



Universidad del País Vasco Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

Applied Linguistics 1

Foreign Language Anxiety: Students' Perspectives and Pedagogical Implications

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Academic year: 2014/2015

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Abstract

During the last four decades, researchers have shown an increasing interest in the effect of affective variables in language learning because of their decisive role in understanding individual differences in language learning success rate among language learners. This paper tries to shed some light on a particular affective factor, foreign language anxiety, which is a specific type of anxiety that affects the language learning process.

To this end, the concept of foreign language anxiety and its sources are discussed in the first part of the paper. Foreign language anxiety is shown to be a rather widespread phenomenon and to have potential negative effects on various aspects of foreign language learning. It will be argued that its sources are multiple and varied, such as learner characteristics, teacher characteristics or classroom procedures. In the second part of the paper, students' beliefs and perceptions of their own linguistic competence are analysed, as they have also been shown to play a crucial role. In fact, the way learners approach the task of learning a new language eventually influences their academic achievement and language proficiency. In the third and last part of this paper, some practical pieces of advice for teachers to deal with language learning anxiety are provided.

Teachers have been reported to be a key element to help students cope with foreign language anxiety. As a matter of fact, their understanding of students' interpretation of the affective factor information can help them develop teaching methods that will encourage learners to create a more positive self-concept. These new methodologies will in turn lead to more effective learning. While it is difficult to find a single method that would answer to the emotional and intellectual needs of all the anxious learners in the classroom, in this section I discuss four proposals that help teachers alleviate anxiety and encourage student participation. Firstly, teachers should help students understand the irrational nature of their self-perceptions and fears. Secondly, classroom atmosphere must be as friendly and relaxed as possible to be suitable for language learning. Thirdly, teachers should debate sensible expectations with students, help them develop more realistic expectations about foreign language learning, and make them aware of the fact that mistakes are part of the language

learning process. Finally, teachers should create a positive learning environment and adopt the role of facilitator. In short, by understanding the phenomenon of language learning anxiety, by becoming acquainted with students' language learning experiences and beliefs, and by providing some practical tips for teachers, this paper seeks to be of use to future language teachers such as myself.

Key Words: anxiety, language learning, students' perspectives, teaching implications.

1. Introduction

Anyone who has ever taken a foreign language course in school can testify to the fact that it is not always an easy task, as illustrated by the following quotes collected at the Learning Skills Centre at the University of Texas, Austin (1988):

Sometimes when I speak English in class, I am so afraid I feel like hiding behind my chair.

I feel so dumb in my German class. I want to sit in the back of the room so maybe I won't get called on to speak. When I know I am going to have to say something, I spend what seems like eternity thinking of how it should be said and when I say it, it still doesn't come out right.

I put off taking French because I knew it was going to be hard for me. It is the most difficult course I am taking. I don't sound like I think I am supposed to and I make so many mistakes it's not even funny. But, I study a lot for this class! My family doesn't even see me anymore.

I dread going to Spanish Class. My teacher is kind of nice and it can be fun, but I hate it when the teacher calls on me to speak. I freeze up and can't think of what to say or how to say it. And my pronunciation is terrible. Sometimes I think people don't even understand what I am saying.

Teaching Spanish, Basque and English to young learners and being a language learner myself, I have noticed that there are certain situations in the classroom which trigger high levels of uneasiness, discomfort and even fear among learners. These feelings are made clear when students admit not being able to write or speak in the foreign language when the teacher is present because they go blank, they fear what others may think about their linguistic abilities, and they start sweating and their heart starts beating faster when the teacher walks past them. In fact, one interesting question in the field of Second Language Acquisition is why some learners successfully learn a second language while other learners do not. Several reasons have been postulated to tackle this issue, including individual factors such as cognitive abilities, personality characteristics, aptitude, and affective factors. In other words, what the learner brings to the learning situation and how the learner feels can have an impact on what is learned.

