ANXIETY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract
As is well known some students are more successful than others in language learning. This different level of achievement may be attributed to variables associated with the teachers and students. In recent years there has been extensive research into aspects of differences in learning a second language. Some dimensions of learner differences are generally acknowledged such as age, aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, anxiety, attitude and learning strategies. In my paper I attempt to review and discuss one of them — anxiety — which research studies indicate may influence students' achievements of language learning.

Key words
anxiety, foreign language, input, error correction

Introduction
1. "When the teacher is giving explanations my heart beats strongly and I keep saying to myself 'It going to be my turn now.'"
2. "Today the teacher has insisted a lot on tenses. I had beads of sweat. Me and English tenses have never agreed."
3. "Today we have a quiz. It was very easy but I was so anxious about the second exercise that I could not work."
4. "I never forget today and the shame I felt. Everything started when the English teacher asked me to read a few sentences on the blackboard."

Cherchill 1988, In Allwright, Bailey 1991, 75

As foreign language teachers we are too familiar with such statements to think about its potential problems for the students of a foreign language. We are well aware of its existence in the classroom. When students are assumed to voluntarily answer some questions in most cases only students with speaking competence will do while most students may keep silent and even avoid eye contact with teacher by lowering their heads. Sometimes students appear so embarrassed that their faces turn red and voices sound strange when they are called to say something in front of the class. Nevertheless it never occurs to me that the uneasiness and apprehension are not the solely result from the lack of ability, inadequate background, or poor motivation. I'm shocked to learn that they may influence students' language learning and their achievements according to some research studies. It is really worth while thinking about their causes and at the same time the ways to minimise the harmful effect so that the teaching and learning can be more effective and fruitful especially for those anxious students.

Literature review

Research perspectives

Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an
arousal of the autonomic nervous system\[Spielberger1983\] in Horwitz \[Cope1986\]

\[MacIntyre and Gardner\[1991\] delineate three perspectives from which anxiety has been investigated\[They are trait anxiety\[state anxiety\[and situation specific anxiety\]. The first one they think is a “general personality trait that is relevant across several situations”\[Its negative affects are thought to “impair cognitive functioning to disrupt memory to lead to avoidance behaviours and to have several other effects”\[Eysenck 1979\] in MacIntyre et al\[1991\]. The second is “interested in here\[and how experience of anxiety as an emotional state”\[The last is “the specific forms of anxiety that occur consistently over time within the given situation”\[The last one seems likely to be more closely related to attempts to learn an L2 and communicate in it\[for instance the event such as public speaking\[examinations\[or class participation\].

\[Horwitz et al\[1986\] associate anxiety with three performance anxieties\[communication apprehension\[test anxiety\[and fear of negative evaluation\]. The unique component of the first one according to Lucas\[1984\] is the metacognitive awareness that\[as a speaker and a listener\[full comprehension of foreign language message is impossible\]. Therefore\[the potential for frustrated or aborted communication is always present\]. Such frustration may even be considered part of the learning process. The second includes the fear over the frequent tests in the language classroom. Horwitz et al\[1986\] hold the view that “test anxious students often put unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test performance is a failure”\[. The third is more broadly based than are the previous two. Tobias\[1978\] in MacIntyre et al\[1991\] concludes that evaluation\[in this case\] refers to both the academic and personal made of students on the basis of their performance and competence in the target language. Teachers and peers alike listen to each utterance to correct mistakes. Adults\[especially\] can experience apprehension because they can not present themselves in the new language as fully as that can in their native language. The intimate relationship between self-concept and self-expression makes foreign language anxiety distinct from other academic anxieties.

\[Scove\[1978\] maintains that anxiety can be helpful in addition to its harmful effects according to Alpert and Habe\[1960\] who developed the Achievement Anxiety Test to identify the amount of facilitating and/or debilitating anxiety a subject posses. He thinks that facilitating anxiety “motivates the learner to’ fight’ the new learning task \[it gears the learner emotionally for approach behaviour\[”. On contrary \[that debilitating anxiety” motivates the learner to’ flee’ the new learning task \[it stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behaviour\[”.

\[Krashe\[1982\] explains that anxiety as one of the affective variables directly relates itself to success in second language acquisition. He states that “Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition \[whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety\[”. He also stresses the existence of the consistent relationship between all kind of anxiety and language proficiency in either formal or informal situation. The level of the anxiety may thus have a very potent influence on the affective filter.

