Speaking Anxiety Experienced By Indonesian Students in an International University

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Abstract. Systematic and analytical investigations on foreign language communication anxiety outside the language training classroom context have important implications for language use. For instance, Guntzviller et al. (2016) stated that a study in that context will enhance the understanding on the emergence of negotiation with the multilingual environment in the foreign speaker's everyday lives. Unfortunately, there seems to be a dearth in studies in the context mentioned earlier. Even if the studies discussed formerly could give an insight into how anxiety affects the performance of the second language use in the real word settings, they highly likely cannot be applied to the use of L2 in the academic environment. The primary objectives of this research are to investigate the extent to which Indonesian students experience speaking anxiety in the academic speaking context and internal factors promoting them. This study employed qualitative approach to explore the subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of respondents (Dornyei, 2007) related to the research question. Based on the data obtained from the three data collection methods (reflective journal, Focus Group Discussion, and interview), the extents to which the speaking anxiety occur and internal factors promoting it were found varied.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, Indonesian Students, Internal Factors

INTRODUCTION

The existence of anxiety in language learning was identified decades ago. Most studies used the affective filter hypothesis to explain this situation. Krashen (1982) stated that to learn effectively, students need high motivation and low anxiety. When a second language learner's anxiety is high, their affective filter is raised, and they become less able to process language input, fail to take in the available target language messages, and do not progress in their language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). A more accurate example of how the affective negative filter affects a language learner was given by Horwitz (2001). They noted that language learners with high levels of anxiety tend to be self-conscious, have difficulty concentrating, and fear making mistakes, avoid communicative situations, study for extended times, become forgetful, and even experience a mental blockage (Horwitz et al., 1986). From these explanations, it can be argued that the affective filter should be reduced in the language learning process in order to minimise the possibility of failure or of not achieving the maximum language learning output.

Oxford (1999) and Rodriguez and Abreu (2003) mentioned that second language anxiety has a major impact on language learning regardless of whether the context is formal learning (in-classroom language training) or informal learning (outside the classroom language training). It has been proven that the use of the second language in the environment which uses the target language as the medium of everyday communication leads to more anxiety than the second language training classroom itself (Deweale et al., 2008). In this regard, Ceroz (2008) and Guntzviller et al. (2016) claimed that some features of linguistic competence (e.g. phonology, morphology, and lexicon) which must be accompanied with sociocultural competence are important in the use of target language outside the classroom. In addition, a study conducted by Byrne et al. (2012) in the field of general communicative anxiety confirmed that there are many students, who despite having experienced communication in public, cannot fully replicate the reality of public speaking since the preparation they took at school or clubs/societies occurred in an artificial environment. Although this latter study was not conducted in the second language anxiety context, that finding might give a valuable insight into how a language training classroom unsuccessfully prepares their students for using the language in the real-world context of the language use.

Systematic and analytical investigations on foreign language communication anxiety outside the language training classroom context have important implications for language use. For instance, Guntzviller et al. (2016) stated that a study in that context will enhance the understanding on the emergence of negotiation with the multilingual environment in the foreign speaker's everyday lives. Unfortunately, there seems to be a dearth in studies in the context mentioned earlier. Even if the studies discussed formerly could give an insight into how anxiety affects the performance of the second language use in the real word settings, they highly likely cannot be applied to the use of L2 in the academic environment.

This present study investigates the anxiety experienced by Indonesian students in the academic speaking context, in this case the conversation which they

carry out in the classroom related to their subject study. The main distinction between the context of the current study and the ones which were conducted previously by other researchers is the use English as the communication or instruction medium, not as learning material. The context of this study is also different to the former studies conducted in the use of second language for daily communication purposes as its focus is on academic conversation

Furthermore, this research focused on anxiety in the oral productive skills, namely speaking in an academic setting. Speaking a foreign language has generally been considered as the most anxiety-provoking activity among other activities in the use of second/foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1990). Furnham and Medhurst (1995) even found that individuals who had good verbal skills were also prone to becoming anxious when speaking. The primary objectives of this research are to investigate the extent to which Indonesian students experience speaking anxiety in the academic speaking context and internal factors promoting them.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative approach to explore the subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of respondents (Dornyei, 2007) related to the research question. In addition, the suitability of this approach to facilitate the uniqueness of each human's experience and views (Dornyei, 2007) is beneficial for exploring the speaking anxiety that Indonesians face in the international classroom context which is likely different and varied for each student. Since this study aims to explore people and their social worlds in their natural setting and to learn how they understand their situations and account for their behaviour (Creswell, 2013), the methodology selected was case study.

