COPING WITH LANGUAGE ANXIETY OF SECOND LANGUAGE USERS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract: Language learner anxiety requires appropriate approach. This article proposes two ways approaches to redeem the language learner level of anxiety namely learner centre solution and classroom setting. In some respects, the best solution to cope the learners' anxiety is by considering holistic approach by looking at both learners' personal factor and classroom management. It is suggested that language teachers should learn not only about teaching materials but also psychology of the students and class psychology.

Keywords: *Language user, anxiety, learner solution, class management*

For the last thirty years, many studies have focused on the negative impact of language anxiety on the second language acquisition. Many theories gained from different avenues have been proposed to explain what the causes language anxiety and what variables may affect it, and more importantly, how to cope with it. There are two main theories which view the cause of second language anxiety from different perspectives and use different avenues to suggest coping strategy to remedy learners' language anxiety.

The first theory views language anxiety as the result of the learners' distinctive self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986 p. 125, as cited in Second Language Anxiety and Coping Strategies).

Horwitz et. al. view language anxiety as the learners' own personal problem. Conversely, Davies and Rinvolucri (1990, cited in Turula) view the language anxiety as not merely matter of learners' weak personality and negative self-image. They try to

analyze deeper and correlate the learners' language anxiety with classroom management. They hypothesize that the classroom management and the dynamics may affect students' language anxiety. Therefore, they propose a different approach.

It is acknowledged that language anxiety is one affective factor which takes vital role in learning new language (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 2004). Similarly, Gardner (1985) opined that language achievement both second and foreign language learners are much influenced by individual differences as defined as particular situation.

This paper would like to analyze those two different approaches and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of creating proper classroom management and dynamic to alleviate second language learners' anxiety. From this starting point, I would like to conclude what may be the effective way to cope with learners' language anxiety. Many strategies are offered to cope with language anxiety resulting

from students' personal characteristics. Therefore, this will limit the discussion to five strategies that Kondo and Ying-ling propose. These are: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation.

LEARNER CENTERED SOLUTION

To find out how the students cope with their language anxiety, Kondo and Ying-Ling conducted one research. The participants of their research were 209 Japanese students who enrolled in basic English Courses at two universities in Central Japan. There were 3 phases in their research. The first measures students' level of anxiety by using Kondo's English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, the second gathers the respondents' personal strategy in coping their language anxiety by asking them to fill in an open-ended questionnaire and the third clusters the strategies. The researchers identified 5 categories of strategy: Preparation (60.4%), resignation (28.2%), positive thinking (26.2%), relaxation (11.9%), and peer seeking (11.4%) (Kondo & Ying Ling, 2004, p. 258)

Preparation. It is interesting to note here that preparation was the most frequently used strategy. This indicates the correlation between language incapability/deficit and language anxiety. Many second language learners find themselves nervous when they had not prepared before class. There are many ways to prepare including reading the materials before class, taking second language courses provided in or out of school, asking help from friends and teachers, focusing on specific areas which cause anxiety.

Preparation seems to be a good solution since it has two strong positive implications. The first is this strategy may enable the anxious learners to know that they are actually at the same level as good learners. This is supported by MacIntyre, Noels and Clement, 1997, cited in Casado 2001) who note that the anxious learners tend to underestimate their own competency than less anxious ones. This may affect their second language acquisition. What they require is just good preparation. This may alleviate their feelings of inferiority and lead them to study even harder than confident learners. The second point is this strategy shows them how to control their anxiety, stress, and insecurity. Good preparation which results in good performance shows them that feeling anxious is quite normal and therefore, they should not be too anxious about their language anxiety. What they should work on is how to turn this anxiety into a learning motivation.

This is supported by Argaman and Abu-Rabia (2002, p. 146) who state that the right amount of language anxiety and learners' effort to keep their self-esteem may lead to the higher academic achievement. One of those efforts is preparing and practicing task before class. The anxious learners may perform as good as the non-anxious learners when they have sufficient time to prepare and practice the tasks (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, cited in Argaman & Abu-Rabi, 2002, p. 152). Therefore, anxious learners may need more extra time to study.

