Language Anxiety from the Teacher's Perspective:
Interviews with Seven Experienced ESL/EFL Teachers

Kota Ohata

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract

This study examines the teachers' views or assumptions on the phenomenon of language anxiety, especially as to how they have perceived and dealt with student anxiety in their actual teaching practices. In reference to the characteristic features of student anxiety reported in the relevant literature, this study also discusses the teachers' viewpoints in terms of whether there are any gaps or discrepancies with the students' affective needs in the language classroom. In this sense, this study can be considered as an attempt to provide some alternative insights into language anxiety from a different perspective. Similar to the interview study by Young (1992) concerning the perspectives of language specialists (Krashen, Omagio, Terrell, and Rardin) on language anxiety, this study also uses a qualitative in-depth interview format to investigate the seven experienced ESL/EFL teachers' perspectives on the phenomenon. As the interview results indicate, many of the accounts from the participants seem to generally corroborate the findings offered by previous research on language anxiety, but there are also some differences or gaps between the teachers' and students' perceptions on the role of anxiety in the L2 classroom contexts.

Introduction

Various instances of anxiety that students feel in language classrooms have been known to have a serious effect or impact not only on their language performance but also on their further L2 learning processes (Horwitz & Young, 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991a; Young, 1991). Student anxiety manifested in L2 learning contexts, sometimes in the form of nervous feelings or vague fear (Scovel, 1978), is not a single independent variable but rather a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, which involves many other dependent variables. Thus, the issue of student anxiety needs to be addressed from a variety of perspectives and approaches (Young, 1992).

To date, language anxiety has been investigated mainly from the students' perspective, providing a lot of insights into the nature of anxiety that they may feel in language learning and performance (e.g., Bailey, 1983; Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Cohen & Norst, 1989). However, anxiety research from other viewpoints, such as those of teachers, still remains to be addressed thoroughly, especially as to the conceivable gaps between the teacher's views or assumptions on student anxiety and the students' actual psychological needs (Young, 1992).

For example, the students' efforts to deal with their anxiety by using various kinds of affective strategies either consciously or unconsciously may not always be manifested in their apparent behaviors in the classroom so that the teacher can easily notice (Ehrman, 1996). Because of such a covert nature of student anxiety, the teacher's assessment on the students' anxiety might not be matched with the students' actual psychological state. Consequently, such perceptual gaps between the teacher and students in the L2 classroom might be responsible for causing further anxiety among students.

This study, thus, examines the teachers' viewpoints on the issue of language anxiety, especially as to how they have perceived and dealt with student anxiety in their actual teaching practices. In reference to the characteristic features of student anxiety reported in the relevant literature, this study also discusses the teachers' viewpoints by focusing on whether there are any gaps or discrepancies with the students' affective needs in the language classroom.

Review of Related Literature

What is Language Anxiety?: Its Conceptualization

As Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) clearly note in their seminal article on language anxiety, "research has neither adequately defined foreign language anxiety nor described its specific effects on foreign language learning" (p. 125).

Although the phenomenon itself has been widely recognized as some kind of mental block against language learning by language teachers and researchers as well as learners themselves, it

is not until quite recently that a more refined and focused attention has been paid as to the conceptual base of the term, "foreign language anxiety" or more simply "language anxiety" (MacIntyre, 1999).

According to Horwitz and Young (1991, p. 1), there are two general approaches to identifying language anxiety; 1) language anxiety can be viewed as a transfer of other general types of anxiety (e.g. test anxiety or stage flight); 2) language anxiety occurs in response to something unique to language learning experiences. These two approaches represent different perspectives of how language anxiety can be conceptualized, and they are not necessarily taking opposing stances with each other, but the efforts of both sides are considered complementary to the mutual goal of understanding the phenomenon more thoroughly.

The first perspective views language anxiety as a manifestation of other forms of anxiety, such as test anxiety or communication apprehension in the various language learning experiences. This approach has an obvious advantage in its basic assumption that vast knowledge gained from research into other types of anxiety can be applied to explaining language anxiety as well.

Some of the early studies in this approach were mostly correlational in nature, investigating the relationship between some forms of anxiety and language learning and performance. For example, Kleinmann (1977) and Chastain (1975) examined such relationship by focusing on test anxiety and its influence on language learning. Similarly, Daly (1991) and Mejias, Applbaum, Applbaum, and Trotter (1991) studied the ways in which communication apprehension can operate in a second language context.

