



English language anxiety and the solutions to overcome such : A research done amongst under graduate students

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Abstract : Anxiety comprises worry and emotionality (Morris, Davis and Hutchings, 1981). Worry refers to cognitive aspects like negative expectations and cognitive concerns about oneself, the situation at hand, and possible consequences. Emotionality refers to one's perceptions of the physiological-affective elements of the anxiety experience, that is, indications of automatic arousal and unpleasant feeling states such as nervousness and tension. According to Spielberger (1983) anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system (p. 1).

Key Words : Anxiety, English, language

Introduction : Anxiety, when it is associated with learning a second language, is termed as second language anxiety. According to Gardner & MacIntyre (1993), second language anxiety is "the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient", this apprehension being characterized by "derogatory self-related cognitions ..., feelings of apprehension, and physiological responses such as increased heart rate" (1993).

Three of the most well-known types of anxiety are

- **Trait Anxiety:** It is a stable feature of personality referring to a permanent predisposition to be anxious (Scovel, 1978: cited in Ellis, 1994: 479).
- **State anxiety:** It is a transient in nature and refers to a transitory state or condition of the organism that varies in intensity and fluctuates over time (Spielberger, 1966, p.12). It is the apprehension that is experienced at a particular moment in time (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 90). In other words, it is a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test (Spielberger, 1983, cited in Wang, 2005, p.13, and cited in Tanveer, 2007, p. 4).
- **Situation specific anxiety:** It refers to the persistent and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: cited in Horwitz, 2001, 113). It is an individual



tendency to be anxious in a particular situation. It is aroused by a specific type of situation or event such as public speaking, examinations, or class participation (Ellis, 1994: 480).

Causes of foreign language anxiety :

Anxiety when using another language is something that has been examined by psychologists in order to better understand the causes, patterns and potential solutions. Horwitz and Young (1991) were the first to conceptualize foreign language anxiety as a ‘unique type of anxiety specific to language learning’. They came up with two ways to identify foreign language anxiety:

1 – transfer approach – this is where the anxiety caused by speaking another language is really a manifestation of other anxieties you might have.

2 – unique approach – when the anxiety experienced when dealing with another language doesn’t correlate with any other type of anxiety.

Horwitz et al identify language learning anxiety as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process”. So whether or not you experience anxiety generally, the specific experience of learning a language can induce anxiety in part because ‘no other fields of study implicate self-concept and self-expression to the same degree as foreign language study.’

Dealing with Foreign Language Anxiety :

Foreign Language Anxiety really can affect anyone, no matter their age, level or experience with the language in question. At some point, everyone will feel a certain level of nerves when using a new language. Fear of looking foolish is to be expected. But when that fear is preventing you from progressing, it needs to be dealt with. Luckily, there are a few methods that can help end your anxiety for good.

1 – Seek one-on-one conversations



Find a friend! Speaking in front of a group can be daunting no matter what your language level. There's little more humiliating than stopping midway through a story or sentence only to tail off as you watch your audience's increasingly concerned, patronising expressions cement. But one way to reduce your nerves and gain control over the speed and direction of the conversation is to speak with only one person. This can give you the time you need to gather your thoughts and have a conversation that is more suited to your level. Online lessons are a great way to begin. Worst comes to worst, you can always cut the connection and claim dodgy internet...

2 – Embrace your mistakes as part of the journey

When learning a language, mistakes are inevitable. Can you really say you're a language learner if you haven't gone into a shop asking for a photo frame only to come out with a screwdriver you have no use for and a very red face? Mistakes are going to be made. This is the best time to channel your inner-Pollyanna and embrace them. Every mistake you make increases the likelihood of you remembering whatever grammar error, pronunciation fail or word-mixup you made and not repeating it. Do as Chumbawumba do; get knocked down, get back up again. (Learn how to use your new screwdriver).

3 – Take small steps

Reading and writing in a new language is a great start, but in order to speak with confidence you will benefit from incorporating small speaking exercises into your language learning routine. Try speaking in front of the mirror, ordering in restaurants or asking someone for directions to prepare you for longer conversations. Yes, it might feel a bit ridiculous to jabber away to your reflection, asking for directions to somewhere you already know how to get to or to feel disproportionately proud of yourself for asking for a coffee with sugar, but each small interaction can lead to a bigger one. Who knows, maybe one day you'll finally be able to order that matcha-skinny-oat-no-foam-latte-with-a-caramel-drizzle you've had your eye on.

4 – Do some positive thinking

I think (I am good at languages) therefore I am (good at languages). Sometimes your understanding of a situation can be as inaccurate as mine of Descartes. A cognitive distortion is an illogical or negative thought that can leave you feeling stuck. Maybe you catastrophize, thinking that one mispronounced word means you should give up on the new language entirely.



Maybe you're a perfectionist more than you are a linguist and experience polarized thinking, assuming that if you're not perfect at the new language you might as well not try. You might overgeneralise and think that one bad class means it's all downhill, or jump to the conclusion that learning a language isn't for you. Instead of berating yourself, focus on the positives. Maybe you pronounced one word wrong, but for every mistake there will be dozens of perfectly delivered words. Rather than a sign you should give up, one bad class can be an indicator that you need to realign your priorities and take some time to focus on grammar over vocabulary, for example.

5 – Practice

This might seem illogical advice for someone afraid of using a new language, but practice really does make confident when it comes to speaking in a new language. People don't expect you to be perfect! I'm sorry to be the one to tell you, but chances are your accent is a dead giveaway and the chances of you delivering dialogue that sounds native are slim. But the more you try, the closer you'll get. No one is listening to you hoping you'll fail (and if they are, prove them wrong, and then avoid the weirdo for the rest of time). Practice a little bit every day and in time your nerves will melt away and you'll be chattering like a care-free bilingual.

As debilitating as this type of anxiety can be, there are numerous ways in which you can combat it at your own pace. Try your best not to become disheartened by nerves, and focus on the positives. Getting over your nerves is a slow process but it can be done and it is oh so worth it! By taking these steps, you will surely be conversing away breezily in no time.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Language anxiety will directly affect communication and daily teaching in reality and it is caused by internal and external factors. In this paper according to the actual situation to solve language anxiety phenomenon, requires teachers should care about students, early detection anxiety of students, early give students to help teachers to on foreign language learning anxiety and the emotional factors give enough attention, attention should be paid to the observation of manners, found at the foreign language classroom learning anxiety of students, their classroom anxiety to a minimum, so as to improve the students' English learning achievement. Teachers should realise that language learning, and particularly oral production, is a potentially stressful



situation for some students, and that the “tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession” (Horwitz, 2001: 122). The recommendations we make are congruent with previous studies suggesting that teachers should not be consider withdrawn students as lazy, lacking in motivation, or having “poor attitude” (Gregersen, 2003: 30), when in fact they suffer from anxiety. Instead, they should identify anxious learners and make interventions to help them overcome foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994). Because foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom may stem from fear of making mistakes and the consequent fear of negative evaluation, and students’ perception of low ability in relation to their peers, we suggest that teachers may want to consider the following interventions.

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