

Effects of Anxiety on Oral Performance

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The Effects of Anxiety On Oral Performance

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Resumen

Este documento de investigación está enfocado en mostrar los efectos que los factores afectivos tienen sobre la adquisición de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera.

Específicamente se tratará sobre la ansiedad en el desempeño comunicativo. Se señalará algunas de las posibles causas de este fenómeno, así como los síntomas o señales que los estudiantes muestran cuando padecen de este problema. Se indicará como este problema está relacionado al contexto en que el aprendiz se encuentra y también se revisara que estudios has sido hechos en nuestro país y que resultados han arrojado.

Todo esto será apoyado por la revisión de algunos estudios que han sido realizado por varios investigadores de esta problemática.

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Abstract

This research paper is focused on showing the effects that the affective factors have on the acquisition of a second language or a foreign language. However, the main topic of this research paper will be how anxiety affects the oral performance. Additionally, some possible causes of this phenomenon will be explained. Also the signals that students have shown when suffering of this issue will be discussed through this research paper it will be indicated how this problem is linked to the context of the learners and also some research that have been conducted in our country and the results of those will be featured.. All this will be supported by the revision of literature and studies that have been carried out by researchers of this phenomenon.

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Introduction

Since a language is the one of the most important cultural aspects which defines and binds a society and the oral aspect is considered as the main way of interaction. It is necessary to analyze how the learners of foreign languages are dealing with the acquisition of a new language and all that this implies. (Mondada & Pekarek. 2004) For this reason, this research paper will be aimed to analyze one specific factor that affects the oral performance of foreign language learners. This factor is anxiety. As an affective factor, anxiety is embedded in every task in a language learning classroom, especially in the tasks that require students to perform in front of their classmates or that will be graded. Yet, it is in the oral development of learners that the highest levels of anxiety are reached. Speaking is one of the most common and used ways to interact, through the learning of a foreign language process it can be observed that students face serious problems when they have to perform any activity which involves oral performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, (1986) claimed that the nervousness that a student can reach during an oral activity is directly proportional to the level of accomplishment that the student would have in that specific activity. The objective of this research paper was to show the effects of anxiety on the student to acquire a foreign language and which is the correlation between these effects and the achievement of the target language, specifically when they are performing oral activities. By the same token, through this paper some research will be used as reference in order to present the most common causes of the phenomenon and also which are the causes and effects of this problematic

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in our context. Finally, conclusions and recommendations will be given to aid future teaching practices.

Definition of Anxiety

First, it is necessary to define what anxiety in the acquisition of a second language is and which effects it causes on the second language students. Anxiety is a subjective state of apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system which occurs when a student is expected to perform in a foreign language. (Fandiño 2008) On the other hand, Gardner & McIntyre (1993) claimed that anxiety is “the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient” p.5. In the research conducted by Xiaoyan (2008) it is mentioned that Foreign Language Anxiety can be classified in three types; Communicative Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear to Negative Evaluation. Since the main concern of this paper is the anxiety in oral performance, this research paper will be focused on only one of these sorts of anxiety which were mentioned before: Communicative Apprehension. (Horwitz et al 1986).

This type of anxiety has been defined as an “individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons”. Then, Communicative Apprehension causes that Foreign language students feel a high level of anxiety and it inhibits the oral production because an extreme case of shyness or quietness, despite of the willingness of the student to participate in the activities which are aimed to develop speaking skill. (Xiaoyan 2008).

Oral performance in the Foreign Language Learning Process

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After defining what anxiety is, it is needed to observe how the oral performance works in order to be able to accurately point out the effects that anxiety has on this process. For this reason some methods and approaches which are focused on speaking and interaction will be reviewed. Oral production has a relevant part in language learning, as it can be seen in some approaches like The Audio-Lingual Method, The Natural Approach and The Communicative Approach, Content-Based Instruction and Cooperative Language Learning, which placed communication as their root to take students to a successful learning. Considering the emphasis that these approaches give to oral performance, it is natural to assume that students who receive instruction in these frameworks will be likely to face situations that may rise their anxiety levels. Let us then discuss the nature of speaking in these methods and approaches.

