



Development and preliminary validation of four brief measures of L2 language-skill-specific anxiety



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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study on the development and validation of four brief measures of L2 language-skill-specific anxiety scales: L2 listening, speaking, reading, and writing anxiety scales. A total of 523 college students in Taiwan participated in the study. Lang's (1971) tripartite model of anxiety provided a theoretical basis for developing the four scales. An initial pool of items were developed based on a review of related literature and the results of a focus group interview. Less ideal items were removed based upon the results of a pilot test. In the formal study, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to select items for each anxiety scale, which was subsequently validated by confirmatory factor analysis and correlation analysis. The results provided evidence for the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the scores of the four brief measures.

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1. Research background

Second or foreign language (L2) educators and researchers have long been concerned about the influence of anxiety on language learning. Considerable research has been devoted to uncovering how anxiety impacts L2 learning and performance. However, early research revealed quite conflicting results on this issue, with some studies revealing a positive correlation, some negative correlation, and still others no significant correlation between anxiety and L2 learning (see [Scovel, 1978](#), for a review of early studies). These studies mostly adopted a transfer approach to defining the anxiety learners experience in learning and using an L2, in which the anxiety is viewed “as a manifestation of other more general types of anxiety” ([Horwitz & Young, 1991](#), p. 1) and as the transfer of these general anxieties (e.g., state anxiety, trait anxiety, and test anxiety) into the L2 domain ([MacIntyre, 1999](#)). Accordingly, in these studies, learners' anxiety about learning or using L2 was operationalized by such measurement instruments as Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire ([Cattell & Eber, 1962](#)), Trait-Anxiety Inventory ([Spielberger, 1983](#)), State-Anxiety Inventory ([Spielberger, 1983](#)), or Cognitive Interference Questionnaire ([Sarason & Stoops, 1978](#)).

The contradictory findings observed in early studies led researchers to question the adequacy of the transfer approach and shift to a situation-specific approach that conceptualizes L2 anxiety as a unique type of anxiety aroused in the process of learning or using L2. [Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope \(1986\)](#) and [Gardner \(1985\)](#) were among the first who took this view. The instruments created by Horwitz, Gardner, and their colleagues for measuring L2 anxiety, including French (L2) Class Anxiety Scale ([Gardner & Smythe, 1975](#)), French (L2) Use Anxiety Scale ([Gardner, Smythe, & Clément, 1979](#)), and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale ([Horwitz et al., 1986](#)), have since been widely used in L2 anxiety research. This body of research has

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yielded results that generally demonstrated a consistent, negative association between L2 anxiety and L2 achievement or performance (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 1999).

It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned L2 anxiety scales are “dominated by items addressing anxiety about speaking a second language” (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999, p. 420), reflecting the long held assumption that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking aspect in L2 learning. These L2 anxiety scales are thus believed to assess L2 speaking anxiety more precisely than anxiety over other L2 language skills (Cheng et al., 1999; Elkhafaifi, 2005). Since the late 1990s, L2 researchers have started to recognize and substantiate the need for differentiating anxieties associated with specific L2 language skills (Cheng et al., 1999), such as listening (e.g., Elkhafaifi, 2005), speaking (e.g., Woodrow, 2006), reading (Saito, Garza, & Horwitz, 1999), and writing (Cheng, 2004a). Measurements of L2 language-skill-specific anxieties have also been developed. These advancements in theory and measurement have set the stage for a new phase of language anxiety research.

Along with continued interest in general language anxiety, a growing number of researchers have examined L2 skill-specific anxieties from different angles. Many of the investigations focused on the sources and effects of anxiety arising from performing respective L2 skills, including listening (e.g., Bekleyen, 2009; Brunfaut & Revesz, 2015; Chang, 2008; Cheng, 2005; Liu, 2016; Vogley, 1998; Zhang, 2013), speaking (e.g., Gkonou, 2014; Woodrow, 2006; Wu & Lin, 2014), reading (e.g., Liu & Liu, 2015; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013), and writing (e.g., Cheng, 2002, 2004b; Tsai & Cheng, 2009; Woodrow, 2011). Recognizing language anxiety as one important affective factor to be considered in L2 instruction, some researchers included L2 skill-specific anxiety as one of the outcome variables when exploring the effects of particular instructional approaches or tasks on the learning of a specific language skill (e.g., Chang, 2010; Choi, 2013; Hamzaoglu & Koçoğlu, 2016; Yamashita, 2013).