Many of the findings from those studies, however, were fairly inconsistent and sometimes quite contradictory in terms of the directions of correlation observed between similar studies. That is, while some of the studies found negative correlations between anxiety and language learning (i.e. the higher the anxiety, the lower the language performance), others indicated no such relationship. One of the illustrative examples that yielded the mixed results within the same study, as summarized by Scovel (1978), was a study by Chastain (1975), in which the directions of the correlations between anxiety (test anxiety) and language learning in three languages

(French, German, and Spanish) were not consistent, indicating three levels of correlation: positive, negative, and near zero correlations between anxiety and language performance in those three languages.

Young's (1991) review of sixteen studies that examined the relationship between anxiety and language learning (p. 436-439) also showed similar inconsistent results both within and across studies, and she concluded that "research in the area of anxiety as it relates to second or foreign language learning and performance was scattered and inconclusive" (p. 426).

The second approach to identifying language anxiety views it as a unique type of anxiety or "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning a second language" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 27). In the previous studies by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, 1991b), it was found that performance in the second language was negatively correlated with language anxiety but not with more general forms of anxiety. That is, a total of 23 different anxiety scales were clustered into three categories of anxieties by using a statistical method called factor analysis; 1) the first category or "factor" was found to include most of the anxiety scales (i.e. measures of trait anxiety, communication apprehension, interpersonal anxiety and so on) and was then labeled "General Anxiety" or "Social Evaluation Anxiety"; 2) the second factor was found to be "State Anxiety" (e.g. novelty anxiety, the physical danger scale, etc.) and; 3) the third factor was labeled "Language Anxiety", for it was composed of two measures of French test anxiety, French use anxiety, and French classroom anxiety. Such results of factor analysis clearly indicated that language anxiety could be separated from other forms of anxiety, as evidenced by the procedure of factor analysis that specified no correlations among the factors.

Components of Foreign Language Anxiety and Relevant Factors

In response to somewhat scattered and often inconclusive nature of early research on language anxiety, Horwitz and others (1986) have proposed a model that bridges or encompasses the two major perspectives illustrated above, so that insights from both sides can be incorporated into their theory of *foreign language classroom anxiety* in a synthetic manner. They argue that language anxiety can be comprised of three performance anxieties: 1) communication

apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation. It should be noted, however, that the main contention of Horwitz and others is not advocating the transfer approach but rather arguing for the second perspective that views language anxiety as distinct from other forms of anxiety. In other words, they do not view language anxiety as simply the combination of those three performance anxieties transferred to language learning but rather as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

Communication apprehension, which generally refers to a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings (McCroskey, 1987), is obviously quite relevant to second/foreign language learning contexts. Especially in the language classroom where the learners have little control of the communicative situation, and their performance is constantly monitored by both their teacher and peers (Horwitz et al., 1986), communication apprehension seems to be augmented in relation to the learners' negative self-perceptions caused by the inability to understand others and make themselves understood (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

Such feelings of apprehension that second/foreign language communicative contexts induce are often accompanied by fear of negative evaluation from others. Watson and Friend (1969) characterize it as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (p. 448-51). Even in small group class discussions, for instance, some of the learners might feel anxious for fear of negative evaluation from their peers, possibly ending up being quiet and reticent, contrary to their initial intention to participate. Such psychological dilemmas of L2 learners between willingness to speak up in the classroom and fear of losing their self-esteem in front of others, thus, seems to be a quite ubiquitous phenomenon in second/foreign language classroom settings (Bailey, 1983; Cohen & Norst, 1989).

As Brandl (1987) notes, the learners' fear of being negatively evaluated in the classroom can be further intensified when the instructors believe that their primary role is to constantly correct students' errors more like a drill sergeant's than that of a facilitator. Although many learners feel that some error correction is necessary (Koch and Terrell, 1991; Horwitz, 1988), the manner of

error correction is often cited as potentially provoking anxiety in students. As Young (1991, p. 429) argues, thus, students are more concerned about how (i.e., when, what, where, or how often) their mistakes are corrected rather than whether error correction should be administered in class. In this sense, instructor beliefs about language teaching can also become a source of creating language anxiety in L2 learners, because the assumptions of the teachers as to their role in the language classroom may not always correspond to the individually different needs or expectations that the students would hold toward the teachers.

