

Language Anxiety in Acquisition of Speaking Skill among Engineering Undergraduates

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Received Feb. 10, 2017

Accepted March 11, 2017

ABSTRACT

*"We have received complaints from recruiters highlighting lack of communication skills among students.....even if knowledge of English language improves in students, be they from Gujarat or other states, proficiency continues to be a problem."
-Dr. Ketan Kotecha, Former Director of Institute of Technology, Nirma University, Ahmedabad.
In the light of above statement cited from an interview article, one can not overlook the wide-spread importance of English Language which has increased the demand to learn good communication skills irrespective of any particular field or a profession. This has led to the use of modern communicative language teaching approaches in the language classrooms. Having been pressurized by the demand of good communication skills in general and speaking skill in particular, the students are suffering from the conditions like anxiety, nervousness, fear or apprehension which may prevent the EFL/ESL students / learners from achieving the desired goal. These feelings can exercise considerably negative effect on the process of developing the oral communication in the target language. This paper attempts to find out the factors that language anxiety may result from - the language learning environment in and out of classroom in the wider social context. The possible techniques and strategies will be suggested to deal with these factors.*

Key Words : Language Anxiety, Factors Affecting Language Anxiety

Introduction

Increasing demand to learn good communication skills in general and English Speaking Skill in particular irrespective of any particular field or a profession results into the negative psychological conditions like anxiety, nervousness, fear or apprehension which may affect the EFL/ESL students / learners in acquiring the considerable mastery over the second / foreign language. Such feelings, if rectified properly, can be handled and dealt with care in the interest of learners. The time has come to find out such factors that language anxiety may stem from i.e. the language learning environment in classroom and out of classroom in the wider social

context. And thereby the students can be helped by the teachers in coping up with such situations inside and outside the classroom.

Language Anxiety and How They Affect acquisition of Speaking Skill – A Literature Review

"Psychological phenomena, generally described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971 cited in Scovel, 1991). "It negatively affects language learning and has been found to be one of the most highly examined variables in all of psychology and education (Horwitz, 2001).

Types of anxiety described by psychologists : (1) *trait anxiety*, (2) *state anxiety*, (3) *situation-specific anxiety*. (1) *Trait anxiety* is relatively stable personal characteristic, 'a more permanent predisposition to be anxious' (Scovel, 1978: cited in Ellis, 1994). (2) *State anxiety* is a temporary anxiety, a reaction to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test (Spielberger, 1983: cited in Horwitz, 2001). (3) *Situation-specific anxiety* is the persistent and multi-faceted type of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: cited in Horwitz, 2001). It occurs due to particular type of situation or event such as public performance, exams or class participation (Ellis, 1994). What distinguishes speaking is the public nature of the skill, the embarrassment suffered from exposing our language imperfections in front of others. (Arnold, 2000)

Considering anxiety as a highly effective factor in language learning, SLA researchers have tried to search out the reasons that cause language anxiety with reference to academic and social contexts and also have recommended a variety of ways to cope with it. As language anxiety is a psychological construct, it emerges from the learner's own 'self' - as an intrinsic motivator (Schwartz, 1972; cited in Scovel 1991). (His or her self perceptions, perceptions about others e.g. friends, teachers, interlocutors, etc. and target language communication situations, his/her beliefs about second / foreign language learning)

Sometimes Language Anxiety may be caused by insufficient command over the target language (Sparks and Ganschow; cited in Horwitz, 2001). It may occur due to linguistic difficulties the second / foreign language learners encounter in acquiring and using the target language. Language anxiety may stem

from extrinsic motivators (Schwartz, 1972; cited in Scovel, 1991), such as various social and cultural setups, especially the environments in which L1 and a second / foreign language learning takes place. Some learners may experience anxiety because of their own worries about foreignness and ethnicity. (Gardner cited in Horwitz & Young, 1991). Some other factors are Social status of the speaker as well as the interlocutor and a sense of power relations between them. Even Gender factor can not be overlooked. Thus, the investigation of these factors through this study will help the teachers to make the language learning environment inside / outside the classroom less anxiety provoking and assist them to improve language learner's performance.

Research Objectives

The issue of language anxiety is very essential and critical as we witness the present scenario in Gujarat where Engineering students of Gujarat (or any other field for that matter) are labeled with weak communicator and are being criticized frequently for the same. The chief objective of this research is to discover why ESL/EFL learners feel anxious while speaking English Language. Making it simpler, what are the factors that make learning process of English Language Speaking more stressful in number of situations? The other key objective of this study is to find out the factors that cause language anxiety suggest some strategies for language teachers and learners in order to lessen the language anxiety in the language learners.