Since the 1970s, researchers have focused their attention in the field of foreign language learning-teaching and the effect of affective variables, such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. In this line, Arnold (2000, p. 2) gives two main reasons to emphasize the importance of understanding the role of affective factors in language learning: (1) “attention to affective aspects can lead to more effective language learning”; (2) attention to affective aspects can contribute to the whole-person development, which is “beyond language teaching and even beyond what has traditionally been considered the academic realm.” Furthermore, Ellis (1994, p. 483) states that:

Learners’ affective factors are obviously of crucial importance in accounting for individual differences in learning outcomes. Whereas learners’ beliefs about language learning are likely to be fairly stable, their affective states tend to be volatile, affecting not only overall progress but responses to particular learning activities on a day-by-day and even moment-by-moment basis.

This paper deals with one affective factor, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which is considered a rather generalized phenomenon by students and teachers (Aida, 1994; Foss & Reitzel, 1991; Lucas, 1984; McCoy, 1979; Powell, 1991; Price, 1991; Spielberger, 1983). Indeed, “several recent approaches to foreign language teaching, such as community language learning and suggestopedia, are explicitly directed at reducing learner anxiety” (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). Amongst the reasons that would explain the appearance of this affective variable in language learning, Allwright and Bailey (1991) emphasize two. Firstly, since students do not have a high command of the target language (TL), they feel deprived of the ability to communicate appropriately, hence the fact that the most affected linguistic skills¹ are oral expression and comprehension. They cannot display their knowledge in a natural and spontaneous way, bringing about a sense of discomfort that may lead to anxiety. Secondly, the teaching methodology: if students cannot follow the instructions and the classroom environment is not appropriate for an exchange of opinions and ideas, the situation might be anxiety-inducing (Krashen, 1982). Another reason that would explain FLA is that public speaking is a challenging experience for many people, which is aggravated when they do not possess a high communicative competence in the TL (Silva, 2005).

¹ There are four major linguistic skills involved in the process of learning a new language: oral comprehension (listening), written comprehension (reading), oral expression (speaking), written expression (writing).

This paper has a twofold aim: (i) to report on students' own perspectives about their language learning experiences and anxiety; and (ii) to provide some pedagogical implications of language learning anxiety in the form of teaching strategies to help students cope with language anxiety. To this end, FLA is characterized and its sources discussed in the next section.

2. Foreign Language Anxiety

It is important to accept the existence of a type of anxiety specific to the language learning process because it can represent an emotionally and physically uncomfortable experience for some students. The term "Foreign Language Anxiety" (FLA) or "Language Anxiety" (LA) was coined by E. K. Horwitz, M. Horwitz and J. A. Cope (1986) in their article "Foreign Language Anxiety," where they formulated a theory of an anxiety type specific to the language learning situation. They defined LA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). To measure anxiety and see whether a high level of anxiety hinders language learning, they developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (see Appendix A), which served as a starting point for the development of language and culture-specific anxiety scales (e.g. the Arabic Foreign Language Anxiety Questionnaire), as well as scales that would measure specific linguistic skills (e.g. the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale and the Second Language Writing Anxiety Scale). Horwitz *et al.* integrated three related anxieties in their conceptualisation of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension (the fear of communicating with other people), test anxiety (the fear of exams, quizzes, and other assignments used to evaluate students' performance), and fear of negative evaluation (the worry about how others view the speaker), and concluded that anxiety could take place in any setting related to language performance.

Anxiety has been studied under three main approaches, namely, an individual's *trait*, a temporary psychological *state*, and a *situation specific anxiety*. The first "may be defined as an individual's likelihood of becoming anxious in any situation" (Spielberger, 1983, in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 87). This perspective considers anxiety to be a characteristic of the individual's personality, affecting not only language

learning but also other situations (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Ellis, 2008; Scovel, 1978; Spielberger, 1972). The second perspective understands anxiety as “apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time, for example, prior to taking examinations” (Spielberger, 1983, in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 90), and “[it] is interested in the here-and-now experience of anxiety as an emotional state” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 87). The name of the third approach, “situation specific anxiety”, was coined by MacIntyre and Gardner (as cited in Horwitz, 2001, p. 113) and it refers to the diverse and consistent nature of certain anxieties, e.g. public speaking or participating in class (Ellis, 2008).