Another self-conflict within L2 learners, which may be attributable to their unrealistic expectations or beliefs on language learning and achievement, can often be instantiated as frustration or anger toward their own poor performance in second language.

According to Young (1991), erroneous learner beliefs about language learning can contribute greatly to creating language anxiety in students. Gynan (1989) reports that some learners believe that pronunciation is the most important aspect of L2 learning, expressing great concern for speaking with an excellent accent over the content of their statements. Similarly, Horwitz (1988) has also suggested that some of the learner beliefs are derived from their unrealistic and sometimes erroneous conceptions about language learning. She found that 1) some learners were concerned about the correctness of their speech in comparison to native-like accent or pronunciation, that 2) some believed that two years of language learning is enough to achieve a native-like fluency, that 3) some expressed that language learning means learning how to translate, and that 4) some others believed that success of L2 learning are limited to a few individuals who are gifted for language learning.

As is apparent from these results, it is quite conceivable that unrealistic beliefs held by learners themselves can lead to greater anxiety and frustration, especially when their beliefs and reality clash. For example, if beginning learners believe that pronunciation is the single most important aspect of L2 learning, they will naturally get frustrated to find the reality of their imperfect speech even after quite a lot of practice. In this sense, learner beliefs can play another major role in creating language anxiety in students.

With respect to test anxiety, many of the learners feel more pressure when asked to perform in a foreign/second language, because they are doubly challenged by the fact that they need to recall and coordinate many grammar points at the same time during the limited test period. As a result, they may put down the wrong answer or simply "freeze up" due to nervousness, even if they know the correct answer (Price, 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

According to Tobias (1979, 1980, 1986), the arousal of anxiety may work as a mental block to cognitive performance at all of the three cognitive stages: Input, Processing, and Output. In other words, anxiety arousal, which is typically associated with self-deprecating thoughts, fear of failure, or worry over performance procedures, may compete for cognitive resources that normal cognitive processing will demand. Because the capacity for information processing is limited, when combined with anxiety related self-thoughts, the mental processing is naturally overloaded to the extent that language performance is impaired (Eysenck, 1979). As Price (1991) and Schwarzer (1986) point out, even bright students who are excessively concerned about their performance may become so anxious and attempt to compensate by studying even harder (e.g., in the form of "overstudying", Horwitz et al., 1986), because their compulsive efforts do not lead to their intended performance.

Rationale for the Study

From the research on language anxiety presented above, we can naturally conclude that language anxiety that students experience in their various L2 activities cannot be defined in a linear manner, but rather that it can be better construed as a complex, psychological phenomenon influenced by many different factors. Thus, it seems to be more appropriate to investigate language anxiety from a variety of perspectives or approaches (Young, 1992).

One of the conceivable approaches toward better understanding student anxiety and its manifestations in the contexts of L2 learning is to investigate the teacher's perspective or view on language anxiety. Although many of the existing anxiety research have been centered on the student perspective on language anxiety (Bailey, 1983; Koch and Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; and Young, 1991), the teacher's perception on the role of anxiety in L2 learning has not been

examined thoroughly as a potential source of student anxiety.

As clearly noted in the potential sources of language anxiety classified by Young (1991), some of the sources of language anxiety are closely associated with the teacher and the instructional practice. Thus, the teachers' beliefs about language teaching and their actual instructional procedures in the classroom should be examined further, as they have the potential to create anxiety in students.

Similarly, the teacher's error correction practices, which include the ways in which the teacher actually delivers corrective instruction, can also be considered a reflection of individual teacher's beliefs or assumptions about language learning and teaching (Young, 1991). In this sense, the teachers' viewpoints on their students' anxiety and also on the role of anxiety in their learning processes seem to be worth investigating, because the particular social context that the teacher creates in the classroom may have a tremendous impact on the formation of the students' anxiety (Tsui, 1996; Bailey, 1983).

Interviews

Similar to the interview study by Young (1992) concerning the perspectives of language specialists (Krashen, Omagio, Terrell, and Rardin) on language anxiety, this study also uses a qualitative interview format to investigate the experienced ESL/EFL teachers' perspectives on the phenomenon, especially in reference to their own experiences in the language classroom that they have perceived significant or highly relevant to the development of language anxiety among their students.