The subjects of this study were Indonesian students studying at a university in the UK. An invitation letter was posted on the social media group representing the Indonesian society in that city. In all, 11 students voluntarily joined as participants. They were master's students who started their programme eight months before this study was carried out. Before applying for their programmes, they ensured that they met the minimum score of English competency.

Three data collection methods were employed in this study: personal reflective journal, focus group discussion, and interview to explore the opinions and experiences of the respondents. The analysis was conducted through content analysis, as suggested by Robson and McCartan (2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained from the three data collection methods (reflective journal, Focus Group Discussion, and interview), the extents to which the speaking anxiety occur and internal factors promoting it were found varied.

1. *Not familiar with the speaking partner(s)*

Not being familiar with the person they are talking with, either in the group or in one-to-one conversation setting, was identified as a factor which provoked anxiety. In the focus group discussion, Diana described her experience of being

anxious to speak in a group discussion which involved students she was not familiar with. Especially because the other members seem have been quite close to each other, she perceived herself as a student whose attendance in the group is ignored. Therefore, she felt hesitance to speak. Furthermore, in the personal conversation context, Elli mentioned that her inability to get along with some people in her class makes her feel anxious to speak to them. In another situation, Kay feels hesitant to speak on a one-to-one basis to a particular classmate who seems to avoid interaction.

The possible reasons promoting anxiety to speak with a stranger is the speaker's feeling of inability to make a good first impression to their speaking partner(s). Furthermore, although not directly correlated to the apprehension in the use of second language, in an earlier study which investigated communicative apprehension among first-year business and accounting students at a higher education institution in Ireland, it was also found that communicating with strangers led to more heightened anxiety than interacting with friends (Byrne et al., 2012). Since such a condition has appeared not only in the second language speaking but also in the general communication context, it seems this problem is not an exclusive component of foreign language anxiety. However, I keep put this point to be discussed as, pedagogically, it could become a consideration for the English language teacher in grouping students in e.g. speaking activity in the classroom.

2. Unconscious mimicking (Chameleon effect)

In the Focus Group Discussion, Luna mentioned that when speaking to a friend who looks anxious and cannot speak fluently, she suddenly slows down and stutters as well. Unfortunately, although it has been reconfirmed in the one-to-one interview section, Luna could not mention the reason of why this happened. However, Kate pointed out to a reason. She stated that a friend speaking stutteringly shows an anxious face which makes her anxious as well. From Kate's point, it could be predicted if, probably, the respondents experienced a chameleon effect or unintentional mimicking. Chameleon effect is a term which refers to the unintentional tendency to imitate the speech accent, hand gesture, facial expression, and other behaviours of the one's interaction partners (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). While in many studies (Dewaele, 2008; Donovan and MacIntyre, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, et al., 1999) mentioned that speaking to a more competent English user made foreign speakers hesitant to talk. This point indeed shows that the participants' speech deteriorated when their speaking partner's competency was lower than their own. Although Luna and Kate can speak fluently, because of being unconsciously affected by their speaking partner, they felt nervous and spoke as worse as their speaking partner.

3. Learner's perfectionism

In the FGD, Luna mentioned that although she is confident about the clarity of her speaking, the factor which sometimes provoked her anxiety when giving a presentation was the worry about note being fluent. She experienced this when making a presentation in front of the class. It seems after having set an ideal target

of fluently delivering the content of the speech during the presentation, she was becoming anxious to talk because of the fear of not being to achieve this expectation. In this study, Luna seems to be experiencing a similar condition that was observed in a study conducted by Pishghadam and Akhhondpoor (2011). Echoing the discussion in the literature review section, in psychology, perfectionism is defined as a personality attribute which is indicated by the following aspects: making efforts to ensure flawlessness, setting very high performance goals, making over-critical evaluations of oneself, being concerned about other's peoples evaluation of oneself, and never being satisfied with one's achievement (Stoeber et al., 2010). In the 2011 study, it was found that perfectionism negatively affected a learner's speaking ability because they are usually concerned with a prior ideal set goal which emphasises the perfect quality of their speech, i.e. grammatical accuracy, pronunciation accuracy, and fluency.

