

Foreign Language Learners & Communication Apprehension

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المستخلص :

يهدف هذا البحث الى استكشاف العوامل التي تسبب ظاهرة التخوف من التكلم باللغة الاجنبية لدى الطلبة وبالتالي تؤخر عملية تعلم اللغة. حيث تمنع هذه الظاهرة الطلبة من المشاركة في الحوارات الصفية الضرورية لتعلم اللغة . اعتمد الباحث في جمع البيانات الاولى على بعض الدراسات السابقة التي تعاملت مع هذه الظاهرة كما قام الباحث اضافة الى مراقبة هذه الظاهرة في صفوف الطلبة باجراء مقابلات لعدد من طلبة المرحلة الثالثة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية لغرض جمع البيانات الاولى. اظهرت الدراسة بعض العوامل المسببة لهذه الظاهرة كما قدمت الدراسة بعض التوصيات لمدرسي اللغة الاجنبية والتي تساعد طلبة اللغات الاجنبية على تجاوز هذه الظاهرة .

Abstract

This qualitative research aims at exploring the factors that cause foreign language communication apprehension among university students. This phenomenon affects the oral performance of the students and prevents them from participating in classroom conversation. The research also aims at finding new methods to diminish this phenomenon which delay the process of foreign language learning.

The researcher has reviewed some previous researches which dealt with the same topic as data-bases for the current study. In addition to the classroom observation, the researcher has interviewed (10) university students who are at the third stage in the department of English as a purposeful sampling to collect information concerning foreign language apprehension. The findings of the study have introduced some conclusions as well as some recommendations for teachers of foreign to

help the students cope with the phenomenon of foreign language communication apprehension.

Introduction

Foreign language learners especially at an advanced level of study or adults acquire that feeling of fear and anxiety when speaking that language in front of the others. a learner of a foreign language who has the ability to speak that language will make mistakes at a much higher rate than he or she will make in any other area of study. Such a person will also very likely suffer a drop in self-confidence that is not simply linguistic, for one is unable to be one's "normal self" and establish equal relationship; one's self-concept may be undermined and one is subjected to negative evaluations.

Horwitz et al (1986) observe that people may feel they are reduced to a childlike state when they have to use another language, an experience fraught with potential embarrassment. That kind of feelings which nearly most foreign language students experience in classes especially at college, where the learners are quite aware of their performance, is called "foreign language communication apprehension".

(Spielberger,1983) named that feeling as a state of anxiety which is experienced at a particular moment in time , for example a student who has to speak in a foreign language in front of his classmates.

1-1 Statements of the problem

From my experience in teaching English as a foreign language at different colleges in Iraq as well as in other countries, I have noticed that there is a negative relationship between communication apprehension and learners' performance. That feeling of apprehension is responsible for the students' weak performance and their uncomfortable experience in language classes.

1-2-The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of foreign language apprehension on the performance of the foreign language learners and to investigate the causes of that feeling that affects the process of foreign language learning .The study's main objective is to find ways to diminish students ' apprehension which therefore improves their performance in foreign language learning. The current study will try to answer the following questions:

1-What are the causes for “communication apprehension”?

2-How can “communication apprehension “be overcome or reduced?

1-3-The Scope &Significance of the Study

The study will be significant to three fields of education; the field of foreign language teaching, the field of foreign language learning, and the field of foreign language syllabuses design. It will be of some importance to the teachers of foreign languages in helping them choose the appropriate strategies and methods of teaching which can help the learners overcome their feeling that causes apprehension and which has a negative effect towards the acquisition of foreign language. The study will also help university students find the solutions to cope with communication apprehension or help them to overcome that feeling which negatively affects their oral performance. Consequently, this will enable them to participate in classroom conversations which is necessary in foreign language learning. This study will also help foreign language syllabus designers establish the appropriate textbooks which contain the types of foreign language exercises and activities that make easy the learners ' participation and help them master the spoken aspect of the foreign language .

1-4-Definition of terms

Communication Apprehension has been defined as “individual level of fear or anxiety with either real or anticipated communication with others (McCroskey,1977).

Foreign Language Apprehension is defined as “apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time, for example , having to speak in a foreign language in front of classmates” (Spielberger, 1983).

