

A STUDY ON ESL AND EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN A NATIVE SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT

Cynthia Aling

Faculty of Language and Communication
Swinburne University of Technology
Sarawak Campus
Jalan Simpang Tiga,
93350 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
caling@swinburne.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Anxiety has become a major determinant in deciding the success of the second/foreign language learners learning English in the native speaking environment. Second/Foreign language anxiety can be conceptualized as a unique type of anxiety related to distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviour related to the language learning process. Students' level of self-efficacy tends to affect the self-perceive communicative ability whereby they will doubt their successful performance. Language anxiety literature has established on the idea that anxiety may have a detrimental effect on the learners' competency and usage of the target language. This study aimed to investigate two hypotheses namely; (i) high level of anxiety lead to a low competency of language usage among the learners; and (ii) high level of anxiety among the learners will impede with their communication skill with others. A questionnaire adapted and altered from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used and administered to 54 Bond University English Language Institute (BUELI) students currently undertaking English courses at the institute located in Gold Coast, Australia. Result from this study indicated that high level of anxiety does impede the competency of language usage among the learners and their communication skills. Nevertheless, low self-confidence seems to be an important component in relation to anxiety. Possible implications of the study on anxiety are indicated.

Keywords: Language anxiety, competency, self-perceive, communication

INTRODUCTION

The English language has established its importance in both academic and social context. Acknowledging the importance of learning the English language either for academic or business purposes, the number of people, especially students originating from the country where English is their second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) wanting to learn the language has increased significantly. However, acquiring a new language other than their mother tongue has been reported to be a challenge because learners are required to construct a new language system with only very limited exposure or knowledge on the structure and function of the second language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Therefore, anxiety or fear tends to develop as these learners lack knowledge of and <http://worldconferences.net/home>

about the English language. Cyclical unknown origins of relationship of anxiety and students' performance may exist, where anxiety leads to poor performance, which leads back to anxiety, and hence restarts the cycle.

The main goal of most English language learners is to be able to use the target language effectively. However, with limited language proficiency, compounded by the fact they are embedded in an environment where the target language is also the daily conversational language, may influence their anxiety level significantly. According to Humphries (2011), students tend to avoid trying to produce complex sentences or messages in the target due to high levels of debilitating anxiety. This will have a detrimental effect of their learning rather than improving their learning and usage of the language.

It is evident that further investigation is needed in order to have a holistic understanding of how anxiety can impact on their concentration and motivation in learning English, communication apprehension and test performance. For this reason, the focus of this study will be on the relationship of the learners' anxiety level and their competency of using the target language for communication purpose with others in the context of native speaking environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Prior to understanding the impact of anxiety on acquisition of the target language, it is important to review what anxiety constitutes. Therefore this section will firstly review definitions of language anxiety available in literature. Upon reviewing how anxiety is conceptualised, the review of studies on ESL and EFL's language competence will be carried out. This is to ensure that a better understanding of learners' communication skills in the target language and its link with their level of anxiety can be achieved.

Language Anxiety

Language anxiety is a phenomena long associated with the learners of second language or foreign language. According to Semmar (2010) anxiety is an intricate feeling of tension and apprehension which involves having difficulty to concentrate in the English class, feeling embarrassed to volunteer answers in class, disliking to speak often in English out of fear that the teacher will think that students are weak or incompetent, feeling uncomfortable when having to speak English in class, and feeling afraid to be laughed at by other students when speaking English. A study conducted by Awan et al. (2010) in Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) on the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and students' achievement, revealed that there was a negative relationship between language anxiety and achievement. It is affirmed that language anxiety is one of the main hindrance in the acquisition of language and fluent production of the target language by the learners. This language anxiety will impede with the learners' ability to learn the new language and causing a breakdown in learning the target language.

Anxiety that is closely related with second language acquisition is termed as situational-specific anxiety. Situational-specific language anxiety can be broken down into three components i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) in Liu and Jackson (2008) defined communication apprehension as the feeling of shyness due to fear or anxiety when communicating with other people using the target language. In other words, communication apprehension is the act of reticence in speech as the result of feeling anxious when communicating with others using the target language and in the context of situation where they have little role to play or not familiar with. As for fear of negative evaluation, Semmar (2010) mentioned that the learner is fearful of being negatively evaluated in a social context, in that they may be perceived or judged unfavourably by others due to their lack of linguistic competence. This

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eventually impedes the use of the target language. In fact, it is due to such anxieties that students tended to shun themselves from situations where their performance will be judged entirely on language skills. As learners have to undergo some form of assessment, it is also useful to review test anxiety. Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) defined test anxiety as unpleasant emotional experiences, feelings, and worries in situations in which one's performance is being evaluated. This often results in the decrease in one's ability to cope with stressful conditions such as test-taking situations.