4. Negative Self-perceived Competence

The factors related to the students' negative self-perceived competence are quite varied. In total, there are five components that the students believe have lower capability with. Those refers to two domains, negative self-perceive on language competency and negative self-perceive on learning material mastery (the knowledge of the speaking content). *Negative self-perception of language competence.*

There are two conditions leading students anxious to speak caused by their self-underestimation on the language competence. The first one is their feeling doubt on the clearance when speaking and another one is their worry for unable comprehend the speaking partners' speaking due to their belief that they have a low listening ability. Rather than mention this conditions as students' low language competence, I put them as negative self-perceive competence. The reason is because, as mentioned in chapter 3, their IELTS speaking and IELTS listening score described that at least they should be able to handle the communication in the overall meaning in most situations including in their own field. Moreover, an increase was expected in language competency during the eight months they are studying in that university since that second language was intensively practiced. Therefore, the statements they delivered in the data collection which mention about the low language competence seems to be their self-underestimation.

a. Speaking clarity

Errick, in his reflective journal, wrote if he tends to be worry to speak in the classroom as he is not sure whether his speaking could be understood or not. Such a feeling was usually felt when he was speaking in a group discussion, during a lecture, in presentation, or in a one-to-one conversation.

Specifically, in a one-to-one conversation setting, at the beginning of her study, every time Kay spoke, many of her Chinese friends asked her to repeat what she had just said. Consequently, she underestimated her speaking ability and felt afraid to speak since her friends seemed unable to catch her words.

A similar condition was experienced by Danny. In the FGD, he mentioned the factor which he believed was the cause of his worry of not being understood by his

speaking partner. He felt that his speaking accent was different from the accents of his friends.

b. Listening ability

Most participants confirmed that the reason behind their hesitance to speak was the fear of not being able to understand what the interlocutor was saying in response to their question or the interlocutor not understanding them. It was identified some conditions leading them to be worry for unable understanding their speaking partner's talk. For example, in the case of one-to-one speaking, in the FGD, Diana mentioned that:

> *"But when it is with British, I feel rather uncomfortable because, firstly, they speak more fluently, and sometimes I feel worried that I might not understand what they say. So I feel more comfortable to talk to international students".* *(Diana)*

FGD.1.8

From the transcription above it was identified that the difficulty in understanding the interlocutor's speech increased the respondents speaking anxiety was due to the speaking tempo. In other data, it was identified some other factors make the students feel worried, for example, speaker's unique accent and dialect.

Another condition in which the participants felt worried about their listening ability was in the group discussion. Most of the members spoke continuously not giving the respondents the chance to process the meaning about what they are talking.

Related to a different context, Diana mentioned that a barrier she usually faced while she was still thinking about the meaning of a question addressed by the lecturer, and was thinking about the answer and translating the answer into English, other students did spontaneously. So, she frequently lost the chance to speak. Or, on another occasion, Diana and another respondent Danny felt anxious to speak to their friend since they could not engage in simultaneous comprehension and speech production.

These speaking settings above refer to two-way communication in which both parties (all people involved in that conversation) involved transmit information, including feedback from the listener. Therefore, to be able to speak in such a situation, one needs not only the ability to produce sentences but also the ability to understand the listener's response. From the data, it was identified that the student's lack of confidence in their ability to understand the other parties' words could make them anxious to speak because the speaker is afraid to be unable to give respond. *Negative self-perception of subject material mastery*

Concerning the students' negative self-perception of the subject material mastery, there are three conditions in which such feelings are experienced: when the learners want to ask something but are unsure of the quality of the question, when they feel less competent than other students either in the lecture sessions or

in the group discussion, and when feeling unsure about whether they have done sufficient preparation to understand the subject material or not.