The first method to consider is The Audio-Lingual Method, the starting goal that this method aimed at was to train the army to be fluent in some specific languages, that is why it was also known as “Informant Method”, which some colleges decided to apply this method in language classroom, one of those was the University of Chicago. In this approach the student takes a course in which text books and written activities are practically inexistence. The Audio- Lingual method was focused on repetitions and it had the oral part as the essential tool in order to obtain a communicative level in the target language. Despite, this approach got many critics and it was almost discarded as a useful and complete learning method, some current courses still apply it. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that this approach is mainly focused on the achievement of accuracy in speaking obtained by the repetition of sentences in the target languages rather than developing an ability to communicate or to interact actively in a conversation. Hanchey (1974)

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Second, The Natural Approach was developed by Tracy Terrell (1981) but it was focused and based on Krashen's Monitor model (1977), and for this reason it has a relevant meaning for this research paper, since it does not only present an approach in which the oral part is the way to teach a foreign language, but it also has all the affective components and theories that Krashen has studied. The way this approach presented the acquisition of a language is related to the mother tongue acquisition, which is the reason why the oral part has a meaningful component in this method, considering that people do not learn their mother tongue by reading and practicing grammatical rules, people do it by using it and learning through the error. Clement, Dornyei, Noels,(1994). Another important point that this approach has, is that Terrence claims that it is a harmful action to correct the student during the speech, because it can hurt his or her self-esteem and can contribute to increase the fear of the student towards this sort of activities. Tricomi (1986).

If the oral component needs to be considered important and needs to be encouraged there is an approach that has to be mentioned, The Communicative Approach. This approach does not only present a variety of activities to put in practice oral activities, but it is also important because it can contribute to reduce the anxiety in language students since it is closely related to Kagan's approach "Cooperative Learning" and which deals with the anxiety that students face when they have to perform any oral task in front of their classmates. Even though the usage of Cooperative Language Learning approach can make students feel more comfortable in that sort of activities, the result might be counter-productive because some learners could get more stressed and more anxious by the insight of their classmates as Kagan (1989) suggests. Focusing on the Communicative Approach, since it is mainly based on interaction and

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this interaction is not successful when students feel nervous or shy to perform and oral activity it can be concluded that; it has a direct impact on final outcome performed by the foreign language learners (Basta, 2009).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is definitely one of the options which can help to cope anxiety in oral performance, because this approach gives a considerable amount of language to the learners through stimulation and the usage of activities which are related to the context of the students. Since, it has been proved useful in specific courses of English for Specific Courses, in which students can feel more confident when they have to perform any oral task, due to they have a previous knowledge of the subject that is going to be treated in the language classroom and it helps to lower the level of anxiety (Troncale, 2002). Nonetheless, CBI has a shortcoming, and it is that this approach deals with different academic subjects, which are planned to be taught in the target language, but this subjects have a cognitive factors that sometimes are difficult to comprehend in the native language of the students and it will be ever more challenging to understand it in a second or foreign language. For this reason, if this method is thought to be applied the activities and strategies must be carefully planned in order not to create more pressure and anxiety on the learners.

Cooperative Language Learning has shown that students who have been taught through the use of it can achieve higher level of foreign language than groups that have worked using individual efforts and competitiveness. In the oral performance and activities this can be a useful tool to lower anxiety, since the cooperation between peers can ease the mind of the students. Learners might not feel the assessment process of the teacher directly, because they would pay more attention to the interventions of their classmates. Nevertheless, this method does not work in the same manner to all students.

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For instance, many foreign language learners have claimed that the factor that increases their anxiety the most is to have to interact with other students, due to the think of the mockery and the comments that their classmates could do in case that they make some errors, and of course this sort of activities would only contribute to make the feel more nervous and anxious (Zhang, 2010).

