations of the participants in their academic settings.

The participants were encouraged to describe the way they felt about FLL from the moment they started learning a FL to the time they were interviewed, and to also talk about the way they envisioned their future L2 learning/speaking selves. The classroom observations provided me with a wealth of additional information about the participants, about their interactions with their peers, for instance, and enabled me to obtain a richer story and a more holistic view of them.

After obtaining permission from the school principals to conduct my study in their schools, and receiving ethical approval from my University, possible informants were asked to participate on a voluntary basis in the research project. Consent forms in English and French were distributed in order for the participants to understand what was involved in the research.

They were informed from the start about (a) the study's general purpose, (b) the right to confidentiality and anonymity, (c) the right to ask any question relating to the aim of the study, (d) the right not to participate in the study without any negative outcome, (e) the right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion or penalty (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and (f) that there was no 'correct' answer and nothing of what they said would get them into trouble. It is to be noted that, shame being a particularly sensitive topic, the participants were blind to the exact topic of my research. They were informed that the aim of the study was to help them lead happier and more fulfilled lives as language learners.

The interviews started in December 2013 and ended in June 2016, were 15 to 80 minutes long, were conducted one-on-one, in French, in a conversational tone and relaxed atmosphere, and followed a semi-structured format, that is to say they were a mixture of planned and spontaneous questions, "on target while hanging loose" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 42), which allowed for unexpected themes to emerge, and the researcher avoided stating directly the research topic to the interviewees.

The questions revolved around four main themes: factors believed to cause shame, manifestations of shame in the classroom, factors believed to alleviate shame, and issues of identity like the way the participants envisioned their L2-users selves in the future. At the end of each interview session, I summarized what the participants said to make sure that I understood them well and was not betraying their thoughts.

The structure of each interview was based on three types of questions: main questions, probes, and follow-up questions aimed at checking the consistency of what the participants said. Probes were used in order to confirm, exemplify, or clarify the participants' accounts and gave them the opportunity to elaborate on their answers.

In some cases, the participants went for follow-up interviews until saturation was reached (Bowen, 2008), that is when additional data did not yield new information about the topic (Morse, 1995; Sandelowski, 1995), and whenever it was possible, two interviews with the participants were conducted, one at the start of the academic year, and another one at the end, in order to round out the data collected earlier during the year.

All the interviews were transcribed, translated into English by myself, and finally analysed through latent content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to elicit themes and patterns regarding the symptoms, sources, and the classroom situations that might engender shame experiences. First, the relevant extracts in the transcripts were assigned codes. Then, the codes were examined and broader themes based on the research objectives and questions were established (e.g. shame-eliciting situations, behaviours and feelings when experiencing shame, language versus general shame). Each broad theme was then analysed deeper, which enabled to identify more specific categories under each theme (e.g. fear of negative evaluation, fear of failure, change of identity).

Immediately after each interview, I noted in a research journal my own impressions and all the verbal and non-verbal cues I noticed during the course of the interviews, such as gaze avoidance, head down, redness of the face, voice quality, facial expressions, and body movements, which I thought to be as revealing as the verbal discourse itself. I also took into consideration silences, hesitations, laughters, and giggles, and considered what the interviewees did not say. Silences, for instance, were regarded as very revealing of the fact that they had found it painful to recall shameful experiences.

8 Initial findings and analysis

This section considers the findings from the analysis of the interview data. The themes which emerged were investigated against the research literature and language learning theories, and according to the research questions posed. I have selected the interview extracts that refer to the language learning experiences that have been assigned some particular significance by the participants themselves. It is worth noting that the findings that are presented here are tentative. The respondents' feedbacks provide ample evidence and convincing support for claims that shame is a ubiquitous and prominent emotion in the French language classroom.

Out of the 30 participants, twenty reported positive or negative emotions in the FL classroom. Out of the participants who expressed emotions, 56% spoke about L2-related shame, to a high or minor degree (see Figure 1). It thus appears that shame is not limited to a trivial number of individuals, but is an often-experienced phenomenon in the French FL classroom.
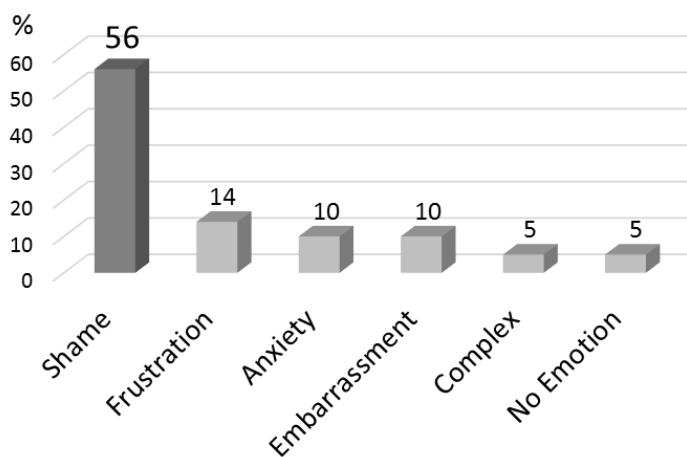

Figure 1. Interviewees' emotions.

