



Speaking Anxiety of Kurdish Candidate Teachers of English with Foreign Lecturers

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety is one of the challenging difficulties for language learners. Even if they are going to be language teachers, some student teachers may also have the same problem when they talk to foreigners. In this research, reasons for speaking anxiety of candidate teachers talking to their foreign lecturers are portrayed as a result of interviews with them. Some candidate teachers of English Language Teaching Department of Ishik University, Erbil, were interviewed about their holding off speaking to their foreign lecturers while this is supposed to be a good practice for their speaking skills. Some solutions for students and lecturers are also suggested for this problem.

Keywords: Language, Learner, Speaking Anxiety.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the aims of learning a second language and foreign language is to facilitate communication and understand different cultures and speak different languages (Yashima et al., 2004). Dörnyei (2005) states that it can be common to find people who tend to avoid entering second language communication situations even if they possess a high level of communicative competence. When people are given opportunity to use their second language skills, some of them choose to speak up and some others keeps silence. The question arises about this situation to understand the reason why some second language learners cannot become second language speakers even though they have studied this language for many years. This is not a simple question to answer easily; while there can be various factors such as individual, social, linguistic and situational (MacIntyre, 2007).

Speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate are two terms used in literature of language to define speaking problems of foreign language. Willingness to communicate is related with factors affecting the second language learners' psychological readiness to start communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

In fact speaking anxiety is described as one of the anxieties in language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Language anxiety is one of the important factors for the personality theories. Speaking anxiety includes two components of language anxiety. These are called state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety consists of subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry as defined by Spielberger et al. (1976). They also stated trait anxiety as stable individual differences in anxiety tendency in dangerous and threatening situations.

Research has been done on speaking anxiety such as Gkonou (2011), Woodrow (2006) and Gopang et al. (2015). These studies concentrated on communication in the class during lessons. But this research is based on students' anxiety when they are communicating in foreign language with their foreign lecturers.



2. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to identify reasons for the speaking anxiety problems of candidate teachers of English Language when they need to talk to foreigners and their foreign lecturers. The results can be useful to find a solution and overcome their speaking anxiety problems towards foreigners; and lead to better practice of their language skills with the foreigners.

3. METHOD

This is a qualitative study in which semi-structured interview method was used to collect data. In semi-structured interview, researcher prepares form consisting information and questions for the interview but may adapt and revise his/her questions during the interview to dig in interviewers' interests and knowledge about the subject (Altunısık, 2010). Furthermore, this research comprises an interview form was prepared consisting 7 questions for the student teachers. Some professionals were consulted in the preparation process of the form. Some of the questions were revised or extra questions were asked during interviews to get more information. The interviews were in Kurdish, mother tongue of the students. The recordings of the interviews were decoded and transferred to computer. Themes were decided on the collected data.

4. SAMPLING

This research covers candidate teachers studying in English Language Teaching Department of Ishik University, Erbil, Iraq. These student teachers are going to be teachers of English language in the following years. 5 of them were chosen as sample of this research. They were chosen randomly among some of the candidate teachers reported as coming to see their foreign lecturers with a translator.

5. FINDINGS

Five students who were claimed to take someone with them to see their foreign lecturers were interviewed. Approximately half of their lecturers are foreigners so that students mostly have to communicate only in English. They were asked whether they were taking somebody with them to see their lecturers or not. They all approved that they took someone with them when they visited the foreign lecturers. However, some of them claimed that they were not using those people as a means of translation as opposed to their lecturers' assertion, while most of them confessed that they are using their friends as intermediaries between them and the lecturers. Some of the expressions (translated from Kurdish) for the confessions:

"I take somebody with me." S1 (Student 1)

"I go with friends..." S2

"Yes, I take someone." S3

"My friend is with me she is my cousin we're always together." S4

"Last year I used to talk someone but not this year, this year I am better." S5

Students have similar reasons for taking somebody with them and some of them using those friends as translators. Almost all used the words "shyness, worried, anxious, nervous, and scared" to express their feelings about visiting their foreign lecturers.

"Because I'm shy... For example today I went to see Mr L1 (Lecturer 1) but I couldn't find any of my friends to come with me I was able to ask my question and I got my answer but I was trembling and my heart was beating very fast." S1

"I am afraid and shy at the same time. When you fear but you don't shy its better but if you have both feelings at the same time you're helpless." S1

"I fell nervous...I scare if I make a mistake..." S2



*"If I am lazy now the reason is my shyness...I feel **anxious**, because I am a **shy** person...I feel **shy** I cannot speak in front of any other teachers...I don't show my **anxiety** but inside me I am very **anxious**."* S3

*"I am **shy** and I was the same at school...When I first meet a lecturer I **hesitate** and **worry**...when you make a mistake you become **worried**"* S4

*"I feel **anxious** with some of the teachers and sometimes."* S5

Even the students who claimed not using their friends as translators have similar feelings. Even though they don't use their friends for translation but they still feel uncomfortable to visit foreign lecturers.

