

A Review and Research Methodology of Chinese University

EFL Students' Perspectives on Anxiety in Native and Non-Native English Speaker Classes

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reveal how native and non-native speaker EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers influence students' levels of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in classrooms. Researchers in the area of second and foreign language acquisition have long been studying the role that anxiety plays among foreign language learners. Their findings are reported and analyzed in the first part of this paper. Then, research methodology is presented on two groups of students (180 in total) of whom 90 is in NS (Native Speaker) class and 90 in NNS (Non-Native Speaker) class taking English as a foreign language course for 4 hours a week at one university in China.

Keywords

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Native Speaker (NS), Non-Native Speaker (NNS)

1. Introduction

As a result of the rapidly developing science and technology in today's world, it has become more and more significant to learn English as a foreign language compare to past years. It is not an exception in Chinese schools and universities. In the national curriculum in China, English language is one of the compulsory subjects. Most students are officially taught English from the third year of primary school. Thus, Chinese students have to study English for ten years before they enter university, four years in primary school, plus three years in middle school and another three years in high school. However, learning and teaching English in China is still a challenging task for both EFL students and teachers at university level. After learning English for nine years, quite a number of Chinese EFL learners are not able to acquire competence in using the English language or interact with confidence (Liu, 2006). Consequently, it is vital to exam and find out what prevents Chinese EFL learners' ability from studying English as a foreign language subject even after nine years of education in the school system.

Foreign language anxiety is believed to be one of the obstacles in learning foreign languages. It has been a long time that language educators and researchers interested in the possibility that anxiety impedes foreign language learning. According to many of them (Bailey, 1983; Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Schlesinger, 1995), anxiety can hinder EFL students' foreign language achievement and production. Krashen (1985a, 1985b) reported that anxiety restrains EFL learners' ability to process incoming foreign language and to acquire the language. There is a correlation found among anxiety, ability and task difficulty. Anxious EFL learners tend to learn less and feel difficult to fully demonstrate what they have studied. As a result, they will undergo more failure and in turn accelerate their anxiety.

The English language teacher is one of the important reasons that caused foreign language anxiety in classroom. Three components of foreign language anxiety were identified by Horwitz et al. (1986). They are communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. They are all connected to language teachers to a certain extent. For instance, if a teacher discourages students instead of motivating them during correction of mistakes, students' level of anxiety will be raised. After entering university, a lot of Chinese EFL learners have opportunities to be taught by native speakers. The aim of this study is to investigate how native and non-native speaker teachers influence EFL students' level of foreign language anxiety. By comparing two groups of Chinese EFL learners, this study is going to identify whether there are significant differences between native and non-native speaker classes.

In general, my study attempts to understand anxiety level of Chinese university EFL students in two different types of classes. Moreover, there is an effort to see if anxiety level differs between native speaker and non-native speaker classes. Therefore, the following research question is generated based on the purpose of this study: How do native and non-native speaker teachers influence Chinese EFL students' level of foreign language anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

Researchers in the area of second and foreign language acquisition have long been studying the role that anxiety plays among foreign language learners. In Campbell and Ortiz's (1991) study, they found about half of all EFL learners were suffering from anxiety in certain level. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, 1991) believe this is a unique type of anxiety that only relates to people who study foreign languages. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope defined Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Researchers generally believe that foreign language anxiety negatively affect second and foreign language learners (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Krashen (1985a, 1985b) reported that anxiety restrains EFL learners' ability to process incoming foreign language and to acquire the language. There is a

correlation found among anxiety, ability and task difficulty. This correlation impedes at the input, processing, retrieve, and the output level. However, it is believed that language learners do not start learning language with anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Foreign language anxiety is regarded as a learned emotional reaction. After students coming into contact with a foreign language, their attitudes and feelings toward learning this language start to develop. If students happen to have some negative experiences in the learning process, FLA may begin to appear. If these negative experiences continue, FLA starts to develop, and the students begin to perform badly.