1\[2\] Research measures

The first anxiety measure concerning specifically with second language learning is The French Class Anxiety Scale developed by Gardner and Smyth\[1975\] in Gardner 1985. It is followed by English Use Anxiety\[1977\] and English Test Anxiety\[1980\] by Clement\[Gardner and Smyth\[1991\] in MacIntyre et al\[1991\] in 1986 Horwitz et al\[1991\] develop a 33 Item measure of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. The results of some studies demonstrate significant negative correlations between language anxiety and standardised tests\[course grades\. MacIntyre and Gardner\[1991\] conclude \[covering several measures of proficiency\ in several different samples\ and even in somewhat different conceptual frameworks\ it has been shown that anxiety negatively affects performance in the second language. In some cases anxiety provides some of the highest simple correlations of attitudes with achievements.\[While other results do not show clear negative correlations\ for example\ Ely\[1986\] finds no relationship between anxiety and university learner’s level of participation in class\].

1\[3\] Effects of anxiety

Though the research results are mixed\[students\[to some extent\[are experiencing the anxiety in
classroom Oxford 1999 sums up the following signs of language anxiety which prove it to be worth tackling by both teachers and students:

- General avoidance, Forgetting, showing carelessness, cutting class, coming late, arriving unprepared, low levels of verbal production, lack of volunteering in class, seeming inability to answer even the simplest questions.

- Physical actions, squirming, fidgeting, playing with hair or clothing, nervously touching objects, stuttering or stammering, displaying jittery behaviour, being unable to reproduce the sounds or intonation of the target language even after repeated practice.

- Physical symptoms, complaining about a headache, experiencing tight muscles, feeling unexplained pain or tension in any part of the body.

- Other signs which might reflect language anxiety, depending in the culture, overstudying, perfectionism, social avoidance, conversational withdrawal, lack of eye contact, hostility, monosyllabic or noncommittal responses, image protection or masking behaviours, exaggerated smiling, laughing, nodding, joking, failing to interrupt when it would be natural to do so, excessive competitiveness, excessive self-effacement and self-criticism.

FLCAS Items presented by Horwitz et al. 1986 show that 49% of their subjects endorse “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my language class.” 33% of them think “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.” 28% of them agree that I feel very self-conscious about speaking in foreign language classes.” 47% of them reject the statement like “I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.”

It is often the case with Chinese students that they do not speak in the class until they are called on, that they are highly likely to be unable to answer the very simple questions. It is assumed to have something to do with what language teachers do in the classroom. Horwitz et al. 1986 mention that some researchers are discussing “in detail the defensive position imposed on the learner by the most language teaching methods.” I think it is true in my context, for instance, teachers’ input, attitude to the error, and expectation for the students, which are not in accordance with students’ beliefs to teacher, teaching techniques and language learning. The following part will be concerned with the causes of anxiety in the classroom.

2 Causes of anxiety

2.1 Teachers’ input

Research theory and practical experience all point to the fact that input is crucial to language learning. “Input” refers to the language which the learners hear or read — that is, the language samples to which they are exposed. Allwright & Bailey 1991. It is therefore the teacher who has to make the decision as to what and how to expose students to the target language. In light of teaching theories, teachers at different times may have different focuses. In terms of Structural Perspective language teachers have to organise the teaching by saturating students with dialogues and pattern drills for the purpose of forming good habit. Then in terms of Cognitive Constructivist Perspective, Chomsky 1965 insists that the development of the language grammatical system be guided by innate cognitive structures — not behavioural reinforcement. Later Krashen 1982 emphases to provide comprehensible input which has profound influence on language teaching. He hypothesises that target language which is understandable but with effort and which is a little more advanced than learner’s actual level of comfortable understanding are bound to promote learning. He states it as the following:

1. The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning.

2. We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence.

3. This is done with the help of context or extralinguistic information.

When communication is successful when the input is understood and there is enough of it, 1 will be provided automatically.

