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# AN ANALYSIS OF SPEAKING ANXIETY AND AFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN MEDAN

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## *ABSTRACT*

*This study examines the speaking anxiety level and the employment of affective language learning strategies among English Applied Linguistics students in Medan, including the relationship between the two aforementioned variables. The research data were collected by administering a set of questionnaire encompassing 11 items assessing the comprehension apprehension factor and 6 items assessing fear of negative evaluation factor which were adopted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales and also 6 items assessing the affective language strategies. There were 60 students of English Applied Linguistics participated in the study, comprising of 16 male students and 44 female students.This study found that the level of the speaking anxiety of the respondents was generally moderate, with the level of comprehension apprehension factor and the fear of evaluation were also moderate. The results suggest that the respondents in the present study moderately employed the affective language learning strategies in English medium classes. This study also found that students' speaking anxiety level is negatively correlated with the involvement of affective language learning strategies in the process of language learning.*

*Keywords        : language learning, speaking anxiety, affective learning strategies*

## INTRODUCTION

English in the recent era has been used not only confined to international communication but has also been pervaded local communication (Gunantar, 2016). Increasing demands for English learning and proficient English speakers especially in non-English speaking countries are inevitable. Among the four skills in language learning, speaking is believed to be the most essential skill and many learners, in spite of years of studying English, still face difficulties in speaking it competently (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Despite its complexities and difficulties, being competent to speak English can benefit learners'future professional careers. With copious opportunities available for individuals who are able to communicate in English fluently, Indonesian learners have been taught English since elementary or even younger to the higher level of education that is university or college. Out of all the effort of competency development, the fact remains that English in Indonesia is still considered as a foreign language since it is dominantly used only in classrooms not in daily communication (Yosintha, 2020). English majoring students in Indonesia are indisputably in advantageous position in learning almost all subjects using English as medium instruction; however, it is still a challenge to the students to perform their speaking skills confidently.

One variable that may hinder EFL learners' speaking performance is anxiety. One-third of all foreign language learners is stated to experience language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001, as cited in Sutarsyah, 2017). Anxiety is reported as one of the factors impeding the foreign language learners in conveying their idea and communicating (Muna & Fitriah, 2019;Marwan, 2007). It has been undoubtedly crucial topic in language learning as it is experienced by both foreign and second language learners and can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language (MacIntyre& Gardner, 1991, as cited in Von Worde & Wörde, 2003).

and the employment of affective strategies are suggested to improve speaking performance of EFL learners(Galti & Tahiru, 2016).

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was developed by Horwitz et al., 1986 were applied to identify anxious university students and measure their anxiety. FLCAS encompasses three aspects— communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This scale was administered to 75 Spanish learners of English at an American university. The study divulged that foreign language anxiety was pervasive among many students in foreign language learning, which negatively affected their performance in that language.

A considerable number of studies have been devoted to explore the factors causing foreign language anxiety, particularly among foreign language learners. Dahlab et al. (2013) through a study conducted to Algerian students of English at Saad Dahlab University of Blida reported that fear of interaction, error correction, language proficiency, low self-confidence and self-esteem develop into language anxiety. Anandari (2015) in her study carried out to a group of Indonesian students taking a Public Speaking course at Sanata Dharma University revealed that fear, shyness, and discomfort contributing to foreign language anxiety. Zrekat et al. (2016) ascertained that 60.7 per cent of 351 students and five lecturers in Jerash University, Jordan experience anxiety while speaking in English. Sutarsyah (2017) discovered that speaking anxiety could be detrimental to the overall students' speaking performance achievement which was demonstrated by students with lower level anxiety have

higher score in speaking performance than those with higher level of anxiety.

Additionally, Cabansag (2020) expanded the research on speaking anxiety correlating it to English proficiency, affective and social language learning strategies among ESL Agricultural and Biosystems and Civil Engineering students of a state university in Northern Luzon, Philippines by adapting the six (6) items on Affective Language Learning Strategies (ALLS) and six (6) items on Social Language Learning Strategies (SLLS) by Oxford (1990) as well as the Foreign Language Communication Anxiety Scale designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and utilizing the English Proficiency Test developed by Commission on Higher Education. The study revealed notwithstanding small negative correlation existing between students' English proficiency and speaking anxiety and a small positive correlation acquired in the correlation between the respondents' speaking anxiety and SLLS, a medium and small positive correlation established when their speaking anxiety and ALLS was correlated.

All studies show that foreign language anxiety is substantial and mostly adversely affects language learning. Therefore, more researches are indispensable to investigate students' anxiety levels, causes and consequences as well as their relationship with other variables. Based on the discussion above, the study aims to find out the relationship of speaking anxiety to affective language learning strategies among the English Applied Linguistics students of a private college in North Sumatera, Indonesia. The study, specifically, attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the speaking anxiety level of the students?
2. What are the affective language learning strategies used by the students?
3. What relationship exists between speaking anxiety and the affective language learning strategies?