MacIntyre and Gardner's concept lead me to raise a question of why the anxious learners need some more extra time to study if they are at the same level of cognitive capacity as the non-anxious learners. The more time needed to study in this case may imply that the anxious learners in fact have lower cognitive capacity. This problem involves both cognitive and psychological aspects. Therefore, psychological approach should be taken into account. This is supported by Argaman and Abu-Rabi (2002, p. 146) who find that the anxiety involves a

complicated psychological component. The anxious learners may need more task processing time because of their mental block. This may be caused by fear of using second language and the nervousness. Their mental block can be manifested in forgetfulness, sleep disturbances, difficulty in concentrating. In spite of their anxiety, anxious second language learners are basically those who are good at other didactic fields (Horwitz et.al, cited in argaman and Abu-Rabi, 2002, p. 147).

It seems that preparation is a suitable strategy for some language learners, but not for all. Spielberg (1983, cited in Casado, 2001) differentiates between trait anxiety and situational anxiety. He defines trait anxiety as a condition of being anxious in any situation, while situational anxiety is being anxious only in certain circumstances. This means that trait anxiety can be an innate characteristic, a component of one's personality. It is also supported by Daly (1991, cited in Argaman and Abu-Rabi, 2002, p. 144) that language anxiety is genetically inherited. Trait anxiety plays more important role than the environmental and situational factors. In this case, preparation may be less effective because learners with innate anxiety may be anxious in any situation, including when preparing before class. Therefore, instead of preparing well, those students may become more frustrated at being unable to do so. Moreover, highly anxious students are likely to find difficulty in understanding the class instruction or misinterpreting the task. Therefore, they may not be able to make good preparation because of their misinterpretation. This is supported by Zaidner (1998, p.66, cited in Kondo and Ying-Ling , 2004, p.263) who states that there is a lot of evidence showing that anxious people experience a relatively high level of task-irrelevant thoughts in evaluation setting.

These two classes of anxiety may lead the researchers to recommend different avenue to cope with language anxiety. Those who believe more on the personality as the cause of language anxiety may propose learners' personal solution, such as therapy, engage in language and study counseling, and preparation. Conversely, those who view the situation as more important in influencing language anxiety propose different avenues, such as promoting classroom dynamics and using the community language learning.

Resignation. The anxious learners may resign themselves by giving up, stopping paying attention, accepting the situation, stopping making any effort, even going to sleep in class.

It seems that this is an extreme strategy. However, it was the second most used strategy, after preparation. 28.2% of the participants used this strategy. This may be because "accepting the reality" is one of many ways to reduce stress and tension. They do not want to try and re-try after failing because they are afraid of more stress. They may ask themselves "why should I try to learn if I will fail again and again?". This explanation is also supported by Ely (1986, cited in Turula). She notes that one characteristic of anxious learners is reluctant to take risks.

Resignation seems to be one possible strategy. However, this only offers a temporary quick solution. Later, those students may face greater problems. They may not be able to acquire proper mastery of the second language and may also fail in examination. Moreover, they may also fail in getting a job which requires good mastery of that language.

To my mind, there are a contradiction between learners who cope their language anxiety by preparation and resignation in terms of

learning perception. First, those who use the preparation perceive the inability in doing tasks may reduce their self-esteem academically. Therefore, they study harder to get good academic achievement to keep their self-esteem (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002 p.142). However, this may also bring a potential hazard. The anxious learners may study overly. Therefore, they may spend excessive studying hours before tests. They become extremely concerned about their mark in the test. Consequently, making mistakes in the test may stress them, even more severe than before.

Conversely, the learners who use resignation as the solution perceive that any learning efforts may be worthless. The cause of this perceptual difference can be traced psychologically, since it relates to the defense mechanism concept. Defense mechanism refers to the internal conflict between wish and reality. By using preparation strategy, at first the learners wish that they will get good mark or can master second language well. They may feel that they can control their anxiety if the reality says so.

Furthermore, this reality may increase their self-esteem and convince them they can cope their anxiety by preparation. However, these learners may divert from preparation to resignation if the reality show that they can not control their anxiety. This may be proven by bad mark or incapability to master second language at least at the same standard as the non-anxious and confident learners.

Conversely, learners who resign may not have positive wish to be success in their learning. They tend to convince themselves that they are not good at learning second language. This perception may be gained through the accumulation of reality that shows their fail.

