



A Review of Research on Language Anxiety in Face-To-Face and Remote Learning

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Abstract

This review of language learning anxiety research, both in physical and remote classrooms, describes the process development of understanding the phenomenon of anxiety among students over the past 3 decades to the present day. The main prevailing school of thought in the study of second language acquisition is presented for the nature, causes, and effects of the experience of anxiety. Among the topics discussed are the learner's presuppositions of language learning as a cause of anxiety, feelings of anxiety in synchronous and asynchronous learning, the relationship between motivation, enjoyment, and anxiety, the use of learning strategies, and cooperative learning. The last part of the article suggests practical pedagogical suggestions to alleviate language learning anxiety.

Keywords: *Language anxiety, distance language learning*

1. Foreign language anxiety

In the mid-20th century, studies revealed early anxieties that exist in learners prior to language learning and don't necessarily arise during language learning, which affect the ability to study and function. Evidence of this was found in the research of a couple of linguists who recorded a diary of their experiences in learning Arabic and Persian in the target cultures vs. a US classroom. It was found that personal characteristics, tensions, pressures of social and cultural adaptation, rejecting teaching methods, and personal goals, all constitute variables that may have a negative or positive effect on language acquisition (Schumann & Schumann, 1977). According to McCoy (1979), people who are wary of criticism may experience language anxiety. This may overwhelm the feelings of fear and shyness and affect the level of functioning in class. Even students with public speaking anxiety will express language anxiety and poor speech skills due to the requirement to speak publicly. In the late 80s, Horwitz et al. (1986) described situations in which language students "freeze" during exams, and stutter while speaking in class. Others trembled during writing activities. Some felt uncomfortable in colleagues' presence and embarrassed when native speakers addressed them (125). Anxiety was described as a unique emotion for a foreign language classroom, independent of other anxieties and even separated from anxieties in other academic subjects. It is a major factor affecting the functional abilities of language learners and isn't a side effect of language studies (Horwitz et al. 1986). The FLACS Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was developed by Horwitz et al. to assess speech anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative criticism related to language learning. Later came the FLRAS-Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale and the WAT-Writing Apprehension Test (Pichette, 2009). Both tools were used to measure anxiety levels during the course, incorporate a pedagogical intervention in early and late course stages, as well as to evaluate the impact of these pedagogical changes on learner's anxiety (Russell, 2020). Young (1991) summarizes in her review the studies in this field until the early 90s and lists the main factors found to influence language anxiety. [1] Learner's personality- According to Krashen, learners with low self-esteem worry about what others think and pleasing others. The emotional filter is removed when people feel they are part of a group (qt. in Young 427), and Price adds that while performing a verbal task, there is a fear of self-image and loss of self (qt. in Young 427). [2] Learner's perceptions- According to Ginen, some learners believe they must speak with no accent, avoid content and grammar errors, and have no reason to speak L2 until they are proficient (qtd. in Young 428). [3] Teacher's role- Brendel claims that a teacher who acts as ruler and center of knowledge, constantly and publicly correcting student errors and avoiding



group activities for fear of losing control, will contribute to an ineffective teacher\learner relationship and language anxiety (qt. in Young 428). [4] Classroom activities- Koch and Terrell believe that activities such as speaking in front of the class with no prior practice, oral tests, or demanding an immediate response stimulate dominant anxiety (qtd. in Young 429). [5] Assessment- According to Madsen, unfamiliar or vague assessments and a mismatch between teaching and evaluation methods, will lead to an anxiety increase and a decrease in performance ability (qt. in Young 429).

2. Learners' perceptions of physical and remote learning

From the existing research, no significant difference was found between anxiety levels in physical and remote classes, but the difference is within the quality of anxiety. Baralt and Gurzynski (2011) showed how students expressed both positive and negative feelings about the two spaces but for different reasons. The physical classroom is viewed positively as a natural and social environment, while in the remote class, positive feelings arise from characteristics of learning space diversity, innovation, and speed. However, both spaces are captured as frustrating and stressful. In the physical class, the main reason is the fast rate of the teacher's speech, causing confusion and embarrassment. In the remote class, feelings of detachment, fear, boredom, and frustration are due to a lack of personal attention (216). These differences are rooted in learners' choice of learning space and in the combination of beliefs and perceptions regarding distance learning. Although choosing the remote learning space is moved mainly by external factors such as adjusting to life schedule, cost, or even a global virus, assumptions (sometimes wrong) that learners have about distance learning and language learning in general, affect their language abilities and the nature of experience (Hurd 2007; Russell 2020).

2.1 Anxiety in Language Acquisition Processes

Aydin (2018) claims anxiety level is shaped by the presentation of goals and the assignment's nature. Anxiety in distance learning is inherent in its processes and comes to form during the language acquisition process. In the passive stages of input and processing, the anxiety is not to a great extent. Few learners expressed fear of listening and understanding a native speaker, low fear of errors, and low anxiety while listening to authentic materials using digital devices. Also, an increased vocabulary and grammatical topics have not been proven to have a significant effect (Russell, 2020; Hurd, 2007; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018). However, in the productive processes of speaking, reading aloud, and writing, a high anxiety level was shown in all learning stages, specifically in synchronous reading and writing exams there was a fear of pressure (Aydin, 2018). However, in speaking exercises on VoiceThread \Flipgrid measures of anxiety were found low, although there is no certainty that it is precisely these systems that reduce anxiety levels (202). David et al. (2018) found that using a remote dialogue log not only lowered writing anxiety but also its nature changed. Anxiety moved from fear of the writing's action to fear of the final product quality and the reader's reactions (80-79).

