

PUBLIC SPEAKING: A CASE STUDY OF SPEECH ANXIETY IN L1 AND L2

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Abstract

A lot of research has confirmed that speaking in class makes the most anxiety in second and foreign language classroom (Young 1990). It is particularly true for young and inexperienced speakers (Beatty 1988). In public speaking, "a speaker presents a relatively continuous message to a relatively large audience in a unique context" (Devito 2000) can be too threatening to our students. However, fear of public speaking has been considered normal for every speaker even in their native language. It is a characteristic which many people have. In America, the Bruskin Associates conducted a nationwide survey in 1971 and revealed that the number one fear of Americans is the fear of giving a public speech. Even the fear of death came in the third. This paper investigates the causes of anxiety of public speaking on L1 and L2 and hopes to bring some suggestions to the teaching and training of speech delivery. Two questionnaires are given. An interview is conducted. Three speeches were done. The findings suggest that "friendly" and customized steps should be adopted. Self-introduction, show-and-tell speech and storytelling can be good starters. Finally, the language features of storytelling in second language teaching are exhibited.

1.0 Introduction

A lot of research has confirmed that speaking in class makes the most anxiety in second and foreign language learning. This paper investigates the causes of anxiety of public speaking on L1 and L2 and hopes to bring some suggestions to the teaching and training of speech delivery. Two questionnaires are given. An interview is conducted.

In this paper, I will use the term "speech anxiety" instead of stage fright, shyness or communication apprehension. As a speaker, I have met different kinds of "anxious speakers". I agree that speech anxiety is "the unpleasant thoughts and feelings aroused by the anticipation of a real or imagined speech in public." (P.52)

Anxious speakers may "tremble, blush and perspire" (Brydon and Scott 2006). Young and inexperienced speakers may withdraw from speaking activities (Beatty, 1988).

2.0 Literature Review

Fear of public speaking has been considered normal for every speaker even in their native language. It is a characteristic which many people have. In America, the Bruskin Associates conducted a nationwide survey in 1971 and revealed that the number one fear of Americans is the fear of giving a public speech. Even the fear of death came in the third. Many researchers have found the reasons.

2.1 Audience expectations

Ayres, J. (1986)

“the fear of public speaking emerges from a personal assessment that one’s speaking abilities fall short of audience expectations.”
(p.276)

In this paper, Ayres explains why speakers get their anxiety. He says, “as people’s perceptions of their abilities exceeds audience expectations, the likelihood they will experience some degree of stage fright decreases, and conversely, as their view of their abilities fall below their perceptions of audience expectations, the likelihood they will experience some degree of stage fright increases.” (p.277)

2.2 Sole attention

Devito (2006)

“Being fearful of giving a public speech is perfectly normal. Everyone experiences some degree of fear in the relatively formal public speaking situation. After all, in public speaking you’re the sole focus of attention and are usually being evaluated for your performance. So experiencing fear or anxiety isn’t strange or unique.” (p.269)

2.3 Social anxiety

Dale & Wolf (2006)

“Feeling nervous at the thought of public speaking is perfectly normal. You respond the same way you would to any stressful situation. Your body produces extra adrenaline. This is what makes your heart pound faster and your hands shake.” (p.1)

Due to the fact that many L2 learners have lower competence in English than in their native language, anxiety level of public speaking in the second language is expected to be higher than in the first language.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) reported that students are very self-conscious when they are required to engage in speaking activities that expose their inadequacies, and these feelings often lead to “fear, or even panic” (p. 128)

Krashen (2003)

“Ten “anxious” foreign language students interviewed by Price (1991) stated that their greatest source of anxiety “was having to speak the target language in front of their peers” (p.313).

“Of great interest here is the finding that another source of stress was the frustration of not being able to communicate effectively.”
(p.105)

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Participant

The participant is 14 years old, Form two. He started learning English when he was 3 years old. The family is very supportive. They sent him to a public speaking class for 6 months (September 2007 to March 2008). The class took place once a week and every class lasted for 2 hours.

The participant scored A in UPSR English. He is studying in a private secondary school in Johor Bahru. This is a decision of the family due to the importance of English. He has to converse in English at school. If not, he will be punished. However, he does not use English outside of school. He knows many English words and can write quite good English compositions with some avoidable grammar mistakes.