After going through some of the most relevant approaches and methods which involve speaking and communicative competences, then some research about the effects of anxiety in foreign language students will be shown to analyze these effects and how it directly affects the achievement of an appropriated level of the target language.

Anxiety in Language Learning Process

According to Macintyre and Gardner (1993), the anxiety that learners of a second or foreign language can feel is different from other sort of anxieties that can be developed in other subjects or areas. Following this further, it is necessary to focus on this issue since it is closely linked to the achievement of the foreign language but it is necessary to take this problem as a cause of the fear that students can feel towards the acquisition of a second or foreign language. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) stated that the term language anxiety was assigned physiologically to determine a specific sentiment of dread in students who were part of a second language class. This term was aimed to make a differentiation between other kinds of anxieties. In this research is also claimed in the pedagogical implications, it is claimed that “educators have two options when dealing with anxious students : 1) they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety- provoking situation; or 2) they can make the learning context less stressful. But before either option is viable, the teacher must first acknowledge the existence of foreign language anxiety” (Horwitz et al. 1986).

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Young (1991) suggested that if second language instructors studied the causes of this problem, it could help students to lower the level of anxiety when they had to develop tasks in the target language. Some strategies that Young (1991) stated were: She stated that instructors should give positive reinforcements when they have to correct a mistake and by letting the learners know that mistakes are part of the language learning process. Another strategy in to aid student to create real expectations about the language course, by telling them that they are not supposed to have a perfect performance after few semesters, that it is a growing process, and they will achieve a better level in the target language in time and with dedication. Some students also stated that it is mandatory that instructors correct their mistakes, but they also claimed that the feedback should not be harsh. For this reason, Young proposed a manner how teachers could clarify the errors of the students, in order to avoid error-fossilization, when the learner make a mistake the teacher should say the correct form of the sentence emphasizing the part that has been corrected. She also pointed out that when teachers know the trigger of this issue they can find out solutions to ameliorate or to reduce the level of anxiety in their students.

It is known that the affective factors have several implications in the normal development and acquisition of foreign languages, and anxiety is also considered as one of the most common affective disorders during the learning process. Krashen (1982). One of the emotional problems that a language learner might feel is anxiety. Scovel (1978) pointed out that all the emotional variables affect our performance in a second language. According to his research this problem created a hurdle in the acquisition process, since it makes students to hesitate over their own abilities and make them feel a high level of nervousness, but at that moment anxiety was not been studied deeply.

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Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) presented a study in which anxiety is showed as a specific issue, which had certain causes that can be studied and analyzed. This study has an important value in the development and advances that have been done in this area, due to it presented a better measurement manner to calculate the levels of anxiety, and the conception of anxiety was taken as a current problem that had to be taken into account in order to achieve a proficient level in the target language. Another important aspect of this research was that it revived the interest in studying this problem and the seeking of a satisfactory solution.

Young (1991) stated that this issue had to be studied in depth in order to have a better idea of its causes and to find more accurate a solution. She also suggested whether this problem was left aside and teachers or instructors did not pay attention to it, it would create a frustration case in the students, owing to they would feel incapable of learning the target language but it would affect teachers as well, because they would feel that their methodology and strategies are not efficient to teach a second or foreign language.

Due to anxiety takes a relevant impact in the affective repercussions, as many other affective aspects, it is necessary to show up all the literature and research that have been done to analyze and to get a better understanding of this issue to be able to find out some solutions to reduce the anxiety in second or foreign learners and in order to avoid being a cause of the raising of this negative emotion. Colin (1990).

As well, it is necessary to analyze how the learning process works in order to have a better idea of where the high level of anxiety can affect this process and be conscious of how those effects can be ameliorated. According to Javad (2011), it is

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important to discover which factor in this process may hinder the successful acquisition and learning of the target language.