*"I take someone but not for translation...I make some jokes to hide my shyness...I feel **anxious**, because I am a **shy** person."* S3

*"When I first meet a lecturer I **hesitate** and **worry** because I don't know what his reaction will be, it's not like someone that you know."* S5

Except from the one that doesn't use intermediaries, they have speaking anxiety as an obstacle affecting their communicating in the foreign language, English. They use translators to communicate with the feelings mentioned above. Students mentioned two main reasons for their speaking anxiety. One of them is their English level while the other one is the lecturers. First, they stated that they don't feel confident about their English level. They are worried about not to be understood and not being able to express their ideas well. They think they may mispronounce some words,

"I understand what the teacher says but I cannot transfer my opinions, words...I know the words and even the whole sentence but I doubt about my pronunciation... I am afraid of my incorrect words or misunderstanding... I'm shy because I don't know how to answer in English...I am afraid of saying the words incorrectly." S1

"I go with friends; because of my language .My language is not good enough to speak with teacher... I take a friend to help me and translate... because it's the second language I scare if I make a mistake or the teacher doesn't get me or I don't get the teacher that's why I take someone with me... Indeed the ones whose English is not very good many thoughts may come to their mind, they think a lot while they talk, and that's why they fear to speak and this thinking makes them to feel shy and not focus on what they say. They think of the whole sentence and it leads into errors a lot. I think it's bad because everyone makes mistakes at the beginning." S2

"I feel worried and afraid especially with Mr. L2. I am afraid of him because he has a difficult language and I feel scared of not understanding his words...I feel anxious of making mistakes and someone speaks later I feel very bad." S3

"Sometimes I forget the words they don't come up." S4

"Language creates a barrier and don't let me convey my message and feelings because foreign language is different...I was taking a friend because of my weak language and sometimes I were asking students how to say my words in English then I was going to the office... I have problem in pronunciation as well." S5

Secondly, it seems that these students have negative perceptions about talking to some of their foreign lecturers. Some of them infer some prejudices or perceptions from their past memories even though the lecturer might not mean in that way. They also expressed that they feel comfortable with some of the foreign lecturers. The reason for this is varying such as being warned by the lecturer once, lecturers' identity, the pronunciation of the lecturer and the way lecturer speaks.

"Once Mr. L3 asked me to go and bring absent paper and I asked what then the other students translated into Kurdish and he became very angry and said you are third grade and you can't understand. So I prefer to keep silent rather than hearing harsh words and



break my heart... I'm afraid of the teacher if he gets angry with me and blame me that I'm in the 3rd class and why I can't speak." S1

"Once we had a native teacher and I was afraid to participate." S2

"I feel worried and afraid especially with Mr. L2. I am afraid of him because he has a difficult language and I feel scared of not understanding his words." S3

"I hate repetition and my voice is very low then when the teacher asks me to repeat I don't like it... I panic to speak especially the ones that I had bad experience in class... because of the teachers' harsh words and you know previously that they might say some heart breaking words so I feel better not to speak." S5

However the same students may feel comfortable with some other foreign lecturers whom they feel closer and feel that they are understood.

"Especially Mr. L4 I am friend with him he easily understands me and I understand him...sometimes I make some Kurdish fun and speech with Mr. L4 just for fun." S3

"I feel okay with Mr. L5 because he gets my point even with very few words he understands what I say." S5

These students feel more comfortable with the Kurdish lecturers because they can speak Kurdish, even though some of them may still feel shyness.

"When I speak Kurdish its better but in English I can't speak at all...even with Kurdish teachers I shy to speak but it's a little bit better because at least they understand what I want , yet I shy...I take someone with me because I shy" S1

"I don't take anyone because it's my own language and I express myself easily because it's the same language. I never feel worried and afraid I have no problem." S2

"I don't have problem with Kurdish teachers because if they don't understand me I will say it in Kurdish." S5

These student teachers were also asked about their participation in the class and a comparison between speaking foreign language in the class and in the lecturers' office. All of the participant students stated that their participation during the lessons in the class is low and they are reluctant to participate.

