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### A Study of Factors Affecting and Causing Speaking Anxiety

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#### Abstract

English language speaking anxiety is considered as one of the most challenging issues in teaching learning process. Educationists and researchers have undertaken numerous, in-depth research on causes and reasons for speaking anxiety. There are many internal and external factors that impact the level or intensity of speaking anxiety. This paper highlights the various factors that lead to speaking anxiety of Arts and Science college students who belong to different discipline. It also focuses on the measures taken by them to overcome speaking anxiety factors.

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## 1. Introduction

English has come a long way with all its high level of uniqueness and challenges and gained global status. As it is the language related to all academic and professional disciplines, English language has become the unique reflection of all growth and development in the recent years. English is spoken in many countries and it is considered as official language. English is the only language which serves as a link language uniting people at the global level. It is not only a language of business, industry and information, but also confers confidence, imagination and power to discover, invent, innovate and create. English is taught as second language and has also become a symbol of better life in India.

## 2. ELT and Teaching

In view of the job and academic global arena, it is evident that the significance of English language has spread widely in the present scientific and technological world. English is the only alternative language which can be used as a common language in Indian context. Right from our independence, the importance and the need for English was deeply felt in the area of higher education and research. As it has gained a special and important place, knowledge of English guarantees an entry ticket to the gateway of national and international world of job.

Therefore, teaching of English should be strengthened by improved methods, approaches and techniques. English language teaching has accomplished new magnitude and it is marching towards several tactics of teaching both at school as well as college levels in India.

### **3. Language Skills**

Language teaching concentrates on the four dimensions of Language skills and offers a strong platform for the learners to enhance their proficiency as well. Learning to speak demands more attention and requires a lot of practice. At the outset, in terms of listening and speaking, if enough opportunities are created to improve the target language, the result of language acquisition becomes effective and phenomenal.

### **4. Speaking**

Speaking is considered as the fundamental and very efficient form of human communication. It is a process through which people exchange ideas, views, opinions and all other information. The most significant process of any language learning is speaking. Students try their level best and take effort to improve this productive skill in many ways. According to students, they experience high level of anxiety during English speaking activities and experience more anxiety in speaking test than in other skills. According to Young (1990), “from the students’ perspective speaking activity in front of the class and on spot activities produce very high level of anxiety”. Necessary steps should be taken to overcome speaking anxiety issues as it causes negative effect on the academic progress and career growth.

In spite of the fact that suitable environment like language lab, classroom speaking sessions, seminars, presentations, workshops are conducted, even with the advancement of the teaching English through different innovative and creative methodology in schools and colleges, many factors are affecting learners’ English speaking abilities. These factors affecting the speaking abilities of the students are in terms of both physiological and psychological.

### **5. Anxiety**

According to Scovel (1978), “anxiety is a very complicated experience that needs to be perceived as a combination of feelings, state of emotions and personality traits”. In research study, trait and state are the two different types of anxiety variations. In trait anxiety, the condition is somewhat stable personality trait. In this category, the learner feels anxious in a variety of situations. A temporary condition with certain physical signs experienced at a particular moment or point of time is ‘state-anxiety’. Situation-specific anxiety reflects and reoccurs in specific situations. The language anxiety is known as situation-specific anxiety. Situation-specific anxiety “can be seen as trait anxiety limited to a given context.” (MacIntyre & Gardner)(1989).

### **6. Language anxiety**

Language anxiety is the unease feeling, nervousness or a kind of fear due to individual’s perception in learning or using a second language. It is an expression of fear, a feeling of disturbance, an emotional conflict during specific language performing situation. Many students suffer from language anxiety due to various reasons. According to Horwitz et al.(1986), it is a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviour related to classroom language teaching arising from uniqueness of the language learning process”. MacIntyre (1999) defined language anxiety as the “worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language”. The language anxiety is known as situation-specific anxiety.

Speaking anxiety, “one of the most important affective variable that influences foreign language learning, often has a detrimental effect on the students’ oral performance of English”(Melough) (2013). Speaking anxiety can be from slight feeling of “nervousness” to high level of fear. Hand shaking, shivering, sweating, fear, forgetfulness, blankness, butterflies in the stomach, dry mouth and throat, fast heart beat and squeaky voice are the most common symptoms of speaking anxiety. The anxiety level varies from person to person according to the physical and psychological condition and specific situational demands.

## 7. Second-Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition and learning ( L2 acquisition) is the process and practices of how one can learn a second language. The students process and produce the language according to their learning and comprehending ability of the second language. The teaching and learning process is mainly due to the impact of the instruction given by the teacher to the students. As teachers are well aware of the students' learning style, teachers can fine tune their pedagogical concepts to improve speaking performance.

## 8. Anxiety Factors and its impact on speaking

Factors causing anxiety can be classified into psychological and physiological categories. It can be divided into two different groups as Internal and External factors. Many factors can be responsible for causing anxiety. Some of the identified factors through this study are language factor, grammar and pronunciation factor, peer factor, stage fear factor, lack of confidence and shyness.

