
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies in Overcoming Second Language Speaking Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a descriptive correlational study of coping mechanisms and strategies for overcoming second language speaking anxiety. This study aims to determine the coping mechanisms and strategies to overcome second language speaking anxiety. Using the random sampling method, the researcher conducted a research survey of 271 bona-fide ISU-CAS students. The questionnaire used is adapted and contextualized from the FLSA questionnaire from He (2013). The gathered data was analyzed using the frequency distribution and mean. It was found in this research study that the positive attitude of the teacher is the most preferred coping mechanism and strategy of the respondents.

KEYWORDS

Second language speaking anxiety, Coping mechanisms and strategies, Language anxiety, English language as L2.

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1. Introduction

Learning is part of a person's life from the moment he is born. The process by which a person acquires his first and second language is the most fascinating of all the things a human can learn. Clearly, learning a first language is easier than learning a second language, such as the universal language, English. According to Doidge, "Learning a second language after the key period for language acquisition has passed is more challenging because, as we age, our native language tends to dominate the linguistic map space, making it difficult for the second language to fill in the gaps". Foreign and second language speaking acquisition is a challenge for the majority of second language learners who experience anxiety during the process of acquiring the second language. Anxiety over learning a foreign language or target language is one of the elements that have a significant impact on a student's progress and success. Language anxiety is of interest in the language education context for language teachers, as it is regarded as a significant barrier that learners of foreign and second languages must overcome. Given that language speaking anxiety is a phenomenon in English teaching settings, teachers frequently fail to identify anxious students, students with avoidance traits, and students who are unmotivated to participate in speaking tasks. As a result, these students are unable to practice the language, resulting in poor speaking performance.

In accordance with the preceding statements, "second language speaking anxiety" and coping mechanisms and solutions for experiencing second language speaking anxiety are the primary emphasis of this study. Numerous studies and theories are given to provide a clearer perspective in this context; one major study is Horwitz's Language Anxiety. The sensation of discomfort and extreme apprehension connected with second language settings, including speaking, listening, and learning, is known as language anxiety.

There are numerous theoretical papers on general language anxiety, but very few empirical studies focus on the origins of second language speaking anxiety and provide practical recommendations and solutions for addressing the issue (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). This language research aims to investigate the coping mechanisms and strategies of tertiary students at Isabela State

University Echague Campus who experience anxiety when speaking a second language, as well as the factors that cause them to experience anxiety when speaking English.

This research study consists of three variables: one independent variable and two dependent variables. Respondents' profile is the independent variable that is assumed to have influenced the dependent variables that are being tested and measured. The factors that cause the respondents' second language anxiety and their preferred coping mechanisms and strategies to overcome second language speaking anxiety are the dependent variables.

Students underestimate the value of language and the English language's strength. This is especially evident in primary education, where students only see English as a subject to pass rather than an asset to learn for future use. Despite the numerous studies on second language anxiety, there are few studies on coping methods for anxiety in foreign and second language speaking. All of the following themes emphasize the importance of learning through doing.

As a language student, the researcher also experiences and witnesses the above-mentioned real-life circumstances and encounters through classmates and acquaintances. In this context, the purpose of this study is to determine the coping mechanisms and strategies of students or second language learners and speakers at the Isabela State University Main Campus and be able to provide students with some coping mechanisms and strategies for speaking anxiety, which they may use to develop their speaking skills, that will have a good impact on their speaking performance. This paper, therefore, sought to answer this research question:

What are the respondents' preferred coping mechanisms and strategies to overcome second language speaking anxiety?

2. Literature Review

Anxiety is most simply described as a sensation of fear, dread, and unease. Anxiety may cause a person to feel excessively tense, restless, have a quick heartbeat, and perspire; these are normal responses of the body to stress. "Anxiety seems to be a dominant fact- and is threatening to become the dominant cliché- of modern life". The importance of anxiety as a powerful influence in contemporary life is increasingly recognized, and manifestations of current concern with anxiety phenomena are ubiquitously reflected in literature, the arts, science, and religion, as well as in many other facets of our culture. Anxiety is found as a central explanatory concept in almost all contemporary theories of personality, and anxiety is regarded as a principal causative agent for such diverse behavioral consequences as insomnia, immoral and sinful acts, instances of creative self-expression, debilitating psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, and idiosyncratic mannerisms of endless variety (Spielberger, 1966).