Moreover, Alpert and Haber (1960) set a distinction between “debilitative” and “facilitative” anxieties. On the one hand, the former can work as an affective filter (Krashen, 1982), that is to say, as a psychological obstacle that prevents language learners from absorbing available comprehensible input completely, and it leads to a state of discomfort. As a consequence, students avoid doing certain tasks in the foreign language, preventing the learner from achieving a high level of proficiency in a foreign language (FL) (Backman, 1976; Chastain, 1975; Gardner *et al.*, 1976; Horwitz *et al.*, 1991; Kleinmann, 1977; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Mettler, 1987; Tucker *et al.*, 1976; Young, 1986). On the other hand, the latter encourages the individual to solve specific tasks by means of mobilizing fundamentally cognitive resources (Pérez Paredes, 1999, p. 58), and has been thought to have positive effects in language learning (Dulay *et al.*, 1982; Pérez Paredes, 1999).

Most of the research conducted on anxiety has focused on finding correlations between anxiety and oral performance (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2011; Horwitz, 2001; Liu, 2007; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1986; Zhang, 2004), probably because most researchers believe that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking of the four linguistic skills. According to Daly (1991) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), speaking activities require risk-taking and ask students to reveal their possibly insufficient linguistic knowledge in front of the whole class. However, an increasing number of researchers have shown an interest in the relationship between anxiety and the other linguistic skills as well, supporting the existence of language-skill-specific anxieties: reading (Brantmeier, 2005; Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999; Kim, 2002), listening (Elkhafafi, 2005; Vogely, 1998; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Kim, 2000), and writing (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Cheng, 2004). The majority of results have shown that

anxiety plays a detrimental role in language acquisition. In addition, FLA has been proven to have potential negative effects on academic achievement (Horwitz, 1986; Saito & Samimy, 1996; MacIntyre, Noels & Clément, 1997), cognitive processes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), the social context (Kleinmann, 1977; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986), and the reactions of the language learners towards themselves and the foreign language (MacIntyre, 1999; Cohen & Norst, 1989; Price, 1991; Phillips, 1990).

Despite the fact that most researchers agree in there being a significant negative correlation between language anxiety and language performance (e.g. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; Aida, 1994; Cheng *et al.*, 1999; Daly, 1978; Faigley *et al.*, 1981), there are other researchers who argue that the focus should be, not on anxiety *per se*, but on students' beliefs about their own capability or competence, which is what brings about different outcomes in students' performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997). In other words, even though the role of students' perceptions on their own competence is a rather unexplored research area, anxiety has also been shown to be heavily influenced by the confidence or self-efficacy that students might have when performing a given task, eventually influencing academic outcome and language proficiency.

3. Students' Perspectives on Language Anxiety

Since I believe that, in order to tackle the issue of FLA it is crucial to understand the way the main protagonists, the students, feel, I will report on the research on students' perspective on FLA in the following paragraphs.

Horwitz *et al.* (1986) found out that a third or more of the 225 students in beginning language classes at the University of Texas who were surveyed as part of a "Support Group for Foreign Language Learning" suffered FLA to some extent in response to at least some aspects of foreign language learning (e.g. speaking in the foreign language, speaking in front of the class, understanding the language input, being evaluated, and so on). Even if this anxious reaction can vary widely from learner to learner, the effects of FLA can extend beyond the classroom and affect students' future choices such as selection of courses, majors and careers (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; Daly &

Miller, 1975). Moreover, according to Foss and Reitzel (1991, p. 131), self-perception plays a crucial role in language-learning, as “learning to reflect upon experiences and going through some introspection can help students become more in tune with their impressions of their second language competence and provide them with a means for modifying their approaches to language learning.”

Learner characteristics that can cause foreign language anxiety include low self-esteem, competitiveness, self-perceived low level of ability, communication apprehension, lack of group membership with peers, and beliefs about language learning. Along this line, students in McCoy’s (1979) study identified 11 anxiety-causing factors. These factors included pronunciation, inability to understand and answer questions, peer judgement, not knowing or understanding the goals and requirements of the course, and the teacher (especially when a native-speaker).

Bailey (1983) found a relationship between anxiety and competitiveness on the part of foreign language learners. She studied the diaries of 11 learners and described that they tended to become anxious when they compared themselves with other learners in the class and felt themselves to be less proficient. She noted that as the students perceived themselves to be more proficient and consequently better suited to compete, their anxiety decreased.