## 9. Review of Literature

Many studies have been conducted to analyse the factors causing anxiety while speaking. Researchers have identified various factors that are responsible for speaking anxiety. Many factors such as linguistic, psychological, physiological and cultural factors affect and cause second language speaking anxiety. The students' performance may be affected due to situation- specific-reasons or performance conditions.

According to Horwitz (2001), during L1 and L2 learning process, comprehension apprehension (CA) can affect learners. It is directly associated with the usage of language. Apart from the student-connected factors, many other external sources are also involved in language anxiety, i.e., lack of proper support from teachers, learners' insensitive personality and individual attention. (Day & Gu, 2013; Siyli & Kafes, 2015). Ellis (2015) pointed out that due to lack of linguistic knowledge the learner's anxiety level might go high. In 2013, Kayaoglu and Saglame's interview session with 30 Turkish EFL students proved that linguistic issues faced by the learners' (word power, grammatical and pronunciation difficulties) increased the level of language anxiety. The anxiety level of the students increases due to various reasons such as not interesting activities, lack of cooperation, improper teaching style, highly challenging and conditioned classroom ambience, time management reasons, and irrelevant content of teaching (Zia & Norrihan, 2015). McCroskey (2015) described that lack of confidence in an individual's skill and hesitation to be engaged in communication or interaction are inter-linked as it is due to fear of peer evaluation. The role of shyness in language speaking can be interpreted in as many ways as possible. Crozier and Hostettler (2003), for example, "postulated that shy children show lower performance due to their stronger stress reactions in test situations". Liu and Jackson's research (2008) revealed that peer evaluation fear, classroom behavioural issues due to pessimistic assessment of oneself and ultimate failure reflected in speaking anxiety among 547 Chinese ESL university students. Many researchers have identified that learners with high level of motivation and self-confidence perform better and than the learners who lack motivation and confidence. (Krashen, 2002; Viswat and Jackson, 1993)

## 10. Objectives

- To identify the awareness of the factors causing speaking anxiety by Final Year Arts and Science college students of various disciplines.
- To analyse the strategies or self-improvement steps taken by the students.

## 11. Research Methodology

The qualitative method is used in analyzing and describing the data to identify the factors causing speaking anxiety during the English speaking class and also to identify the dominant factors of speaking anxiety. The data in this research is collected in the form of open-ended questionnaire from 50 under graduate, Art and Science final year students of various disciplines. The data obtained is by using questionnaire and one-on-one interaction with the students.

## 12. Result and Discussion

Many factors have been identified as reasons for causing anxiety among students at tertiary level. These factors are closely associated with the learners themselves and the findings show different factors of speaking anxiety.

According to the fifty participants, the primary anxiety factors are language factor, lack of knowledge of grammar, pronunciation factor, stage fear, lack of confidence, shyness, and peer factor. The students are all well aware of their difficulties and they do try to overcome the affecting factors as well.

### 12.1 External Factor:

#### 12.1.1 Language factor:

One of the main factors causing anxiety is language factor. Lack of English knowledge can be a barrier and it can cause fear or anxiety. Students expressed it as, 'I don't know how to express my thoughts in proper English', 'I'll not complete my sentence but I love English'. In addition, there are students who said, 'I can't speak English language' and a few others said, 'can't use some words', 'vocabulary is my problem', 'Not fluent in speaking', 'I speak English wrongly' and two others stated 'I get confused'. In addition, there are students who says, 'I can't speak English language' and a few others say, 'can't use some words', 'vocabulary is my problem', 'Not fluent in speaking', 'I speak English wrongly' and two others stated 'I get confused'. Sometimes students 'couldn't complete sentence due to lack of knowledge in words' (difficulty in vocabulary), 'can understand', 'I can manage fluency problem framing questions', 'but I felt bad while I am speaking because I know the words and don't know how to manage', 'I don't know to speak but I can understand',

All the other identified language factors are factors affecting individuals. Each one of them face various difficulties like 'difficulty to face others', 'Don't know to speak English properly', "Don't get the word when I am speaking", 'can't speak English loudly', 'not able to express properly'; these comments to certain extent is highly disappointing as all the respondents studied in higher secondary English medium schools. 'I am not confident with English', 'I am not confident with the words which I use'. According to the specific reason for the use of language the cause of fear factor might also change.

#### 12.1.2. Grammar factor:

Grammar factor plays a vital role as an anxiety causing external factor. Grammar is one of the main predominant factors that the students have mentioned. Some of them have said 'I am scared of grammar', 'I know to speak English', 'Sometimes I can't able to frame sentences', 'I have to overcome fear while talking' and 'I have fear whether my sentence formation is correct or not', 'I have a problem with grammar, that my words used in the sentence is correct or not'. One of them stated 'grammatical errors' 'sentence formation' as difficulty, and another as 'I can't able to frame sentences'. Some students said, 'I can't speak flawless,' 'difficult making the sentence', 'I make grammatical mistake or fear', 'while communicating I'll get fear and make some errors in grammar', 'I know to speak in English, but I'm afraid whether I will do any grammatical mistakes'. Apparently, it shows that 'grammar factor' plays the major role and it is relatively higher than the other identified factors.

