Learners' Anxieties on Posting Their Own Speeches on Youtube.com: Facilitative or Debilitative?

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there have been numerous studies on anxiety, particularly anxiety and its relationship to motivation. However, very little research has been done with respect to anxiety in public speaking courses EFL learners. If public speaking often brings about a high level of anxiety for those speaking in their L1, for EFL learners the anxiety may be compounded by the awareness of their limited language proficiency as well as their very limited opportunity to practice public speaking. Yet, public speaking courses may be required if English language is their major area of study. As a result, EFL learners may often feel an overwhelming amount of anxiety, to the point of becoming debilitative.

Horwitz and Young (1991) explained that there are primarily two types of anxiety: facilitative and debilitative. Facilitative anxiety motivates the student to "fight" the new learning task and prepares the student emotionally to approach the learning task as a challenge. On the other hand, debilitative anxiety motivates the student to "flee" the new learning task and stimulates the individual to adopt avoidance behavior. MacIntypre, Noels, and Clement (1997) found that those with high anxiety seemed to be in a viciously debilitative cycle, where high anxiety led to lower participation, which led to even greater anxiety, and hence even lower participation.

The participants are 32 third-year college students in Taiwan with all learners at the low-intermediate to intermediate-level proficiency. They are all English language majors at a university of technology located in a rural section of northern Taiwan, and all were enrolled in a required two-semester course on public speaking and presentation in English. In order to study EFL learners' perceptions of the role of anxiety in their public speaking course to find ways to help students to best cope with such anxiety,

journal writings and surveys were designed to address the following research questions:

I.   Do learners experience facilitative or debilitative anxiety with regard to the notion of posting their own delivered speeches on Youtube.com?

II.   Of the major themes that emerge from the learners' journal responses, to what extent does anxiety interrelate with these themes?

III. Do highly desired student activities yield minimal anxiety and why?

This study provides evidence that for low-intermediate to intermediate proficiency EFL learners in a public speaking course, the issue of anxiety is particularly relevant. As this study shows, these learners are willing to put up with moderate to substantial level of anxiety in more than a few instances if they perceive the activity to be of great value. That is, even though anxiety may be unavoidable for many students, if activities selected are those that students regard as highly beneficial, useful, or practical, students may go as far as to want those types of activities despite the significant level of anxiety that it may induce, rationalizing that the gains from such activities outweigh the anxiety costs. Thus, major emphasis should be placed on the interest level of a particular activity in preparation for a major goal such as posting a well-prepared video of oneself on Youtube.com. The challenge is for the instructor to create the necessary learning environment that will enable learners to channel that anxiety into a facilitative instead of debilitative form.

Introduction

In recent years there have been numerous studies on anxiety, particularly anxiety and its relationship to motivation. However, little research has been done with respect to anxiety in public speaking courses for learners of English as a foreign language. If public speaking often brings about a high level of anxiety for those speaking in their native language, for EFL learners the anxiety may be compounded by the awareness of their limited language proficiency. The very limited opportunity to practice public speaking in an EFL environment only adds to the problem. Yet, for many of these students, public speaking courses may be a required course if English language is their major area of study. The consequence is that in these public speaking courses EFL learners may often feel an overwhelming amount of anxiety, to the point of becoming debilitative. This article presents a qualitative study of one class of 32 EFL college students of low-intermediate proficiency level and their reactions towards the notion of posting their speeches on Youtube.com as well as suggestions for course modification. Implications for the foreign language teacher are suggested.

Literature Review

Public speaking: the most feared of all?

Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening (Oxford, 1993). Oxford notes that speaking in front of others is often the most anxiety-provoking of all, that many teachers have observed students who exhibit extreme anxiety when they are required to use the new language in activities such as oral reports, role-plays, or speaking tests.

Research on anxiety has ranked public speaking among the most feared experience, in some instances above death, heights, and flying (Wallechinsky, Wallace, and Wallace, 1978). Gardner (1991a) confirmed that speaking is by far the most anxiety provoking of all for L2 learners. MacIntyre (1998) would agree, contending that language learning provokes a traumatic reaction in some individuals. Therefore, MacIntyre notes that Young's (1991) findings that some teachers feel it necessary to induce anxiety in order to

stimulate learning means that such principles inevitably lead to severe anxiety reactions amongst students.