As far as my teaching situation is concerned as more and more demands to acquire communicative
competence arise[]language teachers at university level have turned their attention to the speaking and
listening[]University English teachers are required to deliver their lessons in English without Chinese in
order to expose students to the target language as much as possible[ because our students seldom have a
chance to get input outside the class[]Students with quite high cognitive knowledge of English but without
experience of hearing lesson all in English may feel nervous in class[ because teacher input is simply
beyond understanding for some students[]My students tell me that they feel worried and nervous in
language class] They try hard to catch every word that teacher says[]If not they feel depressed because
they believe that they must understand every word in order to get the chance of comprehending English[]
What makes it worse is that students are not given the" silent time” based on their current level before
they are forced to speak in class[] Thus some students may muck in the last row[]others even” flee” the
English class[ Krashen thinks it is too early before students” have acquired enough syntactic competence
to express their ideas” 1982 [] Accordingly the second condition of second language acquisition” a low
or weak affective filter to allow the input” in " 1982 [] cannot achieve[] The anxiety impedes the
delivery of input to the language acquisition device[]

[] However Mclaughlin 1987 [] argues that the Affective Hypothesis provides little information as to
why learner are impeded in learning[] He doubts that those who have low affective filter would be
expected to learn more than those anxious[] He claims that Krashen’s theory does not differentiate these
learners[]

[] We personally think those with low affective filter do learn more than those anxious according to our
experience and observations in class[] Therefore what Krashen claims is the case in our situation[[]

2.2 Teacher attitudes to error

It is problematic to define the error in light of some researchers such as Allwright et al 1991[] Chaudron
1986b] Larsen Freeman] Long 1991[] Nevertheless Chaudron defines error as[] 1[] linguistic forms or content that differ from native speaker norms[] 2[] any other performance needs
improving as far as the teacher is concerned[] He categories errorson the basis of phonological[] lexical[]
morphological[] syntactic[] discourse and content[] Corder in Larsen Freeman] Long 1991 [] makes the
distinction between the mistake and an error as the following[] the former is a random performance
slip caused by fatigue[] excitement[] etc[] and therefore can be readily self corrected[] an error is a
systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the L2[] Larsen Freeman
and Long also present a table of error types including[] Interlingual Interference[] Intralingual
Overspecialization[] Simplification] Communication based and Induced error[] Nowadays some
researchers do suggest avoiding error correction[] Rather than being seen as something to be prevented[]
then errors were signs that learners were actively engaged in hypothesis testing which would ultimately
result in the acquisition of TL rules[] Larsen Freeman et al 1991 [] Errors come to be seen in a
new light[] not as bad habits to be avoided but as natural byproducts of a creative learning process[]

[] In foreign language context[] however[] it is long believed that it is the teacher’s responsibility to
identify and correct them[] Concerning what should be corrected[] most teachers may consider on the basis
of students[] phonological[] lexical[] morphological[] syntactic[] discourse and the content[] Some of
students’ utterances such as” He come to see me tomorrow” should be corrected immediately and absolutely
because it is wrong[] But the teacher also rejects some just because the answers are not what the teacher
expects[] Nystrom 1983 [] cited in Allwright et al 1991 [] provides an example of this phenomenon
in the following transcript excerpt[]

[] Transcript 3[] "I see a pig"

[] [T] teacher[] I want you to look at this and tell me ONE THING that is going on in this picture[] Tell
me in a complete sentence[] Okay[] Dione[]

[] [F] pupil[] Gasps[] wants to be called on[]

[] [T] Dione[]

[] [P] A pig[]

[] [T] Looks out of the corner of her eye[] uncertainly[] A pig[] Can you tell me that in a complete
sentence[] You need to say more than just " a pig"[] You need to see " say" I see a pig or you
need to say "uh" The pig is doing something"