Horwitz *et al.* (1986) stated that anxious students often cite speaking in the foreign language to be their most anxiety-producing experience. This might be due to the fact that it is hard to be one’s self in the TL, which can thus trigger anxiety. In other words, communicating in a foreign language may lead learners to a feeling of uncertainty and threat to their ego due to the unknown element of the second language (Guiora *et al.*, 1972). Therefore the foreign language learner is put in the position of communicating something that is meaningful to them without having sufficient command of the language to do so. In addition, self-aware language learners are confronted with the probability that people will perceive them differently from the way they perceive themselves. Hence learners can experience anxiety as a result of the fear to “lose oneself” in the target culture. As Oxford (1992) points out, this is closely related to the idea of “culture shock,” which according to Adler (1987) is “a form of anxiety that results from the loss of commonly perceived and understood signs and symbols of social intercourse” (in Oxford, 1992, p. 35).

Researchers have shown an interest in interviewing foreign language learners in order to understand what it is like to be an anxious student, and to identify anxiety-provoking factors as well as those factors that may reduce anxiety, in an attempt to more fully understand the role that anxiety may play in learning a foreign language from the perspective of the anxious language learner. For example, Price (1991) took a qualitative perspective and interviewed highly-anxious students to gain insight into the subjective experience of language anxiety. One of the interviewees explained that when she finished her oral report at the end of the semester “the room was dead quiet. [The professor] said, ‘That is the absolute worst thing I have ever heard.’” She considered that to be the most traumatic experience she has ever had, and stated: “I’d rather be in prison camp than speak a foreign language” (p. 104). In general, the interviews were consistent with the foreign language anxiety construct identified by Horwitz *et al.* (1986): the participants spoke about their test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. All of them identified speaking in the target language to be the greatest source of anxiety. The interviews conducted by Price (1991) emphasized the importance of low self-esteem, since many anxiety-provoking situations reported by highly anxious learners (e.g. students’ fear of speaking in public, anxiety over making a mistake in front of others and willingness to participate in activities that do not require them to be “spot-lighting”) could be related to low self-esteem. For instance, many of Price’s subjects compared themselves to other language learners and believed that their language skills were weaker, that everybody was looking down on them, and that their work was not good enough. In addition, the participants’ responses suggested that perfectionism is another personality trait that can come into play. In this vein, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious language learners and perfectionists may have a number of characteristics in common (e.g. higher standards for their TL performance, a greater tendency towards procrastination, more worry over the opinions of others, and a higher level of concern over their errors) and that these characteristics have the potential to make language learning unpleasant and less successful for them than for other students.

Students’ beliefs about language learning can also trigger anxiety (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; Horwitz, 1988, 1989; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Students can have unrealistic expectations as to how a person should perform in a foreign language classroom; when those expectations are not met, it can lead to negative feelings about

one's intelligence and abilities. Related to this issue, Horwitz (1988) found that over a third of the beginning university language learners thought that a foreign language could be learned in two years or less of typical university study (i.e. one hour a day). In addition, many students also believed that learning a second language primarily involved memorizing vocabulary words and grammatical rules. Such erroneous beliefs may lead to disappointment and frustration on the part of the students. In fact, Horwitz (1989) found a relationship between several language learning beliefs and levels of foreign language anxiety in university Spanish students. Specifically, when compared to less anxious students, the more anxious learners in this study judged language learning to be difficult and themselves to possess low levels of foreign language aptitude.

Finally, Palacios (1998) found that certain student beliefs are responsible for FLA. In particular she noted that the feeling that mastering a language is an overwhelming task, the feeling that one needs to go through a translation process in order to communicate in the target language, the difficulty of keeping everything in one's head, and the belief that learning a language is easier at an earlier age are detrimental for language learning and are responsible for language anxiety.

In sum, as we mentioned before, in order to understand the cause of FLA, it is important to understand students' perceptions and beliefs' on language learning and their expectations about language learning. Erroneous beliefs may cause students to have unrealistic expectations about the language learning process, and thus cause anxiety. Not acknowledging and checking students' anxieties prevents interaction in the learner group and hinders the acquisition of the second language (McCoy, 1979). In the following section some pedagogical implications are discussed that would help teachers better understand their students and create classroom environments favourable to alleviating FLA.

