The Effects of Interpreting Training on Non-English Majors' Speaking Anxiety

-- A Case Study

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Abstract

In recent years, anxiety as an emotional factor has received increasing attention in second language acquisition research. As for this study, it examined the English speaking anxiety of 32 non-English major sophomore students from a university of 985 Project before and after a 16-week interpretating course. It was found that students' oral anxiety significantly decreased, mainly manifested in three dimensions: 1. the introduction of accent discernment skills enabled students to view oral English "at an eyelevel"; 2. students' expression skills were enriched, allowing them to tackle diverse situations; 3. students properly transferred of the essence of listening principles into speaking. Finally, from the learners' perspective, this study, combining questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations, proposed suggestions for interpretating courses for non-English majors to reduce their speaking anxiety. It is hoped that this study could be of help for second language teaching in Chinese universities.

Keywords

Interpreting training; speaking anxiety; interpreting courses for non-English majors.

1. Introduction

As concerns language teaching, with the teaching paradigm shifting from "teacher-centered" to "learner-centered," more attention has been gravitating towards learners' emotions — a pivotal factor of their foreign language performance and achievement. Amidst the five language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, "speaking" is more apt to induce students' anxiety owing to its communicative and flexible nature along with the risk of making errors publicly (Cheng *et al.* 2007) [1]. As is pinpointed in some papers, compared with English majors, non-English majors whose listening and speaking skills are relatively poorer nurse more anxiety and fear towards oral English, opting for keeping reticent in class (Wang 2014; Zhong 2019) [2], [3], evidenced by a series of discussions between the author and many lecturers in the university.

On the other hand, interpretating courses, previously only offered to senior English majors and postgraduate students, are gradually reaching out to non-English major students (Xiong & Luo 2006; Han & Chen 2011; Zheng 2017) [4], [5], [6]. Highly comprehensive, they can enhance students' linguistic and communicative capacity as well as mental fortitude — also indispensable qualities when speaking a foreign language. Thus, it is justifiable presumption that interpreting courses can help allay students' speaking anxiety. Therefore, this paper attempts to utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the impact of interpreting training on the English oral anxiety of non-English majors and propose targeting pedagogical optimization suggestions from students' perspective in anticipation of enriching the empirical research on interpretating courses for non-English majors.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety (FLA), a concept first proposed by Horwitz et al. in 1986, is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (1986:128) [7]. Grounded on their definition, McIntyre and Gardner (1994) [8] extended this terminology, suggesting that in addition to the learning process, listening and speaking contexts with second language usage involved are all related with this type of stress and fear. Amidst the basic language skills, speaking, as the most direct means of communication, possess the highest potential of spurring anxiety of foreign language learners (Horwitz *et al.* 1986; Xiong & Luo 2006; Kim 2009) [7], [4], [9]. There exist numerous factors triggering FLA, such as learners' fear of communication, apprehension of negative evaluation, incorrect language learning conceptions, teaching methods, curriculum design, and language tests (Young 1991; Mak 2011; Gkonou 2012; Jin & Dewaele 2018; Wu 2019) [10], [11], [12], [13], [14]. A profusion of empirical research has demonstrated a negative correlation between the level of foreign language speaking anxiety and students' performance (e.g., Young 1990; Woodrow 2006; Hewitt 2011; Kim & Tracy-Ventuna 2011; Al-Khotaba *et al.* 2019) [15], [16], [17], [18], [19]. For this reason, scholars around the globe have long been dedicated to exploring effective ways to alleviate foreign language oral anxiety. Some have suggested that a relaxing atmosphere in classroom and proper teaching techniques can considerably reduce students' oral anxiety (Young 1990; Zarrinabadi *et al.* 2021) [15], [20]. Some researchers turn computer multimedia technology for assistance (Rui & Ji 2017; Bashori *et al.* 2021; Hanafiah *et al.* 2022) [21], [22], [23], while others resort to psychological approaches to cultivate learners' positive mindset (Wang 2014; Li 2016) [24], [25].