A numerous number of foreign language learners experience a feeling of anxiety in the language learning process. According to Wu (2010) and Zheng (2008), anxiety has been considered an interest in language education settings for language educators since it was considered one of the major obstacles of foreign language learning that the learners need to overcome. Horwitz (2001) stated that one-third of all foreign language learners experienced some level of language anxiety. Ellis (2008), therefore, concludes that language anxiety has been a topic of much interest and research studies in recent years (Elaldi, Senel, 2016).

Language anxiety is a vital factor which influences the level of achievement in learning a foreign language, according to Dorfinejad and Ahmadabad (2014). Language Anxiety is different from general anxiety; MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) describe language anxiety as the feeling of tension and apprehension associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as distinct complex self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behavior that relate to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. From the different perspectives of the above-mentioned authors, they contend that language anxiety is unique due to the reason that it involves the self-concepts of the language learners to genuinely present themselves while competently communicating with others (Elaldi and Senel, 2016).

Most students who experience fear of negative evaluation do not see language errors as a natural part of the learning process; instead, they see it as a threat to their image and a source of evaluation either from the teacher or their peers. In line with this, Ely (1986) stated that students are silent and withdrawn most of the time and do not participate in language activities inside the class. Students who experience language anxiety consider the foreign language process and, especially, oral production as a test situation rather than an opportunity for communication and skill improvement (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

Foreign language learners experience language anxiety mostly because of the linguistic challenges they encounter when learning and utilizing the target language (Hashemi and Abbasi, 2013). In contrast, Horwitz (2001) asserted that foreign language anxiety is independent of first language learning impairments and should be regarded as a significant issue that impedes language acquisition in and of itself. According to Zhang and Zhong, anxiety associated with language acquisition can be categorized as learner-initiated, classroom-related, skill-specific, and, in some cases, society-imposed (Elaldi, Senel, 2016).

According to Zhang and Zhong (2012), anxiety is primarily caused by learners' unrealistic or erroneous assumptions about language learning. Based on the study by Rahman (2010), one of the causes of second language anxiety is that students feel overwhelmed by the quantity of English speech rules they must master. This may be due to the fact that the emphasis of learning activities is on form rather than overall meaning. This implies that if a language teacher merely emphasizes grammatical structures or linguistic aspects in the classroom, students would lack motivation to study the target language. The study indicates that students should be taught proper language usage so that they can apply their information in an appropriate setting.

According to Zhang and Zhong, classroom-related anxiety is correlated with instructors, peers, and classroom procedures (2012). To alleviate classroom-related stress, Young (1991) believes that teachers add to the anxiety of language learners, where there are teachers who believe that their primary duty is to constantly correct their students. According to Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), the friendlier and more casual a language classroom's atmosphere is, the less likely it is to induce anxiety. They also claimed that "the formal language classroom setting is a key source of stress and anxiety due to the requirement to utilize the target language more accurately and clearly." In addition, classroom activities induced anxiety.

There are two perspectives to consider when discussing language anxiety coping techniques. First, academic research should concentrate on practical coping methods that students could employ in real-world learning circumstances. As language anxiety is a situation-specific concept, students should utilize each unique coping method in each setting. The second issue is the absence of scientific data regarding coping strategy effectiveness. No matter how many actual learners employ coping methods, it remains unclear whether they should be encouraged to do so until their results become obvious (Toshinori Yasuda & Lisa Nabei, 2018).

Another study based on empirical data from 244 students learning Spanish in the United States indicated that teacher traits such as "a non-harsh attitude toward error correction" and "a nice, friendly, and relaxed general attitude towards students" can help reduce students' FLSA scores (Young, 1990, p. 551). Alrabai (2015) presented and evaluated seven tactics for teachers to implement, such as exhibiting proper teaching behaviors to students, reducing students' communication anxiety, and minimizing students' fear of negative evaluation, among others.