4. Pedagogical Implications

Once researchers delimited the problem of anxiety and became conscious of its influence on foreign language learning, they suggested a number of proposals so as to alleviate and get rid of, as far as possible, the effects of foreign language anxiety. They argued that not only teachers but also institutions should pay attention to this affective

variable. In general terms, the humanistic approaches to teaching, such as *Suggestopedia*, i.e. a teaching method that operates with background music (Lozanov, 1973) used by Krashen (1982, p.144) and Alcántara (1992) to help reduce foreign language classroom anxiety, the *Silent Way* (Gattegno, 1972), *Counseling-Learning* (Curran, 1976), and the *Total Physical Response* (Asher, 1969), all of which focus on educating autonomous and responsible individuals, have been the only ones that paid attention to the affective variables involved in the process of teaching-learning a foreign language. In this section I describe some practical proposals designed to address foreign language anxiety based on four ideas.

4.1. Dealing with the irrational nature of students' self-perceptions and fears

Foss and Reitzel (1991) proposed the *Rational emotive therapy* as a strategy to reduce anxiety. This therapy consists in making students aware of the irrational nature of the beliefs that induce anxiety. If the goal is achieved, students will be able to approach rather than avoid a realistic situation in which they are asked to use the foreign language. First the teacher should introduce “the idea that we all operate, to some extent, from individual irrational belief systems” (p. 135), that also exist in our native languages, since they are shaped by our culture, family and life experiences. Then students would be asked to generate and write a list with their beliefs or fears towards speaking the target language. The teacher would write those ideas on the board and thus students would realize that they are not alone in their fears, which should relax them.

Some of the ideas that cause and sustain anxiety for language learners are the following: (a) “It is catastrophic when things are not the way I would like them to be – that is, I cannot speak this language fluently and that is horrible”; (b) “It is easier to avoid than to face certain of life’s difficulties and responsibilities”; and (c) “There is one correct way to handle a particular situation, and if I don’t do it correctly, the outcome will be disastrous” (Foss & Reitzel, 1991, p. 135). Each student would have to choose two or three irrational ideas and a series of questions should convince them of the lack of logic behind those beliefs. These questions are listed below:

1. What irrational belief do I want to dispute?
2. What evidence exists of the falseness of this belief?

3. Does evidence exist of the truth of this belief?

If students work in groups, they will feel the support of their peers and, at the same time, they will have a more realistic vision of their actual language performance. Foss and Reitzel (1991) point out that acting is an effective means to decrease anxiety because, when students are prompted to play a role, they are encouraged to overcome not only anxiety but also stage fright. Silva Ros (2005) argues that the oral interpretation of songs might also be positive in the emotional development of students, producing the same effects as acting.

4.2. Classroom atmosphere must be friendly and relaxed

Crookall and Oxford (1991) draw from the premise that teachers are a fundamental element in minimizing anxiety, as they have the power to modify traditional language classroom rules and methodologies. It is in their hands to make the classroom environment as friendly and relaxed as possible by suggesting pair and group activities, and games. They should help students set realistic goals and not let them develop a competitive spirit that could make them anxious. If teachers embark upon a good relationship with their students, they will create a positive environment for language learning. Crookall and Oxford provide a series of activities designed to “understand and reduce the usual sort of overanxious feelings that sometimes tend to arise in language-learning situations” (1991, p. 145). These researchers encourage teachers to take part in the same activities with some variations in order to make themselves aware of the problems that anxiety may cause to their students in a direct and accurate way. Even though teachers and students can participate in all the suggested activities, these authors divide them into two sections: the first one for students and the second one for teachers.

In the students’ section, they include what they call the “Agony column.” In this activity students have to take on three roles as part of a small editorial simulation: (1) themselves as language learners, (2) an “Agony Aunt” in a magazine or newspaper, and (3) advisors/counsellors. In stage 1 (expressing anxiety), students will have to write a short letter to Agony Aunt explaining “a particularly difficult thing they find in language learning” (p. 146) and then ask for advice. In stage 2 (advising on others’

anxieties) each group (3 or 4 students) tries to reply to one of the letters written by a classmate in stage 1; by now students should begin to realize that they are not the only ones suffering from anxiety. In stage 3 (discussing one's own anxiety), each student gets back their letter accompanied by the replies, and they have to discuss whether they agree with the received answers or not. This is a way for students to face their own anxiety and look at the problem in a more objective manner.