2-Literature Review

This topic has been dealt with by several researchers and their findings could be of great help to the current study. Their findings can be considered as the foundation for this study which is specifically conducted to deal with an issue faced by the university students who are studying English as a foreign language .The following studies are taken as a base for the current study :

Communication Apprehension in English Language Classrooms

By: Muhammad Akram, Ph.D Candidate (2009)

This study considers good communication extremely important for the cordial atmosphere. It also considers effective communication as a must in language classroom in order to perform better in the classroom activities. The present study highlights the importance of the communication on the one hand and on the other it throws light on the students 'Communication Apprehension in English classroom context at university level. The study shows, if provided with proper facilitation, the students can better their performance in their language classroom activities and can achieve better results .The study also provides some solutions to overcome communication apprehensions. As referred to by the study, communication apprehension can be

classified into oral communication apprehension which prevents the students from participating in classroom conversation and written communication apprehension which is the cause of the student 'avoidance of written tasks, a feeling of frustration and poor performance when faced with a written task and a fear of having one's writing read publicly and evaluated by others.

This study has expanded communication apprehension to include the following types of communication apprehension:

1. State –like communication apprehension or anxiety associated with particular communication contexts.
2. Personal traits which contribute to communication apprehension.

The findings of the study refer to the causes of the communication apprehension as follows:

1. physical causes such as a speech impediment, poor mental ability, deafness and poor sight.
2. Emotional causes which might be less obvious, but failure to take time to understand a situation will lead to a false perception of the issues and could even cause us to censure someone wrongly.

A Study on Second Language Speaking Anxiety Among UTM Students By Khairi Izwan Abdullah & Nurul Lina Bt Abdul Rahman Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

The aim of this study is to investigate students ' anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language and to identify the types of speaking activities that cause high anxiety level among the students .Communication apprehension ,fear of negative evaluation and general feeling of anxiety are among the factors studied in this research.

The instrument used for this study was adapted from Horwitz's (1983) Foreign Language classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The data was obtained by a questionnaire that consists of 32 items, each one on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS version 10.0 Windows and were represented in the form of descriptive statistics which include percentages and mean. Results from this study show that students experienced moderate level of anxiety.

The findings of the study show that 58 respondents (96.7%) experienced a moderate level of anxiety towards speaking English as a second language and only 2 respondents (3.3%) who experienced low anxiety level. These findings suggest that a majority of students experienced moderate feelings of anxiety when communicating in English with other people. In the real language use situation, it is normal for second language learners to feel some anxiety. As stated by Hadey (1992), moderate feelings of anxiety.

In second language learning might help students to create the desire to learn, to motivate and to get the students to realize that they have to work harder in order to acquire the target language. On the other hand, if the students experience low level of anxiety, they may be so relaxed that they do not really learn or acquire any new things and as a result, the process of language acquisition will not be successful. For students who experience high anxiety, they may perceive a second language learning situation as threatening to them and may respond to this threatening situation by showing poor learning performance. This view that anxiety (apprehension) can affect learners' learning performance is supported by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) who found that students with high communicative anxiety tended to have lower scores on oral and written vocabulary tests. The results presented in their research

tend to indicate that anxiety or (communication apprehension) might lead to deficit in learning and performance.

Foreign Language Communication Apprehension of Germans Learning English /A thesis-Master of Arts/ Texas Tech University

By

Paul Reginal Pyrne(1997)

This study introduced a case study where a German student who used to speak publicly In high school .During his high school career he joined the speech and debate team, made class presentations, and even entered speaking contests. Upon arrival at college he continued in this tradition by declaring communication studies as his major and getting involved in organizations which required him to make presentations to peers. During a university –sponsored orientation, this student spoke in front of an audience of over 2,500 people. One can then imagine his surprise when he shook and sweat uncontrollably every time he had to give a speech in German in front of his friends.

A person who tested very low on a test for general communication apprehension must cope with Foreign Language Anxiety .McCroskey (1977) defines communication apprehension as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated oral communication”. The research study has divided communication apprehension into four categories; Trait, situational, audience-based, and context-based.

*Trait apprehension is a part of the person’s personality, usually stemming from shyness or general quietness. In any given situation, regardless of the variable, a person with trait communication apprehension will feel uncomfortable.

