

A Review on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in L2 Learning

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Abstract: In order to understand the current situation, the course of development, and the difficulties related to foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) in the context of second language acquisition, this review attempts to compile and evaluate relevant research in the field. The keywords "foreign language anxiety(FLA)" and "speaking anxiety" were used to search Google Scholar, CNKI, and other databases, and 15 documents—including journal articles and monographs—were found for the literature review. The study's conclusions show that a wide range of factors affect how anxious people are when speaking English. For instance, it has been determined that rivalry in learning a foreign language has a major role in the development of anxiety. Similarly, insufficient vocabulary and mispronunciation have been identified as key contributors to speaking anxiety. Additionally, a lack of intrinsic motivation has been linked to increased anxiety, while the pursuit of perfection and fear of making mistakes have been shown to intensify anxiety. In conclusion, the existing research on FLSA in second language acquisition has yielded valuable insights. However, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates the practical realities of current foreign language teaching with a series of strategic recommendations aimed at effectively alleviating FLSA.

Keywords: Foreign language speaking anxiety, negative affective factor, transferability, intrinsic motivation, external factors.

1. Introduction

As the process of globalization accelerates, the importance of foreign language learning is becoming increasingly evident, particularly in the context of the intensifying interconnectivity of the global economy. From the perspective of personal career development, the acquisition of foreign language skills can facilitate the pursuit of a more diverse and rewarding career. To illustrate, in the context of international trade, numerous practitioners are required to engage in communication and negotiation with customers from disparate countries. In such instances, a proficient command of foreign languages can prove invaluable in facilitating transactions. In the contemporary era, a considerable number of multinational enterprises mandate that their personnel possess a proficient command of foreign languages. This is with a view to conducting business on a global scale and thereby enhancing profitability. Speaking a foreign language fluently allows people to better comprehend and value the subtle cultural differences of other nations, according to the theory of cultural exchange. When

individuals engage with the original texts of foreign literature, they are better able to comprehend the thoughts and emotions of the authors and to appreciate the nuances of different cultures. Additionally, proficiency in foreign languages facilitates communication with individuals from disparate countries, the exchange of diverse cultural and experiential perspectives, and the strengthening of interpersonal connections. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of language learners encounter anxiety during the learning process.

An emotional condition characterized by tension, uneasiness, concern, and annoyance linked to an impending threat or danger is known as anxiety. Anxiety related to language acquisition is a unique and complex emotional phenomenon that occurs during language learning. A growing number of researchers have examined the impact of anxiety related to learning a foreign language since Horwitz introduced the idea of this phenomenon [1]. FLA and foreign language proficiency have been found to be negatively correlated by a large body of research [1,2].

By reviewing the relevant theoretical and empirical research findings on the topic, synthesizing the available evidence, and examining its impact on the final learning outcomes of second language learners, this review seeks to identify the similarities and differences between various studies on foreign language learning anxiety (FLLA). At the same time, a list of tactical suggestions for successfully reducing FLA within the framework of contemporary foreign language instruction is provided.

2. Classification of Anxiety

Three different types of anxiety may be distinguished: situation-specific anxiety, state anxiety, and trait anxiety. Anxiety is a very constant personality feature in which people exhibit increased or decreased anxiety depending on the situation. Increased trait anxiety makes people more likely to experience distress and apprehension across all facets of their lives, even in the absence of overt external threats. Situational anxiety, another name for state anxiety, is a fleeting emotional condition that is unique to a given circumstance. It manifests and dissipates in response to alterations in the situation. Anxiety that a person experiences in reaction to certain, clearly defined circumstances is known as situation-specific anxiety (or situational anxiety). This anxiety is closely associated with particular situations, occurrences, or environmental elements that may not be present or may be significantly less anxiety-inducing in other situations. It differs from generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), which is a diffuse, persistent state of anxiety that is not specifically directed to a number of aspects of life, such as chronic worries about health, finances, relationships. In contrast, situation-specific anxiety focuses on specific situation. FLA is considered to be situation-specific anxiety, as described by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1]. This idea is commonly used to explain the phenomena of anxiety, especially when it comes to learners' speaking trepidation in speaking-related learning scenarios. Speaking anxiety is primarily manifested in learners' nervousness, uneasiness, apprehension about making mistakes, and concern about being evaluated negatively by others when expressing themselves orally in English. Their learning process and speech performance may be significantly impacted by these feelings. Speaking anxiety may stem from a lack of trust in one's language skills, which also extends to listening comprehension. Speaking-anxious students may display similar difficulties in writing as they do in oral expression, such as unclear logic and inaccurate word choice. Horwitz et al. created the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, which is one of the most widely used tools for researching FLA [1]. With 33 items on a five-point Likert scale, the measure covers a wide variety of anxiety levels in learners, including general anxiety, speaking anxiety, listening anxiety, and other relevant variables associated to learning a foreign language. Speaking anxiety can stem from a lack of confidence in one's language skills, which can then show up in writing, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension.

