HOW TO LOSE ANXIETY IN SPEAKING BASED ON TARGETED LANGUAGE

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Annotation: Speaking anxiety is one of the most common psychological barriers in foreign language learning. Many learners experience fear, hesitation, lack of confidence, and stress while speaking in a target language. This article discusses the causes of speaking anxiety and presents effective strategies for reducing anxiety through targeted language practice. The study highlights the role of communicative methods, psychological preparation, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation training, and supportive learning environments in improving learners' confidence. The article concludes that regular practice, positive feedback, and learner-centered approaches significantly decrease speaking anxiety and enhance oral communication skills.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, target language, communication, foreign language learning, confidence, language acquisition.

Introduction. In today's globalized world, learning a foreign language has become an important requirement for academic success, professional growth, and international communication. Despite the growing interest in language learning, many students face serious difficulties in speaking a target language fluently. One of day major psychological obstacles is speaking anxiety.

Speaking anxiety refers to the feeling of nervousness, fear, or discomfort experienced while communicating in a foreign language. Learners often worry about making mistakes, incorrect pronunciation, or being negatively judged by others. Consequently, they avoid participating in discussions and lose opportunities to improve their speaking skills.

This article aims to examine the causes of speaking anxiety and identify effective methods to reduce anxiety through targeted language learning strategies.

Literature Review. Foreign language anxiety has been widely studied in the fields of linguistics and educational psychology. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety is a specific psychological condition associated with classroom language learning and communication. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis explains that emotional factors such as fear, stress, and low motivation can negatively influence language acquisition. When learners feel anxious, their ability to process language input and produce speech decreases. In contrast, a comfortable and supportive environment helps learners communicate more effectively.

Macintyre and Gardner (1994) also emphasized that anxiety affects memory, concentration, and speaking performance. Therefore, reducing anxiety is considered essential for successful language learning .

Causes of Speaking Anxiety. Speaking anxiety, conceptualized as a situational phobia or foreign language anxiety, represents a significant psychological barriers that hinders effective oral communication. In academic and professional settings, this phenomenon manifests as a combination of cognitive apprehension and psychological stress. Investigating the underlying causes of speaking anxiety is crucial, as it directly Impacts an individual's communicative competence and academic performance.

The primary catalyst for speaking anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation. Anthropological and psychological studies indicate that individuals possess an inherent desire for social validation. Consequently, the prospect of being judged, scrutinized, or misunderstood by an audience or peers triggers a defensive psychological response. Speakers often internalize the belief that any linguistic

flaw will result in social embarrassment or a perceived lack of intelligence. This continuous cognitive pressure leads to high levels of performance anxiety, frequently causing individuals to withdraw from oral participation entirely.

Inseparably linked to this evaluation anxiety is the fear of making mistakes, often drive by a mindset of perfectionism. Many language learners operate under the misconception that communication is only successful if it is linguistically flawless. The pressure to maintain perfect grammatical structures and native-like pronunciation creates an intense emotional burden. When speakers realize they cannot meet these unrealistic standards in real-time communication, anxiety paralyzed their thought process, leading to the «blocking» effect where the speaker completely forgets what they intended to say.

From a linguistic dimension, a restricted vocabulary and deficient grammatical competence serve as direct sources of anxiety. Oral communication requires rapid cognitive processing to retrieve words and construct sentences simultaneously. When a speaker lacks a sufficient lexical repertoire, this processing slows down, resulting in unnatural pauses and fragmented speech. This inability to express complex thoughts accurately causes a sudden drop in self-confidence, reinforcing the speaker's belief that they are incapable of effective communication.

Finally, pedagogical and environmental factors significantly exacerbate the severity of speaking anxiety. An authoritarian classroom climate or a hyper-critical workplace environment acts as a negative reinforcer. When instructors or managers practice immediate, harsh error correction instead of encouraging fluency, they create a hostile communicative atmosphere. Furthermore, a lack of systematic oral practice and inadequate preparation for specific topics leave speakers feeling structurally unequipped, thereby multiplying their situation stress.