The rationale behind the use of interviews as a data source is that it can provide access to things that cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, or beliefs (Denzin, 1989; Merriam, 1998). In other words, interviews allow the researcher to obtain a special kind of information, or what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). As Seidman (1998) clearly notes, "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 3). Thus, the

process of interviewing provides participants with opportunities to select, reconstruct, and reflect upon details of their experience within the specific context of their lives.

Given that the primary goal of this study is to explore and describe experienced ESL/EFL teachers' perspectives on language anxiety, in reference to their beliefs or assumptions on language learning and teaching, interviews seems quite appropriate as a way of understanding their unique perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon.

Descriptions of the Participants

I interviewed seven experienced ESL/EFL teachers who are all enrolled in M.A. TESOL program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Each of the participants has a different teaching background in terms of the length of teaching, the context in which they taught English (ESL/EFL), or the levels of students they taught. Two of them (S, E) come from Taiwan with their teaching experience at the junior/high school level for 10 and six years respectively. The other four participants come from different countries: (F) from China, (H) from Korea, (G) from Africa, (T) from Japan, and (M) from the U.S., with varied length of teaching experience for 11 years as a college teacher (F), three years as a junior high school teacher (H), 15 years as a high-school teacher (G), three years as a private school (high school) teacher (T), and four years as a private EFL instructor (M). For descriptive convenience, I used pseudo-initials for each participant.

Participant S:

She is a graduate student majoring in M.A. TESOL program, and she has about 6 years of teaching experience in Taiwan at the junior-high school level. Characteristics of her students, she described, are that they are all taking English classes for their curriculum requirements or for entrance exams.

Participant E:

She is also from Taiwan and pursuing a M.A. degree in TESOL, and she has taught English for about 10 years at the senior-high school level. She described her students as quite smart but always busy with preparing for their college entrance exams.

Participant F:

He has roughly 11 years of teaching experience at a high school and college in China. He described his students as mostly serious and busy with preparing for English proficiency test so that they can get a better job after finishing their degree.

Participant G:

He has taught English for about 15 years at the high-school level in Africa. He described his classes as multi-cultural classrooms for many of them come from different areas of the country where they speak different languages.

Participant H:

She has been a junior-high-school teacher for three years in Korea. She taught only advanced-level classes. She described her students as mostly competitive with each other in class.

Participant T:

He has taught English for three and half years including part-time teaching jobs in Japan. The classes he taught were mainly English grammar classes, and students mostly came to the classes for preparing for college entrance exams. He described his students as always busy with preparing for exams and competitive with each other.

Participant M:

He has roughly four years of teaching experience in several places in Europe. He described his students as mostly very motivated to learn English for getting a better job in and outside of their countries.

 Interview Questions

1)   What's your view on student anxiety in L2 learning/ acquisition? (What kinds of role do you think anxiety play in L2 learning?)
2)   Can you attribute a positive aspect to anxiety?
3)   Do language learners experience an equal amount of anxiety in all four skill areas?
4)   How do you see anxiety manifested in your students?
5)   What kind of measures or techniques do you use to reduce student anxiety in the classroom?
6)   How are those techniques related to your philosophy of teaching?

Although a variety of other questions related to the interview questions above were asked, I followed those 5 questions as a framework for developing our interviews. Question 2, 3, and 4 were adapted from a similar interview study done by Young (1992, p. 158).

Interview Results

1)   What's your view on student anxiety in L2 learning/acquisition?

All of the participants agreed on the idea that anxiety, in general, can play an important role in L2 learning and acquisition. This general view on anxiety seems to be a reflection of their concern about the negative impact of anxiety on their students' L2 performance in class and also their further L2 learning processes. Participant G expressed his concern about student anxiety as he argued, "When students feel anxiety in classroom activities, they cannot perform to their full capacity, which eventually leads to lowering their intrinsic motivation to learn more."

Similarly, participant F, M, and T shared the same negative viewpoint on student anxiety, to the effect that anxious feelings associated with the students' L2 performance may have a tremendous impact on their subsequent L2 learning processes, in terms of the amount or types of input that the students could have access to otherwise. Participant F clearly pointed out this negative side of anxiety, by saying:

> If students become emotionally disturbed or imbalanced, they will not tap their potential ability to the fullest level, and their perception of failure to do so might make them more anxious about their own ability and lead to lowering their self-esteem.

