

To Speak or Not to Speak?

A Qualitative Study of Two ESL Learners' Second Language Speaking Anxiety



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Abstract

The aim of this study is to get a deeper understanding of ESL learners' anxiety when speaking in a learning context and how teachers can help their students overcome FLSA. This study seeks to investigate the causes of FLA that the participants may experience when learning English. The study also investigates what teachers can do to reduce learners' anxiety of speaking a L2. To do this, interviews with two adult ESL learners were conducted via email and the data were analyzed using a qualitative method: content analysis. The data revealed that the primary causes for FLSA were the fear of being judged and limited ability in grammar and vocabulary. The measures taken to ease the learners' FLSA include a comfortable classroom environment, friendly teachers and different teaching methods. The findings also indicate that teachers should create a safe and comfortable classroom environment, prepare their apprehensive students on topics, use translanguaging as a possible pedagogical approach and, finally, have knowledge of the concept of FLA and FLSA as well as be observant of different underlying factors for it.

Keywords: Speech anxiety, second language speaking anxiety, classroom environment, translanguaging

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A large number of people experience anxiety about speaking in different situations, either outside or inside a classroom. A lecture concerning speech anxiety, held by the student health center at Lund University, revealed that there are plenty of people who acknowledge this as being an issue for them. Before the lecture had begun, an increasing number of people came through the door to listen to what the lecturers had to say about the matter. The lecturers, surprised by the high number of attendance, quickly had to find more chairs in order for everyone to fit (O. Samuelsson, personal communication, October 15, 2018). According to Skolverket (2011), learners of English at the upper secondary level in Sweden must be given equal opportunities to develop their English proficiency. This aim can, for some students, be difficult to meet if they are reluctant to speak during class due to anxiety caused by speaking a L2.

Anxiety related to performance in a L2 has become a popular topic investigated by researchers. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), a questionnaire that helps to determine the causes of students' foreign language anxiety (FLA). The FLCAS have been used as a standard questionnaire by other researchers to determine causes for students' fear of speaking in the L2 classroom (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; Muhammad Khan, 2015; Tosun, 2018; Karabiyik & Özkan, 2017; Hilleson, 1998; He, 2018). I have earlier, as a school assignment, studied causes for FLA amongst learners at an upper secondary school in Sweden. Suggestions for further research were, amongst others, FLA's association with age and culture. A study revealed that students from Asia, who studied at Chalmers University in Gothenburg, experienced far more FLA than other national groups (McGee, 1999). A different study conducted on the subject of FLA indicated significant connections between learners' anxiety and the learners' age (Karabiyik & Özkan, 2017), while a study by Tosun (2018) revealed a contrary conclusion. Even though studies on the issue vary, they all show somewhat identical results; a lot of learners do in fact experience

anxiety related to the learning of a L2 (Tosun, 2018; Karabıyık & Özkan, 2017; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; Horwitz et al., 1986; McGee, 1999; Tsui, 1998; Hilleson, 1998; He, 2018). The following study investigates causes for FLA amongst students, however, instead of using FLCAS, the participants are interviewed for a deeper understanding of the issue. This study will not be comparative but merely explore causes for foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) amongst two adult ESL learners based in Shanghai to improve the emotional aspect of second language teaching and learning.

Aim

The aim of this study is to get a deeper understanding of ESL learners' anxiety when speaking in a learning context and how teachers can help their students overcome FLSA.

Research Questions

- 1) Do the respondents experience FLSA when learning English? If so, what are the causes?
- 2) What can teachers do to reduce learners' anxiety of speaking a L2?

Theoretical Framework

This section will display previous research and define specific concepts related to the topic of FLA and FLSA and its connection with L2 teaching and learning.

Foreign Language Anxiety and Second Language Speaking Anxiety

Olsson Jers (2010) defines the concept of *fear of being exposed* which is connected to speech anxiety in a classroom setting. The fear of being exposed is based on the assumption that the content of what is said and/or the physical appearance of the speaker is being judged by the listeners/viewers. Despite the fact that there is no specific definition for FLSA, He (2018) describes it as: “an individual’s fear or nervousness associated with either real or anticipated oral communication in a foreign language with another person or persons” (p. 4).

The FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) is a questionnaire designed to determine the causes related to students’ FLA. Plenty of studies have been made using this scale in order to understand what causes contribute to FLA (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; Muhammad Khan, 2015; Tosun, 2018; Karabıyık & Özkan, 2017; Hilleson, 1998; He, 2018). The findings in He’s (2018) study demonstrated that the general FLA, amongst the participating students, were not high, however, the mean score of the scale showed that the students had high levels concerning FLSA. Other studies’ results confirm that, amongst other causes, limited knowledge of vocabulary, speaking in language classes and being asked questions by the teacher without preparation were, according to the FLCAS, provoking FLA (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; Tsui, 1998; He, 2018, Tosun, 2018).

