

関西国際大学コミュニケーション研究所
コミュニケーション研究叢書 第6集 (2008年2月)

The Importance of Research on “Teacher Anxiety”

教師不安研究の必要性 ―面接調査の結果から―

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1. Introduction

My aim in this paper¹ is to discuss the importance and usefulness of conducting research that focuses on teacher anxiety and to present the results of a pilot study which used semi-structured interviews with Japanese teachers of English.

2. Literature Review

Language anxiety has been studied by many researchers. MacIntyre (1999) explains that two kinds of conceptualization on language anxiety have been postulated. According to the first approach, language anxiety is viewed as a manifestation of other more general types of anxiety. In the second approach, language anxiety is seen as a distinctive form of anxiety experienced in response to language learning. The first approach that language anxiety is a distinctive, unique type of anxiety in learning or using foreign language was also described in MacIntyre and Gardner (1991). MacIntyre and Gardner mention that it seems more appropriate to consider language anxiety as situation-specific anxiety than treating them as trait anxiety or state anxiety. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), language anxiety derives from three sources: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by others, and test anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Some other attempts have been made to study language anxiety. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) investigated the relationship between speaking skills and language anxiety. Elkhafaifi (2005) showed relationships between listening and language anxiety. Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) studied the relationships between writing and language anxiety.

As mentioned above, a vast amount of scholarship has been devoted to anxiety of

¹ The present paper is based on my presentation at the 5th Asia TEFL International Conference held at the Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on June 8-10, 2007.

foreign language learners. However, almost no attention at all has been paid to that of foreign language teachers. Now, I discuss the importance of teacher anxiety research by introducing papers on teacher anxiety written by Horwitz (1996) and Kim and Kim (2004). Horwitz's contribution lies in initially drawing attention to teacher anxiety. In the paper, Horwitz points out that many of nonnative foreign language teachers have experienced language anxiety. It is also pointed out that teachers are susceptible to Foreign Language Anxiety, because they tend to want to learn English sincerely, to pursue an idealized level of proficiency, and to present themselves to the world as high-level speakers. Kim and Kim (2004) also contributed to the study by conducting a quantitative survey. This study used "The Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale," which was developed based on "The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (Horwitz, 1983), to measure anxiety in Korean primary school English teachers. The study aimed to identify sources of primary school English teacher anxiety.

As Horwitz and Kim and Kim discuss, teacher anxiety is an important variable to consider with regard to English language teaching, in that it may negatively influence the way teachers perform. Needless to say, language anxiety can negatively influence not only learners but also teachers. Under the influence of high anxiety, teachers may tend to:

- lose their confidence
- decrease use of their target language
- avoid innovative teaching approaches

Here, I'd like to discuss three points of view that should be added to teacher anxiety research when it is applied to English educational situation in Japan. The points are: a) objective data on the amount of English Japanese teachers use in class, b) anxiety Japanese teachers experience in communicating with foreign teachers, c) some other variables related to language anxiety such as "beliefs"

3. A Pilot Study

In order to sort out variables which should be taken into account in teacher anxiety research, I conducted a pilot study. This pilot study aimed to investigate when English teachers feel anxious and what variables can affect teacher anxiety. Interviews were done from January to March 2007.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Japanese teachers of English.

Seven of them work at a university, one in high school, and two in junior high schools. Nine of them are females and one is a male. Six of them have got high scores on TOEIC, TOEFL or some other English test. Personally I got the impression that seven of them are confident of their speaking ability in English, and three are not. Through the semi-structured interviews, the following questions were asked to most of the interviewees:

- In what situation do you feel anxious? (In class or outside class? In talking with Japanese colleagues or native teachers of English?)
- How often do you use English? (Do you conduct lessons in English? Do you have many opportunities to speak English in daily life?)
- How satisfied are you with your English ability?
- How do you think English teachers should be in front of their students?