The three anxiety types Horwitz et al. (1986) identified in their study of FLA are all closely related to the primary cause of foreign language anxiety. Communication apprehension is “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Language learners whose levels of communication apprehension are high are considered to be disadvantaged at the very beginning for the reason that basic vocabulary acquisition and production are impeded (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). Test anxiety is “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Language learners tend to have test anxiety when they perform badly in the previous tests. They frequently worry about their own performance and generate a negative attitude towards tests. Fear of negative evaluation is “apprehension about others’ evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (Watson & Friend, 1969). Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) point out that fear of negative evaluation is related to communication apprehension. Like students with communication apprehension, people seldom involve in conversation and interact with others when they fear of negative evaluation. In this case, they “tend to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities that could increase their language skills, and may even avoid class entirely” (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, pp. 562-563).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as a tool to measure FLA levels, according to their definition of FLA and its three components. There are 33 items in this scale. Each one is rated on a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In their study, Horwitz et al. (1986) also inspected the validity and reliability of FLCAS. From then on, the definition of FLA and the employment of FLCAS as a tool to measure FLA levels has been widely accepted and supported by succeeding researches (Aida, 1994). These studies all revealed that FLA has negative effects on learner’s accomplishment and performance.

2.1 Teacher’s Role in FLA

MacIntyre (1999) believes that foreign language anxiety exists all the time but is inconsistent in different situations in classroom-oriented contexts. A student may feel anxious in speaking in class, but not in taking a language test. The level of interference between FLA and learner’s achievement is also varying in different contexts. Among all stressors that can trigger students’ foreign language anxiety, one crucial factor in the creation of FLA in the classroom is the role of teachers. When teachers discourage students during correction of mistakes and feed-back, anxiety is induced under this

circumstance (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is also reported that though students admitted the benefit of error correction, their FLA level still increases after being corrected in front of their classmates, getting incorrect responding, or sounding inadequately (Horwitz et al., 1986). In another research that analyze the influence of classroom environment on students' levels of FLA, researchers discovered that among the factors of classroom environment related to FLA, teacher support had the most close-knit relationship with students' levels of anxiety (Trickett & Moos, 1995).

MacIntyre (1999) dug deeper into the role of teachers in foreign language anxiety. It is suggested that learning in a classroom where there exist multi-cultural and native speakers can enhance the level of anxiety. Anxiety is caused when EFL learners are struggling between learning the foreign language and culture and losing their ethnic identity. At university level, a variety of English programs are offered to Chinese EFL learners. Many foreign teachers are involved in these programs. Unlike in primary and middle schools, Chinese university students have more opportunities to learn from teachers who are native speakers. However, there is very few research in China that have been done to students' level of FLA occurs in the classes of native and non-native speaker teachers. By comparing and contrasting two groups of students, this study is going to investigate whether there exit significantly different levels of FLA in native speaker and non-native speaker classes.

3. Research Methodology

As stated in previous sections, the aims of my study are to measure Chinese university EFL learners' foreign language anxiety in native and non-native English speaker classes, and then find out whether the level of anxiety and the cause of anxiety are different between these two groups. The research methodology that I adopt is qualitative in nature, and involve in the use of a small-scale survey using a questionnaire and observation

In this section I will firstly start with identifying my research philosophy, which led to the paradigm in which my research is set, that is, qualitative research method. Next, the use of survey as my research strategy is discussed. This is followed by the explanation of how questionnaire and observation are designed and delivered as methods of data collection. At last, data analysis procedures and other issues, such as ethics, validity and reliability will also be reviewed.

3.1 A Discussion of Research Paradigm

Guba believes paradigm is an interpretative framework. It is guided by "a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Guba, 1990). Most simply, a research paradigm is an approach to thinking about and doing research. According to Dill and Romiszowski (1997), the functions of paradigms including: define how the world works, how knowledge is extracted from this world, and how one is to think, write, and talk about this knowledge. Guba also emphasized that research paradigms are characterized by their distinctive ontology—"What is the nature of the knowable?"; epistemology—"What is the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?"; and methodology—"How should the inquirer go about finding out

knowledge?” (quotes are from Guba, 1990). That is to say, ontology deals with the nature of reality and truth; epistemology deals with knowledge and its justification; and methodology is the identification, study and justification of research methods. It is people’s different positions concerning issues in these three categories lead to different research paradigms. Gephart (1999) categorized research paradigms into three philosophically distinct categories as positivism, interpretivism and critical postmodernism. In order to meet the purpose of present study, the proposing and conducting of this research are mainly underlying interpretivism. Later in this section, the reasons for employing this paradigm will be illustrated and explained.