The teacher insists correcting the student just because the student does not use the complete sentence as teacher requires. The teacher's attitudes to errors are based on the structural perspective that language acquisition is the product of habit formation. They hold that if they do ignore the errors produced by students, the other students may assume them as correct forms and they may follow or even change their existing correct forms. What is more, since the output of any learner in a classroom may serve as input to any other learner, as well as to the entire class. Allwright et al. 1991. Secondly, teachers cannot tolerate the bad habit to be formed in the whole class. In addition, the limited class time and over-loaded content to be covered in a class may result in teachers' immediate interruption by giving some feedback or evaluation. Finally, most teachers believe that correction may help increase accuracy in learners' target language production at least in short term. Mitchell and Myle 1998. Some evidence supporting the idea. Whatever the reasons, for teachers, attitudes to error, they do constitute a threat to some students. Some anxious students to be corrected may be more afraid of being less competent than their classmates or being negatively evaluated. They may have the experience of being laughed at or punished for their errors before. The correction can certainly be disruptive and could eventually inhabit the learner's willingness to speak in class at all. Allwright et al. 1991. Ely 1986 proposes students uncomfortable experience, namely Language Class Discomfort was seen as decreasing both Language Class Risktaking and Language Class Sociability. In a long run, anxious students' performance will be damaged.

2-3 Teacher's expectations of the students

Nowadays, cognitively oriented perspectives on language acquisition are gaining popularity. Dell Hymes is an American sociolinguist who coins the term communicative competence in response to Chomsky's mentalistic characterization of linguistic competence. Insists on the social appropriateness of language use remarking "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." Hymes 1971. During the 1980s communicative competence became the buzzword of the language teaching profession. What need to be taught are no longer just linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Canale and Swain 1980. With interactive communicative language use as the call of the day, communicative processes become as important as linguistic product, and instruction become more learner-centered and less structurally driven.

From this perspective, language teaching is viewed not just in terms of providing comprehensible input but rather as helping students enter into the kinds of authentic social discourse situations and discourse communities that they would later encounter outside the classroom. Some saw this to be achieved through various types of task-based learning, in which students engaged in authentic tasks and projects, see for example. Long and Crookes 1992. Prabhu 1987. Others emphasized content-based learning in which students learned language and content simultaneously. Flowerdew 1993.

Under the guidance of these principles and approaches, teacher everywhere has not only tried these tasks and projects in class but also has new expectations of their students based on the research results. Good language students are believed to seek clarification and meaning, ask questions, make inferences, and use deduction. Ellis and Sinclair 1989. Furthermore, good language students are regarded to see the target language as a system amenable to understanding through analysis and reasoning. Oxford 1990. Good language students are convinced that language is communicative; they will seek ways of practising the language and maintaining conversation. Rees and Miller 1993.

However, when applying these proposals and practices, we find in our classroom mismatches arise between teacher intention and students' responses. Students are silent when they are encouraged to be active in activities. They are reluctant to take part in group discussion and give feedback or accept feedback from their peers. They are afraid of asking questions and being asked. When 135 Chinese university students are surveyed to answer the question, why don't students ask questions in class? The responses of it is shown in a table.
Reasons for no questions of respondents

- Students are too shy 46 7
- Other students may laugh 27 1
- Prevented by Chinese tradition/ habits 19 3
- They do not want to interrupt 17 0
- They ask after the lesson 17 0
- They are afraid of making mistakes 14 1
- They do not know enough to ask 12 6
- They are too lazy/bored 9 6
- Nobody else asks 9 1
- The teacher does not encourage it 6 2
- Students can solve the problem themselves later 6 2
- They have no questions 7 4

These responses demonstrate the effect of anxiety in learning process. It is caused by teachers' inconsistent beliefs about language learning as well as cultural context. In the past, students were assumed to learn everything from the teacher. They were expected to keep quiet and just listen, which is partly attributed to the large class with 45-50 students in one classroom. The other factor which contributes to the teachers' contradicting beliefs and practice is determined by the structure of College Entrance Examination for secondary school students and College English Test for college and university students, which require students to have knowledge of extensive vocabulary and grammatical structures instead of speaking and listening skills.