The data analysis allowed answering the following three questions (sections 8.1 to 8.3):

1) How pervasive is shame in the French FL classroom? What are its main sources and manifestations, and the reasons for its development?
2) Does shame impact learners' sense of self, their vision of themselves as users of the TL, and their motivational behaviour?
3) Is shame to be found at all levels of proficiency?

8.1 How pervasive is shame in the French FL classroom? What are its main sources and manifestations, and the reasons for its development?

The quote below gives a hint of the pervasiveness and severity of FLCS:

> You see, I realize I have always been afraid of being ridiculous in the language class. Making mistakes in front of your classmates is so stressful, you speak with a French accent, it is such a shame! You feel diminished in the others' eyes and also in your own eyes! And when you are ashamed, you think about it all the time, and you are afraid that it will happen again (Lucie).[1]

The topic of FLL and language classes triggered a variety of associations and memories of shame-related episodes in these students, which highlights that FLL may be a most taxing enterprise. The fact that the participants tackled the issue of shame themselves without me having to steer the conversation towards my research focus indicates that this emotion is an integral part of their FLL journey, as well as their linguistic self-image.

Interestingly, no positive or facilitative effect of shame was reported in the present study. On the contrary, it was claimed to be felt as a profoundly inhibitory and debilitating emotion, sometimes referred to as *a traumatic experience* (Annelise, Maria, Pierre) which can impact individuals' learning potential and also their psychological well-being in a lasting manner.

In some cases, the respondents complained about psycho-physiological symptoms like "feeling my face blushing" (Maria), or "feeling my heartbeats" (Lucie), and even more serious psychosomatic disorders such as stomach aches, heart or lung-related issues, as in the case of Pierre:

> I was so stressed and was so affected by this shame episode in the English classroom, when the teacher yelled at me that I got a one out of twenty at a written assignment, and that I was such a jerk, putting me down in front of my peers, that for a few days, I was unable to breathe properly, I felt I was stifling, and I had terrible nightmares. So my parents had to take me to the doc's and he said that I had a problem with my lungs due to too much anxiety and stress.

It is to be noted that when shame experiences are recurrent, shame becomes an integral part of an individual's self-image, and a part of their identity. However, some isolated, unique shame experiences were reported to have been so intense and acute in the learner's mind that it resulted in feelings of dejection, worthlessness, and internalization of shame similar to those found when the shame episodes are recurrent. Claire explains:

> I remember one very shameful episode. I felt so humiliated in class, when she [the teacher] shouted that I had mispronounced the word 'beach', and what I said meant

>   something very rude, and everybody was laughing, yes I remember it like it was yesterday, and even today, when I hear this word, it brings me years back, it makes me feel bad. This is still in my memory, like a wound.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the mere remembrance of past shame experiences initiated symptoms like blushing, gaze avoidance, and psychological discomfort during the interview sessions, which shows the pervasiveness, severity, and persistence of this phenomenon. I was alert to any sign of discomfort during the interviews and made sure not to cause additional shaming. In some cases, the participants were offered to cancel, interrupt or postpone the interview. The interview data allowed identifying the following factors as accounting for FLCS (sections 8.1.1 to 8.1.5):

-   The specificity of FL communication.
-   Personality characteristics.
-   Teaching environment and instructional practices.
-   L2-self-image and perceived linguistic competence.
-   Fear of failure.

8.1.1 The specificity of FL communication

The participants' remarks were reflective of the view that fear of shame is inherent in L2 communication, and a prominent feature in class. The respondents referred to feelings of discomfort and psychological uneasiness stemming from problems of self-presentation in the TL, and arising from the fear of showing an unfavourable image of oneself. Charlotte depicts the feeling of being scrutinized:

>   When you are in class, you are like exposed, the centre of attention, as if you were on stage, you are afraid of stumbling, and you think what will they think if I ridicule myself? It would be a shame!

Interestingly, all six interviewees expressed the view that speaking English in class was more liable to provoke shame than any other school subject and than communicating with natives outside the classroom. As shown by Charlotte's remarks and other similar comments, my shame-prone interviewees tend to view FL classes as an ongoing language exam in front of an audience, and believe that making mistakes, not finding the right words, or mispronouncing them, are unacceptable in class, while they are perceived to be tolerated in real-life situations.

Only one participant expressed that he experienced the detrimental effects of shame on a regular basis in different walks of his life as well: "I am always stressed and afraid of being seen in a negative light, no matter what subject I study, I become anxious of being shamed when I speak in public" (Pierre).

8.1.2 Personality characteristics

As evidenced by some interviewees' feedback, it is a question of personality whether a student feels ashamed in class. The following personal attributes figured prominently as factors accounting for FLCS: "I am very shy" (Lucie), "I have always had an inferiority complex" (Maria), "I have a lot of difficulties expressing myself in public. It is so in French, and even more frightening in a language that I don't master" (Pierre), or "I have always lacked self-confidence,

and am embarrassed in public, I am introverted. I fear the negative evaluation by others, I think I have social phobia" (Emilie).

Personality or dispositional traits and learner-internal variables like shyness, introversion, inferiority complex, lack of self-confidence, social phobia, or embarrassment, which are generally regarded as being cognate to shame (Nathanson, 1987), and two personality constructs, fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, were regularly cited as being related to FLCS. Finally, some respondents like Maria expressed the idea that they lacked language aptitude:

> The problem was that I used to think that I had no natural gift for FLL, while my friends had this gift. Sometimes I thought I was really stupid, and it made me feel even more ashamed of this innate inability.