The process of learning a foreign language can be as wonderful as frightening. These feelings can be felt due to the pressure that students have on them at the moment that they have to perform any sort of testing in the target language. This tension towards the foreign language can result in a grave case of anxiety. This subject has been treated and studied many times as we can see it through the literature. However, determining an exact cause of this issue is complicated because of the wide emotional field that it has.

It is caused due to every person has different skills and aptitudes to some specific areas; it does not mean that a person that is good at mathematics will not be capable of learning a second or a foreign language. What it means is that depending on the abilities that the person has it could complicate a little the acquisition of a new subject, in this case a new language. The base of this problem resides in that anxiety can be felt when we are receiving a large amount of information and at that moment our mind tends to create a mental block. Since the language learning gives new information to the student, and sometimes it makes students feel unsure if they can take in all the information that is being given. (Conway, 2007).

Language Anxiety

The term Language Anxiety or anxiety reaction according to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) was assigned by psychologists to make a differentiation between the normal anxiety that can be felt in many other fields and the specific anxiety that people feel when they are acquiring or learning a second or a foreign language. It is well

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known that anxiety problem has become a big problem to overcome in order to achieve a good level in the target language.

Second language anxiety is a term which covers up a broad problem, since this problem can be understood as a main problem which has got some sub problems as MacIntyre (1995) pointed out in one of his studies. MacIntyre (1995) said that the second language anxiety is linked to some other types of anxiety, such as classroom anxiety, testing anxiety and audience anxiety. All these kinds of anxiety are involved to the second language anxiety. This research made by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) stated that having separated the language anxiety from other kinds of anxiety created a starting point to analyze this issue as a key one to untangle the problem that it causes in the language learning process. Despite of the amount of research which have been done about this issue, it was just recently when the measurement of anxiety took a more accurate way to do it. This has been possible because of more structured language anxiety theories. According to Young (1991) the more we learn about this issue the better will be its understanding.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) conducted a study in which they could distinguish the difference between a basic case of anxiety and the language anxiety reaction. Since, when they conducted this research they proposed that second language anxiety is initially a negative reaction towards a language class.

For this reason, language anxiety can be related to another sort of anxiety, for instance audience anxiety, but when this case was repeated in many occurrences, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) established that in that point is when anxiety might be linked to language learning process, because it could be differentiated from other contexts.

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This case of second language anxiety that Macintyre and Gardner (1991) presented took place in a language class where French was the target language and English was the mother tongue. They drew a theory and measurement manner. First, they gave their students the task of writing an essay, in which they could only express the positive experiences they had had in a language class. This task was aimed at creating a better attitude in the students. It tried to make students “forget” or avoid the bad experiences. This way they did not put themselves down or they were not predisposed to face the language class in a negative manner. Afterwards, they presented some specific tasks. All this process was a way to make students not to have a negative self-awareness.

According to Macintyre and Gardner (1991) the result was that “the students can only be aware of it in language class do they experience difficulty. This leads to the differentiation of language anxiety from other forms of anxiety and to the isolation of its effects in the second language context” (p.297) The main problem in these anxious periods for students was that they could experiment feelings like dread or nervousness and one of the most complicated problems to deal with was that they became forgetful and they faced serious troubles to concentrate or to focus on the task. The solutions that were proposed to this specific case were to encourage student to cope with this problematic by changing the first methodology that was applied. Nonetheless, Macintyre and Gardner (1991) pointed out that the solutions which should be applied to a case of language anxiety are individuals, and could not be generalized to all the situations. It is relevant to clarify that context might have an impact on the causes and the solutions to this issue. For this reason, the Colombian context will be analyzed when the relation between context and anxiety be explain in depth.

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Now that language anxiety has been defined by analyzing some literature and researches about this issue, it is possible to observe which the main causes of the development of this problem are in our students.