The participant took an English course which needed him to present speeches. He is opinionated. He likes to debate, in his mother tongue. However, when he started his speech in English, he did not look at his audience which had about 15 students. Besides, his voice trembled and his palms wetted. He blushed. The worst part is only he himself could hear what he was talking.

He can be considered as an “anxious” speaker in English.

When the participant was asked to give a speech in his mother tongue, he seemed more confident. He seemed to have a lot to tell. When he presented his speech, he felt more comfortable. He was still nervous but he knew he could overcome his anxiety.

The participant can be considered as a “non-anxious” speaker in his mother tongue.

3.2 Data Collection

Three instruments are used to find out the anxiety of the participants.

i. PRCA-24

McCroskey (2006) has a famous questionnaire which is known as the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). It is an instrument exploring L1 speaking anxiety. There are 24 statements. This questionnaire has been used by many researchers for more than 30 years and proven to be useful.

The participant was given a short time of 5 minutes to finish 2 PRCA-24. The first one is to check his feelings on L1 communication. The second one is to check his feelings on L2 communication.

ii. FLCAS

Another questionnaire, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), was also conducted. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). It has 33 items. The participant scores on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was developed to capture the specific essence of foreign language anxiety in a classroom setting and to provide investigators with a standard measure. The FLCAS is based on an analysis of potential sources of anxiety in a language classroom, integrating three related anxieties (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation) as posited by Horwitz et al. (1986). This scale has been used in many studies of anxiety in foreign language learning and found to be a highly reliable measure (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

iii. Interview

The interview is designed on the basis of understanding the participant's experience, ability and confidence. Questions 2 and 3 examine the ability. Questions 4, 5, 6 check the confidence. Question 1 and 7 tell whether the participant benefits from the class. Question 8 wants to find out whether anxiety correlates to negative experience.

- 1) Do you like your English presentation class?
Yes, I do.
- 2) Please tell me what you do best about your class. Why?
I like writing the most. I do not need to speak.
- 3) Please tell me what you hate the most in your class. Why?
Speaking. I cannot speak properly. I stutter. I feel cold, from head to toes then I shake my body. I always feel that.
- 4) Do you think that your English is good? Are you confident?
Yes, I think so but only in writing. When I speak, I am not confident. I cannot think of the words that I want. Then I make a lot of grammar mistakes. I feel stupid.
- 5) How do you think your classmates will react if you make mistakes?
They laugh. I feel I lose face.
- 6) Do you try to help yourself when you are worried about speaking in your class?
I usually talk to myself. I tell myself not to be nervous but it does not help me too much. If I have a choice, I don't want to speak. I don't like to be the attention.
- 7) Does this class help you to lessen your worry?
It does. The training helps me. Body gestures and vocal variety help me the most. At least I know my classmates are also not doing the best and I am not the worst.
- 8) Did you have any negative experience in speaking?
Not really. I usually won't volunteer. I haven't got any other speaking experience in other places. This is my first class.

4.0 Data Analysis

The participant did PRCA-24 (appendix 1) on February 20. He was asked to record his feelings about his L1 and L2.

The computation for L1 is as follows:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1. Group discussion | 10 | |
| 2. Meetings | 8 | |
| 3. Interpersonal conversations | 10 | |
| 4. Public speaking | 10 | Total score: 38 |

The computation for L2 is as follows:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|------------------|
| 1. Group discussion | 25 | |
| 2. Meetings | 27 | |
| 3. Interpersonal conversations | 28 | |
| 4. Public speaking | 27 | Total score: 107 |

The participant's score on public speaking is 27. It is considered to be highly anxious. Right after the questionnaire, the interview was conducted. The participant expressed his feelings on English speaking. He enjoys the class. He thinks the class can help him. But when a speech task is assigned, he shows the symptoms of an anxious speaker. In the second questionnaire (FLCAS), the participant also strongly agrees to have worries and anxiety when he is called to speak in front of his class.

5.0 Education Implications

Being able to speak good English and having an English speaking environment are the dreams of many students in this city. The participant should be an example to admire. However, he is still blocked by his problems of public speaking. This has given the researcher an interest to explore some strategies for overcoming public speaking anxiety.