8.1.3 Teaching environment and instructional practices

The narratives showed that teachers and peers play a significant role in the arising of FLCS. The participants indicated that group dynamics, teachers and peers can increase or diminish FLCS, and that humanistic and caring pedagogical practices are vital in maintaining and boosting students' motivation levels and positive emotions. Other factors like class size and bonds of confidence and trust, the 'chemistry' that exists between teacher and learners and among learners, were also reported as factors liable to reduce FLCS, smaller groups engendering a more relaxed and anxiety-free atmosphere, thus promoting willingness to communicate and engagement.

Maria's forceful comment below shows how the attitude of teachers can lead learners not only to feel long-lasting linguistic shame but also to deep-seated ontological issues:

> I didn't like English from the start (primary school), the teacher left me aside. He asked me to sit at the back of the class and whenever I spoke and gave a wrong answer, he would shout at me and say that I was worthless, in front of the others, which made things even worse. All these gazes on me. I felt degraded, devalued, belittled. That teacher was always shouting, focusing on mistakes and laughing at me. And the way he looked at me made me feel so... little, very little. I never volunteered to speak in the TL because I was ashamed of not knowing the basics. He said I should go to a school for students with learning difficulties! It really shamed me! All these years I had a very negative image of myself. I was a good-to-nothing. My life would be a failure, *I* was a failure because *he* made me believe that I was bad at the core (Maria's emphasis, signs of discomfort, gaze avoidance and blushing).

Maria gives a vivid and moving description of the workings of FLCS. Clearly, the teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviour plays an important role in eliciting shame in learners. Repeated shaming remarks and devaluing gazes from the teacher or significant others can be debilitating for language learners and make them feel lower in status and expect negative outcomes in the future. The experience of shame is particularly noxious in the case of teenagers and college students, who are usually more concerned about others' negative evaluation of the self.

Several teacher-related factors have been identified in the arising of the shame feeling, such as humiliating remarks like "you should know that, I have told you hundreds times, even a college student would do better, or who helped you, you can't possibly have done it by yourself!" were cited as important

contributors to learner FLCS and to the development of a fear of being ashamed in a variety of situations.

The respondents' voices present a picture of students always concentrating hard on not being called on to answer, doing everything not to become the centre of attention. Some participants report "feeling uncomfortable" or even "feeling bad about FL classes". Linda's story about a very unpleasant event with one of her English teachers is a good example:

> The way she yelled at me that my sister must have done my homework, that I possibly would not have been able to get such a high grade, and she said that in front of my peers, everybody was looking at me, and I had spent hours on this test, but she wouldn't believe me, I really felt like I would sink into the ground, disappear from the classroom, I felt sweating, and my face becoming red. She was doubting my ability, she attacked my identity. At that very moment, I wished I had never been born, I just wanted to die immediately [biting lips and squirming].

It appears that students can experience shame depending on certain situational factors. Emilie explains:

> In the classes where I felt uncomfortable, when the atmosphere was not relaxed, either between us or with the teacher, I would be more liable to experience shame than when the teacher made us feel at ease, whereas when he was not focused on errors but on the progress we made, I would volunteer answers and be less prone to feel shame.

The extracts above show that language shame is both a situation-specific and a dynamic variable in L2 contexts. Looking at it from this perspective, shame appears as an attribute which is not static but displays fluctuations and a certain amount of changeability.

Another interesting point highlighted by the participants was that the experience of shame seems to be absent when learners make the *choice* of learning a particular FL, and more specifically when it is a less widely spoken language. Maximilien reports: "I learnt Czech out of choice and didn't feel any pressure to be good, it was just for the fun of learning this language. I felt no shame when I made mistakes."

This raises the question of the status of some FLs, like English, which is generally viewed as a universal language that one *must* master. To cite Paul: "Everybody speaks English, when you travel, English is used almost everywhere, so this puts you a lot of pressure, and if you can't speak it, well, you just think you are really stupid! It puts you to shame." Likewise, it seems that the more FLs one studies, the less prone to shame one is. To cite Maximilien again:

> I became less anxious of making mistakes when I started learning this FL [Czech], my fourth FL. I was really more willing to experiment, I think the more FLs you learn, the less reticent you become to use the TL, you just try and you don't care about mistakes. It's a kind of virtuous circle I think.

Also mentioned as a remarkable factor in the eliciting of shame was the presence of peers. Comments in this category pointed to the notion of comparisons with peers and the idea that students generally *feel* they are less competent than others. To give one example: "I was always thinking that the others knew better than me, that they were cleverer" (Lucie).

The interview data elicited from the participants reveal the existence of two kinds of shame. On the one hand, *anticipated* shame, that is when individuals imagine and fear future shame-inducing situations, when they *freeze*, and on the other hand, in-the-moment shame, which shows the pervasive nature of language shame. Lucie's interview excerpt illustrates this point:

> While in class, I would dread being called upon to speak up because I was afraid of making a fool of myself, with this accent, you see, I was always nervous, afraid that they would shame me, and I felt like I was [hesitating] ...freezing, was kind of paralyzed. And when I spoke up, I was always on the alert not to make mistakes, being forced to go out of my comfort zone made me feel extremely tensed and stressed. So I never volunteered answers, I preferred to stay in my shell. Sometimes I would pretend to be sick.