In summary, speaking anxiety is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in both psychological vulnerabilities-such as perfectionism and fear of judgment-and linguistic limitations. Addressing this challenge requires a paradigm shift in both

teaching and communication environments, moving the focus away from flawless accuracy and toward successful message delivery

The Role of Deficient Vocabulary in Generating Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA), specifically speaking anxiety, is a multifaceted psychological phenomenon deeply intertwined with a learner's linguistic competence. Among the various linguistic factors, a deficient vocabulary acts as a primary catalyst for performance anxiety and communication apprehension. When speakers lack the necessary lexical resources, their cognitive load increases significantly, disrupting the fluency of speech and triggering a cycle of anxiety.

Cognitive Load and Lexical Retrieval Failures

Speaking requires real-time processing, where the brain must simultaneously conceptualize an idea, retrieve appropriate words, apply grammatical rules, and articulate sounds. A limited vocabulary disrupts this fluid process. When a speaker encounters a lexical gap—a missing word—the cognitive flow stalls. This failure in lexical retrieval forces the speaker to pause excessively, use unnatural fillers, or abandon the message entirely. The sudden awareness of this breakdown often triggers immediate physiological and psychological anxiety responses, such as an increased heart rate, mental blocks, and fear of negative evaluation.

The Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Self-Preservation

Language production is inherently social and tied to self-presentation. Learners with an inadequate vocabulary often feel that their limited word choice makes them appear less intelligent, incompetent, or uneducated. This fear of negative evaluation from peers or instructors creates high stress environments. Instead of focusing on communication, the speaker’s attention shifts toward self-monitoring and avoiding errors. This hyper-vigilance exacerbates anxiety, making the speaker more prone to stumbles, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of communication failure.

Compensatory Strategies and Their Psychological Toll

To cope with a deficient vocabulary, anxious speakers frequently rely on compensatory strategies such as literal translation from their native language, circumlocution (talking around a word), or semantic avoidance (changing the topic). While these strategies can sometimes bridge the communication gap, they require immense mental effort. The constant strain of searching for alternative expressions reduces the speaker's confidence, increases mental fatigue, and heightens the overall dread of future speaking tasks.

The Vicious Cycle of Lexical Deficiency and Anxiety

The relationship between a limited vocabulary and speaking anxiety is cyclical. Vocabulary deficits generate anxiety, which in turn impairs the working memory capacity needed to recall words during a conversation. This anxiety leads to avoidance behavior, where learners actively shy away from speaking opportunities to protect their self-esteem. By avoiding interaction, learners miss the crucial input and output practice necessary to acquire new vocabulary, thereby locking themselves into a continuous cycle of linguistic deficiency and heightened anxiety.

Leveraging Technology to Mitigate Vocabulary-Induced Speaking Anxiety

Digital tools and educational technologies offer innovative pathways to alleviate speaking anxiety by directly addressing vocabulary deficits. In traditional settings, real-time lexical retrieval failures often trigger immediate psychological distress. Conversely, technology creates a low-stakes, autonomous learning environment that lowers the affective filter and fosters vocabulary acquisition.

Safe, Low-Stakes Practice Environments

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications provide learners with private spaces to practice oral production. Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots and voice-recognition software allow students to engage in simulated conversations without the fear of immediate negative evaluation by peers or instructors. This buffering effect reduces communication apprehension, allowing learners to focus on retrieving and applying new lexical items at their own pace.

Automated, Real-Time Lexical Support

Modern digital platforms incorporate features that scaffold vocabulary deficiencies during speech production. Digital tools provide:

Instant contextual glossaries: Clickable definitions during reading and listening activities build the mental lexicon before speaking tasks.

Intelligent word-prediction: AI tools suggest synonyms and context-appropriate vocabulary during interactive drafting phases.

Automated transcriptions: Voice-to-text features allow learners to visually review their spoken output and identify specific vocabulary gaps.

Gamification and Spaced Repetition Systems (SRS)

To permanentize vocabulary retention and reduce the cognitive load during real-time speech, technology utilizes gamified Spaced Repetition Systems (SRS). Platforms like Anki or Quizlet automatically schedule vocabulary reviews right before a learner is about to forget them. Gamified elements—such as points, streaks, and immediate feedback—shift the student's focus from performance anxiety to task engagement, transforming lexical acquisition from a stressful chore into an interactive habit.