The last but not the least factor is the cultural tradition which stresses the following practices:

- Silence is gold
- If the noisy bird that is easily shot dead
- A real man should be good at thinking but weak at speaking
- Don't speak out unless spoken to
- Keep your mouth shut before your eyes open

These old Chinese sayings have been practiced for so many many years that they are rooted in teacher and student mind. Thus students are not encouraged to air their views loudly for fear of losing face or offending teacher or others.

Besides what I analyse above, some researchers suggest other viewpoints of sources of anxiety such as Krashen 1981 16. He illustrates another source of anxiety that stems “lack of acquisition”. He explains those who get training only in the foreign language classroom will develop extensive formal knowledge of the target language with little acquisition in the end they will absolute become the overusers of Monitor. These learners show hesitation overcareful style of speaking in the classroom.

Still another sources enumerated by Bailey 1983 [17] Skehan 1989 [18] as the following:

- Comparison of oneself with other students either for their performance or for their anxiety levels.
- One's relationship with the teacher either in relation to one's perception of the teacher's expectation or one's need to gain the teacher's approval.
- Test.
- Comparison with oneself and one's own personal standards and goals.
- Since we have some ideas about the anxiety sources then we may find some ways to reduce it or change it into facilitating factors.

The ways to minimise the anxiety in the classroom

Both teachers and students find that relaxed atmosphere is more conducive to teaching and learning as well as decreasing anxiety. Krashen 1982 [19] argues that learner must be in a relaxed and confident
state in order to exploit available input most effectively. Moreover, high levels of motivation result in low levels of anxiety because the student perceives the experience positively and tends to be successful. Creating an affective environment that makes student want to take risk come back for more may also have positive effects on attitudes towards language and language learning. Thus, to modify teachers' input based on students' current levels and to allow students to experience “silent time” is the first priority. As long as what teacher says is understandable, students may have positive attitude to language and language learning. Teaching materials and class activities should not be out of their grasp. Teacher can provide a challenge but also ensure that the new learning is linked to past learning and that students are equipped with tools necessary to meet the challenge confidently. Secondly, error correction strategies should be chosen carefully rather than put students in an embarrassing or singled-out position. Teachers should go a long way in making students feel comfortable and confident enough such as asking clarifying questions rephrasing the statement in a correct manner. For example, “Yesterday I go to the Zoo with my friends” the teacher would respond, “You went to the Zoo with your friends yesterday.” The teacher provides effectively the corrected feedback while also continuing the conversation. Finally, teachers' expectations of the students have to be realistic, that is to encourage students to do as language researchers expect while taking into consideration of students' beliefs and attitudes to language teaching and learning. Chinese language teachers are in dilemma that they themselves and students are not accustomed to these task-based or student-centred ways of teaching and learning on the one hand; on the other hand they all know clearly that these new perspectives are the right paths to competent language users. Therefore they experience greater anxiety than students and teachers in other countries. Only they can work together, they may deal more effectively with language anxiety. Students may get rid of the pain of severe language anxiety and can feel the success in classroom learning.

Horwitz et al. 1986 suggest that Community Language Learning be directed at reducing learner anxiety. Community Language Learning by Curran 1977 is created especially for Adult Learners who might fear to appear foolish so the teacher becomes a Language Counselor. He understands them and leads them to overcome their fears. It follows Krashen's Monitor Theory, Affective Filter Hypothesis, and the Cognitive Theory where the human mind is active. Some techniques adopted in the classroom may reduce anxiety. Take small group tasks as example: teacher may:

A — teacher stands behind students
B — teacher repeats, doesn't correct
C — interaction among students
D — students feel in control, responsible

Thus the form of the class provides the security. Secondly, the understanding between the teacher and students produces a sense of security. Finally, a sense of security is woven into the activity. The conclusion of it's Learning is Persons no superior-inferior Learning is Dynamic Creative From the Internet 1998.

Conclusion

To sum up, there are so many issues to be considered when identifying the sources of anxiety and the ways of reducing it. Everything from research results to teachers' input in the classroom from teacher's attitude to errors to teachers' beliefs about students contributes a lot to our understanding of language learning and teaching. Teachers, of course, cannot be expected to make all students “relaxed” or “happy” all the time but they can certainly strive toward reducing tension and anxiety and setting up a climate where all students feel confident and comfortable.

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