Lucie's words are enlightening in that they show the "complete interconnectedness" (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007) of shame, anxiety and the self, and suggest that the fear of displaying a negative version of one's self is conducive to ingrained and lasting anxious states, avoidance behaviour and self-saving strategies. It is to be noted that the feelings of *freezing*, or *being paralyzed* were frequently reported as activating passive behaviour, as was the term *shell*, which betrays that FLL may represent a threat. Maria's quote stresses the links between psychological discomfort, rumination, and shame, and illustrates her fear of future possible shame-inducing situations and how she builds a system of defence against potential shame experiences:

> When I made mistakes and the teacher shouted at me in front of the others, I would feel so bad, so ashamed of myself, and I would think over it all the time until the next course. Sometimes I dreamt of what had happened during the course, I was afraid that the same things would happen again, and this made me feel very nervous and anxious. So I did everything not to experience this again, like pretending being sick.

8.1.4 L2-self-image and perceived linguistic competence

The passage below is informative of the way Lucie perceives her L2 utterances, but also of the way she envisions herself as a user/speaker of the L2, using self-deprecatory expressions:

> Listening to others who speak so good English puts me to shame. How can they speak so elegantly while you always struggle to find the right word and use the correct tense? You stumble over every sentence, you babble like a child, and wow, it's so embarrassing, and frustrating. You would just like to disappear or hide from the others' gaze.

It appears that FLCS seems to be related to learners' concept of themselves as L2 learners/users and to their actual or perceived linguistic competence. L2-related self-perceptions/beliefs may be a critical factor in the development of FLCS. The data show that language shame is conducive to preoccupation with self-focused attention and concerns with evaluation by others and that learners believe they lack the skills necessary for successful interaction with others.

Of the two skills, speaking in the TL was claimed to be the stronger elicitor of shame (83% of the participants, see Figure 2), and a significant source of anxiety, because of the risk of displaying an incompetent self to others and of being ridiculed for making mistakes.
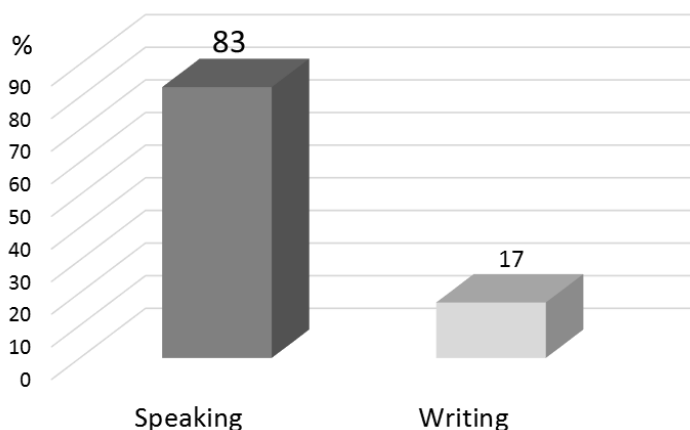
Figure 2. Sources of shame regarding skills.

Learners' feeling of shame arises from the *perception* of inadequacy in the TL and of their limited linguistic abilities rather than their *actual* poor command of the TL, and a bad accent was reported to be particularly detrimental to the image of the self. Annelise reports:

> Perhaps I was wrong, but I was always comparing myself with my peers and I believed I was less proficient than them, that my accent was ridiculous, and this made me feel inferior to them and ashamed of my low competence. I always thought the others would not understand me and inevitably mock me.

8.1.5 Fear of failure

The majority of the interviewees reported that failure was such a threat to the self that they were motivated to *avoid failure* rather than to *approach success*, thus sabotaging their chances of success. To quote Gabriel: "I think I have always been focused on not making a fool of myself, you see, it would be such a shame to fail, to be diminished and ridiculed in front of my peers." The interviewee's words corroborate studies which have shown the links between fear of failure and shame, and demonstrated that a fear of failure is actually a fear of shame (McGregor & Elliot, 2005).

8.2 Does shame impact learners' sense of self, their vision of themselves as users of the TL, and their motivational behaviour?

What emerged as a common feature of the interviewees' feelings about their past FLL experiences was that they did not feel secure and perceived language classes as a place susceptible to threaten their sense of self and (linguistic) identity. Lack of past achievements and experiences of success, negative feedback and reflected appraisals of others, lead to psychological discomfort and high feelings of self-consciousness, which affects their FLL experiences in the classroom negatively. Referring to Krashen's (1985) term, the *affective filter* seems high in these learners.

The narratives interestingly show that repeated, prolonged shame is most pathological and has the most serious consequences on individuals as it focuses on the inadequacy and deficiencies of the entire self and involves internal, global, and stable attributions, corroborating Higgins' argument (1987) that

shame arises from the feeling of discrepancy between the current/actual self and the ideal self. Two overarching themes were that shame is conducive to a global negative self-evaluation, which is congruent with theoretical conceptions of shame (e.g. Lewis, 1992; Tangney et al., 2007a, 2007b), and that others' perceived or actual evaluation/judgement of the self is important in the arising of the shame feeling. All this confirms the generally held assumption that reflected appraisals and the perceived opinions of significant others influence self-concept. Maria painfully remembers: "The way he [the English teacher] made me <u>feel</u> bad and worthless, and I believed he was right, after all, he was the teacher, he knew better" (Maria's emphasis). The consequence in motivational terms is that in some cases, repeated shame experiences are conducive to the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and result in disengagement, as cited by Maria:

> M: I realized that nothing could be done against that.
> I: Against what?
> M: Against my incompetency, I was really null and worthless, I had always been null and would always be, and nothing could change this. I gave up.