The meta-cognitive awareness of the learners towards their insufficient knowledge of the language and lack of proficiency and competency to converse fluently and understand the intended meaning given in the target language may lead the learners to feel despair and de-motivated to involve in any communication activity using the target language. Due to the self-belief that the learner lacks the competence in the target language, this may cause high test anxiety and accordingly, lead to poor performance in the examination. Thus, the competency of the learners in using the target language and their level of anxiety will be investigated. The first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: The competency of using the second and foreign language anxiety is related with the learners' level of anxiety.

Competency of using the language

Competency of using the target language has been shown to affect the learners' level of anxiety. According to Sultan (2012), students experience less anxiety when they perceive themselves as more competent. Kayaoglu and Saglamel (2013) mentioned that language anxiety-arousal will interfere with the learner's cognitive ability to take in, process and produce the target language. When the learners feel anxious (i.e. their level of anxiety is high), errors can be noticed in their usage of the language. They have the tendency to hesitate or procrastinate when they were asked to complete a task or to initiate a discussion. Incompetency of using the language can be noticed from the learners' short fall in speaking, writing, reading and listening. For the purpose of this study, the focus of incompetency will be on the speaking aspect, which is learners' communication skill of interacting with others using the target language.

When a learner is learning the new language, he or she may have limited or have absolute no knowledge about the language. This will make learning the new language difficult as they are unable to relate it to their previous knowledge. It is likely that lack of knowledge in the targeted language has links to the language learners. A study conducted by Sultan (2012) found out those students who perceive themselves as competent report less anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. According to Bandura (1993); Mulkey and O'Neil (1999) in Barrows, Dunn and Lloyd (2013) people's belief of their own capabilities is influenced by self-efficacy. Students with high efficacy will not worry much about the outcome or being negatively evaluated by others. On contrary, students with low self-efficacy tend to lose motivation to complete hard tasks and focus on possible negative outcomes (Barrows, Dunn and Lloyd, 2013). The perceived incompetence due to low self-efficacy contributes to anxiety.

The lack of confidence in using the language and fear of negative evaluation could cause learners to feel stressed and subsequently affect their language competency. The incompetency of using the target language is also related to the fear of negative evaluation (Amiri & Ghonsooly 2015). Students with high level of anxiety tend to demonstrate negative behaviours and action in the process of acquiring the target language. They tend to defer when they were asked to give answers or opinions, more fearful towards evaluation and were more concerned about making mistakes and eventually keeping silent throughout the learning and conversation with others.

The environment where learners acquire the target language also play a crucial role in influencing their anxiety in learning and using the language. Gulmez (2012) stated that the learners who are constantly being evaluated by teachers and peers in a classroom environment may result in high anxiety. This is because learners are constantly aware of their performance in using the language and therefore become conscious towards negative criticisms. The students' lack of self-confidence, being compared with others and from their views on the language lead to the feeling of anxiousness (Gulmez 2012). Example of situation source of foreign language anxiety is linguistic difficulties which include pronunciation. A study conducted by Kayaoglu and Saglamel (2013) revealed that poor pronunciation disturbed them the most when speaking as the remaining learners burst into laughter when mispronunciation occurred. They felt embarrassed and unable to express themselves and eventually led to anxiousness.

On the other hand, for non-native speakers, their learning of English will be interfered or termed as interference of the language. This negative transfer as stated by Ellis (1994) occurs when the learners apply their knowledge of their first language pattern into the learning of the target language and realizing that the pattern of the first language does not fit into the pattern of the target language. Thus, it increased the learners' difficulty and their anxiety of learning the target language. For this reason, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H2: The high level of anxiety among second and foreign language learners impede with their communication skill.

Level of anxiety and the learners' communication skill in the target language

The learners' level of anxiety will impede their communication skills in the target language. The level of anxiety can be a major problem for learners of the English language. Horwitz (2008) stated that the learners level of anxiety range from moderately anxious to strongly anxious. It is also proven that learners with the higher levels of anxiety are more likely to do more poorly in their language classes. Sultan (2012) mentioned that students' perception of their own communicative competence is another factor that influences proficiency i.e. when the students assigned too low a value to their competence, they become anxious. Students tend to compare themselves with the ones better than them. This led to loss of enthusiasm or sometimes giving up the task or avoiding the task entirely.