Positive Thinking. Some anxious learners try to develop a positive self-image. They use various ways, such as trying to be confident, imagining themselves giving a great performance, thinking of something pleasant, or not thinking of the consequences.

This strategy tends to focus on learners' personal emotion. It basically shows that the anxious learners have levels of cognition equal to the confident learners. What makes them different is the problem of psychological factors, such as mental block, fear of making mistakes which may reduce their self-esteem, too shy to communicate with environment. These factors may disturb their learning process and performance. Horwitz et al. (1986, cited in Argaman and Abu-Rabi, 2002, p. 148) note that language anxiety shared some common mental characteristics, such as fear of being ridiculed in class, too shy to communicate with others, and anxious of under-performing compared with the other learners.

To my mind, the fact that basically anxious learners are potential learners in spite of their anxiety as indicated by students who can perform well in everyday class task, yet they gat bad mark in their test. What makes the anxious learners may get worse mark in test is their test anxiety. They tend to be afraid of making mistakes and being worse than their other friends and are more sensitive of what others think about them. Moreover It may be true that the anxious learners tend to have lower level of resilience, in this case, the inability to accept failure. Conversely, the non-anxious learners tend to have good resilience. This is supported by Wenden and Rubin (1987, cited in Turula) who show that good learners are characterized as having positive attitude and outgoing, while anxious learners tend to feels apprehension and frustrated (Arnold and Brown, 1999, cited in Turula).

This strategy implies a different perspective from "preparation". Positive thinking emphasizes the need to control negative emotion because the negative emotion may block the cognitive process whereas preparation focuses on using cognition to control anxiety. This may be based on different perspectives on viewing what blocking good second language performance. Ganschow and Sparks (1996, cited in Argaman and Abu-Rabi, 2002, p. 150) state that the language anxiety is caused by low abilities. On other word, low ability may cause language anxiety. Therefore, good preparation may increase the learners' ability.

The increasing ability may alleviate learners' anxiety. Conversely, Horwitz te. al (cited in Argaman and Abu- Rabi, 2002, p. 147) notes that language anxiety may impede second learners' performance. In this case, learners' low anxiety may be caused by language anxiety. Therefore, approach focused on learners' emotion, including having positive thinking may alleviate learners' language anxiety.

In my belief, these two strategies should be applied side by side. Having a positive thinking without enough preparation may lead to bad performance. This bad performance (in reality) may contradict with their positive thinking and wish. This may decrease learners' positive thinking because the reality shows that they are incapable. Conversely, it may be impossible to perform well without enough preparation and sense of self-confidence. Therefore, positive thinking should be supported by positive reality.

Peer-Seeking. Some anxious students cope with their language anxiety by comparing themselves with others who have the same problems. These students may find a suitable learning partner to talk to or build a small-scale support group with others who experience the same thing.This strategy is a good solution, especially if the students can share their experiences and strategies with their learning partner. However, it may have a drawback in terms of loss of a sense of belonging. Depending on one or two partners may reduce the sense of belonging to the class, create a gap between anxious learners and those who are non-anxious. This gap may create feelings of isolation in the classroom.

To eliminate learners' isolated feeling in class, Koba, Ogawa, and Wilkinson (In Using the Community Language Approach to Cope With Language Anxiety) suggest the application of Community Language Learning (CLL). They believe that CLL may provide techniques to reduce anxiety by using conversational circle and fun teaching method. CLL may work on learners whose anxiety roots on uncomfortable classroom atmosphere. It may not be very effective in alleviating anxiety caused by both different level of cognitive capacity and personality. The peer-seeking phenomenon shows that proper classing should also receive more attention and should also be taken into account as one way to reduce anxiety. Therefore, before starting second language program analysis on level of language anxiety should be carried out. Learners should be group based on their level of anxiety rather than based on their age. Thus, in my opinion, CLL may be more effective if the students are classified based on level of their language anxiety.

Relaxation. Many anxious learners may feel "audience fear" when they have to speak in front of their other friends or public or when they are being appointed by the teacher to answer the question. One of many strategies to relieve this fear is relaxation. Grasha (1987, cited in Second Language anxiety and coping Strategies) suggests

that breathing deeply in and out for three to five minutes is an effective way to reduce tension. However, this only offers a quick relaxation technique. It is not sufficiently effective for high anxiety students because it only focuses on relieving anxiety physically and it may not work for longer than just a few minutes. Moreover it may work only on situational anxiety.