3.2 My Philosophical Position in This Research

In any kind of research or study, researchers always bring a certain set of beliefs as well as philosophical assumptions. It is the qualitative researchers’ job to understand the importance of beliefs and theories that inform their work and also actively write about them in their research. In this study, I am exploring influence of native and non-native speaker on Chinese EFL learners’ perception of foreign language anxiety. Before I get there I must first define in greater depth the problem I am trying to solve and have chosen to explore some of the theoretical methods or approaches to qualitative research to better guide my efforts. All research approaches have underlying philosophical assumptions that guide every aspect of a study. The following aspects described by Creswell (2012) are significantly important in qualitative research.

Ontology refers to the understanding of reality and what it means to be human. Researchers embrace the idea of multiple realities and report on these multiple realities by exploring multiple forms of evidence from different individuals’ perspectives and experiences. Epistemology refers to the nature and ground of knowledge. Researchers try to get as close as possible to participants being studied. Subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views from research conducted in the field. Axiology refers to the role of values in a study. Researchers make their values known in the study and actively reports their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. Methodology refers to the conceptualization and operationalization of the research process. It is inductive and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data.

Educational research is based on certain philosophical perspectives. It can be based on one or more paradigm(s), all depending on the type of work researchers are doing. In this study, I will interpret and understand students’ perspectives on foreign language anxiety. Therefore, the philosophical assumptions underlying my study come mainly from interpretivism. Nevertheless, this study has also trace of post-positivism because I will investigate students’ opinions, views, attitudes and beliefs, and accept them as valid knowledge and as something worth collecting and exploring.

In educational research, interpretive frameworks can be viewed as a basic set of beliefs that guide the researcher’s action. The ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology assumptions are all embedded within interpretive frameworks that researchers use. Many researches have been done in the field of foreign language anxiety. However, little research has been done in the field of Chinese EFL

learners at university level, particularly in the classes between native and non-native speakers. Interpretive approaches can give research a greater scope to ask questions such as “why” and “how”, and also address issues of influence and impact (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). From the ontology aspect, interpretivists believe multiple realities do exist. It is able to explore and construct these realities through human interactions and actions. The reason why social realities exist is because of varying human experience, such as people’s views, knowledge, interpretations and experiences (Cantrell, 2001). These statements vindicate my choice of interpretive for this study.

I adopted a subjective stance towards the reality I am investigating. The intention of understanding the subjective meanings of people in studied areas is essential in interpretive paradigm. Researchers do not stand outside in the interpretive approach (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 88). They are participant observers who involve in the activities and identify meanings of actions as they are within specific social context. Adopting a subjective stance can enable me to increase my understanding of issues related to Chinese university EFL learners’ foreign language anxiety. The approaches operate under the assumption that only through social constructions such as language and commonly accepted meanings, the access to reality can be possible. Therefore, a subjective epistemology was specifically relevant to my understanding of what reality and truth are.

3.3 Qualitative vs Quantitative

Cohen et al. (2011) suggest the purpose of quantitative research is to test a theory or verify a claim. In order to be as objective as possible, the research tries to minimize any effect that their own beliefs, values and opinions might have on the data. They make themselves detached from the participants and the data. They seek to generalize their findings across time and beyond the location in which they collect the data. On the other hand, Cohen et al. (2011) suggest the purpose of qualitative research is to generate theories but not to verify them. Data could be collected using observations, interviews, questionnaires and will describe attitudes and beliefs. The relationship researchers have with the participants and their own values can affect how the data are interpreted. The findings will not be generalizable but they will be relatable to similar situations.