The training of skills can be linguistic such as the preparation of scripts, pronunciation, and grammar, and para-linguistic such as breathing exercise, body language and confidence building. The researcher focuses on types of speeches.

In Toastmasters International Youth Leadership Program, a set of 8 prepared speeches are as follows:

1. Introduction to chairmanship
2. Introduction to public speaking
3. Impromptu speech
4. Organizing your speech
5. Listening
6. Gestures in speaking
7. Voice and vocabulary
8. Show your skills

In the speech training, the students were given three speeches to start.

1. Self-introduction
2. Show-and-tell
3. Story-telling

The three assignments are used because they are taken as easier tasks. First, writing is not much involved compared to a persuasive speech like “should handphones be allowed in schools?” Second, these topics are familiar to them. Furthermore, the other speech elements can be introduced to the students through these three. The elements are body gestures, vocal variety and eye contact.

On the first day, the participant was given a game as an ice-breaker. The class interviewed as many classmates as possible. Then, they summarized the similarities and differences of their friends and introduced some interesting facts about themselves.

“Good afternoon, everybody. This is my friend, Jack. He likes orange juice. He does not like noodles. He is studying in SMK Pelangi Indah. He has two sister(s). His father is a boss (self-employed) and his mother is a housewife.”

This is a common example used by the students. The speech is very short. The sentences are also simple and short. They are straight to the point. The pronoun ‘he’ is repeated many times. This could be a symptom of anxiety.

However, the participant felt that it is less threatening when he did that. One important finding is he felt that the game implied that the teacher is a friendly person who is also willing to help.

Then, the class was required to write down their introduction in their exercise books. The teacher explained the importance of an opening and an ending. The teacher marked the books and corrected their mistakes.

The class was required to do self-introduction one more time the following week.

In the second assignment, the teacher started with a video clip on how to make a salad. The class discussed the language used. Then, they were asked to prepare a speech. They needed to use a visual aid. Speech with visual aids is considered to be “friendly” to inexperienced speakers who sometimes may wonder where to “put their hands”. As Marrs (1992) suggests, “one way to reduce the pressure of speech making is to provide something for the audience to look at.” When the audience look at the visual aids, the speaker usually feels easier to present the speech and anxiety can be reduced.

The participant spent a week to prepare a show-and-tell speech. He chose the topic - how to wrap a birthday present. Interestingly, some of the other participants did it with a proper opening and ending.

“Good morning (afternoon), Ms Tan and all my friends. Do you know how to wrap a present? Today, I want to show you how to wrap a present. First, you need some ‘ingredients’ (materials). Then, put the present on the wrapper and fold.(pausing).....(folding).....Put a cellophane tape here. Then, it is done.”

The participant was required to talk for 3-4 minutes. However, the pausing time was about 1 minute. He was required to try again.

When the participant tried for the second time, he asked his friend to help him.

“Good afternoon, Ms Tan and all my friends. Do you have a good friend? This is my good friend, Jun Xuan. Last week was his birthday. I gave him a present. Look at this. This is the present. Do you want to know how to wrap a present like this? Let me show you. First, you need some ‘ingredients’. A wrapper, a cellophane tape, a scissor (a pair of scissors), a present. Then, put the present on the wrapper and fold..... (pausing)...you must be careful....(pausing)...when you use the scissors. Then, turn to this side. Then, ...fold here. Put a cellophane tape her. Now, it is done. Do you like the present? I hope so. Thank you.”

The participant felt that he could talk a bit more now. However, he still felt very scared. His hands trembled. His palms wetted. He found it exciting.

The teacher then asked the students to write down their speech and marked it.

The third assignment is story-telling. Jones (2001) advised second language teachers to devote part of their syllabus to the teaching of storytelling skills. The participant was required to tell a story for 3 to 5 minutes. He chose the topic of “The wolf in the sheep skin” because it was short. He memorized it, not very well.

On the day, the teacher deliberately asked two experienced female storytellers to start. The two students won in the storytelling competitions before. They were using the same stories which they used in the competitions. They appeared to be more comfortable and willing to be ‘starters’ when asked. They had been trained to use their voices and gestures by their school teachers. Every part of the story was done skillfully.