THE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The learning environment may be one of many sources of language anxiety. Turula considers the circumstances in classroom dynamics as one of many sources of situational anxiety. This is supported by Young (1991, cited in Arganman and Abu_Rabia, 2002, p. 145) who state that Processes, atmosphere, and events in class may be the source of language anxiety. Different from Hadfield who only focuses on the importance of conducive class atmosphere, Young considers the existence of other anxiety-provoking factors, including personality component, learners and teachers beliefs about language learning, teachers-students interaction, tests in the second language.

In the classroom, the teacher plays a principal role. The teacher should use implicit error-correction (Turula). This is based on the idea that by correcting the students' mistakes implicitly, the teacher believes in the capability of the students to make self-correction. This may raise self-confidence among the students. They may think that can correct their own mistakes. Moreover, Prodromou (1994, cited in Turula) suggests the teacher should use the students' name when eliciting and asking questions. This may also raise the students' feelings of self-worth.

The layout of the classroom may also affect the students' interaction (Turula). Desk arrangement which lets the students face one another may contribute to good classroom interaction between student-teacher and between students. This may increase the students' feeling of belonging. This feeling is crucial because it is the foundation for applying and developing effective learning strategies.

The proper classroom layout may allow the students to help each other. This mutual assistance may have a double effect. The first effect is increasing students' cognitive skills because the anxious learners may get some help from non-anxious ones to prepare before class. The second strategy is alleviating anxiety. By knowing that the other students are ready to help them whenever they need, anxious students may feel that they are not being isolated in the classroom. This covers the positive thinking strategy because this may let them know that non-anxious learners are also their friends, and there no need to consider them as a threat.

Koba et. al. (Using the Community Language Learning approach to cope with Language Anxiety) support the importance of seat arrangement. They show that the conversational circle in CCL which enable the students to face each other may help the students to build class community. This face-to face interaction may promote co-operative learning in which the students can work together to solve the problem (Joan, 1993).

The effective class community may enable the students to feel comfortable because they have non-competitive atmosphere. All of the students may work together, sharing skill and academic capability. However, in my belief this atmosphere may pose a potential hazard. This may fade the spirit of motivation among students, since motivation to learn can be grown through a positive competition among students. Thus, this may promote

double effect: the positive and negative effect. The positive effect is this may be very effective to alleviate the in-class language anxiety. The negative effect is this may fade the students' motivation out. Therefore, the education field still needs a concept on classroom management which can both enhance the students' motivation and reduce their language anxiety.

Considering classroom setting is a good idea, since it may provide strategy that may cover two learners' centered-strategy. Those are: preparation and positive thinking. However, the above proposed classroom management strategy seems to be very difficult to apply in a big class. The teacher may find managerial problem in handling a class with more than 60 students, especially when the teacher should remember the name of each students. The ideal classroom layout may also be very difficult to apply in a big class with limited space.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the various cause of language anxiety requires different approaches to cope with students' language anxiety. Some theories focus on the learners' own-solutions which imply that the problem of language anxiety lies with the learners' personal problem. An innate anxious personality may be the cause. Other theories propose classroom dynamics as an alternative cause of learners' anxiety. In some respect, general tactics to cope with language anxiety are difficult to formulate. Language anxiety involves psychological and cognitive factors and every learner is unique. Every learner has their own personality trait and cognitive capacity. Therefore, a generalized theory on coping is difficult to obtain. Each different situation needs a different strategy.

Turula may be right when considering that the classroom management may also affect students' language anxiety. This includes the layout of the ideal classroom, teacher behavior, and teacher-student interaction. However, she does not consider the matter of big class, in which there are more than 60 students in one class. Therefore, study on coping strategies needs further investigations and researches. Therefore, the best solution to cope with the learners' language anxiety is a holistic approach, which takes account of both learners' personal factor and classroom management.

It is suggested that the teacher should learn not only about the teaching materials, but also the psychology of students' personality and class psychology. However, so far, there is not sufficient research on how to cope with learners' classroom management on big class. Therefore, further research on this is necessary.

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