3. Empirical Studies Pertaining to Anxiety in the Context of Foreign Language Learning

Bailey posits that the competitive aspect of foreign language learning can precipitate anxiety, particularly when learners engage in comparisons with others or with their ideal selves [3]. In adults engaged in second language learning, this sense of competition can precipitate anxiety. For instance, students are more likely to experience anxiety when they see other students who are more proficient in the language or when they compare their current level of proficiency with the ideal level they hope to reach and discover a large gap between the two. Bailey used a diary research to look into anxiety related to learning a foreign language. The researcher may obtain a thorough grasp of the learners' everyday experiences, feelings, and ideas during the learning process by using this approach. It also allows for the observation and analysis of the emergence and evolution of anxiety from the learners' own perspectives. A more thorough knowledge of FLLA is made possible by the examination of learners' diaries, which reveals personal characteristics and variations that could have gone unnoticed in more conventional study techniques. During the learning process, students with high anxiety levels may participate less in class discussions and show a reluctance to participate in group activities, among other avoidance behaviors. Their language learning results may be further impacted by such avoidance actions, creating a vicious cycle where anxiety triggers avoidance behaviors, which in turn hinder language acquisition and worsen anxiety.

According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, a person's subjective assessment of their ability to carry out a certain activity affects the way they behave [4]. In the context of speaking learning, it has been demonstrated that learners' self-efficacy is negatively affected by speaking anxiety. Learners who have a lot of speaking anxiety often think that they can't express themselves orally. Their overall performance in the foreign language may suffer as a result of their poor performance on speaking drills and exams brought on by this negative self-perception. According to Horwitz et al., anxiety related to learning a foreign language has a negative impact on the process [1]. Nervousness, perspiration, and a fast heartbeat are just a few of the psychological and physical symptoms that people with high anxiety levels are likely to experience. Additionally, they are more prone to participate in avoidance behaviors, including not speaking up in class or actively participating in group projects. Additionally, they often have negative expectations of their own learning, believing that they are unable to learn a foreign language well. Collectively, these factors increase the likelihood of failure in foreign language learning.

When learning a second language, emotive elements have a filtering effect, according to Krashen's affective filtering theory [5]. Oral anxiety, as a negative affective factor, functions as a barrier that impedes learners from receiving and processing incoming linguistic information. When learners are in a state of high oral anxiety, the "affective filter" is thickened, resulting in less comprehensible input. This, in turn, affects their acquisition of language knowledge and ultimately leads to lower foreign language achievement. Horwitz recruited 75 students, 39 of whom were male and 36 of whom were female, ranging in age from 18 to 27 years, to take part in their study [1]. By examining the talk among the pupils in the classroom, the researcher identified a significant prevalence of FLA, which was negatively correlated with foreign language achievement. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing scores were all worse for learners who experienced anxiety in the classroom than for those who did not. Cheng, Y. S., Horwitz, E. K., & Schallert, D. L. showed that anxiety in learning a foreign language has associated effects across language skills, even though speaking anxiety is a separate type of anxiety in the context of language acquisition [6]. Specifically, given that both speaking and writing necessitate the utilization of linguistic knowledge for expression, speaking anxiety may prompt students to question their capacity to utilize language, subsequently resulting in a lack of confidence in writing. For instance, they may engage in repeated revisions and pauses during the writing process, or they may be reluctant to utilise advanced vocabulary and sentence structures due

to concerns about grammatical inaccuracies, which ultimately impacts their writing performance. Students with high speaking anxiety may lack confidence in foreign language learning as a whole, which will further affect their performance in reading comprehension. This may manifest as difficulty in focusing on the content of the text and in accurately grasping the main idea of the text. Research has shown that affective factors have a complex and multifaceted impact on the learning of different language skills [7].