Then, the participant was called upon. He started by saying “Good afternoon, Ms Tan and all my friends. Today, I am going to tell you a story. A wolf was hungry. Suddenly, it saw a flock of sheep in a farm. (See appendix 4)

Again, the participant did not put in any of his own words. He just told all the things he memorized. He did not do any gestures for him found them very awkward. When interviewed later, he said that the story was something old-fashioned and only primary school students did it. He could not change his voice as needed. The two experienced storytellers looked ‘funny’ even though they were good. He said only girls liked it. When asked about ideas, he said he would rather tell a story of a great scientist like Thomas Edison. He did not like storytelling.

This could be a result of his voice. His weakness was exposed. He did not feel especially nervous but his resistance did not help him to perform well. In other words, he told the story because he was asked.

In this task, the researcher found that all the ed sounds in the stories done by every participant were not pronounced. “The wolf continue (continued) to catch the sheep.”

“The shepherd did not know what had happen (happened) to his sheep.” “The disguise (disguised) wolf came again.”

The teacher took this opportunity to teach the pronunciation especially the linking of sound. She told the class that words work together with each other and the language will be natural. They should learn how to put words together and sound natural.

“The wolf jumped at one of the sheep.”

“Before the disguised wolf could eat the sheep, the shepherd came out.”

“So, it is you!”

“You have been eating my sheep.”

Then, the teacher also demonstrated how to use body gestures and vary voices as needed. The assignment went on interestingly. Most of the students felt relaxed because they could all stand up and ‘play’. Then, the students were asked to reread some sentences in the stories and demonstrated the linking of sounds to the class the following week.

In all the three starters speeches, the teacher used a ‘sandwich’ evaluation strategy that she learned in the Toastmasters meetings. That is after every speaker, the teacher always said two good points that he/she had then one suggestion for him/her to improve on his/her next speech. This is to make sure that the speakers feel comfortable being evaluated.

As Littlewood (1984) pointed out the importance of the emotional climate of the learning situations.

“In the classroom, anxiety can hinder learning and make learners reluctant to express themselves through the second language. We should therefore avoid becoming over-critical of their performance, try to create space for each learner’s individuality to express itself, and work to produce a relaxed classroom atmosphere with co-operative relationships” (p.97-98)

For example,

“Jimmy, you had a very thorough preparation on your speech. Your eye contact was very good today. You looked at your audience when you spoke. If you can use some hand gestures, your speech will be wonderful. I look forward to your next speech.”

In general, the class went on quite satisfactorily. There were a lot of hiccups. The class was not exam-oriented. A lot of excuses made by the students are:

- (1) I don’t know how to do.
- (2) I forgot.
- (3) I am busy. We have a lot of homework.
- (4) Exam is coming. Teacher, postpone lah.

All in all, the research has benefited the participant and the researcher. However, this is only a case study with other limitations.

Appendix 1

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)

Directions: This instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communication with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are undecided, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree. Work quickly; record your first impression.

- _____ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- _____ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- _____ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- _____ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in a group discussion.
- _____ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in a meeting.
- _____ 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
- _____ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- _____ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me feel uncomfortable.
- _____ 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- _____ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- _____ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- _____ 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- _____ 16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- _____ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- _____ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- _____ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- _____ 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am giving a speech.
- _____ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- _____ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- _____ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- _____ 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring

The PRCA permits computation of one total score and four subscores. The subscores are related to communication apprehension in each of four common communication contexts: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. To compute your scores, merely add or subtract your scores for each item as indicated below.

Subscores Scoring Formula

Group Discussion - 18, plus scores for items 2, 4, and 6 and minus scores for items 1, 3, and 5.

Meetings - 18, plus scores for items 8, 9, and 12 and minus scores for items 7, 10, and 11.

Interpersonal Conversation - 18, plus scores for items 14, 16, and 17 and minus scores for items 13, 15, and 18.

Public Speaking - 18, plus scores for items 19, 21, and 23 and minus scores for items 20, 22, and 24.

To obtain your total score for the PRCA, simply add your four subscores together. Your score should range between 24 and 120. If your score is below 24 or above 120, you have made a mistake in computing the score. Scores on the four contexts (groups, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking) can range from a low of 6 to a high of 30. Any score above 18 indicates some degree of apprehension. If your score is above 18 for the public speaking context, you are like the overwhelming majority of Americans.

