

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY: A CASE OF AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study was triggered by the fact that students' different proficiency and personality may raise some communication skill problems, particularly speaking skill. One of the problems faced by the students is speaking anxiety during classroom activities. By understanding that non-English students may face a higher risk of speaking anxiety during a foreign language class, this study aims to explore the potential sources of agriculture students' speaking Anxiety during English class. The participants were 35 Agriculture students of Faculty of Agriculture, Brawijaya University Malang. This study was conducted qualitatively by using questionnaire and interview for collecting the data. The findings showed that the speaking anxiety levels of agriculture students were connected to various factors. One of the factors may be related to the fact that the students felt unconfident to speak English.

Keywords: *foreign language anxiety, foreign language speaking anxiety, agriculture students, speaking skills*

INTRODUCTION

Psychological aspects play a significant part in foreign language learning context, one of which is a personality factor. Ozturk and Gurbuz (2013) found that there were a number of personality factors that may have either positive or negative effects in foreign language learning process such as extroversion, self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety. Of these variables, anxiety has long become the area of studies, particularly focused on the speaking situation. In speaking activities, foreign language students tend to experience anxiety because they often feel anxious toward their ability in the foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) said that even talkative students became silent in a foreign language class because they have anxiety. This type of anxiety is explained as communication apprehension (McIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Speaking anxiety therefore plays an important part in studying the foreign language since communication apprehension brings out the biggest challenge for improving the students' communication skills.

In addition to academic purposes, foreign language learners need to enhance their communication skills. Foreign language learners commonly feel anxious and nervous while speaking a foreign language which can potentially bring negative effect on communication by using the target language. The presence of such anxiety should become the teacher's concern and consciousness to help students attain the desired goal of the course. The consideration of learners' anxiety during the foreign language learning will be useful for the teacher to gain a deep understanding of students' obstacles during foreign language classroom and help them to overcome it.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

There are many definitions of anxiety, but a common definition of anxiety is explained by Spielberger (1983, cited in Ozturk & Gurbuz (2013)) which defined anxiety as an unpleasant emotional condition characterized by feelings of tension and apprehension. MacIntyre and Gardner (1993) defined it as the subjective feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with foreign language contexts, which include speaking, listening and learning. In the foreign language contexts, according to Scovel (1978), anxiety in the process of language learning can be seen as a condition of apprehension and a vague fear. This kind of feeling can carry a

negative feeling and also detrimental effects on learners when they come to communicate in the target language.

In relation to foreign language learning, Horwitz and Cope (1986), who were the pioneers in conducting the study of foreign language anxiety sources by developing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), defined foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. They were also identified three sources of foreign language anxiety, namely communication apprehension identified the fear of communicating with others, test anxiety identified the fear of failure, and fear of negative evaluation from others.

In today's foreign language class, students are required to perform many activities verbally in front of their classmates, group discussion, and even a bigger forum. These activities may trigger the students' nervousness when speaking the target language. Learning English as a foreign language always becomes a challenge for Indonesian students because they are not used to be continuously exposed to English. The complexity of integrated skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) conveys another challenge for the students. Young (1990) stated that speaking in a foreign language is often considered as the most anxiety-producing experience by the students. Students with non-English background usually have more fear of speaking English, because they have two duties in being able to master both the language and the knowledge and information related to the specific field.

The anxiety felt by non-English students can trigger the failure in using the target language inside or outside the classroom context. Moreover, during the classroom activities, students who experience anxiety usually tend to be passive during the classroom activities. They withdraw themselves from activities that could increase their language speaking skills, and may even avoid class entirely (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). The anxious students usually avoided being called on to take part in the class and they were less likely to volunteer answers in spoken classes (Bekleyen, 2009). The challenged experienced by the students regarding to the speaking anxiety were considered as a negative factor in learning English as it was usually taken for granted that language learning mainly relied on the amount of exposure to use the target language (Debreli & Demirkan, 2015).

Foreign language speaking anxiety can carry a negative impact on EFL learners as it may cause them to have negative self-assessment, mental block, and also poor performance. Therefore, high-level anxiety learners in foreign language (FL) classes are less likely to improve their English speaking levels and achieve the expected learning outcomes (Ghorbandordinejad and Ahmadabad, 2015). It is, therefore, the teachers' responsibility to use useful strategies and materials to create a supportive learning environment for students to increase their willingness to communicate during the classroom activities.