A comparative study, that examined FLA’s correlation with age, revealed that students’ age had a significant impact on their FLA and that the older students experienced higher levels of FLA than the younger students (Karabıyık & Özkan, 2017). Another similar study established

no such correlation which concludes “that there is no difference in terms of different age groups when anxiety is the case on the subject of foreign language teaching” (Tosun, 2018, p. 235).

Foreign Language Anxiety in the L2 Classroom

Olsson Jers (2010) mentions a *comfortable classroom environment* or *comfortable classroom culture* (p. 165), which refers to students’ comfort and well-being in the classroom and the relationship amongst the students as well as the relationship between the students and their teacher. Olsson Jers (2010) explains that it is common for learners to feel anxious about speaking during the first school year due to the unfamiliar situations that will occur and since the students are new with one another as well as the teacher. Olsson Jers (2010) further explains that this period is when a safe classroom environment needs to be created. A comfortable classroom environment which contains mutual respect can ease learners’ anxiety about speaking (Olsson Jers, 2010; Muhammad Khan, 2015), therefore, it is essential that interactions are conducted in a safe and relaxed environment (Strömquist, 1992). The participants in Muhammad Khan’s (2015) study held, amongst other causes, a “stressful classroom environment” (p. 51) accountable for why they experienced FLSA. Muhammad Khan (2015) writes:

During the interview sessions, the high anxious subjects pointed out that classroom is a place where they are judged, their mistakes are highlighted, and their grades are affected whenever they take part in any speaking activity. (p. 51)

One student demonstrated this stressful classroom environment further by referring to their teacher’s and classmates’ “strange facial expressions” (Muhammad Khan, 2015, p. 51) whenever they spoke the L2 which made them afraid to speak in class.

When asked which aspect was more anxiety provoking, 22 out of 30 participants in He’s (2018) study expressed that speaking the L2 with their teacher was worse than speaking with

their classmates since it is the teachers that evaluate them and corrects their mistakes. The participating teachers own suggestions to help their students with their FLA were to “arrange games in English and provide examples before tasks” (He, 2018, p. 149). One solution that can ease FLA is to create a “relaxed or friendly atmosphere” (He, 2018, p. 148), this would, according to one student in He’s (2018) study, make students feel less nervous or embarrassed and take the fear out of making mistakes (He, 2018). Both the participating students and teachers listed four qualities a L2 teacher should obtain in order to ease students’ FLSA: “friendly, humorous, patient (tolerant of errors), and easy going” (He, 2018, p. 150).

The *fear of being negatively evaluated*, where the one doing the *evaluating* refers to both teachers and other students, is considered as one major reason for why students experience FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; He, 2018).

Hilleson (1998) investigated what factors of FLA L2 students, attending the United World college of South East Asia in Singapore, experienced and how these factors could be managed. The results revealed that a negative classroom atmosphere, concerning the students’ performances in the classroom, was one major contributing factor to the students’ anxiety. The participants indicated that they did not always feel encouraged to speak in the classroom, therefore, the anxious students’ reticence could easily be interpreted as a personality factor rather than caused by speaking a L2 (Hilleson, 1998).

Reticent students that experience FLSA can be considered both back-benchers and low achievers which makes teachers not expect much from them (Muhammad Khan, 2015). Another study with similar findings showed that students’ reticence was connected to the students’ fear of making mistakes, being laughed at and the teachers’ intolerance of silence in the classroom (Tsui, 1998). In order to understand why reticence in a language classroom occurs Tsui (1998) explains that:

we need to understand language learning [...] as a process in which individual learners are constantly putting themselves in a vulnerable position of having their own self-concept undermined and subjecting themselves to negative evaluations. This process is stressful and likely to generate much anxiety for the learners. [...] learners are required to perform in a language that they are still trying to master. (p. 155-156)

There are strategies that teachers can implement in order to reduce students' anxiety about speaking in a L2 class. Hilleson (1998) mentions open discussions about the subject of anxiety in order for the students to understand what they or their peers are going through. Allowing the students a longer time to reflect upon questions, accepting a wide range of possible answers and building trust and a good relationship with the students are other possible implications for teachers (Tsui, 1998).

It is crucial for teachers to have knowledge of FLA in the L2 classroom and the causes of it which can prevent misjudgment of their students (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) present two approaches teachers should consider in order to help students deal with their anxiety. The first approach regards the construction of the lesson. Teachers need to make it diverse and less stressful for the students, furthermore, teachers need to help their communication apprehensive students handle their anxiety. It is important that teachers prepare their apprehensive students on topics and provide them with the time they need in order to formulate themselves correctly before answering questions (Burns, 2012). Tsui (1998) raised this problem and revealed that teachers normally wait only two seconds or less for students to answer their questions. Tsui (1998) further explains that this can lead to students feeling unprepared and this could be a cause as to why they are reluctant to speak.