Reviews of apprehension surrounding public speaking reveal numerous contributing factors. These include perceived skill deficiency, fear of evaluation, audience scrutiny, lack of experience in public speaking situations, poor preparation, a low level of self-esteem, and below-average abilities and achievement, and even genetic predisposition. (Bippus & Daly, 1999; Pearson, Dewitt, Child, Kahl, and Dandamudi, 2007). Other studies (Cao & Philp 2006) have focused on students' willingness to communicate (WTC), finding that a number of factors were perceived by learners to influence WTC behavior in class: the group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s), interlocutor(s)' participation, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-confidence, medium of communication and cultural background.

Speaking in a foreign language often generates additional anxiety due to the need to pronounce, and learners often feel insecure or inadequate about their pronunciation accuracy. Shams (2006) noted that foreign language learners attach great importance to their own pronunciation, often resulting in anxiety. In her study, the learners were able to reduce their anxiety through the use of computerized pronunciation practice.

Kimura studied affective factors of Japanese EFL learners at a junior college in oral communication tasks and found that, in general, easier tasks are less anxiety-provoking than more challenging tasks, and that pair work also helped to reduce anxiety. Rojo-Laurilla's research on maritime students in the Philippines showed that students who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses in communication tend to not only improve in subsequent communication based activities, but also were able to reduce their anxiety.

Anxiety: facilitative or debilitative?

Horwitz and Young (1991) explained that there are primarily two types of anxiety: facilitative and debilitative. Facilitative anxiety motivates the student to "fight" the new learning task and prepares the student emotionally to approach the learning task as a challenge. On the other hand, debilitative anxiety motivates the student to "flee" the new learning task and stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance

behavior. There are often situations where anxiety becomes debilitative. MacIntypre, Noels, and Clement (1997) researched biases in foreign language learners' self-ratings, and found that anxious students tended to underestimate their competence relative to less anxious students, who tended to overestimate their competence. They found that those with high anxiety seemed to be in a vicious cycle, where high anxiety led to lower participation, which led to even greater anxiety, and hence even lower participation. Feigenbaum (2007) showed that frequent occurrences of debilitating anxiety results from speaking to the teacher and large numbers of peers directly. Cheng (2005) studied the fear of evaluation by peers and instructors with respect to oral performance and found that the greater the fear of evaluation, the lower the level of achievement. Similarly, Yurong & Nan (2008) studied the effects of affective factors on oral English fluency of college students in China and found that high anxiety negatively correlated with oral achievement while self-esteem positively correlated.

Negative impact of debilitative anxiety

Studies on the impact of anxiety on second or foreign language learners have repeatedly confirmed through qualitative (Yan & Horwitz 2008) as well as quantitative investigations findings on the negative impact of anxiety on second language achievement (see. e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 1989; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Saito & Samimy, 1996). Yan's study employed a qualitative approach to examine learners' perceptions of relationships between the origins and consequences of anxiety in their language learning, and they found that personal issues strongly influence anxiety. Yan & Horwitz noticed that motivation also seemed to play a role in affecting anxiety. Thus, they recommended that further research be directed towards understanding the relationship between motivation and anxiety in language learning, with emphasis on personal and sociocultural factors associated with language learning, because interactions between "personal variables related to language learning will take different forms in different contextual settings." That personal issues strongly influence anxiety corroborates with Spielmann & Radnofsky's (2001) finding that students prefer focusing on what's relevant to them rather than on the difficulty of the task. That is, high relevance in the eyes of students may go a long way towards reducing anxiety.

Yang's (1999) studied learners' beliefs and found that those beliefs were closely linked to learners' use of formal oral-practice strategies, suggesting a cyclical relationship between learners' beliefs and strategy use. That is, that which they believed affected their strategies, which in turn confirmed their beliefs. However, Yang's research did not delve into whether the strategies were successful in reducing anxiety. Merritt, Richards, and Davis (2001) aimed to assess whether a specific training program in vocal and physical skills could reduce the level of perceived performance anxiety. Results indicated that the particular vocal and physical skills training program used showed positive results in effectively reducing the level of perceived performance anxiety.

Liu's (2006) research on Chinese EFL students revealed that most students would become very nervous when doing oral presentations, particularly the lower-proficiency ones, and especially when they were singled out to speak English in class. They felt the least anxious during pair work, and with increasingly greater exposure to oral English, the students gradually felt less anxious about using the target language. Daubney (2002) found that academic and social evaluation contribute to anxiety. Daubney asserts that anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process, noting that anxiety is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension.

Is there such a thing as "facilitative" anxiety?