As forcefully expressed by Maria, shame involves global, uncontrollable and stable dispositional attributions of inadequacy, where learners feel that their *entire* self is flawed and incompetent, and perceive themselves as powerless to change their unwanted identity (Heider, 1983). In other words, they perceive that the goal of mastery is unreachable. The findings are in line with Cohen and Norst's (1989) contention that the linguistic self and the global self are so intimately interwoven, "if indeed they are not one and the same thing, that a perceived attack on one is an attack on the other" (p. 76).

From the participants' accounts, L2-related shame "touches the core of one's self-identity, one's self-image" (Young, 1992, p. 168). Most of the interviewees believe that the mastery of a FL is an innate gift that they do not possess, hence the feeling of hopelessness, and in terms of motivation, a disengagement from the task/FLL. Evidently, believing they cannot reach achievement through hard work is detrimental to their self-identity. Maria explains: "I felt bad at the core. It was in my nature, I was really worthless, this English teacher kept repeating that I was useless, that I was a blockhead. So I ended up believing that he must be right" [shoulders receding].

These words are reminiscent of Covington's (1984) self-worth theory, which asserts that individuals' ability to achieve is directly linked to their perceptions of themselves by others. The author further argues that individuals will do their utmost to "protect their sense of worth or self-value" (Covington, 1984, p. 4).

Another noxious consequence of FLCS the interviewees talked about was a behavioural one, namely an unwillingness or reluctance/reticence to participate in class, even when they knew the answer. As Lucie puts it:

> I was just freezing when I felt the teacher's gaze on me. Sometimes I was a hundred per cent sure of my answer, but I didn't raise my hand, for fear that I might make a mistake that would lead to my teacher mocking me.

The behavioural consequence of shame experiences was some reticence or unwillingness to participate actively in class, ruminating about past and future possible shame, anticipating difficulties and failure, and avoidance behaviours

like fleeing from situations in which students could use the TL. From the data, shame experiences discourage future linguistic experimenting and risk-taking for fear of losing a positive self-image.

The data seem to indicate that shame is no incentive for reparative action. On the contrary, shame involving negative evaluation of the global self, feeling of inferiority and global defectiveness, this emotion is conducive to withdrawal and avoidance behaviour, rather than attempts at redressing the situation. Annelise explains:

> I revised hard to get good grades, but I always got 5 out of 20. I was frustrated and disgusted, I had put so much effort for nothing! Revising so hard and still getting bad grades was a shame, I felt I was really bad, nothing could be done against it, and I would never be able to reach this goal, becoming a good English speaker. No, the goal seemed to me unattainable. I felt hopeless. I gave up.
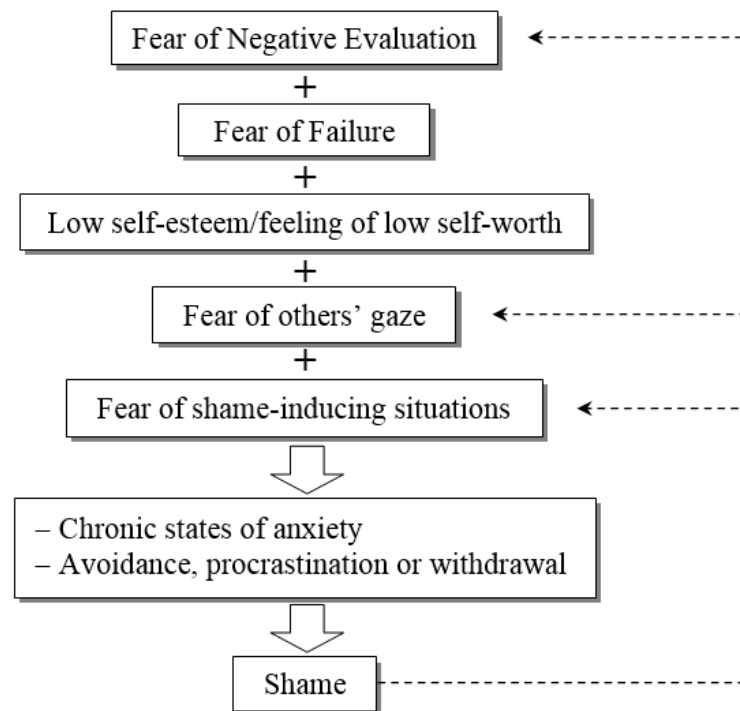
Her words are echoed in Maria's:

> M: Making effort was useless, I was worthless, I was a failure.
> I: Did *you* feel this way?
> M: That's the way my English teacher made me feel, useless.
> I: Useless? Really? That's a strong word!
> M: Yes, but that's the way I felt at the time, I was and would always be a failure, it was in my nature.
> I: So what was the consequence of your feeling worthless?
> M: I gave up studying, I was demotivated. I thought FLs were not for me.