Other views presented by participant H, E, and S, however, seemed to look more at the positive side of student anxiety, reflecting their own experiences as L2 learners. Participant H said, "Anxiety can be either helpful or devastating, depending on the individual students. But in general, if they don't feel any pressure or anxiety, they would not do anything after all." Participant E also suggested in a similar vein, "Anxiety may or may not influence the student's L2 learning, but it all depends on many different factors, such as the level of anxiety, personality of the student, cultural background, etc."

2) Can you attribute a positive aspect to anxiety?

In relation to the question 1, many of the participants responded to this question in a quite extensive manner by offering interesting and illustrative examples. Although they all agreed that anxiety might have a positive aspect in itself, their views on how facilitative it could be for the student's L2 learning seemed to differ from one participant to another. The participant H, for example, claimed:

> Anxiety could be a strong motivational drive to some students, especially when recognized as a chance for their learning, but too much anxiety might have a quite adversary impact on their psyche, as it triggers their defense mechanisms even before they try to deal with it consciously. I know that some of my students are more resistant to some edgy circumstances than others, but it doesn't mean that they would never feel anxiety in the language classroom. Maybe they might know how to optimize their negative affectivity for their own good, somehow.

The participant E, on the other hand, noted on the potentially facilitative sides of anxiety that coexist within us:

> Any kind of learning inevitably involves certain elements of affectivity, but we cannot claim that they are all necessarily harmful to our learning, because we often find ourselves feeling extremely nervous and vulnerable yet quite eager to learn at the same time. The very fact that our emotional psyche cannot easily be divided into either positive or negative seems to suggest that we constantly negotiate the balance between the two, and such struggles definitely underlie the processes of our learning.

Besides such highly reflective comments above, many of the participants also pointed out several factors of individual learner differences that might affect the possibility of whether student anxiety could become facilitative or debilitating, such as the levels of anxiety, the student's different personality, task difficulty, the students' perceived level of English proficiency, cultural differences, etc. But it should be noted at the same time that some of them expressed their inability to assess all these individual differences of the students as well. The participant S noted, for example, "We all know that different students feel anxious for different reasons, but we cannot simply tell whether their anxiety is facilitating or debilitating". Similarly the participant T maintained:

> Facilitative anxiety could be created by the teacher's efforts to meet the needs or interests of the students, but how could we possibly attend to their individual uniqueness in the classroom? It seems virtually impossible for us to be equally sensitive to all the individual differences, in the sense that certain classroom tasks might be perceived quite anxiety provoking to some students but not necessarily so to others.

3) Do language learners experience an equal amount of anxiety in all 4 skill areas?

All the participants seemed to share the same view on this question, in the sense that the level of anxiety for each language skill (listening, writing, reading, and speaking) can vary, depending on the individual student differences, such as their personality traits, levels of L2 proficiency, or learning style preferences.

For example, they argued that some students who would perceive themselves as shy and quiet

and prefer an independent learning style might think of speaking tasks in class as the most stressful of all the other skill areas, while others viewing their disposition as rather out-going and self-expressive might prefer speaking tasks to the other learning tasks that would require them to work by themselves. As many of the participants noted, however, they found it quite difficult or sometimes impossible to detect which skill areas were more anxiety-provoking than the others, because of the uniqueness of individual students. In other words, they were quite aware that a variety of factors pertaining to the individual learner differences might underlie the actual manifestations of student anxiety, but at the same time they had also acknowledged the reality that they could not possibly attend to all the psychological as well as affective needs of each individual student in the classroom.

While all the participants expressed shared feelings of difficulty in assessing or detecting student anxiety as to which skill areas could be more stressful than the others, they also noted that one of the key factors that might influence student anxiety the most, regardless of different skill areas, would be the involvement of evaluation. Participant S, for example, claimed in a quite assuring manner, "If some kind of evaluation, either from the teacher or other students, is involved, students may feel anxiety in all the skill areas."

4) How do you see anxiety manifested in your students?

Some of the physical or psychological symptoms they had noticed in their students as a sign of anxious feelings were: playing with their hair, avoiding eye-contact with the teacher, sweated palms, blushed faces, nervous facial expressions, trembling, shaky body movements, etc. In general, however, many of the participants said that they would not be able to notice the real anxious feelings of their students unless their anxiety was manifested as obvious physical symptoms as in the examples above. Participant H, E, and S expressed their honest attitudes toward student anxiety, as represented by H saying, "I always try to be sensitive to their anxious feelings in class, but I cannot always tell whether they are nervous or not just by their physical behaviors."