2.2 Anxiety, motivation, and learning enjoyment

Russell (2020) states that distance learners must take responsibility for their work, manage time and course load, and be ready to learn despite the physical distance (space and time) and the psychological (separation from colleagues). Failure to meet these conditions will be a basis for manifestations of anxiety (342). Coryell & Clark (2009), however, testify that even learners who came with high motivation to learn a language to integrate into culture also expressed anxiety in distance learning. The reason is that the production of language in remote space is perceived by learners as a live performance of correctness and accuracy, and not as an indication of developing communication skills within the community. This perception makes learners focus on memorization and error avoidance. They avert from producing meaningful communication and the enjoyment of it. According to Curiel and Klar (2009), learners who are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, appreciate learning communication skills but during communication attempts in distance learning, enthusiasm turned into anxiety for fear of being caught as a fool (493). As for enjoyment, Grant et al. (2013) found that remote learning is not necessarily more fun or interesting, but feelings of enjoyment are important in the learning process (7).

2.3 Anxiety and Cooperative Learning



The researchers' opinion on shared work is consistent. Hauck and Hurd (2005) conclude that anxiety levels will decrease if learners cooperate, feel part of a supportive community, and experience a non-threatening learning environment. These conditions will increase self-confidence, motivation, a sense of cohesion, and the development of mutual trust (17). Speech activity in small groups allows more thinking time towards language production and learners don't feel as if they are under a magnifying glass, and able to communicate with others at a similar level of proficiency. Role-playing using synchronous platforms isn't a threatening experience and allows ease of speech. Using Wikis in collaborative writing reduces anxiety levels among learners. Uploading videos, responding to content by other learners, proofreading, and editing others, found a measure of low language anxiety (Yen et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018; Baralt and Gurzynski, 2011). Curiel and Clark (2009) conclude that language learning in remote space which doesn't allow a high degree of learner interaction, will lead, among other things, to anxious learners.

2.4 Anxiety and learning strategies

The Oxford model (1990) distinguishes between direct and indirect strategies in language learning. Direct strategies include cognitive strategies of repetition, memorizing, and guessing. Indirect strategies include metacognitive actions of organizing and planning information, techniques of emotion control during lessons, and cooperation with others to practice the language (17). Hauck and Hurd (2005) examined the experience of anxiety in distance learning and metacognitive strategies of learners. It appears that metacognitive strategies of self-management, planning, organization, and assessment, are necessary for all remote learners who experience language anxiety. Hurd (2007) proved this in a follow-up study and showed that using indirect strategies, primarily taking risks, and guessing, giving positive self-feedback, and the use of calming techniques, were the ones that helped to reduce anxiety.

3. Summary and Conclusions

A summary of studies indicates the level of language anxiety in the remote space is in general like the traditional classroom (Baralt and Gurzynski, 2001; Pichette, 2009; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018; Hurd, 2007). Learners often come to remote language classes by choice, accompanied by different assumptions and perceptions about the traditional classroom and the remote world. Combining concepts in relation to the two learning spaces creates new assumptions and approaches that are not necessarily correct. When these assumptions are encountered, the level of anxiety may increase or decrease (Pichette, 2009; Webb & Doman, 2019; Russell, 2020). It was found that in remote courses, anxiety levels decrease, but it is not clear if the reasons for this are the characteristics of the learning channel (synchronous or asynchronous) or the amount of exposure to the target language (Pichette, 2009; Russell, 2020). Another variable is cooperative work which indicates low levels of anxiety (Baralt and Gurzynski, 2005; Yen et al. 2013; Aydin 2018). As for the modes of communication, it seems that there are higher anxiety levels in productive processes than in receptive processes (Russell, 2020; Hurd, 2006; Grant et al. 2013; Aydin, 2018). Distance language learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous, raises fear of criticism and negative evaluation of peers and teachers (Hurd, 2006; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Baralt & Gurzynski, 2011; Grant et al. 2013; Yeng & Quadir, 2018; Russell, 2020). Finally, the use of metacognitive methods, emotional and social, reduces anxiety in the remote space (Hurd, 2006). As in the physical class, and in the remote class, the presence of learning enjoyment increases the degree of motivation and allows a reduction in anxiety (Coryell & Clark, 2009; Grant et al. 2013).

4. Pedagogical recommendations

To create a remote learning environment with less anxiety experience, it's recommended to take the following pedagogical actions: [1] Check the learner's familiarity with the remote space and give guidance on the use of platforms (Russell, 2020; Aidyn, 2018). [2] Inform the learners about learning strategies that can optimize the learning process (Bown, 2006; Russell, 2020; Hauck & Hurd, 2005). [3] Repeat instructions several times and allow practice time for cooperative work before presenting to the entire class. Before asynchronous tasks, practice and demonstrate in a synchronous class to make sure that



learners are aware of the task's nature and its objectives (Russell, 2020; Pichette, 2009; Aidyn, 2018). [4] Give learners open, encouraging, and supportive feedback, emphasizing that there is no expectation of perfection, and create a supportive learning community by providing collaborative assignments (Bown, 2006); Russell, 2020). [5] Provide authentic, humorous, and up-to-date content, which gives opportunities and encourages to get to know the target culture (Russell, 2020; Pichette, 2009).

Recognizing the nature of language anxiety, its character, and modes of expression allows one to identify feelings of frustration and discomfort among language learners, whether they learn in the remote space willingly or out of necessity. The learner's perceptions of language learning, remote space, task types, cognitive factors, and metacognitive, emotional, and social, all influence anxiety and shape its nature in the process of remote language learning.

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