Causes of Language Anxiety

Among the causes which can provoke anxiety in the students, it is possible to find that the first factor that scares students is the negative evaluation. It is so important to have in mind this fear since in a good language classroom students are constantly assessed. Every single performance is profoundly looked at by the teacher.

Nevertheless, the biggest fear is not related to the teacher and his/her assessing action.

Students feel more dreadful when they have to cope with the peers' evaluation.

(Conway 2007) It is there when students can reach the highest levels of anxiety, since they feel that if they commit any failure their classmates might make fun of them or they might change the perception of them. This hurdle is presented in anxious individuals because they tend to look down to their peers due to students might think their skills are not as good as their classmates. They are always afraid of speaking out loud, and in some studies, learners said that they would be more participative in speaking tasks if they would not be aghast of giving the wrong answer. One of the causes of this problem might be that students always try to compare their abilities or skills in the speaking part with native speakers. This issue is very significant for the students because they have the perception that speaking part is the most important one in the acquisition of a foreign language, and if they want to compare their skills with their peers, teachers or native speaker, they tend to use the speaking part as a point of reference, Javad (2011). For this reason, if they have a poor conception of their own abilities they will experiment a big deal of anxiety at the moment of performing.

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As it was mentioned before, another root of anxiety is the assessment part. Students usually feel afraid of facing the testing process. Horwitz et al. (1986) said that the more information the student has to remember the higher level of anxiety is felt. She proposed the example of testing a huge amount of grammar, because students sense a terrible nervousness when they have to recall that information. And if teachers add the pressure that they already have at the assessing moment, they often forget many of the topics they have studied. She stated that it can be observed this anxiety case in the students, for the reason that once the test is over many students, who are relaxed at that moment, they remember where they put a wrong answer and which would have been a correct one.

Another factor that makes the testing process create anxiety in the students is when the question types are not familiar to the learners, at that moment they start feeling disoriented and sometimes they think that they are not able to answer it correctly, since they consider that they are not prepared to complete that task, despite of knowing the topic very well. Young (1991) claimed that if the test is organized or presented in an unfamiliar and ambiguous manner, students will experiment a higher level of nervousness and anxiety. Sometimes the studying procedure itself causes anxiety in the student since they have the fear of failing or mistaking the topics which will be evaluated in the test. For that reason some students avoid studying in order to reduce the anxiety levels. Horwitz (1986)

Another skill, of the four skills which is necessary in order to acquire a second or foreign language, is listening. Listening also could cause anxiety in the learners due to the lack of comprehensibility that they have.

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According to a research done by Horwitz (1986) some students claimed that when a teacher speaks in the target language they understand little of none of the teacher's output, and they can feel desperation when someone is talking to them and asking for an answer and they cannot understand the question itself.

Another important source of anxiety can be the teacher. It is because it is possible to find teachers who think that intimidation is a really helpful tool in the language learning. Thus, students already deal with a high level of anxiety, due to fact that learning a foreign language is not easy whatsoever, and the teacher starts making them feel afraid, situation that only contributes to the negative experiences that learners have in language classroom. Young (1991) said that some teachers still think that they are the central resource of knowledge and they have to correct every single error. Some teachers still think that working in pairs is a way to provoke "chaos" in the classroom, and they still need to make his/her role more representative as Young (1991) stated that in order to reduce the level of anxiety in the classroom, the role of the teacher ought to change, it has to stop being the "drill sergeants" role to become in a facilitator which would contribute to ease the learner anxiety (p. 428)

In a second language teaching field it is important to know that students cannot be put under pressure while working foreign language classroom, because some sorts of correction of students' mistakes can contribute to raise the level of anxiety in them. Arnold, (2000). Nonetheless, some errors need to be corrected, but the solution to this difficulty lies in the way how teachers apply all their pedagogical knowledge and correct them without hurting the perception the students have of themselves or adding more anxiety to them.