According to Kondo and Yang's (2004) study of 219 Japanese students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), there are 70 coping techniques for language anxiety, classified into five categories: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and resignation. Resignation is not an active coping mechanism and, hence, has no pedagogical value (He, 2017). While some, but not many, previous studies have sought to uncover realistic coping strategies learners actually deploy in learning environments, there are tragically very few findings on the effectiveness of these strategies.

There are several suggestions for avoiding speaking anxiety in classroom settings from the research titled "A Study of Second Language Speaking-Anxiety among ESL Intermediate Pakistani Learners" by Nazir et al. (2013). First, ESL teachers should not indicate grammatical mistakes in speaking, which means fluency over accuracy. Second, the classroom environment should be friendly and relaxed. Third, the use of L1 in the classroom should be strictly prohibited. Fourth, the ESL teacher should choose a topic for communicative activities as per the learners' level and interest. Fifth, the communicative activities must be as realistic as possible. Lastly, teachers' talking time must be less than the students' talking time.

With the prevalence of the learner-centered approach, learner autonomy has become one of the most emphasized aspects of L2 or FL acquisition, notwithstanding the importance of teachers' roles in language classrooms. Although it is still difficult to define the concept of autonomy precisely, there is general agreement that it involves behavioral, cognitive, affective, social, and political elements (Benson, 1997; Murase, 2015; Oxford, 2003). Consequently, while the efforts of teachers to establish a low-anxiety environment are crucial, language learners and teachers alike must also regulate their own emotional components, including language anxiety. Specifically, language learners should attempt to employ coping skills to manage their own language anxiety (Toshinori Yasuda & Lisa Nabei, 2018).

3. Methods and Designs

This descriptive-correlational research design mainly aims to determine and describe the respondents' coping mechanisms and strategies for overcoming second language speaking anxiety. This study comprises 271 respondents from all the year levels and different departments of ISU-E College of Arts and Sciences, namely AB English Language Studies, BA Communication, BS Biology, BS Chemistry, BS Mathematics and BS Psychology from first year to fourth year during the first semester of academic year 2022-2023. The researcher intends to have respondents from all courses in order to obtain fair data and minimize discrimination and biases; hence, simple random sampling is used in this qualitative study. This language study utilized questionnaires as a research instrument, which is designed to examine students' Second Language Speaking Anxiety. Questions are adapted and contextualized from FLSA level questionnaire from He (2013). The questionnaire was utilized to test students' second language speaking anxiety level, which included 12 five-point Likert scale items for the FLSA level questionnaire from 'How to Cope with Foreign Language

Speaking Anxiety Effectively? The Case of University Students in China' He (2013). Moreover, descriptive correlational statistics were used in this study, and the mean or 'the average' was used to analyze the overall result of the respondents' preferred coping mechanism in overcoming second language speaking anxiety. In addition, the 5-point Likert scale was used to describe the rating displayed in the results in the following:

| Scale | Mean | Descriptive Equivalent |
|-------|-----------|------------------------|
| 5 | 4.01-5.00 | Strongly Agree |
| 4 | 3.01-4.00 | Agree |
| 3 | 2.01-3.00 | Neutral |
| 2 | 1.01-2.00 | Disagree |
| 1 | 0.01-1.00 | Strongly Disagree |

Figure 1 The 5-point Likert Scale

4. Results

The table shows the respondents' preferred coping mechanisms and strategies to overcome second language speaking anxiety. All twelve (12) strategies were believed by the respondents to be useful in reducing their second language speaking anxiety.