"It's (participation) very little... Last week one of our lecturers made group work in the class and he asked me to come in front of the class and tell my idea but I said I won't speak even in my place." S1

"If the teacher is Kurdish I participate...this year my participation is much better than before but yet it's not as necessary as it should be and as I have planned." S2

"I have very little participation." S3

"It's very limited .I know all the answers but I don't like to participate... Speaking with the teacher in the class is more formal." S4

"Very little (participation)." S5

They expressed similar reasons about their unwillingness of speaking in the class as it is with the foreign lecturers except from peer pressure. It seems that peer pressure is affecting their unwillingness of speaking more than other factors. They feel ashamed of other students even their close friends in the class. Gender issues are also important on these young adults, especially when it is considered that boys and girls were separated in different high schools. Due to lack of peer pressure in the office, they feel more comfortable to speak foreign language in their foreign lecturers' offices. Besides peer pressure, they have their own barriers such as being shy and their foreign language level while lecturers are still another factor of their unwillingness. Below are the sample expressions for the peer pressure showing their perceptions about the reactions of other students in the class.

"I don't want to speak in class because I feel the other students are looking at me.

Whenever I speak after I finish my face blushes and I turn around and look at the



students to see who were looking at me... Especially my close friend I feel shy to speak in English in front of them." S1

"I think of the other students' opinion and staring at me a little bit, but the thing that I mostly feel anxious is my own incorrect answers. I feel ashamed of myself that I can't speak correctly... I fell nervous when I speak because of my broken language and the other students look." S2

"I feel the boys are looking at me while I am speaking in the class, it's very difficult but when I go to office I feel better. While I speak I think all of the students are staring at me and I scare to make mistakes and they laugh at me. It's very uncomfortable." S3

"I feel shy because of the students reaction sometimes even you don't have any mistakes but you don't like them to look at you." S4

"I don't want to give incorrect answer and waste other students' time." S5

The samples for other reasons for their unwillingness:

"I'm shy because I don't know how to answer in English... I am afraid of saying the words incorrectly." S1

"It was not because of the teacher it was because of my own mistakes...I fell nervous when I speak because of my broken language and the other students look." S2

"I can't speak in English in front of people even my parents, but I can speak with my sister alone at home...I don't participate because I am shy and my father is shy as well maybe it has effect as well." S3

"I don't like to participate I just don't want to participate, because I am shy and I was like that at (high) school as well" S4

"Because I am not prepared and didn't study at home so I don't want to give incorrect answer and waste other students' time. Whereas, when I study at home and feel ready in the class its better... I fear to participate because of the teachers harsh words and you know previously that they might say some heart breaking words so I feel better not to speak" S5

Even though having some problems Student teachers feel more comfortable while speaking English with their foreign lecturers in their offices.

"In the office I don't feel nervous and I can speak Kurdish or even English with the teacher" S2

"Speaking in the class, it's very difficult but when I go to office I feel better." S3

Most of the students accept their speaking anxiety is a problem while some others do not accept it as a problem. They were asked if they have thought of any solutions to this problem. Although some of them were hopeless about the problem, some proposed several solutions as practicing more especially studying extensively out of courses by watching, listening and reading. The followings are statements of students.

"Yes, of course it's a problem... every year in the summer I plan many things to read story books, watch a lot of movies, listen to music and so but I the summer holiday ends and I never achieve my goals. In fact I need not only one course but four language courses to improve my English." S1

"Yes, it's a problem for me... I have a problem in my English until now, I can't speak well and it's an obstacle for me. If I didn't have these feelings I might have improve my language much better... external following up, English is not only the book that you study at class. If you movies or speak with your mates or reading extra things. But it's my personal fault until now I haven't started seriously to enter English language." S2

"It's a very very big problem, because my low marks are due to this... I don't think it has any solution." S3

"No, I don't see it as a problem because the teachers all know me. It's not nice feeling but it's not a big problem... I think by practicing a lot you can overcome it." S4



"I don't see it as a problem, because every problem if you try you can overcome it and sort it out." S5

6. CONCLUSION

In this research, the inferences of speaking anxiety of Kurdish candidate teachers of English Language towards foreign lecturers were analyzed. As a result, it is clarified that some candidate teachers may have speaking anxiety with foreign lecturers but causes can vary. There are some internal or external factors lead to speaking anxiety. Internal factors are handicaps coming from characteristics of the student teachers and level of their English language skills. Participants demonstrated themselves with shy personality and mostly found themselves insufficient in English or hesitant to speak. External factors are the lecturers. Student teachers don't feel comfortable with foreign lecturers if they haven't developed some kind of rapport with them. The language is another barrier between student teachers and their lecturers. Some of the students are also affected by some of the expressions used by lecturers. These student teachers may feel speaking anxiety both in the class and office of the lecturers.

In terms of the results of this research, the administration or the lecturers may try to help these students which are not that many in number. Advising system of the University should be involved to decrease speaking anxiety of these student teachers and overcome their problems. Personal advisory can be suggested for them to practice their language skills and overcome anxiety problems. The lecturers should think about what they say to students and their behaviors towards them in order not to discourage them from speaking in English with their lecturers. Anxiety is a problem in language learning. Lecturers should reduce anxiety by supporting them during lessons or their interactions out of the class.

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