Exploring Foreign Language Anxiety in the Listening and Speaking of Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract: Foreign language learning anxiety, a psychological and emotional variable, significantly impacts the effectiveness of L2 learners' acquisition. Listening and speaking are the language skills that take up the first two forms in second language learning and the branches that cause the most anxiety among L2 learners. Due to their unique characteristics, reviewing foreign language anxiety in listening and speaking is significant and insightful. This paper examines previous research on listening and speaking anxiety as a second language, analyzes relevant sources and scales, summarizes progress made in these fields, and provides practical strategies for reducing such anxiety. Reviewing and summarizing previous studies, this paper aims to provide language learners with a correct and comprehensive understanding of listening and speaking during language acquisition. Additionally, foreign language instructors are expected to thoroughly comprehend contributing factors to anxiety and implement effective pedagogical strategies, which will have significant implications for enhancing English instruction.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Listening Anxiety, Speaking Anxiety, L2 learners

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, foreign language anxiety has become crucial to domestic and international second language acquisition research. However, in the early days, most researchers focused on the more general form of foreign language. In recent years, scholars have refined the study of foreign language learning anxiety to encompass specialized language proficiency across the four essential skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing [1-3,6-7]. They have also developed corresponding measurement scales for distinct types of anxiety and conducted comprehensive analyses and specialized studies on language acquisition. Technical studies in foreign language anxiety have begun early in foreign countries. Scholars posit that foreign language anxiety is a prevalent psychological phenomenon among L2 learners [1-3]. Essentially, the presence of anxiety is indeed inevitable.

Furthermore, researchers have made significant strides in the two specialized fields. Regarding listening anxiety, most researchers have found a negative link between foreign language listening proficiency and concern about it. Most scholars have discovered a negative correlation between foreign language and listening proficiency. In addition, according to certain studies, foreign language listening anxiety also negatively affects learning strategies. This implies that appropriate use of relevant methods can mitigate listening anxiety to a certain extent and enhance the efficacy of

listening comprehension. Concerning speaking anxiety, the leading cause is related to classroom activities, while personal learning style has little influence on it.

To sum up, as an input skill, listening is the primary source for spoken language in the language learning process as an output skill. Recent research has revealed a positive correlation between anxiety in listening and speaking. The finding that language learners can reduce speaking anxiety by decreasing their pressure over listening skills also offers a new perspective. Therefore, this paper reviews previous studies on the measurement and development process of foreign language listening anxiety and proposes coping strategies based on primary sources. The second central part of this paper covers three aspects: anxiety performance, anxiety scale, and stress caused by foreign language speaking anxiety. Finally, the report summarizes the core progress, finds out the limitations in the field, and puts forward specific suggestions for future research.

2. Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Language learners often experience anxiety when confronted with challenging or unfamiliar listening tasks, especially when second language students perceive themselves unable to cope with foreign listening activities [1]. Hence, the negative emotions experienced by L2 learners, such as tension, discomfort, and apprehension, can disrupt and reduce the effectiveness of their listening comprehension process.

2.1. Overview of Measurement in Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Since the late 1970s, researchers have emphasized studying anxiety related to learning English as a foreign language. The systematic review of how anxiety affects language learning, published by Scovel, holds significant implications for studying the development of learning anxiety. Since the 1980s, there has been a breakthrough in second language acquisition. This is primarily related to the findings of American psychologist Horwitz and his scale. Horwitz was the first to investigate the separate issue of foreign language anxiety in the learning context and defined the connotation of foreign language learning anxiety [2]. To conduct a practical quantitative empirical analysis, Horwitz first developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in 1986, providing an available and effective measurement tool for foreign language anxiety. However, this scale was not designed for specific research on listening anxiety. On this basis, Kim's Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) compensates for the deficiency. The findings indicate that listening anxiety is negatively related to hearing ability [3]. Therefore, these two scales are the most authoritative instruments to conduct a practical quantitative empirical analysis, and the subsequent relevant researchers mostly used or adapted them. Conform to the trend of foreign-related research, some domestic researchers have developed their own listening anxiety scale. Zhang and Zhao used exploratory factor analysis to analyze and test the FLLAS, further promoting the scale's localization in China [4]. Moreover, by utilizing a self-designed questionnaire, Zhou investigated the impact of emotional strategies for anxiety management on their listening performance [5]. Studies indicate that anxiety has a detrimental effect on listening comprehension and attempts to control the passive impact of anxiety on listening performance by using emotional strategies.

To conclude, measuring foreign language listening anxiety is essential in research of this field. The birth and continuous advancement of the two representative scales have ended the era of non-standardized tools for measuring language anxiety. Numerous scholars at home and abroad have employed diverse experimental methodologies to compile or adapt existing scales and find a negative correlation between second language listening anxiety and listening proficiency level.