Other activities within this section are “mistakes panel,” which encourages students “to take an amusing look at errors and to realize that they are not taboo –and that they can contribute to learning” (p. 147); and “anxious photos,” in which students are given a series of pictures depicting a range of situations that they will have to group according to the degree of anxiety that those situations provoke them; afterwards they discuss the reasons for that grouping with their peers and the strategies to overcome anxiety (see Crookall and Oxford, 1991, for additional activities).

4.3. Developing realistic expectations about foreign language learning

Campbell and Ortiz (1991) took a different approach and held a workshop of three hours in 1987 at the Defense Language Institute (DLI). “It attempted to prepare students psychologically for the experience of learning a foreign language in an intensive program by dispelling common myths about foreign language learning and by developing foreign language skills” (p. 155). Some of the activities presented in the workshop include an icebreaker activity that allows the students to get to know everyone in the class, a discussion of the myths and realities of foreign language learning, a discussion of successful foreign language learning strategies, and a discussion of the ideal language learner. According to Campbell and Ortiz, “the workshop helps the individual student cope with what he or she may perceive as a harrowing experience –learning a foreign language: it also acts as an icebreaker for the class as a whole as it slowly transforms a disparate group of individuals (...) into a cohesive community of language learners” (p. 158). That is, by carrying out these exercises –in pairs or groups- the issue of anxiety is treated directly and students learn to develop a more positive attitude towards the foreign language.

Tsui (1996) also includes some of the above mentioned suggestions to fight anxiety and adds a few more:

1. When students have to give an answer, teachers should let them write the answers in a piece of paper first. In this way, students will have time to think about the answer and they will not feel the pressure to give an immediate answer.

2. Teachers should ask questions that may have several different correct answers, which will lead to a wider and more confident participation.

3. Allow students to compare and discuss their answers with their peers before putting them together with those of the rest of the class. This will make students feel more confident when contributing with their own answers.

4. Even if it is true that competitiveness, as mentioned before, might be a source of anxiety, it is also true that competing –with the group’s support- can motivate students and motivate them to beat the opposing group.

Yan (1998, cited in Pérez Paredes 1999, p. 103) argues that activities should be motivating both in terms of content and format for students. Activities should be short and should encourage peer cooperation. Activities dealing with songs, for instance, may fulfil all these conditions.

4.4. Creating a positive learning environment

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) state that “in general, educators have two options when dealing with anxious students: (1) they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety provoking situation; or (2) they can make the learning context less stressful” (p. 131). However, due to the vast variety of affective and cognitive variables that intervene in language learning, it is difficult to propose a specific method to address the emotional and intellectual needs of the majority of students (Brown, 1977, in Scovel, 1978). That is to say, teachers can help students reduce their anxiety levels by focusing on the students’ characteristics that are causing the anxiety, as well as by focusing on what teachers themselves do and what goes on inside the classroom, yet it is difficult to determine which methodology is the best.

Pérez Paredes (1999, pp. xxii-xxiii) puts forward the use of a communicative methodology through activities with a communicative potential to solve or alleviate the negative emotions anxiety produces. By means of a communicative methodology, teachers play a less authoritative role in the classroom, becoming an interactive guide to facilitate learning. In accordance with this view, Ortega (2002, p. 255) provides the following guidelines to minimize the negative effects that anxiety may cause:

1. Instead of taking an authoritative role, the teacher should act as a therapist. Teachers should support students in the process of overcoming stress, providing them with a less academic and more human and relaxed classroom environment, in which the student will be able to communicate.

2. Avoid the tendency to correct students' errors all the time, since this can make students fear speaking.

3. Encourage group work to alleviate fear of peer evaluation. It is convenient to group students according to their cognitive level to avoid making them perceive themselves as inferior when communicating with other group members.

4. Conduct presentation activities for students to feel more comfortable.

5. Remove the "surprise effect" as far as possible, and give students time to prepare and understand what they have to do.