As regards interpreting, this activity features complexity with high demands for a synthesis of capabilities. As the interpreting course moves on, these qualities will be stressed frequently in teachers' instructions as well as in classroom activities (Li & Dong 2020; Deng *et al.* 2018) [26], [27]. According to Deng *et al.* (2018) [27] and Horwitz *et al.* (1986) [7], the key skills required in interpreting classes are actually transferrable to general scenes of foreign language communication. For instance, emphasis of immediacy in offering translated utterances helps learners to offer prompt responses in conversations. Another case in point is that stress on calmness for emergency in interpreting cultivates students' endurance and handling abilities of their slips while talking. Therefore, it is safe to assume that English oral anxiety can be relieved via interpreting training. Nevertheless, to what extent can interpreting training lighten students' speaking anxiety attract little attention from the academic community and calls for further exploration.

2.2. Interpreting Course for Non-English Majors

Providing interpreting courses for non-English majors was first envisaged at the inception of the 21st century. Since then, researchers have been pooling their suggestions on this topic. In respect to feasibility of offering the interpreting curriculum, the improvement in non-English major students' language proficiency, their richer knowledge in a specific field, the popularization of specialized English concepts, the application of multimedia technology, etc. lay foundation for this idea on the theoretical level (Zhou 2002; Cai 2003; Xiong & Luo 2006; Chang & Wu 2008; Yu 2008; Guo 2009; Zhang 2010) [28], [29], [4], [30], [31], [32], [33]. Empirical evidence is also aplenty, such as students' willingness to learn, students' acclaim of courses, scores of College English Test (CET), language capacity competition outcomes, etc. (Ibid.) Following the full delivery of undergraduate interpreting course for non-English majors is the academia's focus on the teaching objectives, teaching ideologies, and teaching methods of

non-English major interpreting courses. Xue (2008) [34] argues that the objectives of these courses should not be set too high — students only need to be able to complete the most basic consecutive interpreting. Luo *et al*. (2008) [35], however, refutes that the goal of interpreting courses for non-English majors is to model students into quasi-interpreters. Congenial with Luo *et al*.'s opinion, Zhou (2014) [36] points out that for students with linguistic talents, a vocational interpreting training mode can indeed be adopted.

On this basis, attempts have been made to refine the interpreting ability of non-English major students in daily situations (Pan 2021) [37]. At the same time, an increasing number of scholars have applied more advanced teaching ideologies and strategies such as problem-oriented approach, content-based approach, task-based teaching method, and prefabricated chunk strategy in non-English interpreting teaching (e.g., Sun & Huang 2012; Shao 2014; Zheng 2017) [[38], [39], [6]. Briefly, these discussions — whether on teaching targets, philosophies, or methods — all aim to boost the effectiveness of interpreting courses for non-English majors. This improvement has a critical indicator: the positive or negative alteration in students' language capability or skills. Nevertheless, this issue has gravitated inadequate attention. In addition, interpretating classes involve an abundance of listening and speaking training. Yet, few researchers have explored the impact of interpreting courses on the oral expression ability of non-English majors.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

Given the insufficiency in studies on foreign language speaking anxiety and interpreting course for non-English majors, this paper will adopt both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the influence of interpreting courses on English oral anxiety among non-English majors. Three research questions are thus formulated:

a) In which dimensions can interpreting techniques introduced in the course alleviate students' speaking anxiety?

b) The alleviation of students' speaking anxiety is related to which interpreting technique(s), and specifically, why?

c) From students' perspective, what methods can be adopted by themselves and the teacher in non-English major interpreting training to reduce speaking anxiety?

3.2. Participants

This study has been conducted in an interpreting course for non-majors in a university of 985 Project. The class consists of 38 sophomore students majoring in STEM such as Mathematics, Physics, and Automation Technology. Perusal of the students' CET scores has revealed that their overall English proficiency is approximately on the average level. Yet, these students' listening and speaking skills are quite weak. According to the syllabus provided by the teacher, this interpreting course lasts for 16 weeks with 2 sessions per week.