According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1991), the use of affective learning strategies help reduce the level of language anxiety, freeing up cognitive resources to be applied to the use of cognitive strategies. Furthermore, affective variables are probably more powerful in influencing strategy use than intelligence and aptitude. Poza's (2005) research showed that when free from the time constrains of the classroom, coupled with the absence of the instructor and peers, learners showed an increase in the amount of risk-taking in terms of saying something that they were not sure about. Poza attributes this willingness to take risks to the reduction of fear of negative evaluation. That is, the absence of the instructor and peers helped to reduce anxiety. By having more time to prepare their answers and record their contributions as many times as they needed, enabling learners to record only the best version, anxiety was greatly reduced. The

capability of putting forth the best version available, thereby bringing about the results that one wants and hence reducing anxiety as a result, was confirmed in Huang's (2005) study. Huang's research showed that self-efficacy was the single most important variable for increasing motivation while decreasing anxiety.

Interventions to help manage public speaking anxiety of learners often focus on lowering anxiety and increasing perceived competence. Ayres et al. (1995) reported that the public speaking anxiety of at-risk students lessened after exposure to a videotape intervention designed to reduce speech anxiety. Chesebro et al. (1992) suggested that teachers direct their attention to reducing levels of anxiety by increasing student self-esteem, especially in the area of communication competence. The result has been a plethora of research on strategies for coping, such as PAVES (Posture, Attitude, Voice, Eye Contact, Smile) (Combes et al. 2008). Other studies have focused on managing presentation anxiety through techniques such as acknowledging presentation fears, practice sessions, peer evaluations, videotaped examples of effective presentations, and class discussions (Hartman & LeMay 2004).

Ohata (2005) compared the teachers' perspectives on language anxiety with those of students and found that while many teachers believed in facilitative anxiety, the vast majority of students felt that anxiety was debilitative. Krashen contended that there is nothing facilitative about anxiety in language acquisition, but that "helpful" anxiety might exist for performing language tasks (Arnold 1999) (p. 62). Chen (2000) researched Toastmasters members and compiled a list of advice on reducing public speaking anxiety including practicing often, developing a positive learning environment, creating student-leadership responsibilities, etc. Although such advice directly targets EFL learners of public speaking, what was not reported was the applicability of such advice to lower-proficiency EFL learners. More recently, Na (2007) proposed that teachers should take measures to reduce anxiety, but not completely eliminate it. That is, Na believes that adequate anxiety plays a facilitative role and can motivate students to maintain their efforts on learning. Therefore, the teachers' real job is to help students keep adequate anxiety, neither too high nor too low. The issue thus remains: should foreign language teachers focus on "adequate" anxiety, on reducing anxiety as much as possible, or something else when it comes to teaching public speaking? Arnold notes that "the jury is still out" concerning the existence of helpful anxiety (p. 62).

Research Questions

In order to study EFL learners' perceptions of the role of anxiety in their public speaking course, journal writings and surveys were designed to address the following research questions:

I.   Do learners experience facilitative or debilitative anxiety with regard to the notion of posting their own delivered speeches on Youtube.com?

II. From the learners' journal responses regarding anxiety, are there themes that emerge?

III. What is the relationship between learners' suggestions and anxiety?

To address these questions, the researcher applied a grounded-theory analysis. Grounded-theory analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to derive meaningful categories in data-based qualitative studies. Grounded theory is defined by Strauss and Corbin as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (p.158). Grounded-theory analysis was chosen as the approach for this study because this study sought to identify factors that served as impetus for becoming more diligent while gauging the level of anxiety induced by each factor. Thus, it was important to select an approach that could systematically incorporate all of the learners and their comments to gain a more thorough perspective.

Method

Participants

The participants are 32 third-year college students in Taiwan with all learners at the low-intermediate to intermediate-level proficiency (as measured by online simulation General English Proficiency Tests). They are all English language majors at a university of technology located in a rural section of northern Taiwan, and all were enrolled in a required two-semester course on public speaking and presentation in English. Of the 32 students, 27 were female and 5 were male. The participants' age

range was from 20 to 23 years and had studied English for at least six years in grade school before entering university, although none of them had enrolled in English language courses extensively during grade school. Since the instructor was previously the faculty advisor to this group of learners (for the past two years), the instructor understood that the vast majority of students came from middle to lower-middle class socio-economic background, with nearly all of them receiving some type of financial aid to cover their tuition and expenses.

