

Language anxiety and its effects on english speaking learning of 2nd year students at Hue Industrial College

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Abstract: *This study identified the effects that language anxiety caused to students when they learn English-speaking skill. The study also explored the influential factors and manifestations of anxiety on students' English-speaking learning. The result showed that language anxiety could have facilitating effects, which motivated students to study better or debilitating effects, which discouraged students in their speaking. Based on the findings, some recommendations and implications were suggested.*

Keywords: *Effects of language anxiety, English-speaking practising*

1. Introduction

Downs (2000) claimed that Vietnamese students as well as Chinese students are self-conscious when being asked to express their views in public. This is true even if their language abilities are comparatively good. Therefore, lots of researches were done to find out the factors affecting students when they speak a foreign language. Among these factors, language anxiety can be a determining factor in the language performance of students (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). This research paper is an attempt to provide some of the underlying points in this regard.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Language anxiety and its impacts on foreign language learning

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986: 127) describe three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. According to McCroskey's (1978 as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) definition, communication apprehension is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with other persons.

Test anxiety is defined by Sarason (1984 as cited in Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) as: "*the tendency to view with alarm the consequences of inadequate performance in an evaluative situation*".

Fear of negative evaluation is defined as "*apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively*" (Watson, & Friend, 1969 as cited in Chan & Wu, 2004).

Anxiety can also be classified into facilitating

anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Which encourages the learners to fight the new language task. Motivates the learner to assume an avoidance attitude and therefore tends to escape from the new learning task (Scovel, 1978 as cited in Brown, 2004)

2.2. Anxiety-provoking factors in learning English speaking skill

- Cultural or socio-cultural factors
- Psychological or affective factors
- Learners' proficiency
- Fear of negative evaluation
- Students' anxious personality

2.3. How anxiety is manifested in language classroom

In a comparison of anxious and good students, Turula (2002) points out that anxious learner:

Is reluctant to take risks.

Relies heavily on memory.

Is reluctant to hypothesize.

Is disorganized and inefficient in recall of learned items

Feels apprehension and self-doubt, is frustrated

3. Methodology

A set of questionnaire with 15 questions was delivered to 129 students at HueIC. Besides, a similar set of questionnaire was also delivered to 7 teachers who are teaching English credit at the college. Observations and interviews were also done to make sure that what people wrote in the questionnaires are believable and to witness what really happened in the classrooms.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are applied to the analysis of the data to make the result of the research more precise, subjective and reliable.

4. Findings

4.1. The current situation of learning English speaking skill in students' perspectives

4.1.1. Students' perception of speaking skill

Among 129 students questioned, 45 students affirmed that speaking skill was very important and another 72 students thought this skill was somewhat important. However, there were still 12 out of 129 students occupying 9.3% denied the importance and necessity of English speaking skill.

The data also showed that most students (48%) considered their competence as *average* and a remarkable number of 26.4% students thought their skill was *below average*. Not many students regarded their speaking skill as *rather good, good or very good*.

4.1.2. Students' feelings when speaking English in front of the class

The survey revealed that students of English experience *excited, normal, a little anxious or very anxious* feelings when speaking in front of class. A majority of students (63.5%) have the feeling of anxiety when speaking English in front of their classmates and the teacher. As the questionnaires revealed, those who evaluated their speaking competence as average and below average tended to feel *a little anxious or very anxious* when speaking in class. Meanwhile, those who have good or rather good English speaking competence tend to feel *normal or excited* when they speak English. Therefore, there may be a correlation between students' competence and their feeling towards speaking English.

4.2. Influential factors causing anxiety for students in English speaking

4.2.1. Shyness in Vietnamese communicative culture

A large number of students occupying 58.1% admitted the effect of the shyness in communicative culture of Vietnamese people on their anxiety. About 22.5% of students felt neutral about this matter. This result shows that the shyness in Vietnamese communicative culture affects students differently.

4.2.2. Losing-face psychology in Vietnamese communicative culture

The data shows that all of the teachers and a majority of students (73.6%) supported the influence of losing-face psychology on Vietnamese people's communication. Furthermore, most of the teachers (5 out of 7) agreed that this psychology did affect their students' English speaking and a remarkable number of students up to 44.2% also admitted the influence of this psychology on their speaking.