I decide to adopt a qualitative research approach because qualitative research is generally applied to let people express their perspectives and to understand people’s experiences. It is used when one wants to explore or study more about a topic but there is little know about it (Johnson, 1994). Moreover, in qualitative research, it is believed that different groups of people construct their different realities. And inversely, these social constructions will influence how people understand their worlds and how they act (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As a result of the above discussion, I feel that this approach will be the most appropriate method of collecting data for a small-scale survey, especially because I will be dealing specifically with the attitudes and feelings of students.

In qualitative research, getting close to the objects of study through participant observation is essential. It enables researchers undergo for themselves the subjective dimensions of the phenomena they study (Johnson, 1994). In this study, I will be the instrument of data collection. Instead of using a

standardized test or measuring device, I will record what is observed and make interpretations. I will try to understand the people I am observing from the participants' viewpoints.

Researcher's competence to interpret the data is one of the issues that has been concerned with qualitative research. The researcher plays an important part in the interpretation process, so this can be seen as a more subjective interpretation in qualitative research (Cryer, 2000). However, by using a Likert scale within the questionnaire, a more accurate analysis by means of a quantitative method of analysis would relieve this subjectivity and provide a more objective view of the results.

3.4 Questionnaire and Observation

The purpose of researchers using questionnaires is to get access to information related to people's feelings, beliefs, attitudes, values, perceptions, and behavioral intentions (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). One of the advantages of utilizing questionnaires in a small-scale survey in this study is that all of the students have to answer the same questions, so it is much easier to provide comparisons of answers. Another advantage is that the questionnaires could be anonymous, so that they can give students the chance to state their own opinions more truthfully without worrying about being identified. As these questions are of a qualitative style, the students can express their own opinions and also the data can be analyzed and graphs created quantitatively. Then the researcher can have the opportunity to provide a number of visual comparisons to readers.

The second method of data collection in this study is observation. In research, observation is defined as "the watching of behavioral patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In observation, the observer should attempt to be unobtrusive so as not to affect what is being observed. One reason observation is adopted in this study is because of the potential incongruence between attitudes and behavior. Students do not always do what they say they do, so it is help for me to collect observational data in addition to questionnaires. However, observation does have its own disadvantages. It is susceptible to observer bias. Observers may only see or hear what they want and ignore what is really happening. Another disadvantage is concerned with participants in observation. They usually behave better when they know they are being watched. However, researchers can adopt indirect observation to decrease this problem. Also, observation can be time-consuming compared to other approaches of data collection.

3.5 Sampling

If it is possible, all researchers would prefer to study the whole population in which they are interested. Nevertheless, it is difficult to do. Most population of interest are large, diverse, and scattered over a large geographic area. Therefore, researchers often select a sample to study. Generally speaking, there are two main types of sampling: random sampling and nonrandom sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The purpose of random sampling is to select a sample that is representative of the population of interest. On the other hand, the purpose of nonrandom sampling is to select a sample based on researchers' certain purposes.

In this study, the data generated will be criterion-based selection, based on actual attitudes and

observations and give an insight into the feelings of the population chosen to be questioned. I will choose students who are placed into the same English proficiency level as my population. This will afford me a sample of approximately 180 students, which I feel would produce a significant response to my research, and their English proficiency level won't interfere with the results. Half of the students are taught by a native speaker and the other half by a non-native speaker. This would provide me with a view of how the students perceive foreign language anxiety in different contexts.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

In research, the term "reliability" refers to the consistency of scores or answers provided by an instrument (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). I will make sure that the questionnaire which are going to be answered by both groups, students in native speaker class and non-native speaker class, reveals consistency in responses. As I construct my questionnaire, I will make sure the questionnaire items and my research objectives are consistent. I will also use natural and simple words to write clear and precise items, and finally produce a questionnaire that is properly organized and easy for the participant to use. Reducing causes of measurement error like data collector bias is also another way to ensure reliability. If the researcher is the only one to administer the questionnaires and standardize conditions, such as conducting questionnaire survey in the same week, then data collector bias will be minimized.