The English Language in China and the Chinese L2 Learner

In the Swedish school system, there are high demands on students' oral participation in the classroom. Skolverket (2011) state that in the teaching of the subject of English 5 at upper secondary school, students need to develop their oral communication skills and be able to "summarise, explain, discuss, report and argue" (p. 3). In China, the English language has been "viewed as the language of the enemy" (Hu, 2004, p. 7) but, over the last 25 years, China has accomplished an increasing number of changes in the English language education in order to nationally modernize and develop the country (Hu, 2004). The Chinese leadership gave attention to "a new wave of educational reforms" (Hu, 2004, p. 10) where the country invested in English teachers, upgrading the teaching content and new syllabi that focused on providing learners with new strategies that partially focused on communicative ability (Hu, 2004).

McGee (1999) investigated FLA amongst different national groups at an International Masters Programme at Chalmers University in Gothenburg. The findings revealed that students from Asia experienced far more FLA than other national groups due to sociocultural factors. McGee (1999) writes that there appears to be a difference of teaching and learning styles in China compared to Western universities due to a "different set of demands and expectations" (p. 184). A major difference is, for example, that memorization is highly valued in Chinese education and students should not seem too smart in front of their classmates. It is also a rare occurrence that students are asked to answer questions without preparation (McGee, 1999). Tsui (1998) writes that "the problem of getting students to respond is particularly acute with Asian students, who are generally considered to be more reserved and reticent than their Western counterparts" (p. 145). It is, however, important not to generalize and make the assumption that talkative students learn better or acknowledge this Western fashioned stereotype of the Asian learner but, rather, find the root cause for why students are reticent and do not participate vocally in the classroom (Tsui, 1998; McGee, 1999). It is important that

students verbally participate in the L2 classroom and be a part of what is “essential to language acquisition” (Tsui, 1998, p. 146), namely input and output (Tsui, 1998).

Teaching Techniques for Language Speaking

Learners who have a hard time speaking tend to have more anxiety speaking in a L2 class (Horwitz et al., 1986). There are students who believe that reticence in a L2 class is better than guessing a word or pronouncing the word incorrectly (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In the history of language education, there has been a monolingual view on languages where the languages have been seen as parallel systems which should be held apart in order to achieve maximum L2 proficiency (Cummins, 2008; Cenoz, 2017; Carstens, 2016). Translanguaging argues for a contrary approach. The definition of translanguaging is that bi- or multilingual learners’ languages are, instead of being parallel entities, seen as a resource in the classroom and learners should be able to use their “entire linguistic repertoire” (Lopez et al., 2017, p. 4). The translanguaging pedagogy believes that learners benefit from using all languages at their disposal and should actively use them (Garcia & Selzer, 2016; Lopez et al., 2017). Garcia (2009) illustrates translanguaging as “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (p. 45).

The participating students in Cummins’s (2008) study thought translanguaging was a beneficial approach and helped them to understand complex concepts and, by mixing their L1 with their L2, only benefitted their language learning. Creese and Blackledge (2010) examined a Gujarati school, in the United Kingdom, where both English and Gujarati were used to provide information to the students and their parents at an assembly. The findings confirmed that, by using translanguaging as a medium of instruction, the individuals with lesser proficiency in English contributed far more to the discussions and were more likely to grasp the information. Tsui (1998) writes that the participating teachers in her study expressed that the students’

reticence was a product of not being able to fully understand the questions or instructions at hand. This would either lead to the students asking the teacher to rephrase the question or falling silent. This reticence further causes problems because “the teacher has no way of knowing what the problem is” (Tsui, 1998, p. 155).

Since the teacher, presumably, does not possess knowledge in every language in the classroom, they should merely make the languages available in the classroom (Garcia & Seltzer, 2016). This could be accomplished by dividing the students with the same mother tongue into groups so that they will be able to get the most out of discussions, provide instructions in the L1 to grasp concepts and information and using dictionaries and word lists to help the students comprehend the content and provide them with the chance to show their knowledge (Garcia & Seltzer, 2016; Cummins, 2008; Cenoz, 2017; Lopez et al., 2017).

Not only do teachers need to keep in mind that real-life material, in the teaching of students, is desired, which Leung (2012) calls “meaningful language use” (p. 14), but also in order for students to speak, teachers need to teach speaking (Burns, 2012). Burns (2012) explains that since speaking an L2 can be anxiety provoking, teachers can use different strategies such as “[u]se grammar flexibly to produce a wide range of utterances that can express meaning precisely” (p. 171) and “[u]se appropriate vocabulary [...] relevant to [the students] speaking needs” (p.171) to help learners with their anxiety.