Considering the limited class hours and the relatively weak listening and speaking abilities of non-English majors, the objective of this interpreting course is to help students more effectively capture information in listening as well as overcome the fear of speaking up in English. Therefore, the focus of this course is to equip students with listening and speaking techniques, empowering them to express themselves more accurately, fluently, and confidently in English and to switch between English and Chinese relatively smoothly. The techniques in listening, expression, note-taking emphasized in the course are shown in Table 1 (in this paper also referred to as "the interpreting training method"):

Table 1. Techniques Introduced in the Interpreting Course

Listening	Expressing	Note-taking
accent discernment	elaboration	
focusing on the gist	using antonym/hypernym/hyponym	note-taking skills in interpreting
deduction	omission of trivialities	

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Questionnaire

For data collection, this study primarily relies on the questionnaire, which encompasses two parts: the first part garners the participants' personal information, such as name and student ID. The second part consists of the adjusted version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz *et al*. (1986) [7]. Modifications have been made according to the features of the course and participants. It involves five dimensions: low self-assessment, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, in-class anxiety, and test anxiety with 24 items in aggregation. A Likert five-point scale is utilized with choices of 1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree. The corresponding score is 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. To avoid habitual mindset, five reverse-scored items are included in the scale. The total score ranges from 24 to 120. The higher participants score, the more anxiety they nurse. The Cronbach's α coefficient of this scale is 0.932 and the KMO is 0.853, indicating good reliability and validity. Namely, this scale can be used for further analyzing students' oral anxiety alterations. The third part of the questionnaire involves several open-ended questions where students are required to describe what efforts they can make to reduce English speaking anxiety based on interpretating training and what assistance they expect from teachers.

3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

To further probe into the specific impacts of interpreting training on various dimensions of oral anxiety among non-English major students, after the course ended, the author randomly selected two students from each echelon of speaking anxiety (high, medium, and low) in the pre-test questionnaire for semi-structured interviews. This was done to validate and supplement the analysis results of the questionnaire data, as well as to address research question two and to enrich the answer for question three.

3.3.3. Classroom Observation

In this experiment, the author adopted participant classroom observation. Over the 16-week course, the author participated as an auditor and joined in various classroom activities in order to gain a better understanding of teaching practice, capturing students' real reactions, thoroughly investigate the impact of an interpreting course on students' oral anxiety. In this way, research question three can be more comprehensively addressed.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

At the incipient of the course, the author first approached the professor for teaching objectives, teaching schedules, and teaching content. Prior to distributing the questionnaires, to dispel students' concerns and to obtain more accurate results, all students were informed that results of the questionnaire would have no relation with course grades. In addition, all the participants in the survey had signed an informed consent form beforehand. The pre-test questionnaire was distributed a week before the interpreting training sessions began, while the post-test questionnaire was handed out immediately after the course ended. Ultimately, the author has collected 32 valid questionnaires. SPSS 22.0 was used to analyze the data.

4. Results of Quantitative Analysis

In in a bid to gain an insight into the English speaking anxiety of these non-English majors before the start of interpreting training, a descriptive analysis on the pre-test questionnaire data was carried out.

4.1. Students' Anxiety Level before Interpreting Training

Table 2. Students' Overall Anxiety Level before Interpreting Training

Dimension	N	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Std.Deviation
Overall	32	76.406	111	35	17.805

Table 3. Students' Anxiety Level of Specific Dimensions before Interpreting Training

Dimension	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Low SA	32	3.388	0.792
CA	32	3.206	0.837
FoNE	32	3.306	0.786
In-class Anx	32	2.863	0.833
Test Anx	32	3.148	0.820

Notes: SA: self-assessment

CA: communication apprehension

FoNE: fear of negative evaluation

Anx: anxiety

As is shown in Table 2 and Table 3, students got averagely 76.406 points on the 24-item English speaking anxiety scale, with an average score of 3.184 per item. According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) [40], if the average score per item is ≤2.4, respondents' anxiety level is low; if the figure falls in the range of 2.5 to 3.4, students are considered to possess anxiety of medium level; if the number is ≥3.5, then pupils are deemed to be highly anxious. Thus, in this study, students' English oral anxiety level is slightly above the medium level. Regarding specific dimensions of speaking anxiety, low self-assessment garnered the highest marks, indicating students' lacking confidence in speaking up in English, which might be attributed to two reasons: first, overall low English proficiency among the non-English majors — existing research (Philips 1992; Brown 2008; Gai & Yang 2010; Wu 2019) [41], [42], [43], [14] suggests that students with lower foreign language proficiency or those who perceive their proficiency to be low tend to harbor negative attitudes towards foreign language oral expression. Secondly, English teaching in China is chiefly exam-oriented, concentrating on grammar and reading while neglecting listening and speaking practice (Huang & Pan 2011) [44]. Such inadequacy of speaking opportunities for students hinders the cultivation of their oral confidence. In addition, standard deviation of 17.805 implies that significant individual differences in students' levels of speaking anxiety.