The instructor for the public speaking course was a Taiwanese-American who grew up in New York and whose native language was English, having received his entire education in the USA. The instructor had already known the students for nearly 2.5 years, having taught the learners every semester throughout this time period. Based on prior experience with this group of students, the instructor perceived these learners to be highly willing to learn, yet with concomitant poor learning habits as well as a deeply-rooted sense of insecurity about their potential for making great progress in learning the English language. The instructor's attitude towards the learners in this public speaking course was one of being as flexible as possible in supporting students' needs whilst being insistent that they post their speeches on youtube.com. In other words, the goal was not to be modified, but the process was up for negotiation.

Data collection procedure

The public speaking course began with the instructor informing students early on in the semester that they would be preparing their own speeches for posting on Youtube.com as part of their final exam project. The instructor initially assigned the topic, "Why Taiwanese People Generally Dislike Mainland Products" as the standard topic for students to work on, and this was later modified to an optional "Why Do People Like or Dislike Products from Certain Countries" as a result of student request. Throughout the first half of the semester, the class focused on learning phrases commonly used in formal public speaking, with practice sessions that required the use of those phrases and included peer evaluation and videoing.

During the middle of the first semester, students were asked to write in their first of two journal entries. The first entry asked learners to reflect on their thoughts of posting

on Youtube.com, whether this goal would prompted them to work harder, as well as any suggestions they might have for videoing and evaluating their speeches. The reason for waiting until November was to see how students would feel after having experienced some practice and preparation in their speech-making process, so that they would have concrete experience to reflect upon, which the instructor felt would more accurately reflect their true feelings as opposed to unsubstantiated fears.

Towards the end of the 1st semester, learners were asked to record a second journal entry to provide detailed reflections on that 1st semester as well as suggestions for the 2nd semester of this public speaking course. To elicit detailed suggestions, the instructor provided examples by asking learners to also offer suggestions for videoing and peer-evaluating, both of which were conducted during the first semester. However, learners' responses were not limited to the aforementioned examples cited by the instructor. Students were also encouraged to reflect upon and write on any other thoughts pertaining to this public speaking course. Students were given approximately twenty minutes to write in their journals each of the two times and were free to write in their native language (Chinese), in English, or both. This time period for writing was determined by seeing how many students had finished writing their journal entries. The instructor waited until at least 80 percent of the students were finished writing before wrapping up the journal writing exercise. The journal writing was semi-structured. Specifically, the instructor asked them to write about their thoughts of posting their own speeches on Youtube.com and any other thoughts related to this course. The use of the data from their journal writings for this research project was approved by the entire class. The resulting responses helped to address the first research question, that is, do learners experience facilitative or debilitative anxiety with regard to the notion of posting their own delivered speeches on Youtube.com?

Despite the original intention of analyzing the journal responses, the wide diversity of responses within the same class with regard to desired teaching techniques and classroom activities led the researcher to conclude that administering a survey based on the learners' collective ideas was needed to see the relative percentage of students who preferred a specific activity. The researcher subsequently compiled a list of activities and techniques in a survey form for the students to anonymously complete at the end of the first semester. The reason for anonymity was to ensure that students felt comfortable

about being honest in their responses, in contrast to journal writings, where the instructor knows exactly who the writer was. The survey asked learners to rank the level of anxiety different activities induce as well as to rank their preference for those activities. These survey responses served to help answer the second research question, which is to determine the anxiety levels experienced amongst the most preferred course-related activities. The benefit of administering this survey at the end of the first semester was that learners had undergone some of the activities listed on the survey and had a reasonably clear idea of what it was like to perform public speaking, and therefore were presumably responding based on some prior practical experience as opposed to pure speculation as to the desirability of the activities.

Data Analysis

Applying the first level of the grounded theory involved a thematic analysis of data from their journal entries. The purpose of using thematic analysis techniques was "finding and marking the underlying ideas in the data, grouping similar information together, and relating different ideas and themes to one another" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 229). The researcher read the journals responses regarding Youtube.com, translated the Chinese comments into English as precisely as possible, and then summarized and coded the responses into one of three following basic categories: (a) Emphatic "yes" (Want to be posted on Youtube.com); (b) Conditional "yes" ("Yes", but only if…); and (c) "No". This coding process helped to answer the first research question, as to whether or not anxiety developed from the notion of posting on Youtube.com was facilitative or debilitative, and the proffered reasons.

The second level of applying the grounded theory involved further organizing the journal responses into clusters of major themes. The third and final level involved determining interrelationships between those thematic clusters. This served to answer the second research question as to what extent anxiety interrelates with these themes.