Method

This section presents the method for this study as well as the gathering of the empirical material.

This section also holds information about the interview, respondents, and ethics.

Interview

Seidman (2006) writes that “the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). The reason for choosing to interview ESL learners was, therefore, to get a deeper understanding of the respondents’ experiences with the issue that is FLSA. The data were collected through what Nunan (1999) calls a “structured interview” (p. 149) via email, which has predetermined questions for the respondents to answer. Some follow-up questions of their answers were also sent.

Respondents

The two respondents were adult ESL learners based in Shanghai, China. Respondent 1 (R1) is at an advanced level of English, whereas respondent 2 (R2), is at an intermediate level. R2 is currently taking private lessons in English. I have previously done a school assignment that focused on ESL learning in Sweden and wanted an international approach for this study. Therefore, respondents based in Shanghai were chosen. The respondents were contacted through a mutual acquaintance who acted as an interpreter. The interpreter helped the respondents with the translation of specific words, assured that R1 and R2 fully understood the consent form and information sheet and did not act as an interpreter normally would (i.e. the interpreter would not translate all communication from English to Chinese). The interpreter was a necessity since I was not able to meet with the respondents in person.

Gathering of Material

The data were collected by sending out interview questions, information about the study and a general consent form for the interviews to the respondents via email. After receiving the answers, some follow-up questions were sent back to the respondents. The examples of the respondents written answers, which are shown in the analysis, have not been altered. The primary interview questions can be seen in the appendix.

Content Analysis

The material for this study is qualitative, therefore, analyzed with a qualitative analyzing method: content analysis. A thematic content analysis allows the researcher to see different themes the participants refer to. Widerberg (2002) writes that one can proceed from either a theory or an empirical near approach in the studying of the material. This means that the researcher can, in advance, choose themes from a particular theory or, after a careful reading of the material, single out themes (p. 144-145). I have proceeded from the latter, namely studied the material and then found reoccurring themes.

Bryman (2002) states that the best way to analyze the material is to read through the material without taking notes, then to look for similarities in the participants' answers, also known as coding. Bryman (2002) further explains that one should code everything that could be of relevance and subsequently choose the most central themes. The themes that emerged through my material that provoked FLSA was: *Fear of being judged* and *limited ability in grammar and vocabulary*. The themes that emerged through my material that eased FLSA was: *Different teaching methods, comfortable classroom environment* and *friendly teachers*.

Ethics

An information sheet, as well as a general consent form for interviews, were sent to the respondents. The information sheet let the respondents have full insight into the study and the purpose and process of it. The information sheet also specified that the participation in this study was voluntary, that they could withdraw their participation at any time if they wished to do so, and would be able to read the study before publication. Seidman (2006) states the importance of “maintaining the confidentiality of the names of the participants who are the source of the [...] transcripts and any other material that could identify the participants” (p. 70), therefore, the names of the respondents as well as their schools have been kept confidential. The risk of the study is another important factor to inform the interviewees of, for instance, certain questions may arise uncomfortable emotions for the interviewees which was explained in the information sheet that was sent to the respondents (Seidman, 2006).

Analysis

This section will display the five themes that emerged through the material: *fear of being judged, limited ability in grammar and vocabulary, comfortable classroom environment, friendly teachers* and *different teaching methods*. Each theme will hold examples of the respondents' answers, which have not been modified, and are analyzed with concepts and previous research presented in the theoretical framework. The respondents will be referred to as R1 and R2 and the interviewer as I in the examples. The aim of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the respondents' anxiety when speaking English as an L2 and how teachers can help their students overcome FLSA. The research questions are: 1) Do the respondents experience FLSA when learning English? If so, what are the causes? 2) What can teachers do to reduce learners' anxiety of speaking a L2?

Fear of Being Judged

When asked whether they ever felt nervous about speaking during English class and if yes, why?

R1 reported as being nervous as a new learner of English. They expressed being afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly.

I: Why did it make you feel nervous pronouncing the words wrong, do you think?

R1: Cause I feel its embarrassing to pronounce words wrong. And when you are young and a student you are nervous that other classmates will laugh at you.

Here, R1 touches upon two subjects. Firstly, they believe that they were more nervous when they were a younger learner of English which can be seen as a contradiction to the findings of a study which examined learners' FLA's correlation with the learners' age (Karabiyik and Özkan, 2017). The findings revealed that age had a significant effect on the learners' anxiety

about speaking the L2, yet it was the older learners who experienced far more FLA (Karabıyık and Özkan, 2017). Tosun (2018) findings, however, establish no specific correlation between FLA and the learners' age and the conclusion being that everyone can experience FLA in all ages (Tosun, 2018).