a. *Afraid of the quality of the question*

In the discussion section in a lecture, many participants feel anxious to raise a question. They said that their anxiety was provoked by their worry about asking a question which may be regarded as a "stupid" question. "Stupid" question refers to a question which has been actually explained by the lecturer in their talk or has been explained in the reading material they should read before coming to the class.

b. *Feeling less competent than other students*

The next identified factor provoking participant's discomfort in delivering an idea is the belief that other students are more competent with the topic/subject than themselves. In the lecturing section, Helen admitted that her braver to talk depends on the students' expertise level background in that classroom. The more expert she believes her friends are, the more anxious she felt to speak.

In her neuropsychiatry class, Diana always felt anxious to speak in the group discussion because she believed that the other members of the group were more experienced than her, as their previous career was related to the subject. In that case, unfortunately, such feelings of fear were promoted only by her self-underestimation. Such feelings make her lose the chance to actively respond to the lecturer's questions in the class.

c. *Feeling of not well-prepared with the learning material*

With regard to the mistakes they may make in their speech content, one reason leading the students to feel anxious to share their ideas or to ask questions is the feeling of insufficient preparation of the learning material. Helen mentioned that although generally she is quite confident to speak, when she attends a lecture without reading the materials before, she feels anxious to speak up.

Specifically to the group discussion context, Danny mentioned that he tends to be passive in a group discussion when he does not understand the topic well. Rather than speaking up, he prefers to let other members speak and he just remains silent to take the chance to understand the topic from his friends' words.

In the reflective interview conducted with Fred, he said that he is not brave to speak up in a lecture session because he believes that while he feels understanding nothing, the lecturer understands everything about the material. Therefore, he feels not eligible to give an opinion during the class.

All the data presented above show that students' underestimate their language competence or their mastery of the subject material, thus feeling anxious to speak to various extents. The findings confirm a number of findings of previous studies on foreign language anxiety which are also correlated the occurrence of such a feeling with the speakers' negative self-perception of their competence (Dewaele, 2008; Donovan and MacIntyre, 2005; Onwuegbuzie, et al., 1999). However, while the previous studies found that negative self-perception is strongly correlated to the speakers' second language competence, the present study found that such feelings are also correlated to subject material mastery. This distinction

might have appeared since the setting of the present study is the academic or classroom setting in which the conversations are carried out mostly about the learning material topic. In addition, the factors mentioned in this part are in some way related to the students' need for maintaining face. This aspect will be discussed further in the discussion of the cultural factor.

CONCLUSIONS

From three data collected (personal reflective interview, focus group discussion, and interview), it was found that speaking anxiety occurred in some kinds of oral interactions, namely one-to-one conversation, speaking at lecturing sessions, speaking at group discussions, and in giving presentations in the classroom.

Regarding the internal factors promoting anxiety in these four cases, firstly, the students felt anxious to speak when involved in community speaking or when speaking with partners with whom they are not familiar. Secondly, the occurrence of the chameleon effect or unconscious mimicking of the feeling of anxiety when speaking to a friend who speaks anxiously was observed. Thirdly, the students' perfectionism was also identified as a psychological factor provoking anxious feelings when speaking. Lastly, the students' had negative self-perceived competence. Concerning to the latter aspect, while the many previous studies in this context find the speaking anxiety promoted by the speakers' tendency to underestimate their language competence, this current identifies if the speaking anxiety factors are also related to the students' underestimation to their learning material mastery. In terms of language competence, the aspects they usually underestimate are the clearance on their speaking and their listening ability. Regarding subject topic comprehension, the participants usually felt anxious to speak when they were afraid about the quality of the questions they wanted to ask, felt less competent than other students, and felt their reading preparation was not sufficient. Furthermore, the kind of conditions which are related to their negative self-perceived knowledge mastery are overweight the aspects referring to their negative self-perceived language competence.

Theoretically speaking, the findings of the study can contribute to the development of the second language anxiety theory, especially speaking anxiety in the real-world setting, which is an under-researched topic. Concerning its practical contribution, this study could provide an insight into the second language teacher's treatment of their students to prevent them from experiencing speaking anxiety when their students use the target language in the real world.

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