Journal entries from both the first and second journal entries offered widely divergent viewpoints as to the process of preparing their speeches (both written and oral aspects). Learners themselves had many points of disagreements. This prompted the researcher to identify patterns of suggestions emerging from their responses. The

researcher sifted through the journal entries to develop a survey to determine anxiety levels associated with suggestions which were all offered by the learners. Also, from this survey the researcher sought to determine whether interrelationships existed between anxiety and learners' suggestions for the course as well as interrelationships amongst the suggestions themselves (the third research question). A list of suggestions was compiled and organized into a survey in learners' L1. This survey was then distributed to learners to be completed anonymously. The survey asked that they rate each of the collective suggestions in terms of the amount of anxiety induced by that particular suggestion, ranking from 1 to 5 (1 = least anxiety, 5 = greatest anxiety), as well as the desirability of those suggestions from 1 to 3 (1 = highly preferred, 3 = least preferred). The survey responses were then read and analyzed by the researcher to determine the extent to which the listed activities or techniques were anxiety provoking, and to what extent they preferred those activities.

Results

Journal entries

The results from preliminary coding of learners' responses with regard to posting speeches on Youtube.com revealed 11 of whom approved with little or no hesitation, another 14 of whom approved but with substantial reservations about the process of preparation, and the remaining 7 of whom disapproved of the idea almost vehemently. However, these figures do little justice to feelings and thoughts of the learners, so the researcher sought to identify major themes that emerged. The researcher identified eight major themes emerged from all the journal comments on the application of Youtube.com as well as overall course design. The themes are listed here, but not in any particular order:

1) Choice of topic: Comments referred to the extent of suitable of a given topic.

2) Pronunciation: Comments on whether others will understand them.

3) Writing: Comments on capability to write in English.

4) Developing courage: Comments on courage to post their speeches on Youtube.com.

5) Global dialogue: Comments on dialogue with online viewers of their speeches.

6) Shyness: Comments on shyness; fear of being verbally attacked; losing "face."

7) Impetus for preparing well: Comments on extent of motivation.

8) Respect for learners: Comments on extent to which learners feel respected.

Theme1: Choice of topic

This first theme identified by the grounded theory analysis was somewhat surprising to the instructor because all along the instructor had believed that a controversial topic would invite the greatest amount of dialogue on the Internet which would presumably lead to truly authentic exchange of ideas on a global level. However, several learners had reservations:

We are just students. I think we shouldn't announce our views regarding problems between China and Taiwan at this critical period when all the news and politics are a mess.

Other learners offered suggestions for modification:

I have to say, the topic is too serious. I think we can change the topic. We can talk about something like "What will USA be like after Obama's election to the presidency?"

Another student concurred:

I feel a little embarrassed because I am afraid that someone else will be unhappy. Maybe the topic can be about loving this world.… "Global warming and what we can do about it." I think this will be interesting and many people will also want to know. So it won't be a bad idea to switch the topic.

These and other similar responses illustrate that students are afraid of offending others or getting verbally attacked. Although some students wanted a controversial topic, by far most of them preferred a "safe" topic, one that was minimally controversial.

Theme2: Pronunciation

The instructor again was somewhat surprised at the high importance placed on pronunciation, because students rarely approached the instructor with pronunciation

questions. However, it soon became quite clear that pronunciation was of virtually unanimous concern to the students:

> *We can strengthen our pronunciation because many students' pronunciation are not clear enough.*
>
> *We can practice pronunciation more, because I am not good at it. Therefore, I wish to learn the pronunciation aspect well.*

Many students had negative perceptions of their own pronunciation. However, this may have been inadvertently due to their teachers' influence:

> *We can focus more on speaking and pronunciation, because from listening to the teacher, the teacher says that this will be very important for the upcoming graduation project....*

The graduation project is a required group project that includes a group presentation in English for at least 12 minutes followed by a Q&A with the evaluators, and they appear to know from word of mouth that poor pronunciation sometimes led directly to failing grades on the presentation part of the graduation project, which mean delaying graduation. Thus, anxiety over their upcoming graduation project may have exerted at least some influence on their concern over their pronunciation.

Theme3: Writing and speaking skills

The instructor of this course felt that students should be writing and revising their own speeches while orally practicing what they have written. However, this requires enormous sacrifice of time from the teacher, as one learner explained why:

> *I think teacher can help us to revise our article. Revise and correct our grammar and vocabulary usage one student at a time.*
>
> *In fact, I don't know what to suggest for this semester, but I'd like the teacher to teach us more writing and speaking. My writing is very, very poor. I hope that I can learn more and more writing techniques.*

It was quite clear that students wanted the instructor to spend more time in both writing and speaking, and that students practically craved for individualized attention.