Secondly, the respondent raises the problem of pronouncing the words incorrectly and being laughed at which Olsson Jers (2010) conceptualizes as the *fear of being exposed*. The concept refers to the assumption that what you say is being judged and valued by the listeners/viewers. He (2018) further defines the concept by relating it to L2 learning. An anxious person experiences nervousness while having a conversation or even expected oral communication in a L2 with others (He, 2018). Similar to R1, a student in Muhammad Khan's (2015) study articulated being afraid of speaking during English class. This student pointed to "strange facial expressions" (Muhammad Khan, 2015, p. 51) of his peers and teacher. Being laughed at or the fear of being judged is a result that is closely associated with other studies that have used Horwitz et al. (1986) FLCAS which conclude that this fear is highly FLA provoking (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017; He, 2018). These studies, however, refer to this phenomenon as the *fear of being negatively evaluated*.

R2 stated feeling more embarrassed than nervous when asked if they ever felt nervous when speaking English during class.

I: Do you feel embarrassed to speak in front of your teacher or your classmates (classmates from when you studied English earlier)?

R2: Not in front of the classmates because most people in China have a similar English level, or at least when I was in school. Today most young Chinese can speak.

This can be interpreted as the respondent feeling embarrassed speaking English in front of their teacher. In He's (2018) study, 22 out of 30 participating students declared similar answers when stating that it was more anxiety provoking to speak the L2 with their

teacher rather than with their peers since the teacher was the one that both corrected their mistakes and evaluated them (He, 2018).

Limited Ability in Grammar and Vocabulary

In the second interview question (see appendix), R2 answered that they were probably at an intermediate level and that they could handle most conversations in English, but sometimes found it hard to express themselves and getting through to others when speaking English. R2 revealed that they became frustrated when they knew the words in English but could not articulate grammatically correct.

I: What is the most difficult part of speaking in class?

R2: The most difficult part is when my teacher give me a topic that we should discuss or when my teacher ask more detailed questions. It is difficult for me because usually I need some time to prepare my thoughts and finding the right vocabulary.

R1: I think is when [...] people don't understand you because you can't express exactly what you want to.

As early as during the second question, R2 raised the problem of not being able to express themselves fully in the L2. A similar result was presented in a study by Tsui (1998) where the teacher found this to be problematic because they are not aware of why their students did not speak during classroom interactions or why they did not do what they were asked to do. The teachers of the study explained that the root of the problem was that the learners did not understand the questions and/or instructions (Tsui, 1998). Some students perceive reticence to be a better approach when it comes to speaking a L2 than pronouncing words incorrectly or guessing the answer (Horwitz et al., 1986). Limited knowledge in vocabulary can be seen as a

root cause for why students are quiet during classroom interaction and as a contributing factor to FLA (Sadighi & Datpak, 2017; Tsui, 1998; He, 2018).

Comfortable Classroom Environment

As viewed above, R1 reported that they felt more nervous speaking during English class as a beginner. The feeling of safety in the classroom should be constructed during the first school year, when the fear of communicating is a frequent phenomenon since the students are new with one another as well as the teacher and in many aspects unsure of the new situations that will occur (Olsson Jers, 2010). R1 also said that the teacher must create a comfortable environment if there are students in the classroom who are reluctant to speak.

I: How would you describe a comfortable classroom environment?

R1: Where everyone is treated the same way, both from the teacher and classmates.

I: How important is it to feel comfortable with your teacher and classmates in order to speak during class?

R1: I think a comfortable environment is the key to make students speak with confidence.

Olsson Jers (2010) defines a *comfortable classroom environment* or a *comfortable classroom culture* (p. 165) as students' well-being in the classroom. She refers to a good relationship amongst the students as well as a good relationship between the students and their teacher (Olsson Jers 2010).

The findings in Hilleson's (1998) study, who investigated what factors contributed to students' FLA, revealed that an unsafe atmosphere in the classroom, related to the students' performance, was a major factor that contributed to the L2 learners' anxiety about speaking. Tusi's (1998) findings additionally advocated that the teachers' intolerance of silence in the classroom led to students' reticence.

Communication in the classroom should be implemented by a relaxed environment where the students feel safe (Strömquist, 1992). Olsson Jers (2010) and Muhammad Khan (2015) affirm that a comfortable environment that is infused with mutual respect can ease L2 learners' anxiety about speaking. R2 believes that this classroom is a key factor which could make students speak with confidence. A participant in He's (2018) study comes to a similar conclusion when they say that a comfortable environment in the classroom will make them feel less embarrassed and nervous as well as make them less afraid of making mistakes when learning English as a L2.

Friendly Teachers

As discussed above, a comfortable classroom environment is an important factor which could help learners with their FLSA (Olsson Jers, 2010; Muhammad Khan, 2015). Teachers play a major role in creating this comfortable environment for the learners. Both of the respondents stressed the importance of friendly teachers who listen to them and respect their opinion. L2 teachers' friendliness was, likewise, a quality that the participants in He's (2018) study rose as an important factor to help the students speak.