Open coding process and Axial coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to analyze my data. The first step, open coding, was to label and code phenomena found in each statement. The second step, axial coding, was to collect similar codes I made in the first step and relate them to each other

4. Results and Discussion

In the first step, I made labels abstracted from statements given by teachers during the interviews. As a result, 49 labels were made. After labeling, as the second step, I made four big categories, category a) - d). This categorization is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Categorization of Teachers' Statements

Category	Subcategory	Label
a) Relationships with Interactants Which Influence Anxiety	a1) Relationships with Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 anxiety about making mistakes in front of students 2 positive attitude toward making mistakes in front of students 3 anxiety about performance using English in front of students 4 confidence in performance using English in front of students 5 preference for speaking English in class 6 beliefs about relationship between teachers and students

		<p>7 anxiety about their relationships with students</p> <p>8 positive attitudes toward the current relationship with students</p>
	a2) Relationships with Their Colleagues Who Are Native Speakers of English (CNS)	<p>9 reasons why they feel easy in communicating with CNS</p> <p>10 positiveness in communicating with CNS</p> <p>11 preference for communicating with CNS in English to with Japanese colleagues</p> <p>12 positions that they are learners and CNS are teachers</p> <p>13 perception that they are learners of English</p>
	a3) Japanese Colleagues	<p>14 perception that communication with CNS are different from that with Japanese colleagues</p> <p>15 perception that there are no difference between communication with CNS and that with Japanese colleagues</p> <p>16 anxiety about communicating with CNS</p> <p>17 negativeness in communicating with CNS</p> <p>18 anxiety about communicating with Japanese colleagues in English</p> <p>19 reasons why they feel easy in communicating with Japanese colleagues</p>
b) Images of How Teachers Should Be	b1) Images Related to English Ability	<p>20 perception of average English ability of general English teachers</p> <p>21 teachers should use different approaches according to educational levels</p> <p>22 teachers should have different types of English ability according to educational levels</p> <p>23 teachers should have different levels of English ability according to contents they teach</p> <p>24 teachers should have different levels of English ability according to educational levels</p> <p>25 teachers should have different types of English ability according to contents they teach</p> <p>26 every teacher should have the same level of English ability</p>
	b2) Images Related to Teaching Ability	<p>27 English use in class</p> <p>28 reasons why they take positive attitudes toward using English in class</p> <p>29 reasons why they take negative attitudes toward using English in class</p> <p>30 unwillingness to use English in class</p>

	b3) Images Related to Other Factors	31 teachers should have different aptitudes according to educational levels 32 beliefs about teaching methods 33 beliefs about ideal images of English teachers
c) Perception of Their Own Ability as an English Teacher	c1) Perception of Their English Ability	34 perception of their own willingness to communicate 35 reasons why they think their present English ability is good enough to teach English 36 what part of their English ability they feel anxious about 37 what part of their English ability they don't feel anxious about 38 willingness to improve their own English ability
	c2) Perception of Their Teaching Ability	39 what part of their teaching methods they feel anxious about 40 what part of their teaching methods they don't feel anxious about
d) Others		41 perception of how often CNS use Japanese work shift 42 reasons why they are willing to be exposed to English in daily life 43 English use in daily life 44 causes of anxiety 45 practice to decrease anxiety 46 no practice to decrease anxiety 47 motivation to decrease anxiety 48 beliefs about English

Nineteen out of 49 labels were grouped into three subcategories, a1), a2), and a3), depending on the interactant such as students or colleagues. Then the three subcategories were grouped into one, category a). The name “Relationship with Interactants Which Influence Anxiety” was given to this category. Labels such as label 1 “anxiety about making mistakes in front of students” and label 5 “preference for speaking English in class” are included in this category.

Labels 20 to 33 were grouped into three subcategories, b1), b2), and b3). Then the three subcategories were grouped into one, category b). The name “Images of How Teachers should Be” was given to this category. Labels such as label 24 “teachers should have different levels of English ability according to educational levels” and label 30 “unwillingness to use English in class” are included in this category.