Theme4: Developing courage

Developing courage to speak directly to an audience is one of the goals of the

public speaking course. Hence, the instructor wanted to offer students as many opportunities to practice in front of their peers as possible. One learner commented:

> *I think not bad, because posting on Youtube.com …can develop our courage and let us know how to face and respond to everyone.*

Thus, students generally felt that developing courage was important, but wanted to use less invasive methods such as avoiding the use of video cameras.

Theme5: Global dialogue

One of the instructor's objectives was to generate authentic dialogue on a global scale, and Youtube.com allows for this to occur. Some students were very optimistic about the rare opportunity to establish dialogue on an international level:

> *Whether the speech article is good or not, that manner (posting on Youtube.com) is a very helpful way to enhance interaction from everybody, everywhere.*

However, others were deeply afraid of offending strangers:

> *I feel that teacher should not put the speech on youtube.com, because everyone can search it, and it may be possible that some unreasonable people will post nasty comments. Those with differing views may disagree and feel that we are criticizing other countries, resulting in some unnecessary misunderstanding, and friends and relatives will all be able to search it, causing us to feel uncomfortable and have difficulty in performing well.*

Even though the instructor had previously explained that their speeches should be backed up by substantive evidence, clearly the above learner felt that misunderstandings were bound to occur.

Theme6: Shyness, embarrassment

Shyness is practically the opposite of courage, so the instructor wanted learners to overcome shyness. The question is "how," since overcoming shyness is easier said than done:

> *I'm too shy, so I am afraid my speech won't come out well. I hope that it's not put on Youtube.com. I can put it on my own blog. When I'm too tense I cannot perform well.*

I feel that if the performance is just so-so, and it gets posted for others to see, I will get laughed at!!

These learners felt that their self-esteem, already low as it is, would be completely annihilated if they were seen and criticized by strangers. Although learners generally agreed in principle about overcoming shyness, many disliked the actual process, such as the use of videoing during their practice sessions:

During the first time I was videoed, it felt really terrible. Horrible. The pressure was huge when facing the camera.

Clearly, the use of video camera was not well received.

Theme7: Impetus for preparing well

That the goal of posting on Youtube.com may possibly increase learners' collective level of effort was the main reason for the instructor's push to require the learners to post their speeches. Some learners agreed, such as the following:

I think this idea is very good, because many students will work hard to prepare this speech. This is the first time I've heard of this method. This is very special.... Some students...won't diligently use one's heart to do it, but if use this method (posting on Youtube.com), it can really push students hard to prepare the speech. And that can be a great memory in college life. This is great!

Interestingly, in a follow-up journal entry two weeks later, the same learner wrote:

I think this idea is very good, but I think not everybody will work hard to prepare. Those whom are usually diligent will be diligent, and those whom rarely put in the effort still won't put in the effort. As for me, maybe this time I will work harder than normal to prepare.

The above learner apparently felt that the concept of posting on Youtube.com may work to push some people to work harder such as herself, but that it may not work with everyone.

Theme8: Respect for learners

The instructor did not think this was an issue. However, as one learner put it:

Those who perform well should be selected for posting or voluntarily post it.

> *Making it voluntary would respect the few students whom do not like being exposed!*

Comment like this one made it glaringly clear that some students felt that they were being disrespected by being forced against their will to post on videos of themselves on the Internet.

Survey results

The survey was a compilation of activities and suggestions recommended by learners collectively. As noted above, learners were asked to identify the level of anxiety that an activity induces as well as to rank the extent to which the activity is preferred for that same activity. The results showed that the overwhelming majority of the learners did not prefer activities that were on the extreme high end of being anxiety inducing. However, it is important to note that these high anxiety activities were not necessarily disliked. Many of the highest anxiety producing activities were ranked a "2" on the preference scale (with 1 being most liked and 3 being most disliked). This appears to show that anxiety does not exert a total influence on learners' decision as to preference. On the opposite extreme, towards the low-anxiety end of the spectrum, one interest result was that most of the minimally anxiety inducing activities were not necessarily preferred as well (also ranked a "2"). When the instructor asked the learners as an open-ended question why this was the case during class, several responded that those activities were simply boring. Nevertheless, in general, the highly preferred activities or suggestions ranged on the middle to lower-middle end of the anxiety spectrum, revealing that this range of anxiety was manageable or at least tolerable while being of relatively high interest to the learner involved.