2.2. Coping with Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

In second language acquisition, listening anxiety stems from various sources. Horwitz initially identified foreign language classroom anxiety into three components: communication barriers, apprehension of passive evaluation, and examination anxiety [2]. Young later categorized foreign language classroom anxiety into six sources: personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner and teacher beliefs, teacher-learner interaction, classroom procedures, and language testing [6]. Based on students' oral reports, Vogel summarized the potential sources of listening anxiety into four aspects: input material characteristics, foreign language listening comprehension processes, teacher factors, and personal traits [7]. Later, Oxford categorized over ten anxiety-inducing elements into three categories: learner personality traits, cultural disparities, and pedagogical approaches [8]. The reviews summarize the diverse causes and factors of foreign language listening anxiety, providing significant information for teachers to develop coping strategies in instruction. Therefore, we can take appropriate measures based on the sources of anxiety above.

Throughout the research, they conducted both domestically and internationally. However, few scholars have explored strategies to alleviate anxiety experienced during foreign language listening; the previous suggestions have significant implications for contemporary educators. Vogely suggests using familiar and meaningful topics, known vocabulary, and other listening strategies can reduce listening anxiety [7]. Elkhafaifi then recommends alleviating listening anxiety through training in listening strategies and more practice [9]. Chang and Read found that providing topic information and repeated input is more effective than pre-learning vocabulary in reducing learners' listening anxiety [10].

To conclude, language learners must prioritize enhancing their fundamental language skills. Additionally, L2 learners should implement a promotional strategy by thoroughly analyzing the reasons and selecting the most suitable approach for their needs. This rule is very similar for educators of foreign languages. Teachers must recognize that listening anxiety is not an individual student phenomenon to eliminate anxious students' feelings of inferiority. Additionally, teachers should update their teaching concepts and strive to create a relaxed and harmonious atmosphere in the listening classroom while changing how they provide positive feedback. In conclusion, enhancing L2 proficiency can be achieved through continuous collaborative efforts between educators and L2 learners to alleviate anxiety.

2.3. Summary of Foreign Language Listening Anxiety

Throughout domestic and foreign research on listening anxiety, it is evident that most scholars are investigating foreign language listening anxiety on Horwitz's FLCAS and Kim's FLLAS. Firstly, scholars have established that foreign language anxiety is a universal phenomenon. Hence, it is of great importance for L2 learners to recognize the existence of anxiety and have a good mentality cognitively and correctly. Secondly, many researchers focus on the connection between foreign language anxiety in listening and both listening performance and strategies, demonstrating a negative relationship. However, it has been found that a host of studies have shown the existence of hearing anxiety among learners.

Nevertheless, the current research on the connection between learners' listening anxiety and various physiological, emotional, and cognitive factors is not comprehensive enough. In addition, most studies have not fully considered the variations in nationality, ethnicity, language proficiency, and individual cognitive ability when administering anxiety scales, nor have they made appropriate adjustments or modifications. Meanwhile, due to the lack of a standardized listening anxiety scale, the extensibility of the research results remains to be verified. Lastly, given the differences in listening

strategy use among students with varying anxiety levels, teachers must tailor their training approaches accordingly, capitalizing on strengths and addressing weaknesses.

3. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

According to Horwitz et al., language anxiety comprises three parts: communicative fear, test phobia, and the fear of being criticized [2]. Speaking anxiety refers to worry, tension, and other adverse emotional reactions to speaking a second language, which falls under "emotional anxiety." The tremendous pressure brought by speaking anxiety often puts language learners in the state of "dumb foreign language", which makes learners a shadow on oral language learning and significantly affects their learning enthusiasm.

3.1. The Performance of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The student's language anxiety can be shown as follows: "On account of the different intonation of the foreign language, students get anxious that they cannot make the correct sound and rhythm of the foreign language. When students stand up and answer questions in a foreign language in public out of fear of the negative evaluation of others, their minds may suddenly go blank. When trying to speak in a foreign language, students can always forget those words that they have just learned, and they can't find the right words to express their meaning, so they are afraid of difficulties speaking and always keep silent [6]. In addition, more anxious English beginners in oral practice under a tense state lack initiative and dare not speak, making the oral communication process more difficult with a poor effect. For English majors, due to the influence of English learning in middle school, oral English has become the weakest and most fearful part of their listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The impromptu oral question and answer or oral presentation in class have become the activities that professional students are terrified of and even more resistant to [11]. In an oral communication class, when the teacher assigns a group to discuss and present a specific issue, the students will begin the discussion in Chinese, use translation software to translate the result, and then read the translation to the class. If the teacher forces the students to communicate in English in class and does not allow them to speak their mother tongue, the course will fall into silence, which is a severe consequence.

3.2. The Measurement of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

The first measuring instrument is FLCAS, a foreign language anxiety scale for the classroom written by Horwitz et al., is applied to assess the degree of speaking anxiety, which has been proven to have high reliability and validity. The 5-point Lecter Likert scale was adopted. The FLCAS form is divided into 33 items, law, allowing students to select from among five levels based on their actual English learning circumstances: 1 means "strongly agree", 2 means "agree", 3 means "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 means "differ" and 5 means "strongly disagree". The 33 items have a total value ranging from 33 to 165, and the greater the student's score, the more anxious they are about learning English [2]. The second measuring instrument was developed by Chislett and Chapman in 2005. The VAK (Visual, Aural, and Kinesthetic) model questionnaire consists of 21 questions, each with three choices A, B, and C. All items in the questionnaire revolve around trends in learning styles. You can best remember things in the following ways: A. Write notes B. Say or repeat the main points in your head out loud C. Do it through practice. Options A, B, and C indicate whether a person tends to learn by watching, hearing, or doing, respectively, and identify the three learning styles the subject is: visual, auditory, or action-oriented [12].