A study conducted by Liu and Jackson (2008) also reflected that learners with high level of language anxiety in terms of communication are less willing and tend to avoid participation of classroom conversation and considered the act of communication as meaningless and unreliable activity. In contrast, learners who are willing to participate in interpersonal conversation and social conversations have a more positive attitude toward the activity and view it as helpful in improving their conversational skills using the target language. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) as stated in Dörnyei (2005) affirmed in their studies that as a result of anxiety, anxious learners' verbal production will be lower and thus reluctant to express personal relevant information using the target language. They preferred to be silent so that their peers will not pick on them and the mistakes they made in conversation. They also show hesitation when required to answer questions or give their opinions using the English language.

Overall, language anxiety is associated to the learners' feeling and behaviour while acquiring the language and using the language. A study conducted by Kayaoglu and Saglamel (2013) on possible sources of anxiety affirmed that several causes namely linguistic difficulties: lack of sufficient vocabulary, poor command of grammar rules and pronunciation difficulties; cognitive challenges: fear of failure, lack of self-esteem; and competitiveness contributes to the feeling of anxiousness among the students. The learners will feel lack of confidence in using the language such as

interacting with others using the target language, afraid being called in the classroom and afraid of making mistakes and being laughed about it.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for the purpose of this study is a quantitative. The instrument used is a questionnaire adapted from Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that was developed to find out the anxiety level of the foreign language learners when acquiring or using the target language. According to Horwitz and Young (1991) in Semmar (2010), the FLCAS has satisfactory psychometric properties that allow levels of anxiety to be measured. Hence, it is believed that this scale is valid and reliable.

Sample

The sample for the purpose of this study consists of 60 Bond University English Language Institute (BUELI) students of mixed gender and nationality. The rationale behind the selection of this sample is because the students taking English courses in BUELI consists of students whose English is not their first language and they are studying English in BUELI for the purpose of acquiring the English language for social or academic purpose. Their current state of acquiring the target language and using the target language in the native speaking context would be very much reflected in the hypotheses of this study. The students were randomly selected.

Preview of measures

For the purpose of this study, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was adapted and used to measure the situational-specific anxiety among the learners. The FLCAS measures the learners' anxiety in terms of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Five point response scale ranging from never to always was used for the learners to rate their responds to the statements stated in the questionnaires. (Refer detailed measure of questionnaire in Table 1; Refer detailed fractions of questionnaire in Table 2.)

Table 1: Measures of Questionnaire

H1: The competency of using the target language is related with the learners' level of anxiety.	
Likert scale: 1 – Never 2 – Rarely 3 – Sometimes 4 – More often than not 5 – Always (to measure the students' probability to experience situations in which will impair their competency using the target language)	
iv:	Competency of the learners in using the target language
dv:	The likelihood of the learners to make mistakes and errors in the target language
iv indicator:	Self-graded competency in using the language (1-need effort, 2- average, 3-good, 4-very good, 5-excellent)
dv indicators:	Usage of wrong vocabulary, and wrongly pronounced the word in English Usage of fillers (e.g. er, uhm), hesitation in conversation Usage of translation in sentence formation
Empirical referents:	I make a lot of mistakes when having conversation with other people using the English language. I think in my first language before I can express my opinion using the target language. I always get mixed up with the different vocabulary which carries the same meaning. I paused and hesitate to fill in the gap when having conversation with others.
H2: The high level of anxiety among second or foreign language learners will impede with their communication skill with other people	
Likert scale: 1 – Never 2 – Rarely 3 – Sometimes 4 – More often than not 5 – Always (to find out the students' main problem impeding their communication skill using the target language.)	
iv:	Anxiety level of the learners
dv:	The probability of the learners to occur communication shortfall with others when trying to express their opinion

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iv indicators:	Feeling of nervousness Feeling lack of confident
dv indicators:	Feeling short of word/vocabulary in the target language Unable to express own opinion clearly to others Feel uneasy when talking with others using the target language
Empirical referents:	I feel very nervous when I need to talk with native speakers using the target language. I tend to shy away or not looking up when the teacher required the students to give their opinion in certain issues. I am tongue-tied and my mind becomes blank when speaking in front of the class using the target language.
Hypotheses:	H1: High level of anxiety leads to low competency of language usage among the learners. H2: The high level of anxiety among second/foreign language learners will impede with their communication skill with other people.