5) What kind of measures or techniques do you use to reduce student anxiety in class?

Many of the participants illustrated various kinds of techniques they had used or they would use to reduce student anxiety in the classroom, and it was found that the particular emphasis was often placed on the following two points; 1) creating a comfortable classroom environment and 2) instructional procedures that encourage student involvement.

1) Creating a comfortable classroom environment
   a. A lot of fun activities so that students can relax, such as games or songs
   b. Letting students laugh by telling jokes
   c. Playing some background music

2) Instructional procedures
   a. More use of display questions (open-ended) than of referential questions
   b. Encouraging group works
   c. Setting different expectations for different students (asking different questions according to their proficiency levels)
   d. More use of recasting for error-correction rather than direct error-correction

6) How are those techniques related to your philosophy of teaching?

As is apparent from these classroom techniques presented above, many of the participants seemed to share the same underlying assumption about teaching, as in the participant E saying, "The classroom should be student-centered rather than teacher-centered, and otherwise the students would remain totally dependent for their own development as learners, which naturally diminishes their further chances of self-directed learning and growth in the long run". Similarly the participant S argued:

> The teacher should provide a comfortable learning environment for the students to maximize their learning potential. Although the context of language classroom itself inevitably involves some elements of evaluation and competition, which might induce anxiety in some students, the very attitudes of the teacher to recognize such a reality can be a basis for creating a non-threatening learning environment in the classroom.

Thus, in general, it was found that the ways of dealing with student anxiety were closely related to their own teaching philosophy as a reflection of their images of good teachers. However, some differences were also found in terms of the role of the teacher they should assume or wanted to assume in the classroom. Some said that the role of the teacher should be that of counselor, care taker, facilitator, or friend, while others maintained that the teacher should keep the stance of authority even if they could assume the role of facilitator.

Discussion/ Implications

Q1 and Q 2. Descriptions of the seven experienced teachers' perspectives on language anxiety and its possible effects on L2 learning and acquisition seem to be mostly corroborating the findings offered by previous research on language anxiety from the students' perspectives. But there were also some differences or discrepancies found between the teachers and students' perceptions on the role of anxiety in the classroom L2 learning.

For example, commonly cited psychological constructs in defining language anxiety, such as test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al, 1986), were expressed by many of the participants as potential sources of student anxiety in the classroom. These perceptions, thus, are considered to be a clear indication that the teachers can recognize that language classroom could become a highly anxiety-provoking environment for students (Tsui, 1996). In addition, mostly negative responses by many of the participants as to the possible effects of anxiety on L2 learning also seem to support the current research that claims that language learning anxiety is to be rated significantly higher than other class anxieties (e.g. math and English class anxieties (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991).

At the same time, however, many of the experienced teachers maintained that some of the language anxiety experiences could have a positive or facilitating effect on L2 learning and acquisition, which is also in line with the theoretical contention proposed by many anxiety researchers that "some 'edge' is necessary in language learning" (Omaggio, 1986). According to Terrell and Rardin (as interviewed in Young, 1992), a positive aspect of anxiety can be interpreted as a state of "attentiveness" or "alertness" so that the learner's attention to the needed

input can be facilitated.

Although many of the accounts from the participants mostly correspond to the existing research findings on language anxiety, there are some theoretical perspectives that they did not refer to in the interviews. For example, a more profound type of anxiety called "existential anxiety" or "social anxiety" proposed by Rardin (1988) and Leary (1982) was not mentioned by any of the participants. According to Rardin, existential anxiety refers to the type of anxiety inherently built into the process of language learning. She characterizes it as the feelings of losing one's self-identity deeply rooted in his/her native language and says, "If I learn another language, I will somehow lose myself; I, as I know myself to be, will cease to exist" (as cited in Young, 1992, p. 168). In other words, this anxiety can arise in fear that learning another language might lead to the loss of one's positive self-concept or self-image that he/she has cultivated in the first language, and as Guiora (1972, 1984) clearly notes, a well-developed "language ego" might be threatened in the face of one's perceived incompetence in a second language, compared to the facility in the first language.