**Research Method**

The study was conducted at a private institution in Medan, North Sumatera in 2020. There were 60 students of English Applied Linguistics participating in the study, comprising of 16 male students and 44 female students. The respondents in the study were majorly from semester one and five, i.e. 21 and 23, respectively, and the remaining was in semester three, i.e. 16 students.

A set of questionnaire was administered to the respondents using Google Form. The first part of the questionnaire collected respondents' demographic information and self-rate on proficiency in English language. Students' speaking anxiety was measured using Foreign Classroom Language Anxiety Scale (Howart, et al., 1986). Each item on the anxiety scale was scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Some items were reversed during the coding, namely *I don't worry about making mistakes in the English medium class, I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers, I feel confident when I speak in the English-medium class, I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students, I would not probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.* This study followed the

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Data

|  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Sex |  |  |
|    Male | 16 | 26.7 |
|    Female | 44 | 73.3 |
| Semester |  |  |
|    one | 21 | 35.0 |
|    three | 16 | 26.7 |
|    five | 23 | 38.3 |

classification of anxiety level used in Akkakoson (2016).

Table 2. Anxiety Level Criteria (Akkakoson, 2010)

| Mean range | Category |
|---|---|
| 4.21 – 5.00 | highest-anxiety level |
| 3.41 – 4.20 | high-anxiety level |
| 2.61 – 3.40 | medium-anxiety level |
| 1.81 – 2.60 | low-anxiety level |
| 1.00 – 1.80 | lowest-anxiety level |

Concerning respondents' learning strategy, the present study employed Affective Language Learning Strategies. Each item on the scale was rated in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never true of me) to 5 (always or almost true of me). The classification of the results employed the criteria in Syafryadin (2020).

After the data were collected, the scores were calculated using Statistical Package for Statistical Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistical analyses were carried out to figure out the anxiety level of the respondents and the affective language learning strategy used by the students. Moreover, in order to assess the significance of the relationship between the speaking anxiety level and the affective language learning strategy, Pearson's correlation calculation was performed.

**Results and Discussion**
*Research Question 1*: What is the speaking anxiety level of the students?

Table 4 illustrates the results of students' self-rate on proficiency in English language. Surprisingly, when the respondents were asked to compare their proficiency in English language, only 2 students (3.3%) perceived that they were excellent in English language. The other students majorly rated their English

language proficiency in fair and good levels, i.e. 43% (n= 26) and 35% (n=21) respectively. Furthermore, when compared with the proficiency of native speaker, none of the respondents reported that their proficiency was excellent. The majority of the respondents rated their proficiency to be poor, i.e. 43.3% (n=26).

Table 3. Classification of ALLS (Syafryadin, 2020)

| Mean range | Category |
|---|---|
| 4.50 – 5.0 | Always or almost true of me |
| 3.50 – 4.40 | Usually true of me |
| 2.50 – 3.40 | Somewhat true of me |
| 1.50 – 2.40 | Usually not true of me |
| 1.00 – 1.40 | Never or almost never true of me |

Table 4. Respondents' Self Rate on Proficiency in English Language

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Proficiency in English compared with the proficiency of other students in class | | |
| Poor | 11 | 18.3 |
| Fair | 26 | 43.3 |
| Good | 21 | 35.0 |
| Excellent | 2 | 3.3 |
| Proficiency in English compared with the proficiency of native speaker | | |
| Poor | 26 | 43.3 |
| Fair | 23 | 38.3 |
| Good | 11 | 18.3 |
| Excellent | 0 | 0 |

As displayed in Table 5, in general, the average score of respondents' comprehension apprehension is 2.74,

indicating a medium level of anxiety. The results also show that the highest score in Comprehension Apprehension factor is the item *I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students* ($\bar{x}$=3.53), while the item with the lowest score is *I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English-medium class* ($\bar{x}$=2.17).

Table 5. Respondents' Comprehension Apprehension

| Item | Mean | Category |
|---|---|---|
| I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in the English-medium class | 2.57 | low |
| It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English. | 2.55 | low |
| I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English-medium class. | 2.17 | low |
| I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.* | 3.12 | medium |
| I feel confident when I speak in the English-medium class.* | 2.97 | medium |
| I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.* | 3.53 | high |
| I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in the English-medium class. | 2.68 | medium |
| I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English lecturer says. | 2.50 | low |
| I feel confused by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English. | 2.67 | medium |
| I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.* | 3.15 | high |
| I get nervous when the lecturers of the English-medium class asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. | 2.23 | low |
| **Average** | **2.74** | **medium** |

*items were reversed coded

As shown in Table 5, it can be seen that, overall, the respondents had a medium level of anxiety in terms of comprehension apprehension. However, when faced with native speakers, apparently, the respondents in this study have a relatively higher level of anxiety than when they have to speak in the English-medium classes or with their peers. This finding is somewhat in line with what was suggested by Bozavli & Gulmez (2012) that the Turkish students who were taught by native speaker instructors showed higher anxiety level than those who were taught by non-native speakers of English.