*Situational communication apprehension arises when a person finds himself in a unique set of circumstances which could be the defense of

one's thesis .Even though a person could test low on a communication apprehension scale. He could experience high levels of fear and communication apprehension in this unique, one-time situation.

*Audience based communication apprehension occurs when a person experiences fear or nervousness when having to speak to a particular person or group of people. With this type of communication apprehension, a person could feasibly communicate without problems to his spouse, but not feel comfortable talking to his boss, co-workers, parents, in-laws ,or other person or group.

*The last category of communication apprehension is context-based. This means that a Person experiences communication apprehension every time that he is in a given context. This could be at meeting ,within small groups ,one-to-one talks, or in the classroom .Much of the research regarding context-based communication apprehension has been collected in public speaking courses , probably because public speaking is a fairly common type of context-based communication in the United States, and because communication scholars who study communication apprehension usually have ready access to university students in public speaking courses .But as research in this area has expanded ,scholars have begun to look at context-based CA in other academic areas ,as well as other non-academic areas of the work force.

Foreign Language Anxiety of University Students

College Students Journal Dec, 2001 by Matt A. Casado, Mary

This study investigates the perceived levels of anxiety experienced by a randomly selected sample of beginning foreign language students in a regular university setting.

The results indicate that some levels of anxiety were present in beginner classes and that these levels did not decrease after the

completion of the second semester of language acquisition .The implication of the findings for anxiety, reduction programs are discussed.

The study discusses the relationship of anxiety to foreign language learning which has provided mixed and confusing results because of existence of numerous variables that can affect learning .Two of these variables are trait anxiety (an anemic state of some individuals to become anxious in any situation), and state anxiety (apprehension experienced at a particular moment in time, for example, having to speak in a foreign language in front of classmates) (Spielberger, 1983). Another variable that may affect language acquisition is the students' perceptions of their own communicative competence in both native and second language. This effect is compounded by the fact that these students tend to underestimate their competence relative to less anxious students (MacIntyre ,Noels and Clement,1997), and therefore become themselves anxious about their performance. Language learning can also be affected by direct and indirect psychological strategies used by instructors In the classroom .In a setting where the instructor uses a variety of strategies , language is facilitated .Thus ,direct strategies such as rhyming or using gestures can directly enhance the learning of the foreign language. Indirect strategies , such as planned teaching tasks or increasing cultural awareness ,if used by the instructor ,can also increase language acquisition (MacIntyre and Noel,1996),and subsequently reduce apprehension.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and compare the perceived levels of anxiety experienced by a randomly-selected sample of foreign language (Spanish)students in a regular university setting at the beginning of their first semester with the levels of anxiety perceived by a similar sample of foreign language students at the end of their second semester .The study 's main objective is to ascertain the levels

of anxiety for the two groups and to find if apprehension diminishes as students progress in the study of the language . If substantial levels of apprehension are found, the discussion of anxiety reduction programs is warranted.

Anxiety is usually measured in one of the three ways: by behavioral tests, where the actions of a subject is observed ;by the subject's self-report of internal feeling and reactions; or by physiological tests ,where measures of heart rate ,blood pressure, or palmer sweating are taken .Of these three measures ,the self-reports and paper-and- pencil tests are not easily quantifiable as the physiological tests, but they do an advantage in that they are much more precise in focusing on a specific affective construct ,say anxiety ,than the physical measures which can only assume to be related to affective involvement. For these reasons, self-report and paper-and-pencil tests have been used more abundantly in applied psychology than the physiological tests (Scovel,1978). Some of these behavioral tests have been used to measure the effects of anxiety on foreign language acquisition.

3-The Research Methodology

Introduction

This part of the research deals with the method of conducting this study. It will consist of the principles of sampling, data collection. Data analysis and the findings of the whole study or the conclusions with the recommendations.

Purposeful Sampling

This research study used the purposeful sampling for conducting the qualitative research in which some individuals were intentionally selected to learn about the central phenomenon The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are" information rich"(Patton ,1990.P.169).In any given qualitative study, the researcher

may decide to study a site (e.g., a college campus or a library). In this study, ten college students who have experienced (communication apprehension) have been interviewed to get some information about the causes of this psychological phenomenon which delays the process of the foreign language acquisition.