Notable activities/ suggestions and some possible explanations:

Below is a brief listing of learners' suggestions found to be both highly preferred (ranked "1") as well as inducing relatively high (ranked "4" or "5") anxiety. These are not listed in any particular order.

a) Individual speech, practiced with small group (3-4 peers).

b) Individual speech, practiced with a larger group (5-7 peers).

c) Individual speech, practiced with the entire class watching.

d) Individually written speech (as opposed to written by group collectively).

e) Midterm and final exams videoed in class, with only the instructor watching.

f) Midterm and final exams videoed in class, with the entire class watching.

g) Pronunciation completely and private (one to one) corrected by the instructor.

From the above list, one can infer that despite the relatively high anxiety levels, those activities were ranked a "1" because they were deemed by the individuals to hold great value in some form (personal preference, knowledge gained, etc.). One learner cited in a journal entry that the public speaking course would be absolutely meaningless if one cannot stand up on stage in front of a large group of people, as frightening a prospect as it may appear. Underlying reasoning appears to be that if one wants to learn anything at all about public speaking, one has to "bite the bullet" and deal with the anxiety to make any progress at all. Clearly, from the standpoint of the learners, there is more to judging the utility of an activity than the mere anxiety that it induces, although there is no denying that anxiety plays an increasingly greater role in learners' preferences towards the extreme high end of the anxiety scale.

Findings and Implications

1st research question: <u>Do learners experience facilitative or debilitative anxiety with regard to the notion of posting their own delivered speeches on Youtube.com?</u>

Although on surface it appeared from the initial coding process that 25 out of 32 learners responded with either an unqualified "yes" (11 of them) or a conditional "yes" (14 of them) as to whether they would like their speeches posted, a closer look at their comments from their journals reveals that only 11 out of the 25 viewed the anxiety as entirely facilitative, looking forward to posting their videos. Even amongst these 11 learners, however, many of them felt that they still needed much more practice and coaching before they would feel fully ready to post their videos.

The 14 learners who answered with a conditional "yes" about posting may either view the anxiety as facilitative or debilitative, depending on whether their personal requirements were met. For instance, if a learner required that their writing and

speaking (including pronunciation) be totally error-free before feeling the anxiety would be manageable and thus facilitative, such a requirement posed a tall order for the instructor to fill, given their very limited self-esteem and relatively low proficiency. In fact, the conditional "yes" of the 14 learners were tantamount to "no, I don't want to post, unless all my requirements are met, and if they are not, I will be experiencing debilitating anxiety." What this suggests of the 14 students is that their self-esteem may easily be shattered if their needs are not completely fulfilled. The implication is that the instructor for this type of course plays a potentially crucial role in facilitating the development of self-esteem to prevent the seemingly unavoidable anxiety of public speaking in a foreign language from becoming debilitative. For these 14 individuals, the pressure appeared to stem primarily from videoing them during in class with all their peers and instructor watching. Therefore, perhaps one way of reducing this fear would be to completely eliminate the use of video cameras in the classroom, while increasing their opportunities to rehearse in small group environments before having to face the entire class. The caveat here is that groups need at least one or two individuals whose English proficiency is relatively higher to be able to provide constructive feedback, in light of the complaint that peer evaluation doesn't work for low-intermediate level peer evaluators whom may not understand enough to fairly evaluate the speaker. Also, the instructor will need to strike a fine balance of providing compliments where appropriate along with constructive criticism while not appearing overly critical. And if videoing is absolutely required, the instructor may want to allow learners to video themselves outside of the classroom context and choose the best version to submit as a homework assignment. This would reduce the fear of being videoed in class where learners often only have one chance to get it right.

As for the remaining 7 learners whom basically replied a "no" towards posting their speeches, it was clear from the content of their journal entries that posting their speeches would under no circumstances be preferred. It appeared quite obvious that they felt that at this stage of their language development (low-intermediate to intermediate proficiency), no amount of preparation would be enough to overcome their perceived sense of inevitable humiliation from being watched by others. For these learners, the instructor needs to be very careful in tending to their needs, for posting videos of them would in all likelihood shatter their self-esteem, whatever is left of it.