The lack of time to prepare thoughts during discussions and when they were asked questions, was an issue R2 felt was the most difficult part of speaking during class.

I: What can the teacher do for you here so you feel you have more time to prepare?

R2: Sometime he will send me a topic including questions a couple of days before our class. This way I can prepare better.

I: How would you describe a good teacher?

R2: A teacher that is engaged in a class and in his students. [...] friendly and willing to help in every situation.

In He's (2018) study, 22 out of 30 students, expressed that it was worse speaking a L2 with their teachers than with their peers and they listed qualities that define a good teacher: friendly, humorous, patient and easy going. There are solutions teachers can make in order to meet these qualities. Giving the students a longer time to prepare and reflect upon questions is one such implication in order to allay learners' anxiety of speaking in the classroom (Tsui, 1998; He, 2018; Burns, 2012). Other solutions for teachers are to arrange games in English for the learners, accepting a wide range of answers and to focus on building trust and a good relationship with the students (He, 2018; Tsui, 1998). Hilleson (1998) raises one crucial factor that can help students with their FLA, namely open discussions about the subject of anxiety. It is important to spread the knowledge of FLA and FLSA in order for the students to understand what they and their peers are experiencing (Hilleson, 1998).

Over the last 25 years, China has had a number of changes made to the English language education in order to nationally modernize and develop the country (Hu, 2004). The country has reformed new syllabi to focus more on communicative ability, upgraded the teaching content and given greater attention to the education of English teachers (Hu, 2004). The new reform that focuses more on the communicative ability amongst students are shown in this dialog with R1:

I: Does your teacher encourage you to speak during class?

R1: Yes, they did in primary school, using reward mechanism. For example if you talk more they will give you candy.

I: Do you think this reward mechanism was a good approach? Why/why not?

R1: I think it's a good cause it encouraged me more. I know candy may not be the best thing but 10=15 years ago China was a different country and many English teachers only focused on learning students how to write and read but not speak. So when we got a new

teacher in high school she needed to do something drastic in the beginning to change peoples approach towards learning English.

R1 explains their teachers' attempts to drastically change their approach so that the students could verbally start to express themselves. Students from Asia showed far more FLA in McGee's (1999) study than other national groups who studied at Chalmers University in Gothenburg. The results of the study displayed that the students from Asia experienced more anxiety due to unfamiliar learning styles and other sociocultural factors. This can be associated with R1's answer to how China was a different country that did not focus on getting the students to vocally communicate in the classroom. Learners who experience FLA can be considered to be low achievers which makes teachers not expect much of them (Muhammad Khan, 2015). Asian students are usually considered more reticent compared to Western students and it is essential not to assume that talkative students learn better (Tsui, 1998). It is also essential to recognize that this Western fashioned stereotype of the Asian learner is just that, a stereotype (McGee, 1999). Teachers should instead find the root cause, whether it be sociocultural factors, a stressful classroom environment or other causes as to why students are reluctant to speak during classroom interactions so that communicatively apprehensive students can be part of the input and output which is "essential to language learning" (Tsui, 1998, p. 146). Therefore, it is vital that teachers are aware of the concept of FLA and FLSA in the L2 classroom and are observant of different underlying factors that contribute to FLA in order to avoid misjudgment of the students' performances (Horwitz et al, 1986). Hilleson (1998) presented such a misjudgment as a result of the study showed that teachers saw students' "reticence as a personality factor, rather than a language factor" (p. 264).

Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest two specific approaches that teachers can accommodate when it comes to their communication apprehensive students. The first approach is to help the

students in question to handle their anxiety that arises in various social interactions in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). An example of this approach is to let the apprehensive students have a longer time to prepare their thoughts (Tsui, 1998) by, as R2 suggests, sending out topics and questions for discussion before class. Students need to prepare themselves and plan what to say and how to say it correctly, therefore, it is vital that teachers provide students with that time (Burns, 2012). It has been discovered that teachers generally wait only two seconds or less for students to answer questions which can result in the students feeling reluctant to speak due to a short amount of time to formulate an answer (Tsui, 1998). The second approach regards the construction of the teaching i.e. make it diverse and less stressful for the students to prevent FLSA (Horwitz et al., 1986) which leads up to the last theme.

Different Teaching Methods

R1 brought up different teaching methods as a solution for a comfortable classroom environment and R2 explained that a good teacher is friendly but, in addition to books, uses other materials in their teaching.

I: What do you think is the most important thing for a teacher to keep in mind when it comes to students who do not want to speak during class?

R1: [...] the teacher should find suitable teaching materials for the students including choosing interesting topics that the students can talk about. In other words also use more everyday-life materials or topics rather than always using a textbook.