Table 2: Fractions of Questionnaire

Part 1 gathered demographic information such as country of origin, first language and current semester studying English in BUELI. (Q1 - Q3)
Part 2 consisted of statements on anxiousness in testing condition (Q4 - Q6)
Part 3 consisted of statements on anxiousness in unexpected circumstances (Q7 - Q9)
Part 4 consisted of statements on anxiousness in speaking (Q10 - Q12)
Part 5 consisted of statements on learners' accuracy and fluency of using the English language (Q13 - Q18)
Part 6 consisted of statements on learners' feeling of nervousness (Q19 - Q21)
Part 7 consisted of statements on learners' feeling lack of confident (Q22 - Q24)
Part 8 consisted of statements on learners' communication skills in using the English language (Q25 - Q30)
In order to measure the IV (anxiety level) for the first hypotheses (H1), the following statements were used: Q4: I feel nervous when I know I am being assessed Q8: I get tense and nervous when I have to discuss things unfamiliar to me in English Q11: I feel very nervous when I need to speak in English
As for DV (competency of using the language) in the first hypothesis (H1), the following statements were used: Q13: I always write English sentences without making grammar mistakes Q15: I always use the wrong English words to express my ideas Q18: I can speak English fluently without using fillers (e.g. er, uhm, erm..)
In the second hypothesis (H2), the following statements were used to measure the IV (anxiety level of the learners): Q20: I tend to shy away or not looking up when the teacher required the students to give their opinion in certain issues Q23: I always feel that other students speak English better than I do
The DV (learners' communication skills with other people) in the second hypothesis (H2) were measured using the following statements: Q25: I am tongue tied and my mind becomes blank when speaking to others using English Q27: I can state and support with reasons my position on an issue in English Q29: I feel very comfortable to speak with others using English.

RESULTS

The aim of this study is to find out the language anxiety level of students studying English as second/foreign language and to determine whether anxiety level will affect their competency in using the English language and their communication skill with other using the English language. 60 questionnaires were completed and returned, but only 54 questionnaires were found to be eligible for analysis.

The participants consisted of 14 Chinese nationalities, seven participants from Korea, six participants from Thailand, four participants from Philippines, Taiwan and Indonesia respectively, three participants respectively from Brazil and Spain, two participants from Japan, Pakistan and UAE respectively and one participant from India, Iran and Syria respectively.

The independent variable in all analysis was level of anxiety, the independent samples T-test was conducted to compare the mean score of anxiety with the language competency of language usage of the respondents.

With respect to the first hypothesis (H1), a T-test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that high anxiety level students have low competency of language usage. The test was significant at $\alpha=0.05$ ($p = 1.99257E-50$; $<.05$) and null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistical difference between students with high anxiety ($M=8.03$, $p<.05$) who scored lower on competency scores than individuals with low levels of anxiety ($M=8.55$, $p<.05$). Students with low level of anxiety tend to have higher competency in the usage of the English language ($M=8.55$) in comparison to students with high level of anxiety ($M= 8.03$).

As for the second hypothesis (H2), similarly a T-test was conducted to evaluate the hypotheses that high level of anxiety will impede the students' communication skill with others. The test was significant at $\alpha=0.05$ ($p = 2.11052E-69$; $<.05$) and null hypothesis was rejected. There was a statistical difference between students with high anxiety ($M=8.95$, $p<.05$) who scored lower on competency scores than individuals with low levels of anxiety ($M=10.19$, $p<.05$). Students with low level of anxiety tend to have higher or better ($M= 10.19$) communication skill with other people in comparison with students with high anxiety level tend to have lower communication skill ($M=8.95$).

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis tested was that second/foreign language learners with high level of anxiety are more likely to have low competency in using the English language. Result from the t-test ($\alpha=0.05$, $p =1.99257E-50$) supported this hypothesis. This result revealed that second/foreign English language learners studying English tend to experience high level of anxiety and this high level of anxiety have affect their competency in using the language.

The second hypothesis was tested on the level of anxiety among foreign/ second English language learners and their communication skill with others. The result conducted from the t-test ($\alpha=0.05$, $p =2.11052E-69$) supported the hypothesis that high level of anxiety among second or foreign language learners will impede with their communication skill with other people.

The first hypothesis proposed in this study has proven that high level of anxiety among the second/ foreign language learners does tend to have low competency in using the English language. The null hypothesis for this first proposed hypothesis was therefore rejected. High level of anxiety does indeed hold back their performance in using the language for the mentioned purposes. This findings lends support to Kayaoglu and Saglme's (2013) study whereby second /foreign language students are prone to language anxiety when a particularly language classroom skill is emphasized. These students tend to be more anxious in tests and hence causing the performance in classroom to be deteriorated. Anxiety level of the learners can be detected in their competency through their indication on the statements stated in the questionnaire e.g. *"I feel nervous when I know I am being assess"; "I expect to do poorly in the exam even before I sat for it"; "I always paused and hesitate when I talk to others using English"; " I feel very nervous when I need to speak in English"; "I tend to shy away or not looking up when the teacher required the students to give their opinion in certain issues"*.