There are many researchers who investigate students' foreign language anxiety. For instance, Young (1990) developed a questionnaire to do more analytical research about the kind of speaking practices which lead to students' anxiety. The findings showed that there were six potential sources of foreign language anxiety including personal and interpersonal factors, learners' belief about language learning, and instructors' beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. Based on that research, anxiety overcome by the foreign language learners may bring the difficulties not only in speaking or oral communication, but also in the acquisition, retention, and production of target language. Also, Price (1991) figured out that the students were anxious in making mistakes in

pronunciation especially when speaking in front of their peers. The other study conducted by Tanveer (2008) found out that language anxiety could be caused by the learners' sense of 'self', their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, differences in learners' and target language cultures, differences in the social status of the speakers and interlocutors and from the fear of losing self-identity. Furthermore, the findings of study conducted by Ay (2010) demonstrated learners' anxiety occurs most when they are required to speak without being prepared in advance.

Thus, this present study aimed to explore and understand the possible sources of foreign language learners speaking anxiety in English, especially in non-English speaking students of Agriculture Faculty. By understanding the cause of speaking anxiety experienced by the students, the solution to solve the issue can be identified and applied. So that, the goal in learning English as a foreign language can be achieved successfully. Additionally, understanding students' needs and context can enable instructors to know how to successfully use appropriate approach to teach students and achieve positive learning outcomes (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). For these purposes, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the possible sources that contribute to the speaking foreign language anxiety of agriculture faculty students, Brawijaya University?
2. What are the learning strategies that would help the students to overcome the speaking anxiety?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participant and Setting

This current study was conducted at Faculty of Agriculture, Brawijaya University Malang where English was used intensively during English for Agriculture class. The participants were 30 agriculture students. They were first-year students and all participants came from Agroecotechnology study program.

Data Collecting Instruments and Analysis

This study conducted qualitatively because it intended to look at the students' perceptions and interpretations about the sources of speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This approach was both useful and practical for this study because the researcher can do an in-depth analysis of the data (Kumar, 2011). In this study, two instruments were used to gather the data, questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire will be able to supply standardized answers (Denscombe, 2007). It means that all participants were provided with the same questions in the same way, in which the collected data were less likely to be influenced by interpersonal factors (Punch, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of 34 'rating scales' questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree adapted from FLCAS designed by Horwitz and Cope (1986). Furthermore, diverse questions have been used to best reflect the students' beliefs and elicit the required data as honestly as possible (Kumar, 2011).

The next instrument was interview. The interview was a useful method for collecting data since it could help to elicit "rich data on peoples' views, attitudes, and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviors" (Gray, 2009). In addition to this, an interview is an appropriate means of gathering and verifying the information, and also it can deeply explore the participants' perceptions about the subject which is being researched. This instrument was helpful to find out the facial expressions and to understand what participants intended to say beyond their actual words which could not be achieved through questionnaires alone. For this interview, 15 students were chosen randomly as the representatives, and they needed to response five open-ended

questions during the interview. This kind of questions was selected because it is considered beneficial to enrich the data from the respondents so the deep understanding of the case could be attained. Moreover, open-ended questions would let the respondents express their ideas or opinions from any perspectives (Creswell, 2012).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were presented according to the research questions. The findings from both instruments (questionnaire and interview) were also combined and displayed together to give a clear data. To be precise in presenting the findings, the only significant points from the questionnaire data were shown. To make it more understandable and reduce the complication, the responses “strongly agree” and “agree” were combined into one category of “agree”. Then, the responses “disagree” and “strongly disagree” were also combined into “disagree”.

Table 1 The Significant Items Related to the Research Questions.

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	I am worried to make grammatical and vocabulary mistakes in foreign language class	14	12	0	4	0
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	10	13	1	4	2
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	9	11	3	7	0
6	The more I talk in the class, the more confident I get.	3	7	0	12	8
7	I am afraid that my English teacher will correct every mistake that I make.	11	12	2	5	0
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	14	12	0	4	0
10	I always feel that the other students	16	5	2	7	0

	<p>speak the foreign language better than I do.</p>					
11	<p>I'm worried about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.</p>	20	5	0	5	0
13	<p>It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.</p>	15	10	3	0	2
17	<p>I am satisfied with the level of speaking ability in English that I have achieved so far.</p>	0	5	0	13	12
20	<p>I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.</p>	13	10	0	5	2
26	<p>I feel more tense and nervous when speaking in front of the class without preparation.</p>	18	10	2	0	0
27	<p>I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language class.</p>	15	10	0	3	2
30	<p>I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.</p>	17	12	0	1	0
33	<p>I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.</p>	9	13	5	2	1
34	<p>I think learning English in a group is</p>	15	10	0	5	0

more fun than
learning on my own

The Potential Sources of Speaking Anxiety of Agriculture Students

According to the data from both instruments, almost all of the participants suffered from speaking anxiety in English. However, the degree of anxiety was different. There were twenty five participants reported to feel anxious in speaking because of worrying the consequences of failing in English for agriculture class (item 11). It also could be caused by the fear of getting the other students' negative evaluation or feedback and also being ridiculed by them (item 30). To support this finding, one of the participant during the interview said that he feels fear while speaking because of the other students' negative evaluation could lead him to think that he had lack of English language ability.