4.2.3. Students' personality

From the data collected, while 15.5% of students tended to feel confident when speaking English in their class, another figure of 63.5% felt nervous and confused whenever they spoke in their language classes. Those students who felt confident or normal when speaking tended to be extrovert, sociable and active. Meanwhile, the students who lacked confidence and faced anxiety when speaking seemed to be introvert, shy and inactive. It can be said that personality plays a certain part in students' English learning.

From the results of questionnaires, 71.4% of teachers supported the strong correlation between students' level of anxiety when they speak English and their personality. A teacher even considered personality as the root of students' anxiety.

4.2.4. Fear of negative evaluation

In English classes, negative evaluation may come from teachers and/or peers. In this study, negative evaluation derives mainly from peers. From the researcher's observations, the teachers in the study were so skillful that they did not make their students have the feeling of negative evaluation. However, some students felt embarrassed when their peers watched their English performance. 38% of students are afraid that the other students will laugh at them if they make mistakes when speaking English in front of the class. The in-depth interviews with students gives the same result, 12 out of 20 students interviewed supported the influence of fear of negative evaluation on their feelings when speaking English.

4.2.5. Students' proficiency

It can be interpreted that students' low proficiency was the major source of their anxiety. Their anxiety when speaking English happened when they did not know how to answer teachers' questions orally. Also, they became anxious when they could not understand their teachers. 48% of students totally agreed or agreed that not understanding their teachers' sayings in English was a factor causing their anxiety in English speaking classes. It is apparent that students' language proficiency plays an important role in the correlation with their level of anxiety when they speak English.

4.3. Impacts of anxiety on students' learning speaking skill under students and teachers' perspectives

As results from the questionnaires revealed, the students in this study suffered from their anxiety. Specifically, most students (58.1%) avoided speaking activities in class because they felt anxious.

Another remarkable number of students occupying 55.8% felt their heart beat faster, their voice tremble and their confidence disappear when they speak in their English class. Most teachers also agreed with these effects on students. Another effect was that anxiety made students forget most of what they were going to say. 48.8% of students and 71.4% of teachers confirmed this effect. Feeling anxious while speaking English in classes also made 34.9% of students reluctant to participate in speaking activities in English classes. Meanwhile, more than 80% of the teachers noticed this effect on their students when their students speak English.

Apart from the above debilitating effects, anxiety, however, also had its facilitating ones. 31.8% of students stated that anxiety made them alert and try their best to improve their speaking competence. Sharing the same thought, 57.1% of teachers agreed with this facilitating effect.

5. Recommendations

5.1. For students

- Each student must be aware that their shyness and their timidity are not good for their speaking learning. In addition, it is undeniable that personality cannot be completely changed. However, if they read a lot to widen their knowledge, practice speaking a lot, make acquainted with confident, active friends, they can partly improve their shyness as a feature of their personality.

- To deal with psychological factors, students have to try themselves when speaking English by thinking in positives ways like:

"I can speak English although my speaking is not perfect".

"Anyway I can make myself understood, that's enough".

"Teacher and peers will listen to me in a friendly manner".

- Students should try their best to gain firm background of English in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation so that they will be more confident when they speak. Students need to achieve not only linguistic competence but also communicative competence to be good at speaking a language.

5.2. For teachers

Teachers should:

- Be aware of their students' anxiety in learning a foreign language especially speaking.

- Create a friendly classroom atmosphere

- Design appropriate questions and tasks.
- Include a number of small-group or pair activities in English classes

- Use gentle and non-threatening methods of error correction and offer words of praise and encouragement.

- Teachers should provide students with frequent and positive feedbacks as this encouragement and reinforcement will increase their self-confidence (Wang, 2003).

- Speak more slowly or consider using English to clarify key points or give specific directions.

- Let anxious students know that they may be able to control some of their own anxiety and increase their self-confidence in English learning by taking responsibility for preparing lessons ahead of time and actively participating in classroom activities (Wang, 2003).

- Foster a proactive role on the part of the students to create an atmosphere of group support and a sense of community (Wang, 2003).

6. Conclusion

The results of this research specified the existing status of teaching and learning English speaking from teachers and students' perspectives, the sources of students' anxiety, the effects and manifestations of this feeling as well as some feasible solutions for teachers and students to deal with this problem. With the feasible solutions suggested, it is hoped that facilitating effects of anxiety can be boosted and its debilitating ones can be reduced.

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