Maria's words highlight that, on the ontological level, shame is bound up with the construction of foreign language identity and may also affect learners' global sense of self and identity in a more or less acute way, confirming the importance of self-concept in L2 learning.

However, the dataset seems to suggest that, in the case of some language learners, the feeling of shame arises from the perception of such a big gap between their current self and their ideal/ought to self, that this results in feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and individuals are generally not motivated to reduce this gap. This corroborates Tangney and Dearing's (2002) arguments that there is no adaptive function of shame, and that if shame is caused by attributions to both stable and global aspects of the self, then individuals feel that it is useless to increase effort to mend the situation.

To summarize, FLCS interferes with the acquisition, retention and production of a FL. The findings revealed that shame impairs cognitive functioning, since learners who are afraid of experiencing shame may learn less and not retain what they have learnt as easily as their more self-confident counterparts. They may have difficulties *using* the FL in particular. They therefore experience more failure, which in turn leads to shame, anxiety and may eventually hamper proficiency in the FL.

For fear that they might fail and of the negative consequences of shame (i.e. loss of a positive self-image, loss of self-esteem, loss of admiration/love by significant others), learners behave in particular ways, for instance, by refusing to volunteer answers or engage in communicative tasks unless they are certain that their answer is right, procrastinating, skipping classes, refusing to take risks, or withdrawing from language learning. The following diagram illustrates the vicious circle of FL shame and the potentially noxious effect of this emotion on learners' behaviours (see Figure 3).

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┌─────────────────────────────┐  ◄- - - - - - - - - - - - ┐
│ Fear of Negative Evaluation │                            ¦
└─────────────────────────────┘                            ¦
               +                                            ¦
     ┌──────────────────┐                                   ¦
     │ Fear of Failure  │                                   ¦
     └──────────────────┘                                   ¦
               +                                            ¦
┌──────────────────────────────────────┐                   ¦
│ Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth │              ¦
└──────────────────────────────────────┘                   ¦
               +                                            ¦
     ┌────────────────────┐   ◄- - - - - - - - - - -        ¦
     │ Fear of others' gaze │                               ¦
     └────────────────────┘                                 ¦
               +                                            ¦
┌──────────────────────────────┐  ◄- - - - - - - - -        ¦
│ Fear of shame-inducing situations │                       ¦
└──────────────────────────────┘                            ¦
               ⇩                                            ¦
┌──────────────────────────────────────┐                   ¦
│ – Chronic states of anxiety           │                   ¦
│ – Avoidance, procrastination or withdrawal │              ¦
└──────────────────────────────────────┘                   ¦
               ⇩                                            ¦
        ┌──────────┐                                        ¦
        │  Shame   │- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - ┘
        └──────────┘
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Figure 3. Shame-shame cycle diagram.

In order to save face and avoid the negative outcome of failure, learners develop 'action tendencies' and self-defence strategies such as self-handicapping strategies – defensive pessimism or learned helplessness – and avoidance behaviours such as skipping classes, postponing, or not volunteering answers.

8.3 Is shame to be found at all levels of proficiency?

Another issue my research is concerned with is the role of proficiency level in the development of FLCS. The feeling of shame and fear of shame were found at all levels of proficiency, at the beginning stages and at more advanced levels, and do not seem to decline as learners become more competent in the TL. To quote Maria:

> As years went by, I wasn't more confident in my abilities to speak English well. I knew I would never reach a native-like accent. On the contrary, the more I studied English, the less confident I was, and the fear of making a fool of myself increased with the years of study.

The findings also suggest that the severity of shame increases with the number of years of study. These findings seem to indicate that FLCS is not restricted to the beginning stage or early phases of L2 learning, and long years of commitment to FLL do not necessarily confer a sense of confidence in using the TL. FLCS seems therefore not to become less of a problem for more advanced and experienced learners, and higher levels learners seem to be even more shame-prone than their lower levels counterparts. Annelise remembers:

> When I started learning English I allowed myself to make mistakes, but later, when I was at high school, I was more anxious about my mistakes, I was always tensed and stressed because I think the more you learn a language, the better you should speak. It puts a lot of pressure, you have higher expectations for yourself.

These initial findings call for further investigation of the possible links between proficiency and FLCS in order to establish (1) what part proficiency level plays in learners' FLCS, (2) to confirm that FLCS cannot be attributed exclusively to a poor command of the FL, and (3) to see whether FLCS is a cause or an effect of poor proficiency.

9 Discussion and pedagogical implications

This study serves as a first step towards an understanding of FLCS and is not intended to be seen as a comprehensive work, and further research is needed to fully capture the inherent complexity of this field. What can be said though, is that, thanks to the findings, I have become more aware of my students' struggles with FLCS and understand them better as unique and complex individuals living in complex worlds.

The most vital message of my investigation for teachers of FLs is that FLCS is a profoundly debilitative emotion that is not restricted to the beginning stages of FLL. Long years of commitment to FLL and good command of the TL do not give learners a higher sense of confidence in their abilities.