The validity of my research will be tested when the responses are analyzed. As there are five different levels of response (strongly disagree, disagree, don't know, agree, strongly agree) to each question, there exist the possibility of having five different opinions between five different students. Piloting the questionnaires will provide an opportunity of adjusting any questions felt to be ambiguous or difficult to understand, while at the same time allowing the timing of the overall process of data collection. This then will give me an impression of how the questionnaires are likely to be answered, enabling me to confirm if the data measures the proper concept and therefore providing me with a precise understanding of the research outcome (Denscombe, 2003).

In a qualitative research, reliability is mostly based on the perspective of the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). It is inevitable that researchers all have certain biases. Consequently, different researchers view some things in a clearer way than others. In this study, I need to check my perceptions in order to ensure that I am not being misinformed and seeing and hearing what I think they are. I will record personal thoughts while conducting observations, so actions that seems usual can be noted and checked later. I will also observe the setting of interest over a period of time. It is very important to ensure the duration of an observation in qualitative research. The reason is that the consistency of what an observer is seeing and hearing over time is strong evidence of reliability (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Furthermore, I will make my observation a regular event, so that whatever I observe can settle down to being normal. I will also not to rely on initial data, but wait until my participants have, at least to a degree, accepted the situation.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations must take priority when dealing with any research. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) provides a set of ethical guidelines for use by educational researchers. The main ones that relevant to my research are: do no harm, obtain informed consent from all participants, respect participants' anonymity and abide by all legal requirements. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) has also provides a set of ethical guidelines designed specifically to guide the work of educational researchers (AREA, 2011). The AERA standards include five broad general principles and 22 more specific ethical standards. The five broad principles can be summarized as: professional competence; integrity; professional, scientific, and scholarly responsibility; respect for people's rights, dignity, and diversity, social responsibility.

Following the above guidelines, before conducting my research, permission from the director of the English Language Center in which the research took place needed to be gained. A letter will be forwarded to him or her, which outlined the research topic and reasons for the research. Then I will ask members of teaching staff for their co-operation in allowing the research to take place in their teaching time, due to time constraints and disruption of lessons. Once permission is granted, these considerations will be adhered to and the questionnaire will be compiled and piloted using one student from native speaker class and one from non-native speaker class. Co-operation was essential for the research to take place (Bell, 1999).

Students' safety is paramount in educational research. It is a fundamental responsibility of every researcher to do all in his or her power to ensure that participants in a research study are protected from physical or psychological harm that may arise due to research procedures. Questions needed to take into account any stress that may occur, and enable them to withdraw at any time. Care must be taken to assure participants of the anonymity of their responses at all times and that they should not suffer as a consequence of any response in the research. This should be a primary consideration for the researcher when compiling the questions to be asked (Denscombe, 2003). In the interest of confidentiality, the students will be made fully aware before beginning the questionnaire that these will be anonymous and seen by no-one other than myself, my supervisor and tutor.

According to the Data Protection Act 1998, data users are required to "supply details of their data to a public register and abide by a set of data protection principles" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 141). However, researchers who are conducting their research through a university are covered by a "notification", particularly if it for academic dissertations or coursework. In this study, the data collected must be kept confidential and only be used for its original stated purpose, and not exposing the subjects' identities when publishing or reporting the study. Identifying information should not be entered onto the questionnaires, and questionnaires can only be numbered after data collection is finished. Data will be securely held by myself until such time as it becomes surplus to requirements.

4. Limitations

The limitations in this study are mainly identified from methodological limitations and limitations of researcher. The first one is the lack of prior researches on the same or relevant topic I am investigating. The reviewing of previous research studies can help me to form basis of my literature review. It can also assist me to construct a foundation for understanding the research problem I am investigating. Although lots of researches have been done in the area of foreign language anxiety, there is little evidence of conducting research in the native and non-native speaker context. The second one comes from self-reported data I collect in this study. The disadvantage of self-reported data is that it seldom can be independently verified. As an observer, I have to take what people say, whether in questionnaire or observation. Third, this study only focus on students in one English proficiency level. This focus may limit evaluation and analysis on the impact of native and non-native teachers on students' level of foreign language anxiety. Only focusing on one proficiency level group of participants limits me to explore whether students' perspectives will change as their English proficiency levels go higher or lower.

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