Norms for PRCA-24:

Scores	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Score	65.5	15.3
Group	15.4	4.8
Meetings	16.4	4.8
Interpersonal	14.5	4.2
Public Speaking	19.3	5.1

Source: James C. McCroskey (1993). *An introduction to rhetorical communication*, 6th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., p. 37. Used for Educational Purposes only.

Appendix 2

FOREIGN (SECOND) LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY SCALE

Directions: Each of the following statements refers to how you feel about your English language class. Please indicate whether you:

- Strongly agree = SA
- Agree = A
- Neither agree nor disagree = N
- Disagree = D
- Strongly disagree = SD

Indicate your feelings by checking the appropriate box next to each statement. Please give your first reaction to each statement. Please mark an answer for EVERY statement.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English.					
2. I DON'T worry about making mistakes in language class.					
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.					
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English language.					
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.					
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.					
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am.					
8. I am usually at ease (comfortable) during tests in my language class.					
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.					

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my language class.					
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over language classes.					
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.					
	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.					
14. I would NOT be nervous speaking the English language with native speakers.					
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.					
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.					
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.					
18. I feel confident when I speak in English in my language class.					
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.					
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.					
22. I DON'T feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.					
23. I always feel that the other students speak the English language better than I do.					
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of the other students.					
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.					
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.					

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.					
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.					
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.					
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak the English language.					
31. I am afraid that the other students in the class will laugh at me when I speak in English.					
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the English language.					
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.					

Appendix 3**Assignment 2 (3-4 minutes)****Demonstration speech.**

When we learn, we can learn better by seeing it than by telling it only. Speech is also the same. Tell us how you do something. Show us how you do it. We would love to learn from you.

Instructions:

1. Choose a topic.
2. List all essentials, ingredients or equipment needed.
3. Show the entire process, step by step.
4. Show the results.
5. Maintain eye contact with your audience.

The topics can be:

1. How to wash dishes
2. How to play a musical instrument
3. How to make a salad
4. How to wrap a birthday present
5. How to fold a paper star
6. How to play a game

Assignment 3: (3-5 minutes)

You have learned so many important lessons about life in stories. Fairy tales and fables have been accompanying us to grow. Do you know they can help us again? They are good choices for a speaker to develop gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and vocal variety.

In this assignment, you need to

1. Choose a fairy tale or fable.
2. Recite the story.
3. Play distinct roles (characters) through movements, facial expressions and vocal changes.
4. Use eye contact.
5. Vary rate.
6. Practice aloud several times.

The topics can be:

1. The three little pigs
2. Lion and Mouse
3. The princess and the pea
4. Cinderella
5. The silly goats
6. Beauty and the beast
7. The tortoise and the hare

Appendix 4

The Wolf in the Sheep Skin

A wolf was hungry. Suddenly, it saw a flock of sheep in a farm. They were eating grass. It wanted to catch those sheep.

The wolf was unlucky. There was a shepherd looking after his sheep. He had a rifle with him. "How am I going to catch those sheep?" the wolf asked itself. "The shepherd will shoot me if I go into his farm."

The wolf looked around. Then it saw a sheep's skin. It had an idea. It stole the skin. The wolf covered itself with the skin. It disguised itself as one of the sheep. "Now, I will get those sheep," it said happily. Then it walked slowly towards the other sheep.

The shepherd did not know that the wolf had disguised itself as a sheep. The wolf quietly caught one of the sheep and ran away. It ate the sheep. The wolf continued to catch the sheep and ate them one by one. It was very happy. The shepherd did not know what had happened to his sheep. After some time, the shepherd began to see that his sheep were getting less. He wanted to find out what had happened to them.

One day, the disguised wolf came again. It did not see the shepherd. The wolf jumped at one of the sheep. The shepherd was hiding behind a tree. He saw the disguised wolf. It was catching one of his sheep. Before the disguised wolf could eat the sheep, the shepherd came out. He pulled the sheep skin from the wolf.

"So, it is you! You have been eating my sheep!" the shepherd shouted angrily. The wolf could not run away. The shepherd caught the wolf. He was going to punish the bad wolf for eating his sheep.

The moral of the story is: We may be clever but we may not always be lucky. People who cheat will be caught.

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