Labels 34 to 40 were grouped into two subcategories, c1) and c2). Then the two subcategories were grouped into one, category c). The name “Perception of their own

ability as an English Teacher” was given to this category. Labels such as label 36 “what part of their English ability they feel anxious about” are included in this category.

Other labels left after making categories a) - c) were grouped into category d).

Let us now focus on category a) and consider some tendencies seen from the analysis of these labels in this category. Here, I focus on three labels: label 1 “anxiety about making mistakes in front of students,” label 5 “preference for speaking English in class,” and label 18 “anxiety about communicating with Japanese colleagues in English.”

Label 1: anxiety about making mistakes in front of students

I labeled the following comment given by a teacher as label 1.

“If I make mistakes in English in front of my students, especially high-level students, I’ll lose credibility with them very soon.” [No data on his/her English ability was given, and s/he has about 10 years teaching experience.]

Two more teachers made similar statements. What the three teachers have in common is they are experienced teachers, but don’t have high TOEFL/TOEIC scores. This means that teachers who don’t have high scores on English tests tend to think that they shouldn’t show themselves making mistakes in English to their students. To put this another way, teachers may be influenced by a specific belief about making mistakes in English in front of their students.

Label 5: anxiety about making mistakes in front of students

I labeled the comment below as label 5.

“Strangely, in class, I feel easier speaking in English than in Japanese. ... Since I guess students won’t be able to understand me, I don’t want to speak too much in English. Speaking in English prevents me from speaking too much.” [S/he’s got 970 on TOEIC and about 15 years teaching experience.]

Two more teachers made similar statements. What the three teachers have in common is that they have experiences of relatively long-term stay in foreign countries, and have high TOEIC scores. Though this is just my personal impression, they looked confident of their speaking ability in English. So, it’s not unreasonable to suppose that there is a tendency as follows: Teachers who have confidence of their English ability, which is

backed up with experiences or high scores, may tend to feel more comfortable speaking English than their native language. In other words, experiences of staying abroad or higher English proficiency may be variables which influence teachers' comfort in speaking English.

Label 18: anxiety about communicating with Japanese colleagues in English

The same label, label 18, was given to the two comments below.

“(If I make mistakes in front of my Japanese colleagues···,) Oh, no! Oh, no! What should I do?” [No data on his/her English ability was given, s/he has about 15 years teaching experience, and s/he didn't seem confident of her English ability.]

“I don't care at all, if my colleagues who are native speakers of English find me making mistakes in English. But, I feel very anxious when Japanese colleagues find my mistakes. They may look down on me···.” [No data on his/her English ability was given, and s/he has 18 years teaching experience.]

Three more teachers made similar statements, but I found nothing the five teachers have in common from my data. As this result shows, it may be a common tendency for various types of teachers to be afraid of negative evaluation by their peers. That is, a variable such as fear of negative evaluation by peers could influence many teachers.

5. Conclusion

As we have seen, several variables such as beliefs, experiences, English proficiency, and fear of negative evaluation by peers seem to be related to teacher anxiety. As pointed out earlier focusing on category a), interactants also seem related to teacher anxiety as a situational variable. The results demonstrated that Japanese teachers of English seem to have specific anxiety to them, and several variables seem to be interrelated. Needless to repeat, anxiety can negatively influence teachers in many different ways. It is hoped that the relationships between teacher anxiety and influential variables will be made clearer.

What remains to be done are two: One is to give a clear definition of teacher anxiety, though I've been calling any type of anxiety teachers experience “teacher anxiety” collectively. Another is to develop a questionnaire to measure anxiety specific

to English teachers, based on the results of this qualitative study.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to all the interviewees in this research. I am also grateful to the Department of English Communication / Education for allowing me to conduct the research at the university.

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