Virtual Reality (VR) and High-Immersive Scaffolding

Immersive technologies, such as Virtual Reality (VR), simulate high-anxiety public speaking scenarios (e.g., job interviews, academic presentations) within a controlled environment. VR headsets can display subtle visual prompts, keywords, or vocabulary cues directly in the user’s field of vision. This real-time scaffolding assists learners when they experience a mental block, preventing the psychological panic associated with vocabulary retrieval failure and gradually desensitizing them to speaking anxiety.

The Pedagogical Role of Teachers in Overcoming Vocabulary-Induced Anxiety

While technological tools provide vital support, the classroom teacher remains the primary architect of an anxiety-free linguistic environment. Instructors play a

crucial role in diagnosing vocabulary deficiencies, scaffolding oral tasks, and shifting the classroom culture from a focus on perfect performance to successful communication.

Strategic Lexical Scaffolding

Teachers can directly reduce the cognitive load that triggers speaking anxiety by providing structured pre-speaking support. Instead of demanding spontaneous speech, effective instructors employ targeted scaffolding techniques:

Pre-teaching core vocabulary: Introducing essential thematic words and idiomatic expressions before a speaking task prevents real-time lexical panic.

Providing lexical phrase frames: Supplying sentence starters and functional expressions (e.g., *"From my perspective..."*, *"In contrast to..."*) gives students a linguistic safety net.

Strategic planning time: Granting learners a few minutes to brainstorm and write down key vocabulary before speaking drastically lowers performance anxiety.

Redefining Error Correction and Feedback

The fear of negative evaluation is often exacerbated by rigid or public error correction. Teachers must adopt anxiety-sensitive feedback strategies to protect the learner's self-esteem:

Delayed correction: Noting vocabulary errors during a task and addressing them anonymously afterward, rather than interrupting the student mid-speech.

Recasting: Gently repeating a student's incorrectly used word or phrase in its correct form within the natural flow of conversation, avoiding explicit criticism.

Formative praise: Shifting the evaluation focus from grammatical perfection to lexical risk-taking and successful message delivery.

Cultivating a Commending Classroom Climate

To alleviate communication apprehension, teachers must actively design a supportive, low-stakes micro-environment. Utilizing small-group work and think-pair-share routines allows students to test new vocabulary with a single peer before speaking in front of the whole class. By framing vocabulary gaps not as failures,

but as natural, collaborative learning opportunities, teachers dismantle the psychological barriers that silence anxious learners.

Discussion

Target language learning should focus not only on grammar and vocabulary but also on emotional and psychological factors. Anxiety can become a serious barrier if it is ignored during the learning process.

Modern communicative teaching methods emphasize student-centered learning, where learners actively use language in real-life situations. Such methods help reduce fear and improve communicative competence.

Furthermore, technological advancements have created new opportunities for anxiety-free speaking practice. Online communication tools allow students to practice speaking independently and receive feedback without social pressure.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the critical role of vocabulary deficiency in generating target language speaking anxiety, while highlighting technology and pedagogical intervention as key solutions to this pervasive issue. The findings confirm that speaking anxiety is not an unchangeable personality trait, but a situational challenge deeply rooted in a learner's immediate lexical limitations. When a speaker lacks the necessary vocabulary, the resulting cognitive overload and fear of negative evaluation create a psychological barrier that silences communication. Treating speaking anxiety, therefore, requires addressing its linguistic root rather than merely managing its emotional symptoms. In conclusion, overcoming anxiety in target language speaking is achieved when technology and instructors work together to transform the learning environment. By combining autonomous digital preparation with an emotionally safe, teacher-guided classroom, the vicious cycle of vocabulary deficiency and communication apprehension can be broken. Ultimately, shifting the educational focus from linguistic perfection to

communicative competence allows learners to view vocabulary gaps not as signs of failure, but as natural milestones on their journey toward fluency.

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