#### 12.1.3. Pronunciation Factor

It is essential to pronounce and comprehend the language correctly and accurately. It helps the learner to improve the confidence level. So, pronunciation plays an important role while speaking. Some of the students revealed that they have difficulties in their 'way of speaking', 'mistakes' while speaking, 'pronunciation', 'able to manage; but if frightened, can't speak even a word voice modulation'.

#### 12.1.4. Peer factor

The inner feel and the thought of peers or classmates evaluation would always create anxiety among students. Many students reported the following: 'how to ask a question to others because if any rough words are used, the members will smile and at that time I will get angry and had to put my head down', 'but feels bad'. A few of them feel that 'others will think of that I am wrong while communication to others', 'I can understand the language others speaking and answer', 'not able to express exactly what is there in mind', 'difficulty in facing the crowd' 'How to

‘speak in English to others’. Certainly for some students it is a matter of ‘emotional conflict’ or ‘self-respect’. One of them puts it in this way ‘actually I very much like to stylish talk to everybody, but my problem is I am very Possiv girl if I talk any wrong I feel very bad’. A student has also expressed that ‘I am confident and I love to speak before everyone but I have a fear whether the way I convey will be good or not and what will others think about my conversation’.

## 12.2. Internal Factors

### 12.2.1. Stage Fear:

The stage fear or fright is mainly due to performance anxiety or fear. It is aroused in an individual based on the requirement to speak or perform in front of class/ audience. Practically, the common reason why people face anxiety during their speaking activity is because of stage fear. This is proved as one of the students expressed that ‘Stage fear’ and ‘difficulty to face others while speaking’ as cause for anxiety. Another student has stated it ‘stage fear makes me to forget. ‘Speaking is facing the crowd’, ‘I am feared (scared) to speak when am on the stage’.

### 12.2.2. Lack of Confidence:

The confidence level of the language user is essential to speak a language without anxiety or fear. Anxiety occurs when a student wanted or forced to make an impression on the audience but he or she lacks self-confidence on his or her own capabilities. In fact the students might be lacking L2 lexicon, poor pronunciation skills or grammar. It is considered as one of the most important factors identified. Researchers have proved that lack of confidence is an affective factor and its impact results in low performance level. Few students stated ‘Not confident while speaking’, ‘lack of confidence’, ‘I am not confident with English’, ‘I am not confident with the words which I use’, ‘Not fluent in speaking’. A few of them expressed in the following way, ‘I have no confidence to communicate or to speak’, ‘No confidence’, ‘I won’t speak confidently; because I won’t speak English all the time’, ‘Not confident while speaking to higher authorities’, ‘normally I speak confidently but sometimes I feel scared and collaple (perhaps mother-tongue influenced word of the learner – meaning to say ‘confused’ between words) while I speak to some faculty or senior persons’.

### 12.2.3. Shyness Factor:

Shyness is also one of the important anxiety causing factors which affect the students whenever they are expected to use the target language. One student has given ‘fear’ and ‘shy’ as the factors, whereas another one has mentioned ‘I am feeling shy to speak or communicate with others’. ‘Shy’ to speak’, ‘I know English, but shy is the number one problem’; ‘Fear also’.

## 13. Strategies for improving speaking

The survey reveals that the students have well focused perspective as a requirement to overcome the affective factors involved in their speaking anxiety. According to the participants, most of them are much interested to improve their English. Furthermore, they require teachers encouragement, support, motivation, guidance and special tips for improvement to gain confidence, increase their vocabulary. Besides all of these, students feel that attending seminars, discussions and presentation would be beneficial. Some of them have also requested for special attention to fine tune their voice modulation, pronunciation, grammar revision, fluency, other language related skills, individual guidance, etc., The given data reveals the fact that they are heading towards a very systematic learning process to overcome all their English speaking difficulties.

Apart from the students’ requirements and expectations, they have also mentioned the strategies adopted by them. Memory strategy or perhaps the process of connecting the learnt concepts and applying them to improve their speaking skill is one of the strategies. Majority of them are reading newspaper, books, watching TV News or news channels, cartoon and movies. A few of them are following social strategy by trying to improve through conversing with friends, colleagues or peers etc. Some of them are using meta-cognitive strategy, ie., using their own learning process by using dictionary and by sending messages as easy methods for overcoming the factors, and others by speaking with siblings at home, by listening to others speaking in English, speaking in front of the mirror. It is also quite encouraging to note that all are interested in improving their language skills.

## 14. Conclusion

It is evident from the research that various factors are affecting the undergraduate final year students. As a matter of fact, the inputs offered by the students' who have experienced anxiety during speaking in English can be a frame work for future research. As they are well aware of their anxiety causing factors, thoughtfully they have taken measures with a strong believe and focus to improve their language speaking skills to achieve their goals easily. As it is very evident from the data analysis that the students have enthusiasm to enhance their speaking skills, the teachers are required to identify the needs of their students, and then they should meticulously design the activities and if required a suitable model for teaching according to the need of the hour can also be implemented. According to Nunan (1991), "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language". The ultimate aim is to teach and make the students' excel as effective communicators, this phenomenon which seems to be a challenge to all language teachers.

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