The finding that there is a relationship between FLCS and teachers was expected, and demonstrates that they should be concerned about FLCS as they appear to be a notable source of it. *Encouraging his students to take risks*, *congratulating learners when they make progress*, *not mocking or criticizing their students*, *correcting errors gently*, or *using humour in class* were highlighted as teacher attributes contributing to an anxiety-free learning atmosphere, and one in which learners will not be afraid of experimenting, while humiliating remarks were reported to discourage them from taking risks by engaging in communicative tasks because of fear of possible shame experiences.

The major limitation of the study may be the use of interviews, because of the potential issues involved, such as social desirability bias or self-deception generally engendered by such instruments. However, what emerged from the data as a point particularly worthy of further investigation is the transformative potential of interviews/narratives. Maria expresses this point clearly:

> Being interviewed did me a lot of good, talking about the way this teacher humiliated me. Thank you so much for that! It's like I was talking to a Psy, I feel good now. It's great to be listened to, it's great to be allowed to confide. I feel different today, I feel boosted, my self-esteem is much higher. I never talked about that to anybody before. I feel I am a new person! [smiles] If you need another interview for your research, I will be pleased to help you.

Her words are echoed by Annelise's:

> I think we should generalize this kind of experience, being interviewed and allowed to open up to talk about our past negative experiences in the FL classroom is a way of making us feel better and put at a distance all the bad things. I feel like I am a new person now, this helps me change my vision of FLL.

These testimonies corroborate research which showed that shame is so painful that it is usually hidden (Dearing & Tangney, 2011). Another point which must be emphasised here is that these students had never – or very rarely – been offered the opportunity to voice their concerns about FLL, and most of them

showed an urgent need to express themselves. This very process of telling their stories through interviews – which some of them said were like psychotherapeutic sessions – led to a change in their vision of themselves not only as language learners/users but also in their everyday life identity, thus illustrating the potential transformative and I may say healing power of interviews/narratives, which can be seen as privileged places for making sense of one's experiences and for reinvesting one's identity.

This is clearly illustrated by Nunan and Choi's statement that "the opportunity for learners to tell their own stories, and the control that they have over those stories, is empowering" (2011, p. 228). In this sense, they become active participants in the study as they are "no longer individuals who have research *done* to them. They are *collaborators* in an ongoing, interpretive process" (Nunan & Choi, 2011, p. 228, my emphasis).

Maria's and Annelise's testimonies, which mirror other comments, appear highly revelatory of the fact that being interviewed had a transformative impact on their identity, and corroborate Şimşek and Dörnyei's (2017) contention that, through interviews, students gain a "narrative identity" (p. 57): "People regularly produce narratives to create cohesion in their experiences and perceptions so that the unified narrative can become a kind of guide" (Şimşek & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 57). All this is in line with Helen Block Lewis' (1987a, 1987b) findings that bypassed shame is damaging for the self and at the root of a number of psychological disorders. So it can be said that being allowed to acknowledge this feeling may have opened up the way to healing. Interviewing is a meaning making activity as it enables learners to disclose their often hidden L2-related shame experiences and to reconstruct their past FLL (hi)stories.

One issue needs clarifying. As was said earlier on, shame arises from the perception of a gap between one's current and ideal self. One would therefore be naturally inclined to think that learners who perceive a discrepancy between their current self and their desired L2 self would necessarily want to reduce this gap out of fear of (re)experiencing shame in the future. However, it seems that the majority of the interviewees perceive such a big gap between their actual and future self, and the goal of mastery unattainable, that, in order to protect their sense of self, they adopt a 'flight' response to shame rather than imagining ways of fighting it.

As regards the use of possible antidotes to shame, since the perception of shame varies considerably across individuals and cultures, the question arises as to whether there can possibly exist universally effective and distinctive remedies against prolonged shame that would differ from those advocated in the case of anxiety.

This study provides only the beginning of an answer and further investigation is undoubtedly needed. One of the most efficient solutions would certainly be to provide learners with a protective learning environment, that is one in which learners do not feel that their sense of self will be threatened and self-esteem damaged, a classroom atmosphere in which the risk of experimenting will be encouraged, in which learners will not spend energy avoiding potential shame but rather seek opportunities for speaking the TL. This does not constitute *the* solution, but it certainly is part of it. This undoubtedly will lead to increased engagement and a stronger sense of accomplishment and enjoyment. To cite Maria:

> Thanks to this new English teacher, who gave me positive feedback, who had a listening ear, and spent her lunch time helping me revising the basics, I little by little forgot all these humiliating experiences that had been part of my life for so many years, yes, *she* was really different, non-judgemental, caring, and tolerant of mistakes, I remember her

> saying that errors were part of learning, that trials and errors were part of the process of learning a FL, and she corrected us very gently, without criticizing. [cries] I am indebted to her, she made me change my view of FLL, I was a new person thanks to her. I started working hard, learning words and revising my grammar. And yes, I felt gratitude for her. I started enjoying this language, I progressed, and seeing that I could make it, I envisioned myself speaking English with natives. If I hadn't met her, I am sure I would have given up, because you see, I was convinced that I was an idiot.

Favouring positive emotions in the classroom will certainly counterbalance episodes of setbacks and failure, and focusing on progress rather than error will facilitate the arising of pride. All this will eventually "lead to an experience that is rewarding, interpersonally, linguistically, pedagogically and developmentally for teacher and students alike" (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1999, p. 157).

