



TTLIC 2013

## Gender and Language: Communication Apprehension in Second Language Learning

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### Abstract

For over the decades, researchers all around the world have found that language learning comes with some difficulties and disabilities which can usually manifest into a more severe problem (Dembo, 1991). It is proven that second language learning can become a traumatic experience for certain language learners. Among the catalyst for this experience is the feeling of stressed, anxious and worries especially in communication (Banks, 2008). It is very apparent that communication apprehension, as stated by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1991), has contributed towards the detrimental feeling of anxiety during the process of language learning. Since language anxiety is one of the major factor that determines the level of comprehensible input received (Krashen, 1982), it has undoubtedly developed into a prominent factor in determining the successful of second language learning. However, it is proven that communication apprehension can happen to anyone regardless of the gender. Wick-Nelson & Israel (2006) mention that communication apprehension, as the matter of fact manifests differently according to gender. Thus, it is important to note that female and male process their feeling and experiences differently. The aim of this paper is to determine the difference of communication apprehension level according to gender. A total of 60 respondents were randomly selected among the University Teknologi MARA (Perak) students from various faculties. The instrument used in this study is a set of questionnaire adapted from the measurement scale of language anxiety called Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz (1983). The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of TTLIC2013.

*Keyword:* Anxiety; Second language learning; Communication; Apprehension; Gender

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## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is a country in which English Language is declared as a second language. Its position is secured in Article 152 under the country's law, thus reflecting its importance in the country. The act is significant in making English as a compulsory subject in the education curriculum in Malaysia. On average, most Malaysians start the learning of English Language as early as five or six year old during their kindergarten years, which continue through primary and secondary school. Hence, by the time a Malaysian begins tertiary level education, he or she should have a minimum of fourteen years of exposure to the language.

In UiTM (MARA University of Technology), it is compulsory for all diploma students to attend English classes for a minimum of three semesters during their studies. The language skills evaluated include reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, since speaking skill is not given an emphasis during students' primary and secondary school, difficulties in oral production is clearly observed among the students in tertiary level education.

Issues of language anxiety pertaining to Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (L2), its symptoms, causes and effects have raised particular interest among language researchers and researches on these issues have been flourishing circa 1970s. Findings from these researches indicate that L2 and FL anxiety has a debilitating effect on language learning process. According to Zheng (2008), among all the learning disabilities, anxiety and fear have become the major factors in determining the success of second language learning. Speaking anxiety, also known as communicative apprehension, plays a huge role in determining learners' ability to adapt to the target environment and ultimately achieve their educational goal.

In order for the issue to be properly addressed, educators must first know the level of communication apprehension experienced by the learners. Therefore, the current study sought to investigate the level of the learners' communicative apprehension level in UiTM Perak, and its correlation with gender.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Language Anxiety*

For the past two decades, interest in the significance of anxiety in determining performance in second and foreign language has been thriving. Language anxiety is experienced by learners of both foreign and second language and poses potential problems "because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p.86). Horwitz (2001) debated that language anxiety is a specific type of anxiety and defines foreign language anxiety as 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process'. Tran (2012) too mentions about its volatile effect on language learning.

Numerous studies, like MacIntyre's (1999) and fairly recent ones in FL settings like Tran, Moni and Baldauf (2012) support the findings that there is a correlation between anxiety and language performance, so much so that it is viewed as one of the strongest predictors of foreign language success. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) divided language learning anxiety into three components, namely communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of being evaluated. From this research, an instrument, called FLCAS (Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale) was designed to evaluate the level of anxiety that a learner is experiencing in learning foreign language. The instrument has since been used in various researches to help in giving insights in the anxiety faced by learners all over the world.

### 2.2. *Communication Apprehension*

As speaking skill is one of the most essential skills in language learning, anxiety in speaking is among the most significant factors in a second/ foreign language classroom. McCrosky (1987) defines communication apprehension as a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings where learners have little control of the communicative situation. According to Daly (1991), it is considered as 'Situational Apprehension' whereby it is

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