There is sufficient evidence to support the idea that, for enduring L2 learning to take place, it is imperative that students feel comfortable and positive about their experiences (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; MacIntyre, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Dewaele, 2011). Negative and positive emotions coexist in the language classroom but, while positive and facilitative emotions have the “power to broaden [learners’] field of attention” (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p. xiv), negative and pathogenic emotions may sap their self-esteem, confidence and perception of ability, eventually hampering their ultimate achievement.

The objective of my research is to show that, among the negative emotions experienced by L2 learners, the largely neglected and under-researched self-conscious variable of shame can be regarded as a significant predictor of success or failure in L2 learning. To this end, I first explored the possible links between foreign language classroom shame and FLL achievement through French learners’ in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The initial findings interestingly revealed that recurrent shame experiences in the foreign language classroom (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 lasting L2-related anxiety due to fear of future shame-inducing situations. Among skills, speaking the target language was reported to be the most liable to elicit shame because of the likelihood of displaying an incompetent self to others.

The participants’ thought-provoking remarks corroborate earlier studies (Cohen & Norst, 1989) which highlighted that the linguistic self and the global self are intimately interwoven, since teachers’ shaming comments and negative feedback may generate enduring feelings of general worthlessness, inadequacy and negative self-appraisal.

I believe that acknowledging L2-related shame will help learners harness the negative and paralyzing power of shame in L2 learning.

Keywords: Linguistic Self, SLA, Shame.