The identification of language-skill-specific anxieties also enabled researchers to differentiate the role of language anxiety in learning different language skills and delineate learners' L2 anxiety profiles. For instance, by means of multiple regression analysis, Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006) separately examined the role of anxiety in L2 reading and listening with the effects of self-efficacy and gender statistically controlled. Their results showed that given that self-efficacy and gender were controlled for, listening anxiety was a significant predictor of L2 listening proficiency, but reading anxiety was not a significant predictor of reading proficiency. On the other hand, measuring different skill-specific anxieties at the same time, Jee (2016) as well as Xiao and Wong (2014) provided a detailed account of heritage learners' language anxiety profiles. More importantly, they revealed that different from non-heritage, traditional L2 learners, the heritage learners had greater anxiety about writing than speaking.

With increasing interest in simultaneously examining several skill-specific anxieties came the issue of questionnaire length. Unlike other measures of general L2 anxiety such as Gardner and colleagues' French (L2) Class Anxiety Scale and French (L2) Use Anxiety Scale (see MacIntyre & Gardner, 1988), which respectively comprise only eight items, the current measures of L2 language-skill-specific anxiety contain a greater number of items (mostly ranging from 20 to 29). Therefore, a study that intends to examine the four skill-specific anxieties altogether using the existing validated measures faithfully will require a questionnaire of more than 80 items. This length makes it difficult for researchers to incorporate measures of all four L2 skill-specific anxieties and other constructs in one study under the constraints of resources, such as limited time or item space (Nichols & Webster, 2015). This problem becomes even more pressing as recent L2 research witnesses a growth trend in examining the relationships of multiple constructs through the statistical method of structural equation modeling (Winke, 2014). Given the length of existing skill-specific anxiety scales, it is a big challenge for researchers interested in testing the structural relationships among L2 skill-specific anxieties themselves (e.g., Pae, 2013) or between language anxiety and other constructs (e.g., Bang & Hiver, 2016) to recruit enough respondents to meet an appropriate person-to-item or subject-to-parameter ratio recommended for running factor analysis or structural equation modeling without adopting the controversial practice of item parceling. A lengthy survey might also compromise data quality due to response burden and/or fatigue effect. Thus, there is a need for designing brief measures of L2 language-skill-specific anxiety that would allow researchers “greater latitude in testing alternative hypotheses” by including many variables in a single protocol of reasonable length (Widaman, Little, Preacher, & Sawalani, 2011). In light of this need, this study sought to develop and validate four brief measures of L2 language-skill-specific anxiety: L2 listening anxiety, L2 speaking anxiety, L2 reading anxiety, and L2 writing anxiety.

Another goal of this study was to develop measures of L2 skill-specific anxiety based on the multidimensional approach to anxiety, which views anxiety as a construct consisting of different components triggered by different antecedents and relating to differential performances (Smith, Smoll, Cumming, & Grossbard, 2006). The approach is prevalent in recent psychological theories of anxiety (Lowe, 2016; Smith et al., 2006), and has been applied to development of various measures of anxiety, such as sport anxiety (Smith et al., 2006), test anxiety (Lowe, 2016), social anxiety (Gros, Simms, Antony, & McCabe, 2012), and adult anxiety disorders (Möller & Bögels, 2016). Anxiety researchers generally concur with the benefits of this approach to investigating the antecedents and consequences of anxiety and to tailoring treatments of anxiety according to individuals' anxiety profiles (Kenney, 2011; Möller & Bögels, 2016; Smith et al., 2006).

L2 researchers (Dewaele, 2007; Young, 1991) also portrayed language anxiety as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Nevertheless, few measures of L2 anxiety were of a multidimensional nature; even fewer were constructed on the basis of a multidimensional theory of anxiety. The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) reported in Cheng (2004a) is one of the exceptions. The SLWAI was devised based upon one influential multidimensional theory in the anxiety literature: Lang's (1971) tripartite model of anxiety. In that model, anxiety is conceptualized as comprising three inter-active and relatively independent response systems: cognition, physiology, and behavior. Accordingly, the SLWAI consists of

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