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Teachers are an important part in the anxiety reduction reaction towards a foreign language. Horwitz (1988) stated that teachers can arrange some strategies to success in the acquisition of the target language. All of this must start from the commitment of the student to put in practice all these advises and strategies which are given by the teacher or the counselor. Teachers may also evaluate their teaching performance in order to check if there is any aspect that affects students. Young (1991) invited teachers to record their classes to watch if their teaching style is the most appropriate to that class and how the reaction of the learners is.

Relation between language anxiety and background

Social interaction is a necessary process to achieve a successful level in the target language, and based on the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky which states that “the human cognition is formed through social activity”. Lantolf & Johnson (2007). That is to say, students are able to develop the four skills of the language by the usage of the target language with people who speak it. Furthermore, learning performance might be perceived as a communicative process where several factors apart from the cognitive work of mind-brain take place among members of a group. Likewise, it was stated that any individual’s learning process is inherent to the ‘moment-by-moment’ of interaction that involves the organization of functional activities where learners have the opportunity to produce their own ideas, exchange experiences and complement their knowledge by means of intercommunication. Consequently, learning behavior cannot only be considered as the mere aftermath of learner’s characteristics or different types of backgrounds but also as the subjective and complex patterns that emerge from the perceptions that learners have of their environment and their fulfillment sense along the course where social and emotional aspects play an important role in the process itself.

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Hence, is also important to observe what happens in our context by reviewing a few researches about this issue conducted by Colombian researchers in order to see how our students behave and feel when they have to face oral activities.

First of all it is necessary to point out that students seem not to have awareness about how the affective part and personal beliefs have a direct impact on the achievement they can obtain in the target language Fandiño (2008). In 2010, Fandiño carried out a research whose main purpose was determined how much anxiety influences the changes in the results of the oral performance. Thus, when students had to perform an oral activity the level of anxiety increased, and it could be seen by the behavior of the students, such as shyness, reluctance of volunteering and discomfort. Students pointed out that during written tasks they did not feel so anxious because they had time to put in order their ideas and produce them clearly and in an organized way, but when it came to a spontaneous and authentic use of the target language they felt under pressure. In the same fashion, Beltran (2013) completed a research based on the way in which anxiety influenced English Foreign Language (EFL) students' oral performances in class. Here affective factors are mentioned as an inherent part of the Second Language Learning process which can have a positive and negative impact on the acquisition of a second language. For instance, positive attitudes from the learner towards the target language, as well as the position of the teachers according to the importance of the motivational strategies they can use are considered as positive constituents. Conversely, when learners disdain the new language and teachers for their part neglect the significance of motivation, negative factor take part in the whole process. Additionally, affective factors are divided in two classes; first, the personal ones which the individual has to deal with such as depression, anxiety, shyness and low

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self-esteem among others and the second type has to do with external factors where the elements involved in the learning process environment affect it directly that is to say, social and cultural aspects that play a vital role in the consolidation of the production of the language in communicative contexts. Following this further, all those elements were taken into consideration to complete this research which was developed with two groups with different socio-economic possibilities, the first group had a laboratory and a native speaker as an assistance and the second group did not have all these learning facilities, nevertheless the results were very interesting since both groups showed a high level of anxiety when they had to face a speaking task. Beltran (2013). Two particular cases are mentioned in this research; the first one explained how a teenage girl, from the private academy, suffered “a mental block” and then this learner explained that the cause was “I become embarrassed, very anxious, especially in oral presentations because even when I feel prepared, I always may forget something”. The second case is about a group of students, from a public school, who tried to find external causes to their shyness and anxiety. They said that the first issue was the manner how their teacher used sarcasm to correct their mistakes. Beltran (2013) This part is also mentioned in a research accomplished by Fandiño (2008), where it is said that many of the affective factors depend on the teachers temperament, but it is said that this conception is a misunderstanding, since students neglect that anxiety and motivational factors are part of the process of learning. However the problem resides in the fact that teachers do not apply a methodology to lower these levels. Coming back to Beltran’s study (2013), besides pointing out the behavior of the teacher, the learners said that another common problem is that they feel anxious to make mistakes due to the reaction that their classmates could have, they thought that the risk of mockery did not let them think clearly and calmly.