| Statements | Mean | Descriptive Equivalent |
|---|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. Having classmates work in small groups helps reduce my nervousness when speaking second/English language. | 3.75 | Agree |
| 2. It helps reduce my nervousness to talk with other students about the fears in speaking the second/English language. | 3.56 | Agree |
| 3. Participating in a supporting group or activity (e.g. an English corner) helps reduce my fears in speaking the English language. | 3.64 | Agree |
| 4. Doing relaxation exercises (e.g. productive self-talk) helps reduce my fears in speaking the second/English language. | 3.63 | Agree |
| 5. If accuracy is not the focus, I will not be so nervous about speaking the second/English language. | 3.44 | Agree |
| 6. I do not feel so anxious when speaking the second/English language in a friendly environment. | 3.61 | Agree |
| 7. Teachers' encouragement makes me feel relaxed when speaking the second/English language. | 3.80 | Agree |
| 8. A humorous teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking the second/English language. | 3.79 | Agree |
| 9. A patient teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking the second/English language. | 3.86 | Agree |
| 10. I feel relaxed about speaking the second/English language if I know that mistakes are part of the language learning process and made by everyone. | 3.76 | Agree |
| 11. I feel relieved about speaking the second/English language if my teacher corrects my mistakes indirectly (e.g. just repeat the right form instead of saying that I am wrong). | 3.72 | Agree |
| 12. Playing language games helps reduce my nervousness in speaking the second/English language. | 3.75 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | 3.69 | Agree |

The table illustrates that all the coping mechanisms and strategies in overcoming second language speaking anxiety generated 'Agree' responses from the respondents with a general weighted mean of 3.69. The first three preferred coping mechanisms and strategies by the respondents give emphasis on the 'Positive Attitude of the Teacher' mainly: 'A patient teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking the second/English language', 'Teachers' encouragement makes me feel relaxed when speaking the second/English language' and 'A humorous teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking the second/English language'.

The result implies that 'patience' is particularly significant in the setting of language teaching. Thus, a patient teacher who supports their students can have a positive influence on their students' success in learning the English language and overcoming second language speaking anxiety. It is a universal knowledge that teachers fulfill their role as facilitators in the language learning process by providing students with the tools crucial to communication. Simultaneously, the students fulfill their part by using the input they are given as they interact with others in the English language. For second language learners, it is the patient teacher who helps them effectively overcome their speaking anxiety in the way that the teacher can still establish his authority in a healthy

classroom environment and in a non-threatening manner. Learning the English language is very challenging for the reason that English has complex features and rules. Therefore, learners prefer a patient teacher when it comes to English language learning.

Learners of a second or foreign language should employ positive thinking to study the target language effectively and efficiently; nevertheless, teachers' consideration has a significant impact on the extent to which this method is used effectively. Similar to the well-researched psychological notion of self-efficacy, this technique for encouraging learners to speak the target language is based on positive thinking. Bandura (1997, p.3) defines it as "beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve specific goals." Bandura (1997) identified verbal persuasion as one of the factors that contribute to self-efficacy. The butterfly effect, in layman's terms, is that if significant individuals, such as instructors, verbally demonstrate confidence in their students' abilities, it will be simpler for students to sustain their own self-efficacy. Therefore, when employing the positive thinking method, although students should convince themselves that they will certainly be able to complete the task, teachers should also offer the same persuasion or "you can do it" sentiment and motivate them to complete the task. Regardless of a learner's trust in their own abilities, language anxiety cannot be effectively alleviated unless teachers convey the same cheerful, optimistic attitude. These constant assessments would lead to a steadier sense of self-competence among language learners (Toshinori Yasuda & Lisa Nabei, 2018).

Additionally, learners perceived that having a humorous English instructor is significant and highly desired in view of the fact that it lessens the tension, pressure and anxiety inside the classroom when studying English and especially when having oral activities. When a teacher always appears to be strict, especially in the eyes of his students, it is more likely for the students to feel anxious and scared when studying, and they tend to get insecure and hesitant to speak because they don't want to be embarrassed in front of the teacher. Consequently, for second language learners, English language teachers must have a sense of humor to have an interactive, relaxed and friendly English language classroom setting. Being humorous was found to be a highly efficient strategy for teachers in dealing with learners' second language speaking anxiety in relation to teachers' good qualities or attitudes. There are at least two reasons why humor is crucial in the foreign and second language classroom. Firstly, students may be exposed to a relatively high level of anxiety when learning a second language (Horwitz 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner 1989; Young 1991); however, humor (especially the teacher's humor) can help reduce the students' anxiety and stimulate their desire to participate in speaking activities by creating a relaxing classroom environment (Wagner and Urios-Aparisi 2008). Second, humor can aid the acquisition of the cultural and linguistic content of the target language. This may suggest that both teachers and students should increase their awareness of using humor effectively in daily foreign or second language instruction and learning in order to alleviate students' language speaking anxiety (He, 2016).