The learners' affective states also play a crucial role in affecting their level of anxiety when learning the new language. According to Ellis (1994), the belief that the learners bring in about language learning tend to affect not only their overall progress but also responses to particular learning activities gradually. When the learners believed that language learning is difficult it will demotivate their learning and hence creating an affective filter in their learning as termed by Krashen (1982),

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when input provided to the learners, the affective filter of the learners i.e. anxiety level created a barrier in which it hinders the learning of the learners. The feeling of nervousness and anxiousness impede their competency of using the language and causes the learners to feel demotivated to learn. As mentioned by Barrows, Dunn and Llyod (2013), low self-efficacy will affect academic performance negatively. As they focus too much on possible negative outcome, they may not seek out opportunities to gain the knowledge or skills that necessary to make their learning successful.

On the other hand, it was also found that encountering unexpected situations tend to increase the anxiety level of the learners. Situation such as giving impromptu speech, giving opinions using the target language rouses the anxiety level of the learners and thus feeling of nervousness occurs. Zheng (2008) stated that spoken language competency has been mostly associated with language anxiety among second/foreign language. Their level of anxiety increases as when they are required to complete oral task.

The second hypothesis of the study investigated whether high level of anxiety among second/foreign language learners will impede their communication skill with other people. It was hypothesized that second/foreign language learners with high level of anxiety have difficulty to communicate with other people using the target language. This hypothesis is reflected in the study conducted by Sultan (2012), who maintains that feelings of anxiety can be a hindrance to foreign language acquisition and proficiency. When the communication involves the dominance of teacher and students, the learners' anxiety level is intensified (Kayaoglu & Saglamel, 2013). They were unable to communicate effectively with other people using the target language due to being worried of failure. This also explained the silence among the learners as they are aware of their English proficiency and refuse to take the risk of being laugh at by their classmates for the mistakes they made in expressing their ideas.

Language anxiety and the learners' competency in using the language are interrelated. If the learners suffer from high level of anxiety, they have low competency of using the language as they are more prone to making mistakes or they are reluctant to carry out activities which requires them to use the target language. This is related to the variable of confidence in language learning and their attitude towards the learning of the target language. This study has found out that testing conditions will increase their anxiety level and thus will cause the learners to perform badly in comparison to a condition which is less tense and dense for the learners. Similarly, learners will get anxious when they are require to discuss issues which they possess no knowledge. In terms of accuracy, the learners are prone to making mistakes when their level of anxiety is high. This study has revealed significant and consistent trait of anxiety in all the presented variables. However, detailed research can be carried out focusing on communication among the second/foreign language themselves using the target language. It will provide an insight on how communication using the target language among the second/foreign language themselves as comparison to communication with native speakers.

Limitations

As with all research, this study too had its limitations. Other than the small sample size which would not represent the whole population of second/foreign language learners, one obvious limitation of this study would be the demographical aspect of gender in which the research omitted in conducting this study. Knowing the differences of anxiety level between different genders would make this study to appear more valid rather than just categorizing the learners by high level or low level anxiety in general. Hence, by providing gender and anxiety level in the study, it will deem to make the study to be more significant.

On the other hand, in this study which employed the direct method of eliciting their perceptions of English learning experience, respondents were aware that their feedback were being investigated. Thus, these increases the chances that the responses may reflect artificial sentiments of respondents or even answers that were dishonest. Therefore, it is recommended that observation method to be used for future research in order to get the actual result from the conducted observation and also to validate the hypothesis of the study.

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study sought to find out whether high level of anxiety among the learners will influence their competency in using the language and also their communicative skills with other. Both of the hypotheses proposed in this study were accepted as the study has proven that high level of anxiety does indeed very much influence the competency and communication skills of the learners. Note that learners with high level of language anxiety will struggle in trying to achieve their educational goals especially in the learning of the English language. Therefore, future research should focus on the teaching approaches in which teachers can help to reduce the anxiety level of the learners in learning the target language. Although teaching approaches is an area of common in the educational field, specific approaches with regards to anxiety have yet to be fully explored. Hence, it will provide as a corrective for lowering the language learners anxiety in learning the language and to increase their competency in using the target language.

Overall, the findings of this study have increased our understanding where high level of anxiety will affect the learners' competency and their communication skills in using the target language. These findings fill in the gap on the effect on anxiety and it relation with learners' competency and communication skills.

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