R2: [...] if the student feel bored the teacher should make more interesting classes or topics.

Leung (2012) states that “meaningful language use” (p. 14), the usage of real-life materials in the teaching of students, is advised. Burns (2012) further explains that in order for the students to speak, teachers need to teach speaking. Speaking in a L2 can provoke anxiety in learners,

therefore, teachers need strategies to help learners speak in the L2 (Burns, 2012). Such strategies could be to “[u]se grammar flexibly to produce a wide range of utterances that can express meaning precisely” (Burns, 2012, p. 171) and “[u]se appropriate vocabulary and accurate language forms relevant to [the learners] speaking needs” (Burns, 2012, p. 171).

It becomes clear that R2 experiences FLSA since they express that it is the L2 that restrains them from speaking:

I: If you could speak your first language during English class, do you think you would speak more?

R2: Yes I would speak more because I could express myself more freely. [...] bu[t] of course if I were allowed to speak Chinese I would probably not learn as much English.

I: Do you think it is a good thing to mix languages during English class or do you think it is better to only speak English? Why?

R2: I don't think it's a good thing to mix languages in general if you're trying to learn a new language, but sometimes there are some problems between me and my teacher because we cannot understand each other. So in this situation I want to speak Chinese, but [...] I probably would not learn as much English if I were allowed to speak Chinese as well.

R2 demonstrates the monolingual view on languages that have a history in language education. Languages have been viewed as parallel systems where learners can achieve maximum L2 proficiency when, the L2 is separated from the L1, in other words, languages should not be mixed (Cummins, 2008; Cenoz, 2017; Carstens, 2016). Translanguaging takes the opposite approach and maintains that mixing languages in the classroom should be seen as a resource rather than separate entities that should not be combined (Lopez et al., 2017). The translanguaging pedagogy encourages L2 learners to use all their “linguistic repertoire” (Lopez

et al., 2017, p. 4). There have been studies collected on the matter where translanguaging is considered a beneficial approach in order for learners, to a greater degree, understand concepts and instructions in the L2 class (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2008). Some students believe that mixing their L2 with their L1 helps them comprehend difficult concepts and information which benefits their language learning (Cummins, 2008). A study which illustrates the advantages of translanguaging were created by Creese and Blackledge (2010), who demonstrated how translanguaging could be used as a medium of instruction. The teachers provided the learners and their parents at the school, which was a Gujarati school located in the United Kingdom, with information both in Gujarati and English. This resulted in richer discussions from individuals with lesser proficiency in English.

R2 also expressed sometimes feeling embarrassed when expected to speak during English class when they did not understand a question from the teacher. Teachers have expressed similar problems when the students do not fully understand questions or instructions which resulted in reticence and the problem of teachers being left in the dark (Tsui, 1998). Translanguaging could be a useful pedagogical approach in order to help students like R2 to fully comprehend concepts and instructions which could prevent reticence. Dividing students into groups according to mother tongue (Garcia & Seltzer, 2016), using word lists and providing dictionaries in the students' L1 in are suggestions on how to pedagogically use translanguaging in the classroom (Lopez et al., 2017). Garcia and Seltzer (2016) conclude that teachers should simply make students' languages available in the classroom and do not need to acquire knowledge in all of those languages.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to get a deeper understanding of ESL learners anxiety when speaking in a learning context and how teachers can help their students overcome FLSA. This section holds a brief summary of the results including the two research questions, limitations and future directions and finally implications for practice.

Summary of Results

1) Do the respondents experience FLSA when learning English? If so, what are the causes?

The respondents do in fact experience speech anxiety in the learning of English as a L2. The causes that arose were: *Fear of being judged, limited ability in grammar and vocabulary, comfortable classroom environment, friendly teachers and different teaching methods.*

Fear of being judged: R1 explains that they felt more nervous speaking English as a younger learner. Tosun (2018) established no correlation between FLA and learners' age which concludes that FLA can be experienced by people regardless of age. R1 also felt embarrassed pronouncing the words incorrectly when speaking the L2 which Olsson Jers (2010) refers to as the fear of being exposed i.e. the assumption that what you say or your body is being judged by the listeners/viewers. R2 felt more embarrassed speaking English in front of their teacher than their peers. It can be more anxiety provoking speaking the L2 with the teacher since it is the teacher that corrects their mistakes and evaluates the students (He, 2018).

Limited ability in grammar and vocabulary: According to the respondents, the most difficult part when it came to speaking during English class was when they did not find the correct vocabulary and therefore could not express themselves precisely how they desired. Students who experience FLSA are often reticent rather than guessing an answer or pronouncing words incorrectly (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Comfortable classroom environment: R1 thought that a comfortable classroom environment is a key factor that would make it easier for students to speak during classroom interactions and that it is essential that this classroom is infused by mutual respect. A classroom where learners feel safe and that is permeated with mutual respect is established to ease L2 learners' anxiety of speaking (Muhammad Khan, 2015; Olsson Jers, 2010; He, 2018).