According to a previous study, anxiety in language acquisition is somewhat transferable [8]. The impact of one type of learning on another is referred to as learning transfer. The transferability of anxiety in language acquisition implies that anxiety may interact with other language skills in addition to influencing a specific language skill. Anxiety in language learners may result in an excessive focus on the ability to comprehend the foreign language being listened to, which can lead to distraction and subsequent impairment in listening comprehension. The study is predicated on the theoretical assumption that individuals differ in their language learning processes. It is evident that learners differ in their abilities, strategies, and emotions with regard to language learning. Furthermore, anxiety, as an emotional factor, can manifest and affect individuals in different ways. Researchers generally believe that people who are learning a language experience anxiety as an emotional reaction. This response is believed to result from the interaction between an individual's personal characteristics and the characteristics of the learning environment. Additionally, it is hypothesized that this response will impact the person's language learning results. From a cognitive standpoint, learning a language involves more than just memorizing and accumulating linguistic information. It also entails cognitive processes such as comprehension, processing, and application of language information. Anxiety may impede learners' cognitive processes, influencing their reception, processing, and storage of language information.

In a study conducted by Bashori, M., Van Hout, R., Strik, H., & Cucchiari, C., it was proposed that FLSA had been impacted by several elements [9]. The majority of subjects indicated that inadequate vocabulary impairs oral expression and self-confidence, thereby precipitating oral anxiety. Elimat and AbuSeileek underscored that the foundation of pronunciation exerts a profound influence on learners' self-assurance in oral expression, and that erroneous pronunciation may engender anxiety in oral communication [10].

An extensive study on intrinsic motivation was carried out by Ryan and Deci [11]. When students are not genuinely interested in or enthusiastic about studying a foreign language, like when they are learning it to meet the expectations of others, and lack of initiative in oral learning, they are prone to anxiety. Schumann explored some phenomena in language learning [12]. A learner who is overly concerned with perfection and is afraid of making mistakes may exhibit a low tolerance for mistakes, which can affect the fluency of oral expression and, in turn, increase anxiety.

The degree of anxiety that a person experiences is influenced by both personal and environmental variables. In 1997, Lyster and Ranta examined the effects of error correction feedback on learner acceptance [13]. Teachers who are excessively punitive in their approach to error correction, or those who frequently correct students' errors, may cause students to experience feelings of frustration and anxiety. A teacher-centered model of classroom interaction limits students' opportunities to engage in oral expression, which may contribute to the development of oral anxiety. A thorough examination of the connection between learning outcomes and class size was carried out by Smith and Glass [14]. Excessive class size can impede students' opportunities for oral practice, and the teacher's difficulty in attending to each student may result in feelings of neglect, which can in turn give rise to anxiety.

In 2017, Kim put forth a comprehensive theory of cross-cultural adaptation [15]. There are notable differences in language usage habits and social etiquette across cultures. These differences may lead to misunderstandings in oral communication due to learners' lack of understanding of these cultural nuances, which may in turn give rise to feelings of anxiety. At the social level, factors such as the

social evaluation of learners' foreign language proficiency and the expectations of their family and friends may exert considerable pressure on learners. Those who are unable to withstand the social evaluation and meet the expectations of their family and friends may become anxious.

In conclusion, a variety of factors contribute to the degree of anxiety related to spoken English. As a result, the intervention in question needs to be seen holistically and grounded on providing assistance or correction from several perspectives.

4. Conclusion

The theory of FLSA has yielded significant findings following years of rigorous investigation. From defining key concepts to examining measurement techniques, to exploring influencing factors and coping strategies, scholars have delved deeply into the multifaceted aspects of speaking anxiety. Nevertheless, there remain some avenues for further inquiry, particularly in developing a systematic approach to alleviating FLSA in alignment with the realities of contemporary foreign language instruction.

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