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These were the results that a few researchers obtained and analyzed in our context. These two researchers were selected to be taken as literature for this paper since they were mainly focused on the oral part, which is the part that this research paper is concentrated on. Nonetheless, there are other factors in our context which contribute to increasing the level of anxiety in our students. For instance: First, the enormous gap of resources that exists between the public education and the private education. It is different to work with many devices and materials which are permanently present along the learning process to encourage students to perform oral activities correctly than to have a class when the only available help that teachers and students have is the assigned text book with records, which most of the learners find sort of boring and very little interesting. Another problem that Colombian language teachers face is that most of the schools demand visible results, for example the results of national tests like Pruebas Saber 11- ICFES, in which the speaking part is absolutely left aside. For this reason, only few schools in Colombia encourage the correct development of speaking in the learners, due to there is not a national test which evidences the outcome of this work. Moreover, the small group of Colombian schools in which the speaking skill is treated as necessary an ability to acquire in order to achieve a good level in the target languages most of these institutions are private and are not very accessible to the majority of the public. (Marie de Mejia, 2005)

Signals of Language Anxiety

Young (1991) stated that communication apprehension and a lack of social interaction has always been related to cases of language anxiety. Leary (1982) presented three types of behaviors which can be evidenced when a student is suffering of social anxiety and communication apprehension. These behaviors are: “1) arousal-mediated

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responses; 2) disaffiliative behavior; and 3) image-protection behavior.” According to Leary (1982), the first of these responses is a consequence of the activation of the sympathetic nervous system of the learner, which is usually, accompanies all agitated states. This reactions is usually a form to protect themselves from the fear of the oral performance. Foreign language learners manifested some conducts which are clear evidence that they were suffering of communication apprehension and social anxiety in the language classroom. Behaviors like: trying to hide their face behind their books, playing with their hair or clothes or just the manipulation of any object. This is a signal that they are anxious and as a result the outcome has a jittery and nervous performer. The second of these behaviors is characterized by the lack of interventions in an oral interaction, the allowance of long periods of silent and shorter periods of speaking when students are performing any oral activity in front of an audience. The last of these responses is portrayed by a nearly total lack of oral answers, learners tend to smile and nod in order to response to a conversation. Leary (1982) claimed that these reactions "these responses may serve to protect an image of the person as friendly, agreeable, polite, interested, and even sociable, without incurring any social risks" (p. 114).

Rardin (1988) made a differentiation between the typical anxiety and the language anxiety. She stated that both sort of anxieties could manifest themselves with the normal physiological responses like sweaty palms, nervous stomachs and accelerated heartbeats. Nevertheless, she claimed that language anxiety and communication apprehension presented some symptoms which are a barrier to stop the interaction and the correct development of the speaking ability. The symptoms that the learners who were suffering language anxiety featured were the inability to produce the correct sounds, rhythm and intonation to pronounce a word correctly, Students also had

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“freezing up” state when they were called to perform an oral activity. Also, in some extreme cases foreign language learners just refused to speak. Horwitz (2001) reported that student who were anxious when they were called to perform an oral task try to avoid to take part in a conversation in the foreign language. Students also froze up in role-play activities and later they reported that they knew the correct usage of the grammar but they forgot it during the performance. Bailey (1983) declared that competitiveness can also increase the anxiety levels, because foreign language learners tried to outdo their classmates and started to make self-comparisons to other classmates and their own expectations, and this turned into a hostile competition to get the highest grades and to gain the approval of the teacher.

It is also relevant to see how the background of the students is qualified as an affective factor which contributes to increase the level of anxiety in the foreign language learners. Then, the impact of the context has on the levels of anxiety in learners will be studied. Afterwards, some research conducted in Colombia will be presented in order to show how this phenomenon affects our students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As can be seen, a second language learning process encompasses many factors which have to do with the complexity of human beings as a whole. Coupled with this fact, data has usually shown that those affective factors are all deep-seated to the development of the language skills influencing the results and the evidence of knowledge of learners.