When we take a closer look to each item in the Comprehension Apprehension factor, it can be seen that the students showed relatively low level of anxiety when the lecturer asked the students to speak in the classroom (*I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English-medium class, I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English lecturer says,* and *I get nervous when the lecturers of the English-medium class asks*

*questions which I haven't prepared in advance*). The argument that can explain this finding is proposed by Bozavli & Gulmez (2012) that teacher factor plays a role in creating anxiety in the classroom. According to Bozavli & Gulmez (2012), teacher-student relationship, teacher's behaviour and attitude toward students are important factors in controlling students' anxiety.

Table 6. Respondents' Fear of Negative Evaluation

| Item | Mean | Category |
|---|---|---|
| I worry about making mistakes in the English-medium class. | 3.03 | medium |
| I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am. | 2.07 | low |
| It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in the English-medium class. | 2.97 | medium |
| I get depressed when the teacher corrects my answers in the English-medium class | 3.23 | medium |
| I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 2.15 | low |
| I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English. | 2.63 | medium |
| **Average** | **2.68** | **medium** |

In terms of fear of negative evaluation, the data in Table 6 shows that the anxiety level of fear of negative evaluation factor is medium ($\bar{x}$=2.68). Furthermore, it is also suggested that the item with the highest score is *I get depressed when the teacher corrects my answers in the English-*

medium class ($\bar{x}$=3.23), indicating a medium level anxiety, while the lowest one is *I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am* ($\bar{x}$=2.07), indicating a low level of anxiety.

*Research Question 2: What are the affective language learning strategies used by the students?*

Data in Table 7 shows the affective language learning strategies applied by the respondents in English classes. Overall the category of the affective strategy of the respondents were somewhat true of me, suggesting that the respondents moderately applied the affective strategy in their English classes. It is seen that the respondents usually did not write what they feel concerning language learning in a diary, as it is the item with the lowest mean score ($\bar{x}$=1.68).However, the data reveals that the respondents usually encouraged themselves to speak English even if they were afraid of making a mistake. This finding is suggested by the relatively high mean score of the item, ($\bar{x}$=3.63).

Table 7. Respondents' Affective Strategy

| Item | Mean | Category |
|---|---|---|
| I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. | 3.35 | somewhat true of me |
| I encourage myself to speak English even if I am afraid of making a mistake. | 3.63 | usually true of me |
| I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. | 2.43 | usually not true of me |
| I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English. | 3.07 | somewhat true of me |
| I write down my | 1.68 | usually not |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| feelings in a language learning diary. | | true of me |
| I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. | 2.87 | somewhat true of me |
| Average | 2.84 | somewhat true of me |

*Research Question 3: What relationship exists between speaking anxiety and the affective language learning strategies?*

Table 8. Correlations between speaking anxiety and affective language learning strategies

| | | Speaking Anxiety | ALLS |
|---|---|---|---|
| ANXIETY | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -.293[*] |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .023 |
| | N | 60 | 60 |
| TOTAL AFFECTIVE STRATEGY | Pearson Correlation | -.293[*] | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .023 | |
| | N | 60 | 60 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As it is displayed in Table 8, the results show that there is a negative correlation between speaking anxiety and the application of affective language learning strategies. It suggests that the students' speaking anxiety is inclined to decline as they increasingly apply the affective language learning strategies when learning language or in language classes.

According to Hardan (2013), a successful language learner normally employ at least one language learning strategy, if not a range of language strategies, when learning foreign languages. These language strategies are used to make the learning more meaningful to the learner, help tackle with difficulties, as well as motivate language learners to enhance learning.

It was found that despite the moderate employment of the affective language learning strategies by the respondents in the present study, yet it was relatively effective in decreasing the anxiety level of the respondents. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) suggested that affective language learning strategies are inclined to be involved in the language learning when dealing with handling emotions or attitudes. Additionally, Oxford's as cited in Hardan (2013) categorized the affective learning strategies as indirect strategies which may help learners lower their anxiety, encourage themselves to have a more meaningful learning, and balance their emotional temperature when facing difficulties during the process of language learning.

**CONCLUSION**

This study found that the level of the speaking anxiety of the respondents was generally moderate, with the level of comprehension apprehension factor and the fear of evaluation were also moderate. The results suggest that the respondents in the present study moderately employ the affective language learning strategies in English medium classes. This study also found that students' speaking anxiety level is correlated with the involvement of affective language learning strategies in the process of language learning.

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