4.2. Students' Anxiety Level after Interpreting Training

To answer question one, instantly after the course terminated, the author dispensed post-test questionnaire, gathered data, and conducted a paired T-test to delve into in which dimensions can interpreting techniques introduced in the course mitigate the speaking anxiety of non-English majors.

Table 4. Students' Anxiety Level after Interpreting Training

Dimension	Test Type	Mean	SD	T	*P*
Overall	Pre	76.406	17.805	3.01	0.005
	Post	70.781	16.022		
LowSA	Pre	3.388	0.792	5.75	0.000
	Post	2.906	0.808		
CA	Pre	3.206	0.837	2.232	0.033
	Post	2.975	0.787		
FoNE	Pre	2.862	0.786	2.194	0.036
	Post	2.612	0.765		
In-class Anx	Pre	3.306	0.833	1.269	0.214
	Post	3.175	0.718		
Test Anxiety	Pre	3.148	0.820	0.288	0.775
	Post	3.109	0.625		

Table 4 unearths that after receiving interpreting training, from the holistic view, pupils' average scores on the English Speaking Anxiety Scale decreased from 76.406 to 70.781. The difference is significant (P=.005<.05). Hence, it is safe to reach the conclusion that interpreting training effectively alleviated their English oral anxiety. Moreover, the author observed significant variation in dimensions of self-assessment (P=.000<.05), fear of negative evaluation (P=.036<.05), and communication apprehension (P=.033<.05). However, evident change did not surface in in-class anxiety and test anxiety.

5. The Effects of Interpreting Training on Different Dimensions of Speaking Anxiety

To answer research question two, namely how interpreting training exerts a positive effect on (or fails to alleviate) different dimensions of speaking anxiety of non-English majors, after the quantitative analysis, the author randomly selected 6 students with their oral anxiety level of high, medium, and low (2 students of each level) as identified in the pretest questionnaire. The interviewees are hereinafter called as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6.

5.1. The Eased Anxiety in Self-assessment: from "gazing up" to "view at an eyelevel"

Most interviewees believe that after a semester of interpreting training, their confidence in oral English has been significantly enhanced. Such positive alteration in self-assessment is more prominent among students with high English speaking anxiety. Exuding better command over pronunciation, speech speed, and intonation, they will no longer be "on pins and needles" when using English for speeches, presentations, peer collaboration, compared to the beginning of the semester.

Before, when it came to communication in sheer English, I would reflexively panic: my pronunciation pale in comparison to those voices in the demonstration videos. However, after learning about techniques of accent discernment, I suddenly found out speaking with an accent is in fact normal. A bit of local or personal touch can be quite charming and then I am less timid. (P1)

In the past, I thought the voices in listening tapes were sublimity I couldn't reach, so I never had the courage to speak English. Yet after listening to various accents from all around the globe, I realized oral English is not as "noble" as I imagined. My confidence then gradually rises. Now, I

am much more fluent in speaking English and I can better control my pronunciation, intonation, and speech rate. (P2)

From the feedback of students, it can be seen that the practice of accent identification plays a critical role in increasing their self-confidence. To be more specific, exposure to and acquisition of this technique has rectified students' misconceptions: pupils often consider the language output patterns of native speakers in audio-visual materials as the only correct paradigm for English communication. Moreover, they unwittingly internalized this into a target that they ought to strive for. However, due to the overly standardized pronunciation and intonation in those highly professional and streamlined listening materials, students' goals are hard to accomplish both inside and outside the classroom. Such prolonged frustration causes students to continuously elevate and exaggerate the difficulty of English oral expression, followed by the gradual decline of confidence in oral expression in English. Hence, it can be safe to deduce that before receiving interpretating training, students had been "looking up to" English communication. However, accent discernment practice has subverted this misunderstanding. Once students are no longer anxious about not speaking so-called standard English, they can take a commonplace view of English communication and their confidence naturally builds up. This finding echoes with previous research (Kitano 2001; Mehwish *et al*. 2018) [45], [46].