Language anxiety is an issue that has more than one dimension and it is difficult to point out a common cause for it. Since the causes are linked to many personal and individual aspects such as ethnics, background, experiences that students have had in

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previous foreign language process, classroom circumstances and, of course, the personality of each individual. The variety of responses is widely. All these difficulties the way how this problem should be assessed. (Young, 1991)

Anxiety in oral performance and its effects is a serious issue that must be treated. High levels of anxiety in oral performance can make students abandon their language courses in order to avoid being exposed to any speaking activity, in some cases, foreign language learners have postponed these courses until it was possible or they have decided to change their careers to any other one that does not have any foreign language subject. (Salsedo 2010) To those students who have experienced a moderate level of anxiety only procrastinate in doing their language activities and avoid participate in any activity which involves oral performance and some other students only crouch in the last row. Conversely, there are some groups of learners who have seldom felt anxious during the oral task (Horwitz et al .1986)

The oral tasks in the Language Learning has turned into a difficult activity to perform in any foreign language classroom. Oral activities are generally avoided by the students in order not to be exposed to the nervousness and anxiety that it produces. Then, this reluctance to oral exercises has started to create a low level of achievement in the speaking ability in comparison to the other skills (Fandiño, 2010).

The fact that this research paper is not focused on the possible solutions of language anxiety. It is necessary to pinpoint that the application of the alternatives to solve this phenomenon are wide. Since, the researchers who have conducted studies to identify the probable causes of this issue have struggled to clearly recognize them, it has been even more difficult to find an applicable or suitable explanations to this problem

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due to the factors which are required to find causes as well as solutions are closely bound to individual aspects and perspectives of the language learning process.

Since in this research paper most of the causes and signal that foreign language learners can present when they suffer of anxiety, it is relevant to mention some possible recommendations in order to lower the levels of this phenomenon. For instance: Young (1991) suggested that it is necessary to recognize the manifestations of the student of language anxiety to start coping this fears. On the other hand, Horwitz (2001) proposed more specific tasks to face this issue. In these strategies he included the creation of an environment where students could express their fears and if it were necessary to share them with their peers in order to see that they are not alone. According to Bailey (1983), a suitable solution might be to elaborate a journal, in which they could write how they feel in the daily tasks that they had to perform. Another manner to help learner to overcome language anxiety could be to create an environment where students might discuss their previous experiences in second or foreign language courses, all this attempting to find the initial cause of their problem.

As a personal insight, I think that it is necessary to change the view of the language teacher as the person who has to correct every single error that is made by the students. Teachers need to become facilitators who can give opportunities to interact, to express and to create. However, it is when teachers need to intervene to point out the mistakes of the learners when they have to carefully choose the words that are going to be said and the ways that are going to be used, because it is the critical moment when they can be a cause to lower the anxiety or the opposite to that. As teachers, we need to attempt to make our students thrive, to encourage to take the risk to make mistakes, and make them understand that they can learn a lot from those errors. Of course, this cannot

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be improvised, it is essential to plan the activities for every course, henceforth, language anxiety is presented differently in every single individual. The process to lower language anxiety should be started with communication and dialogues, By the same token, the use of alternative assessment could be a good instrument which helps students to see a different side of the evaluations. That is to say, since it has been known that quizzes, written or oral tests which might be established from the beginning of the course provoke learners fear and concern, teachers should find other ways of monitor their process in terms of how much they learn by the use of constant assessment that could be implicit in daily activities carried out in the classroom, such as students' interventions during class, role plays, essays, articles, so forth. Those resources might contribute to observe and control the progress in students' learning process as well as give them more opportunities to participate without making them feel the pressure of assessment activities.

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