Recently, scholars have recommended fostering positive and facilitative emotions like enjoyment as a means of developing learners' engagement in L2 learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Other solutions would be finding techniques consisting in restoring/repairing the damaged self. In the field of education, a study by Oades-Sese, Matthews, and Lewis (2014) investigated the effects of shame and pride on students and interestingly proposed some recovery solutions for shame in education. The authors argue that, as shame entails the loss of the ideal self, the solutions to move away from prolonged shame would involve repairing the injured self and refocusing from the global self to specific behaviours and tasks, and moving toward unstable attributions for failure.

Finally, another solution regularly suggested by the participants against prolonged shame is stays abroad, which corroborates studies that have shown the restorative function of linguistic stays in that they enable to reframe past FLL experiences and (re)construct the self (e.g. Motyka & Wolcott, 2016; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). Lucie's statement, on her return from Australia, shows how mastery experiences abroad develop learners' self-concept:

> Going abroad had a very positive effect on my self-esteem, it boosted my confidence. I really felt different when I came back from Australia. All these negative experiences are now behind, I know that I can make it, English-speaking people can understand me. And they said I spoke well!

Her words find an echo in Pierre's: "When I came back from Swansea, my attitude towards English changed. I was happy to learn English, far more motivated than before, I raised my hand in class, because I knew that I was able to speak English."

The above statements indicate the power of beliefs, emotion and others' positive feedback, in influencing students' attitudes and motivational behaviour. In line with these, fostering positive visions of learners as TL users and providing them with regular reminders of their past accomplishments as well as tasters or visions of their future successful L2 selves (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014) will certainly help them overcome negative experiences. Lucie's testimony before going to Australia, illustrates the power of visualisation and the importance of nurturing the vision of a possible/desired L2 self:

> Imagining myself in Australia in a couple of months, using what I have learnt, is a real incentive. I spend days and night revising, planning my trip, in order to be able to communicate there. I gave up my hobbies, I don't go out anymore, I am focused on this ultimate goal, speaking with natives. I know it will be a joy to realize that they can understand me, the fulfilment of my dreams [radiant smile].

10 Conclusion

The present study was motivated by the gap in the research literature regarding baseline data on L2-related shame. The initial findings help us obtain a more balanced view of the emotions that hamper FLL and confirm what was said in earlier studies on the significance of psychological and emotional factors in SLA, and that a learner's investment in the TL is also an investment in a new identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011) as shame was found to be bound up with the construction of learners' L2 identity and to entail endurable negative self-appraisal.

In this regard, it is no surprise that harsh comments, recurrent negative feedback, mocking, and too much focus on mistakes on the part of the teacher should lead to a negative image of the linguistic self, and that a feeling of shame and general inadequacy and incompetence should ensue.

The data confirmed earlier findings that teaching a FL consists of something more than transmitting knowledge. It also aims at boosting learners' self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of identity. Why shame is to be taken into consideration in academic contexts – and more specifically in L2-related settings – is obvious: as shame involves global and stable dispositional attributions where learners feel that their entire (not only their linguistic) self is flawed and incompetent, it is vital to find recovery solutions for learners in order that they feel that they can change their unwanted identity and make progress.

From the initial findings, it seems not unreasonable to assume that, of all the emotions experienced during the FLL journey, shame is certainly the one that most encapsulates the notions of identity and the self and that, in conjunction with anxiety, it may be the swivel to learners' reticence to speak the FL and at the root of their entire negative affective reactions to FLL. It is maintained here that shame is one of the main culprits for the lack of engagement in FLL and that language teachers need to be able to recognize shame-indicating cues, so as to identify learners who struggle with high levels of FLCS.

It might be premature to attempt to provide a definition of FLCS. However, based on the interview data, I propose a tentative definition: Foreign language classroom shame can be seen as a complex, dynamic, self-evaluative and particularly debilitative and paralysing emotion arising in the specific context of the FL classroom, found at all levels of proficiency, and composed of a diversity of interrelated factors such as learner beliefs, self-perceptions, feelings, emotions, personality traits, as well as contextual variables (e.g. teacher, peers), and leading to enduring anxious states, avoidance of, or disengagement from FL learning and use, to a persistent diminished sense of self and perception of a flawed identity.

Due to its relationships with the self (feeling of worthlessness, feeling of deficiency, devaluation, and global attribution of failure) and identity, FLCS may qualify as one of the most significant deterrents in FLL.

The present study shows that only by acknowledging learner individuality and diversity and by taking their affect into consideration in a much more systematic and holistic way will teachers "capitalize on the positive-broadening power of facilitative emotions" (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p. xiv), stimulate students' motivation and long-term engagement, develop their feelings of accomplishment and pride in mastering a FL, and eventually fuel their desire to use the target language in academic contexts without being afraid of being/feeling ashamed.

It can be assumed though that the findings of the present study are not confined to the French FLL setting and I suggest to build upon the tentative findings of the present study through the means of questionnaires in order to complement the picture gained through qualitative methodology and to confirm the patterns uncovered. By providing baseline qualitative data, this study paves the way for future studies on shame in SLA. I argue in favour of a further scrutiny and systematic acknowledgement of this emotion in the FLL context (Galmiche, 2014, 2016) and am deeply convinced that it is an exciting and prolific area of research for the future.

Endnote

1 All the participants' quotations have been translated into the language of the article.

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