Moreover, the other findings indicated that the twenty participants in this study are afraid of making language mistakes (item 2, 7). It could be caused by the dissatisfied and unconfident of their level of speaking proficiency so far. From that, it could be inferred that the students who believe that they have low linguistic ability in English more likely to feel reluctant to speak and pull out their participation in the class (item 10, 17). Supporting this finding, the students who tended to monitor their grammatical errors and be more aware that they use the language accurately, tend to be more anxious in speaking (Hedge, 2000). According to Khrasen (1982), the learners who had a high level of affective filter are conscious of making mistakes in speaking and also they tend to be anxious and not very successful in the process of communication. Because of that, they tend to sit passively in the class and often feel willingness to be a volunteer in answering the teacher's questions. One of the participant said during the interview that *"when I speak in front of the class, I feel so nervous and I can't to continue because I feel some of my friends are staring at me. I am afraid to make many mistakes because I want to speak perfectly and I cannot do that"*.

The other potential source of speaking anxiety is the lack of preparation beforehand. The lack of preparation usually brought the students to have low self-esteem and make them talk less during the classroom activities (item 9, 26). Almost half of the interviewed participants said that they needed more time to prepare their speaking before going to the class. Sometimes, they take some notes consisted of some outlines of what they intended to say in front of the class. But still, they felt it was not enough and it make them feel anxious while presenting something.

The negative evaluation also became the next potential source of students speaking anxiety. The fear and worry about gaining many negative feedbacks from teachers as well as their classmates drive them to be more anxious while speaking (item 3, 4, 7, 10, 20, 27). Because of that reason, some of the students stated that they chose to keep silent in the class than speak up. They thought that the negative evaluation they got would decrease their level of confidence in speaking English.

The last potential source was the lack of vocabularies in the specific field, which was Agriculture. The first-year agriculture students were considered as the freshman. Most of them still new in this field and were not used to some agricultural terms yet; it made them feel anxious in speaking. They believed that their vocabularies were not enough and they felt more comfortable to say some agricultural terms in *Bahasa Indonesia*. It is supported by the result of interview *"when I have to present some materials related to agriculture, actually I know the Indonesian terms but I just difficult for me to find the English version of it"*.

Learning Strategies in Helping to Overcome Speaking Anxiety

During the interview, the participants were also asked about the learning strategies to overcome speaking anxiety. The findings showed that sufficient preparation and practices could help students decrease their speaking anxiety and increase their confidence in speaking. Two participants agreed they needed to be well-prepared and also attempted to gather and learn a lot about the topic before going to the class. They also added a proper preparation and more practices have enabled them to speak confidently and control anxiety. These findings supported by Debreli, Kucuk, and Demirkan's study (2015) that showed that it was essential for the students to be well-prepared to speak in the target language, as they were likely not have insufficient language proficiency level and they had to consider what to say first before speaking up to feel safe and prevent language errors. However, it should be seen that making language errors is a natural part of the learning process. It is useful for students to communicate without being concerned about small details of grammar and concentrating on the content.

In addition, a group work could be viewed as a helpful approach for reducing anxiety in speaking. Group work played a stimulating role and encouraged the active involvement of students in the class, who concentrated more on meaning than linguistic form. The collaborative activities in the group work embraced the students' responsibility and autonomy on the tasks (Bolukbas, 2011). In addition, according to Brown (2015), group work generated interactive language offered and embraced effective climate, and also promoted the students' responsibility and autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, agriculture students encountered speaking anxiety in English speaking. This problem may affect the students' accomplishment for agriculture classes in English negatively. Some potential sources that contribute to the agriculture students' speaking anxiety are making language mistakes, lack of linguistic ability and preparation, negative evaluation, and lack of vocabularies in the specific field of study.

The findings of this study contribute considerably to the understanding of helpful strategies for overcoming speaking anxiety, particularly in non-English environments. The students need preparation before coming to the class. They should be convinced and instructed to not too focus on their accuracy and fear in making language mistakes during the speaking activity to boost their confidence and fluency. In the case of agriculture students, group work can also be useful in reducing the anxiety of students and in creating supportive and positive conditions for students. Group work can also be beneficial for students to give them a better chance to talk to their classmates. For recommendation, gender analysis may be needed to enrich the information related to the foreign language speaking anxiety. The behavioral differences showed by male and female students may influence their action in showing their anxiety and how to overcome it. Thus, the data will be more varied.

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