Friendly teachers: Both respondents raised friendly teachers as a solution that would help them speak during the English class. R1 also mentioned the changes made over the last 25 years in the Chinese syllabus. The Chinese leadership has given more attention to both the education of English teachers and the communicative ability of students (Hu, 2004). It is common that learners are misjudged and that teachers see their reticence as part of their personality rather than a problem caused by speaking the L2 (Hilleson, 1998).

Different teaching methods: Interesting topics to discuss during class and teachers who use other materials rather than solely books should, according to the respondents, help them speak during class. R2 stated that mixing English and Chinese during English class would prevent them from learning English, but acknowledged that mixing the two languages could help whenever there was a gap in the communication.

2) What can teachers do to reduce learners' anxiety of speaking a L2?

It is essential that teachers create a comfortable classroom atmosphere where the students feel safe rather than judged which is a contributing factor of FLA and FLSA (Strömquist, 1992; Olsson Jers, 2019; Muhammad Khan, 2015; He, 2018). A safe classroom atmosphere will make students less afraid of making mistakes when learning English (He, 2018). Teachers can help their apprehensive students by preparing them on topics, giving them a longer time to reflect upon questions, accepting a wide range of answers, focus on building a good relationship with the students, using a wide range of material in their teaching and having open discussions on the subject of FLSA (Tsui, 1998; He, 2018; Burns, 2012; Tsui, 1998; Hilleson, 1998).

Translanguaging could be a solution when it comes to learners who are reluctant to speak during their L2 class. The translanguaging approach can help a reticent student to understand difficult concepts and instructions in their L2 (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2008). Teachers can, for example, divide students into groups according to their L1 (Garcia & Seltzer, 2016) and make sure that the students L1 are available in the classroom in the form of dictionaries or by using word lists (Lopez et al., 2017). The most fundamental part is that teachers have awareness of FLA and FLSA. Teachers need to be observant of different underlying causes for this phenomenon rather than falling into the trap of stereotypes or seeing students' reticence as a part of their personality (Horwitz et al., 1986; McGee, 1999; Hilleson, 1998).

Limitations

Interviews conducted via email allow the respondents more time to reflect on their answers and they are more likely to modify them which means that the researcher will not be able to pick up interesting variations in the respondents' answers and advance them. With this in mind, follow-up questions were sent to the respondents on some of their answers in order to get a deeper understanding of them. It can also be problematic when researchers are not able to interview respondents first hand and instead uses a facilitator or interpreter since it is impossible to know exactly how much the facilitator or interpreter has influenced their answers. By having a thorough and regular dialogue with the interpreter before the interviews took place, this problem was allayed. Also noteworthy, this study is considered to have low external validity since this is a fairly small study with only two respondents which makes it difficult to generalize the result (Nunan, 1999). However, this study was conducted for the learners and every experience they have encountered can contribute to the understanding of the issue.

Future directions.

As stated in the introduction, FLSA has been a popular investigated topic by researchers and plenty of studies have been made using the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to determine causes for students' FLA (Sadighi and Dastpak, 2017; Muhammad Khan, 2015; Tosun, 2018; Karabıyık and Özkan, 2017; Hilleson, 1998; He, 2018). A suggestion for future research is to go beyond the FLCAS and interviews, for example, by making classroom observations which can expose far more than words can say. It would be interesting to get a visualization on how teachers actually work with their communication apprehensive students in a L2 classroom.

Implications for Practice

Seidman (2006) states that “the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth” (p. 9) and for this study, the interest lays with the participants. It is for them this study has been made and their participation was important in order to get results, and to observe a problem that can easily be overlooked. Furthermore, this study was done in order to improve the emotional aspect of second language teaching and learning.

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Appendix

1. How old are you?
2. What level of English are you studying/have been studying?
3. Are you studying with other students or do you take private lessons?
4. What is your first language/mother tongue?
5. Do you usually speak during English class or participate in discussions? If not, why?
6. If you could speak your first language during English class, do you think you would speak more?
7. Do you ever feel nervous about speaking during English class? If so, why do you think that is?
8. What is the most difficult part of speaking in class?
9. Does your teacher encourage you to speak during class?
10. When you speak during class, how should a teacher meet what you are saying so you feel comfortable?
11. Does the teacher ever point to you to answer or does he/she wait for someone to voluntarily answer?
12. How important is it to feel comfortable with your teacher and classmates in order to speak during class?
13. What do you think is the most important thing for a teacher to keep in mind when it comes to students who do not want to speak during class?