3.3. The Causes of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Based on the scale obtained by previous research, the factors of speaking anxiety are as follows. It can be concluded that the causes of speaking anxiety can be divided into the following four points. First, the students' weak English foundation and lack of self-confidence can easily lead to the speaking anxiety of English learners. In two colleges in Jiangxi province, Luo conducted a survey on the speaking anxiety of 170 new non-English majors, revealing a correlation between speaking fear and students' English proficiency. Speaking anxiety and student proficiency are negatively correlated.[13]. Therefore, when students' ability to master a foreign language is lower, they might think that it is tough to learn this foreign language and resist learning it, so their proficiency cannot be improved, and their anxiety will also be aggravated. Second, many college students fear receiving an unfavorable evaluation from others due to their subpar performance in foreign language oral expression. Wan's questionnaire survey also presented that speaking anxiety and negative evaluation of new non-English majors are negatively correlated [14]. 37% of students feel anxious when they speak in English because they are concerned about teachers calling their mistakes out in front of the class, and nearly 40% of students suffer from speaking anxiety because they worry that their classmates will taunt them if they do not speak English well.

Third, a lack of sufficient time for good preparation before speaking can also reduce students' confidence in oral expression and cause oral anxiety. Wan's questionnaire survey also showed that nearly 70% of first-year students were nervous because they were not fully prepared before giving speeches [14]. When students are suddenly spoken in English by the teacher in class, the translation mechanism in their minds has not been able to operate; coupled with the current tension and lack of confidence, students will fall into a blank situation, unable to answer the teacher's questions, and speaking anxiety will be generated. Last, regarding teachers' responsibilities, many teachers have failed to help students pass through the classroom mode effectively and to guide students to pay questions in the classroom. The lack of flexibility in the asking method or the evaluation machine system makes students prone to worry about their language. Once students are often frustrated in oral communication, they need help to express themselves accurately and coherently. In the long term, students will feel anxious about speaking English and even avoid all kinds of oral activities at the beginning.

3.4. Summary of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

This paper reviews the main measuring instruments of foreign language speaking anxiety, including FLCAS and VAK. It summarizes the previous articles on its causes as follows: the student's own English proficiency, fear of negative evaluation by others, lack of adequate preparation before speaking, and the influence of teachers on students. Because the last three factors are related to classroom activities, it is concluded that English proficiency and the type of classroom activities are the main factors for speaking anxiety. Student learning styles cannot be accurately measured through questionnaires. It can only be obtained that visual learning style anxiety was the most prominent, so there was no meaningful relationship between speaking anxiety and learning style. Therefore, in the English classroom, teachers can design more group discussions and paired cooperation to release students' speaking anxiety. In second language learning, students should have a good learning attitude and clear motivation to improve their English proficiency. Teachers should emphasize interaction with students in class, create an engaging oral environment, and give students enough time to prepare for oral English. In the teaching process, teachers ought to help students face speaking anxiety, overcome it, and use some direct or indirect teaching strategies to carry on psychological implications. Only when teachers realize that speaking anxiety is a severe obstacle to language learning and take corresponding measures to improve students' learning methods by understanding the causes can they

indeed relieve students' stress, stimulate their love for speaking English, establish their confidence in speaking English, and truly improve their speaking English level.

4.   Conclusion

Throughout the past 50 years of research on foreign language anxiety, it has become evident that many scholars have conducted extensive studies and achieved remarkable results. Firstly, it is undeniable that foreign language listening and oral anxiety are prevalent and inevitable, which can adversely affect our professional proficiency. However, effective measures can be adopted to alleviate such anxiety by identifying its underlying causes. But to sum up, it is worth noticing that research on foreign language anxiety in listening and speaking, both domestically and internationally, is still in its infancy with many limitations. Scholars have predominantly conducted quantitative studies utilizing various scales while qualitative studies remain scarce.

Additionally, most articles have focused on non-English majors as their experimental subjects. However, it remains unclear whether individuals of varying nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, language proficiencies, and cognitive abilities yield disparate outcomes. Moreover, few studies consider the difference between high-level and low-level second language learners. Furthermore, while foreign language listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and anxiety scales have been relatively developed in the research literature, most studies only examine a single aspect, with few systematically exploring the interrelationships among these four skills. Therefore, future research should conduct more qualitative analyses to investigate group differences in social and cultural influences. Additionally, researchers should undertake in-depth and comprehensive studies of the interrelationships among the four language skills anxieties to develop more systematic methods for relieving foreign language anxiety.

Acknowledgment

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