Research Subjects

Research has been conducted on Degree Engineering Students in the Government Engineering College (GEC), Valsad, Gujarat affiliated to Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad. The subjects are the 100

undergraduate engineering students of all the semesters of GEC, Valsad.

Methodology

A questionnaire is designed to collect the data stating the various factors that cause language anxiety among the learners while speaking. The students are asked to rate the frequency of that situation / experience that they had in their real life situations.

Sr.No.	Data Analysis				
	<i>I feel worried / tensed / uncomfortable while speaking English...</i>	Always	Some-times	Rarely	Never
1	because I feel that Speaking skill is very important for success.	14	71	8	7
2	because I have fear of making mistake	57	24	10	9
3	because teacher may scold me for my mistake while speaking	30	49	19	2
4	because it makes bad impression before opposite gender in the class if I commit mistake	0	32	38	30
5	because it makes bad impression before my teacher in the class if I commit mistake	14	21	28	37
6	thinking others will not understand my language	42	29	29	0
7	because making mistake can affect my image in the class negatively	25	35	27	13
8	because my teacher's expectation is more than what I can do	21	24	34	21
9	because I feel inferiority complex	14	37	28	21
10	while speaking in the classroom	0	21	16	63
11	while speaking outside the class	19	53	21	8
12	while answering the question from my place on the bench	9	29	27	35
13	while answering the question standing in front of the class	53	31	11	5
14	while talking to teacher	43	45	8	4
15	while talking to my classmates	0	11	13	76
16	while talking to my close friends	0	0	15	85
17	because teacher correct my mistake on the spot before the class	31	38	17	14
18	because my classmate laugh and make fun of my mistakes	6	15	42	33
19	during my presentation before class	53	34	7	6
20	because I can not remember the content of my presentation in English	48	31	19	2
21	because my teacher insists on correct pronunciation	0	20	24	56
22	because my grammar is weak	56	35	9	0
23	because I can not recall the appropriate words while speaking	61	29	8	2
24	because I fear of pronouncing the word incorrectly	39	47	14	0
25	because I can not find the exact equivalent for my words of mother tongue	59	31	10	0
26	because my family / parents pressurize me to improve my English speaking	36	29	14	21
27	because other students in the class are speaking better English than I can	19	37	27	17
28	because with Good English speaking skill, I will get more respect in society	10	42	21	27

Findings:

- **The most affecting factors causing Language Anxiety in English Language Speaking among Engineering Undergraduates :**

1. The students can not recall the appropriate words while speaking.
 2. They can not find the exact equivalent for their words in mother tongue while speaking.
 3. They have fear of making mistake while speaking.
 4. They feel that their grammar is weak.
- **The least affecting factors causing Language Anxiety in English Language Speaking among Engineering Undergraduates :**
 1. The students feel least worried / uncomfortable while talking to their close friends
 2. They feel least worried / uncomfortable talking to their classmates
 3. They feel least worried / uncomfortable while speaking in the classroom
 4. They feel least worried / uncomfortable because my teacher insists on correct pronunciation

Conclusion and Suggestions:

The most affecting factors causing language anxiety in English Language Speaking give us an idea the students need to concentrate on their vocabulary consciously. Not finding equivalent in English for the words in mother tongue gives us hint that the students need to practice enough the language in day today life events / situations so that the recalling the words at the time becomes easy and natural to them. The language that they listen and speak inside the classroom is not enough. Extra efforts have to be done by the students to get used to English Language and the teachers can guide and facilitate effectively the students in this process. The fear of making mistake is a part of learning process. It can be overcome only by giving your best try and lots of practice and practice. Unless the students commit mistakes, they can't be corrected. The teachers should also allow them to commit mistakes, not correcting them immediately and help students once gaining confidence in speaking English. The first goal of the English Language Teacher must be eradicating the fear of speaking English Language by creating positive and language friendly environment in the class. The students have always believed the grammar of a particular language has to be learnt for learning the language. We, the teachers, must convince them by giving the example of their mother tongue that the knowledge of grammar is not that much

necessary for speaking English Language. Language can be learnt by actual practice. The more they listen, the more they can speak. Thus they should be provided with lots of opportunities of practicing English Language inside and outside the classroom. The students themselves have to create / grab the opportunities for speaking English Language frequently.

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