One alternative for these individuals would be to let them know that the period of posting can be as short as 24 hours, and that the video can be removed afterwards. Another measure that would probably please these individuals (and certainly the 14 conditional "yes" learners) is to post the audio to the speeches and perhaps a short PowerPoint presentation to go along with it but not include their faces in the videos. This would enable these individuals to remain completely anonymous and therefore maintain a sense of security. For these 7 individuals, then, the implication for the instructor is that there needs to be an alternative approach, instead of a one-size-fits-all where everyone is required to post their speeches with their faces in the videos.

2nd research question: <u>From the learners' journal responses regarding anxiety, are there themes that emerge?</u> (relationship of themes with anxiety)

1) Choice of topic: high relationship (with anxiety). That is, the more controversial the topic, the greater the anxiety for many.

2) Pronunciation: high relationship. That is, the poorer their perceived pronunciation, the higher the anxiety of posting on Youtube.com.

3) Writing and speaking practice: high relationship. The poorer their perceived writing and speaking skills, the greater the potential anxiety.

4) Developing courage: negative relationship. The greater the perceived courage, the lower the anxiety level, and the greater the willingness to take risks.

5) Start dialogue with the world: negative relationship. The more learners were willing to face the public, less the anxiety expressed.

6) Shyness, embarrassment: highest relationship. Those whom felt extremely shy about facing others also appeared to experience the greatest levels of anxiety.

7) Impetus for preparing well: both negative and positive relationship. This finding is unique in that some learners conceded that they needed the anxiety to find the impetus to work harder to prepare their speeches (positive relationship—facilitative anxiety), while others expressed that the anxiety experienced from the notion of posting on youtube.com would be so harmful that they would not be able to concentrate or remember their speech and hence would not be able to be fully prepared (debilitative anxiety).

8) Need for respect: high relationship. The more learners felt that posting their videos was disrespectful, the greater the anxiety expressed.

3rd research question: <u>What is the relationship between learners' suggestions and anxiety?</u>

Surprisingly, the highly preferred suggestions (suggestions ranked with a "1" in terms of desirability) on more than several occasions included those that involved substantial anxiety. The possible explanation is that learners perceived the gains (knowledge, skills acquisition, pleasure etc.) to be greater than the costs (anxiety).

Furthermore, many of those activities that yielded minimal anxiety were deemed to not be desirable. This may simply mean that those activities are rather boring. Hence, low anxiety, but not much to be gained either. The implication here is that instructors should not choose an activity based purely on the ease or difficulty level of the task, because such task may be boring. Instead, the instructor should choose activities and design their courses on that which would ignite the interest of the learners, and not be overly concerned with the difficulty level of the activity.

In fact, most of the highly preferred activities were those that yield moderate to substantial anxiety, as opposed to minimal anxiety. This appears to show that if the activity is deemed useful enough or interesting enough or both (significant gains in the eyes of the learners), moderate or even substantial anxiety is manageable and facilitative. Thus, the old saying that only through facing and overcoming substantial difficulties will one build character seems to apply here, with the caveat that the difficult must not be too extreme, and must not be so minimal as to yield boredom. Again, one cannot stress enough that the primary emphasis should be on that which interests the learners, a finding highly supported by the results from the survey.

Conclusion

The present study provides evidence that for low-intermediate to intermediate proficiency EFL learners in a public speaking course, the issue of anxiety is particularly relevant. Learners' self-esteem in their use of their foreign language on a public setting such as Youtube.com needs to be handled with great care to avoid allowing their collective anxieties from becoming debilitative. As in any relatively large language

class, reactions towards posting speeches on Youtube.com and suggestions for the course exhibit highly divergent viewpoints. Nevertheless, some common patterns or themes can be found within this diversity. As this study shows, these learners are willing to put up with moderate to substantial level of anxiety in more than a few instances if they perceive the activity to be of great value. That is, even though anxiety may be unavoidable for many students, if activities selected are those that students regard as highly beneficial, useful, or practical, students may go as far as to want those types of activities despite the significant level of anxiety that it may induce, rationalizing that the gains from such activities outweigh the anxiety costs. Thus, major emphasis should be on the interest level of a particular activity. However, activities that yield extremely high levels of anxiety resulted in almost no one preferring them, even if the ideas were interesting. Youtube.com presents a unique challenge to both learners and instructors because learners may initially feel overwhelmed by anxiety. However, if the anxiety is properly diffused, the results may be quite rewarding, and learners in this study have recognized this. The challenge is for the instructor to create the necessary learning environment that will enable learners to channel that anxiety into a facilitative instead of debilitative form.

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