In short, when learners view the classroom as anxiety inducing, they become less socially oriented, less assertive, and more self-conscious than in other situations. In this context, the teacher plays a key role in alleviating anxiety and fostering a less confrontational atmosphere by means of activities and methodologies created specifically for this purpose.

5. Conclusions

The results obtained from several studies provide evidence that affective components have a considerable impact on learners. The way in which learners interpret affective factor information is the key to developing positive and valuable concepts of self-efficacy about learning, which in turn leads to more effective learning. Appropriate

teacher guidance and advice will encourage stronger willingness to participate and greater effort to learn on the part of learners, and thus a greater success in language performance. Hence, it is advisable for teachers to adopt some practical and effective techniques to promote learners' affective development and consequently get them actively involved in class activities.

Research has established the existence of a specific anxiety related to language learning, foreign language anxiety (FLA). Furthermore, it has shown that FLA not only represents an uncomfortable experience for students, but can also have negative effects on the learning process. In this paper we have seen that anxiety may be derived from a number of sources as, for example, learner characteristics, students' beliefs, teacher characteristics and classroom procedures.

In order to deal with anxiety stemming from learner characteristics, teachers should help students recognize their irrational beliefs and fears through activities designed for this purpose. They should also recommend that highly anxious students participate in some form of supplemental instruction, such as getting individual tutoring or joining a language club. More exposure to the language outside the classroom may help anxious students become more comfortable with the language and thus help reduce the anxiety.

The anxiety derived from students' beliefs about learning a language may be overcome if teachers discuss with students reasonable expectations for successful language learning. In particular, teachers should help students develop more realistic expectations, and adopt an attitude that shows that mistakes are part of the language learning process and can be made by anyone. Mistakes are not a negative thing, they are an indicator of the fact that the students are actually learning and are part of the language learning process.

In order to address the anxiety stemming from teacher characteristics, teachers should create a positive learning environment and adopt the role of facilitator. Furthermore, they should use an encouraging rather than threatening style of questioning, avoid sarcasm and intimidation, and give students more positive feedback. Teachers should also be more friendly, relaxed, and patient in the classroom, addressing the learning styles of all students in the class. Overcorrection should be avoided, since

better methods such as corrective feedback through modelling (e.g., by repeating what the student said, but with the correct grammar) exist.

Finally, anxiety coming from classroom procedures may be avoided if teachers make the atmosphere in the classroom as friendly and relaxed as possible. Teachers should be warm and personable and reward effort, risk-taking, and successful communication. It is strongly recommended that teachers use pair/group work as much as possible. This serves two purposes: (1) it allows all the students to get more practice with the language, and (2) it takes the burden off the individual student to perform in front of the whole class and allows more student-student interaction. Activities used in the classroom should be varied, language instruction should be personalized and it should encourage realistic expectations as well as avoid competitiveness. At the end, teachers can discuss successful language learning strategies with students and review these throughout the semester.

In a nutshell, “dealing with anxiety in an explicit and purposeful way is part of true learner training” (Crookall & Oxford, 1991, p. 145). Foreign language anxiety can probably be alleviated, at least to an extent, by spending some time in class dealing directly with the anxiety that students may be feeling. As a result of a decrease in foreign language anxiety, the time spent on language learning would be more effective. “But if we are to improve foreign language teaching at all levels of education, we must recognize, cope with, and eventually overcome, debilitating [FLA] as a factor shaping students’ experiences in foreign language learning” (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986, p. 132).

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Appendices

Appendix A

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale contains 33 items, each answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. It measures a person’s level of anxiety by coming up with an anxiety score by adding up the ratings on the 33 items. The possible range is 33 to 165; the higher the number, the higher the level of foreign language anxiety. The construct validity of the FLCAS is based on correlations which indicate that the FLCAS can be distinguished from measures of other types of anxiety.

<i>Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)</i>					
By Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz and Joann Cope (1986)					
SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree nor disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.					
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.					
2. I <i>don't</i> worry about making mistakes in language class.					
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.					
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.					
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.					
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.					

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.					
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.					
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.					
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.					
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.					
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.					
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.					
14. I would <i>not</i> be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.					
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.					
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.					
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.					
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.					
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.					
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.					

22. I <i>don't</i> feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.					
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.					
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.					
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.					
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.					
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.					
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.					
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.					
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.					
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.					
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't					