The three least preferred coping mechanisms and strategies in overcoming second language speaking anxiety by the respondents are the following: I do not feel so anxious when speaking the second/English language in a friendly environment, with a mean of 3.61. It helps reduce my nervousness to talk with other students about the fears of speaking the second/English language with a mean of 3.56, and If accuracy is not the focus, I will not be so nervous about speaking the second/English language with a mean of 3.44.

The respondents find it helpful if the students were able to voice out their fears and anxiety about language learning with their classmates rather than being anxious and constantly thinking that their classmates are judging them for speaking the English language. It will also build a good relationship and healthy environment in the second or foreign language classroom setting. Language students tend to have unrealistic or erroneous beliefs about language learning, which hinders them from learning the language effectively. One unrealistic belief is that 'accuracy is the main goal of language learning'; they tend to choose accuracy rather than fluency. It is easier for the learners to focus on communication rather than on accuracy, and they are less concerned with language errors and the consequences of "imagined failure" (MacIntyre, Noels, and Clement, 1997:269).

Ultimately, the preferred coping mechanisms of the students can be an effective strategy on the part of the English Language instructor in an English language classroom setting. Thus, utilizing the said strategies will positively reduce and possibly prevent students' second language speaking anxiety.

5. Conclusion

It was found in this study that teachers' attitude towards second language learners is of great importance. The positive attitude of the teacher is the main coping mechanism of the students, and the teacher can implement these coping mechanisms as a strategy in language teaching. Having a patient teacher helps the learners to study the language motivationally. For students, teachers are encouraged to employ first to their students the valuable lesson in learning the English language, which is 'Making mistakes and committing errors are part of language learning'. In this way, teachers are helping the students debunk the unrealistic belief of the language learners that they acquire second language speaking anxiety. Thus, the learner will become confident and not afraid to speak their mind regardless of the mistakes and errors they can commit. For students, providing them with a safe and healthy

place to learn the English language, which is free from judgement, is vital at the beginning of their transformative period. It will expedite the learners to have high self-esteem and lower second language speaking anxiety.

In addition, it is derived from this study that teachers' encouragement of language learners is also a salient coping mechanism, especially for female learners, as they manifest a higher tendency to be emotional compared to male learners. Teachers' encouragement is perceived by the learners as emotional or moral support to part of the learners; thus, encouragement is a verbal persuasion and is one of the factors that contribute to the self-efficacy of the learners in language learning.

On top of that, a humorous attitude is a highly efficient strategy for teachers in dealing with learners' second language speaking anxiety in relation to teachers' good qualities or attitudes. It is suggested that both teachers and students should increase using humor more effectively in daily second language instruction and learning in order to alleviate students' language speaking anxiety.

It is recommended that further researches which include other variables connected to the learner that are not included in this study, such as the effect of their first language, speaking skills, language background and other possible related variables with second language speaking anxiety, be used as other variables to consider. In addition, the researcher highly recommends that this study be adapted and modified for younger respondents, such as elementary and secondary English language learners, to assess what are their coping mechanisms and strategies in overcoming second language speaking anxiety and to have new studies about early precautions to prevent SLSA in this level. Thus, a study that extensively focuses on the coping mechanisms of the learners and strategies of the teachers in overcoming second language speaking anxiety in a classroom setting are highly encouraged to support the result of this study.

Finally, this descriptive correlational research study presents the coping mechanisms of the students in language learning and strategies that could possibly be employed and adopted by the teacher in language teaching. This study concluded that it is not only the teacher who needs to make an effort to learn a second language and overcome second language speaking anxiety; thus, both the efforts of the instructor and learner are essential to reduce second language speaking anxiety. Language teachers only have the upper hand in teaching a second language that molds their students to become efficient and effective second language speakers. However, it is necessary to note that it's the student's duty to help himself too learn a second language and cope with second language speaking anxiety. Furthermore, without the willingness of the learner to learn a second language and cope with his second language speaking anxiety, the teacher's effort will be fruitless and vice versa.

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