Data collection

The purposeful sampling which has been selected to be interviewed consists of ten Iraqi students in the department of English in their third-year college who met the interviewer in the college library. The interviewer has asked for their permission in advance before starting the procedure of the interview. They have been introduced to the following questions:

1. How do you feel when you talk in English in front of others?
2. What do you think is the reason for that feeling?
3. Do you prefer group-work or individual work? Why?

Here are quotations from the students' answers to the first question.

1. "I feel confused and scared when I talk English in front of my classmates. I expect that they will laugh at me when I make mistakes.
2. "I always feel embarrassed when I talk to others using English though I like English language. I think everyone will criticize me if I make a mistake."
3. "Although I am quite confident of myself and my English language, but I feel scared and hesitant when I talk in front of others and everyone looks at me. I don't feel the same when I speak in Arabic"
4. "When I use English I feel anxious. I love English but I lack a little bit of fluency."

5. “ I have the feeling of fear of making mistakes in front of my teacher and friends”
6. “ when I have to answer the English teacher I feel anxious and I can’t answer though I know the answer.”
7. “I prefer not to talk in English because I experience kind of fear and anxiety when I talk in front of the others. I feel uncomfortable and usually forget what to say or how to express myself.”
8. “I feel confused and have the feeling of fear because I am not sure of my pronunciation.”
9. “ I feel unconfident of my English because I don’t practice it in real situations.
10. “I feel hesitant because English is not my native language and I usually make mistakes.”

As for the answers of the second question if they prefer group work rather than individual work ,their answers are as follows:

1. “I prefer group-work because I feel more secure with each other.”
2. “ I prefer group- work because that makes me feel more confident and we encourage each other.”
3. “I prefer group-work because I learn from the others who may be good at English and can speak it fluently.”
4. “I prefer group-work and that makes me sure of myself especially when I work with my friends”
5. “I think group-work is the best way of learning the foreign language because we can learn from everyone in the group.”
6. “I can work better when I work with the group”
7. “I prefer group-work because we can learn from each other and can correct our mistakes.”

8. "I love group work and I feel encouraged when I work with my colleagues ."
9. "I prefer group –work because we can help each other to perform good work."
10. "I prefer group-work because we can work without fear and anxiety."

Data analysis

In qualitative research, the information obtained from the participants is not expressed in numerical form. The emphasis is on the stated experiences of the participants and on the stated meanings they attach to themselves, to other people and to their environment. Qualitative analysis is often less influential than that of the quantitative; the findings which are reported are subjective and impressionistic.

(Coolican,1994)suggested a satisfactory approach to see whether the findings obtained from a qualitative analysis can be replicated .This can be comparing from an interview study with those from an observational study .As a result from the data obtained by the interviewing, all the participants experience sort of communication apprehension when talking in English in front of others. That feeling as the participants said comes from their lack of confidence in their knowledge concerning the foreign language and which in turn prevents them from participating in oral conversation with others. They also find difficulties in talking in the foreign language because of the differences between their native language (Arabic) and the foreign language (English). They need as they suggested more practice in using the foreign language.

4-Conclusions

1. Communication Apprehension is a psychological phenomenon which most of the foreign language learners experience .
2. Communication Apprehension is a feeling of fear and anxiety which prevents the foreign language learners from participating with others using the foreign language which in turn delays their learning.
3. Communication Apprehension is caused by the differences between the native language and the foreign language(grammar ,pronunciation, as well as cultural differences)

5- Recommendations for foreign language teachers.

The following recommendations can help the foreign language learners overcome communication Apprehension among foreign language learners, if applied by foreign language teachers:

1. Focus on oral aspect f the language by giving the learners chances to speak in the foreign language without putting emphasis on the correction in order not to embarrass the learners
2. Change your strategies so that every learner can participate in oral conversations.
3. Use tapes and compact disks to supplement the learners' listening skills. The more they hear the language spoken the faster they will acquire native accent .According to Stephen Krashen , language learning is a matter of acquisition, "Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding".
4. encourage group-work in your teaching .The learners feel more comfortable and secure when working together .Group work

reduces learning anxiety and help the learners communicate using the target language.

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