One of the possible reasons that any of the experienced teachers I interviewed did not touch on the issue of self-identity and its loss might be that they are mostly successful L2 learners by themselves and may have never been stuck in the bewildering feelings of severe anxiety, especially the ones so threatening to the loss of their own identity in the processes of their second language learning and performance. Though not always easy to put ourselves into other's shoes, further awareness-raising efforts on the part of the teacher seem to be quite necessary, especially as to the affective needs of the students (Ehrman, 1996; Oxford, 1999). In other words, it is rather critical for the teacher to reflect on his/her own experiences as a second language learner, so that a more empathetic understanding of the students' emotional barriers and unstable sate of their mind can be gained from the learner's point of view.

Q3. As many of the participants expressed their inability to assess which language skill areas could create more anxiety in students than the others, previous research on language anxiety also provided quite inconsistent results on this issue. Although some of the studies suggest that students experience the highest level of anxiety in speaking (Bailey, 1983; Horwitz et al., 1986),

there are still little research available that has investigated which of the four skill areas would contribute to student anxiety the most. As the interview responses from the participants suggest, it is rather conceivable that any of the four language skill areas could become a source of student anxiety, depending on the individual learner differences, which include one's previous experiences with the TL and its culture or the general attitudes or beliefs toward second/foreign language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Schumann, 1986).

Q4. The various manifestations of anxiety that the participants noticed in their students seem to correspond to what has been reported in the previous research on language anxiety. Some of the student behaviors in the classroom that they described as signs of anxiety seemed rather obvious (e.g., trembling, playing with their hair, nervous laughter, stuttering or stammering as they spoke), while others were quite subtle and might have been interpreted otherwise without specific socio-cultural contexts (e.g., short responses, avoiding eye-contact, joking, indifferent posture, reticence).

Although some of the participants expressed a concern about their inability to notice all the instances of student anxiety, their perceptions of the students' anxious behaviors or feelings generally corresponded to the research findings on manifestations of student anxiety (Horwitz at al., 1986; Young, 1991). This result seems to indicate that experienced teachers' perceptions of anxious behaviors in students are accurate and credible enough to identify the symptoms of student anxiety. With regard to the teacher's attitudes toward the students' anxious behaviors, Young (1992) presents a couple of suggestions; a) "be sensitive to the signals students provide, b) recognize the behaviors for what they are, c) trust your perceptions, and d) work to reduce language anxiety" (p.169).

Q5 & Q 6. As shown in the responses to the question 5 and 6, the participants' views on language anxiety management seem to be fairly in accord with their own philosophy of teaching and their assumptions about the role of the language teacher.

Commonly shared assumptions about the role of the language teacher expressed by the participants were that the teacher's role should be that of facilitator, care taker, counselor, or

motivator.   Thus, these assumptions are considered to be a reflection of their underlying philosophy of teaching, as the participant H, for example, argued:

> The primary emphasis should be placed on promoting positive learning experiences in the classroom, so that the students are more encouraged to build up their confidence in a second/foreign language. Small bits of success or accomplishment in the classroom can be a corner stone for their further learning, especially as they become more self-directed learners by themselves.

Although a few of them maintained their desire to be respected as an authority figure while at the same time assuming the facilitative roles mentioned above, most of them claimed that they could reduce student anxiety by being sensitive to individual differences of their students, or by being aware of their own verbal behaviors (i.e. personalized evaluative statements or questioning types) as they might induce anxiety in some students. Contrary to my initial thoughts or assumptions, it seems a little surprise that most of the anxiety reduction strategies that each of the participants offered were commonly cited in many of the existing research on language anxiety. As some of the participants noted in a rather confessional manner, however, it might also be true that there is no knowing whether these anxiety management strategies can actually reduce anxiety of all the different students in all the different classroom settings.

Conclusion

Although the existing research has provided valuable insights into language anxiety from the student's perspective, the phenomenon, because of its complex and multi-dimensional nature, still requires further investigation from a variety of perspectives or approaches. This study, conducted through in-depth interviews with seven experienced language teachers, is considered one of such attempts to provide some alternative insights on language anxiety from a different perspective.

As the interview results clearly indicate, many of the accounts from the participants seem to generally corroborate the findings offered by previous research on language anxiety, but there are also some differences or gaps between the teachers' and students' perceptions on the role of anxiety in the L2 classroom contexts. Although the teacher's efforts to sensitize themselves to the students' anxiety might not always converge with the students' actual perceptions, the teacher's

very attitudes of trying to understand the students' affective needs can provide a basis for creating a comfortable, learning-conducive environment in the classroom.

About the Author

The author works at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA.

E-mail: ohatako@hotmail.com

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