5.2. The Eased Fear of Negative Evaluation: Positive Transfer of Listening Techniques to Oral Expression

Conversations with the six interviewees revealed that before interpreting training, students had conceived that they were more apt to receive negative feedback from teachers — one major source of their speaking anxiety. Interestingly, this finding differs from the conclusions of several scholars, who have suggested that pupils' anxiety towards negative feedback mainly stems from their peers (Horwitz *et al*., 1986; Young, 1990, 1991; Mak, 2011; Wu, 2019) [7], [15], [10], [11], [14]. Based on the interview results, this divergence may be due to the fact that as the "only fluent speaker in the classroom" (Horwitz *et al*. 1986:128) [7], teachers are precisely the incarnation of "authoritativeness" from learners' perspective. In this case, students have become more sensitive to teachers' evaluations.

Before, I didn't want to make any mistakes when speaking English, <u>not because I was afraid of the mockery of my classmate, which resembles "the kettle calls the pot black,"</u> so we will never do that. I was especially afraid that the teacher would notice my slips. But, <u>just like in interpreting, the listener will focus on the main idea of what I'm saying</u> and will probably filter out some minor errors automatically. (P6)

<u>I feel that my pronunciation is not like the premium RP sound, which makes me particularly worried that the teacher will think my spoken English is bad.</u> However, after accent discernment training, <u>I realized that speakers have a wide variety of accents. My previous concern does not make sense.</u> Then thinking of listening skills for interpreting, <u>I feel that compared to accents, the fluency and clarity of expression are more important.</u> (P2)

Perfectionism also functions as a major trigger of anxiety towards negative evaluation in students: the interviewees are often fearful that teachers will pay particular attention to their mistakes. In this way, they will leave a poor impression on teachers. The previous study (Gregersen & Horwitz 2002) [47] has indeed pinpointed that perfectionism is the fuse of speaking anxiety. However, with the introduction of listening tips for interpreting, students have captured the nature and essence of these techniques and promptly transferred them to oral expression: they no longer pursue flawless expression but offer more focus on their overall performance and its effect on audience when speaking English. Such a positive transfer is also reflected in the alleviation of communication apprehension. In addition, accent discernment technique has overturned students' blind chase for the so-called "exquisite" and "authentic"

accents, empowering them to concentrate on polishing up the clarity and fluency in oral expression.

5.3.　The Eased Communication Apprehension: multi-situational

From the results of the interviews and questionnaires, in a general sense, participants have emphasized that via interpreting training, the decline of their communication apprehension is manifested in various social scenarios, including English competitions and conversations with international friends in daily life. In other words, such a favorable turn is not confined to the increased activity in group discuss and speaking-ups in the classroom.

The teacher mentioned that we should <u>pay attention to linking words when listening to recordings during interpreting, so I subconsciously focus more on building such a "structure" in oral expressions.</u> With the framework established beforehand, the pressure in many social situations is much less, <u>especially in English impromptu speech competitions. What I need to do is just "filling in" specific content.</u> (P2)

My vocabulary is not large enough. <u>The technique "elaboration" is very effective when I meet unknown words. I will explain them using known words. You know, utilizing existing knowledge can greatly reduce anxiety. And whether in class or playing international games in daily life,</u> this trick works almost every time. (P4)

After focusing on the gist of expression and not being afraid of making mistakes, I am more willing to speak up in classroom discussions or presentations. (P6)

From the feedback of participants, the mitigation of communication apprehension and improvement in communication skills through interpreting training are evident in various dimensions and situations, which also aligns with the requirements proposed in the College English Teaching Guidelines in China (College English Teaching Guidelines 2022): stress should be laid on cultivating students' capacity of applying English in different fields and contexts. Furthermore, the statement in P6 indicates that the reduction in fear of negative evaluation anxiety can effectively social anxiety in classroom situations, thus indirectly confirming Kitano's (2001) [45] finding that the ascending aversion and scary towards negative judgements is an invitation to higher level of speaking anxiety.

5.4.　The Unshaken Anxiety in Classroom Context: Low self-efficacy Caused by Unexpected Tasks

Among the six respondents, four have stated that they leverage the note-taking technique to write down key points in class in order to reduce anxiety of answering questions. However, most interviewees have uttered their uneasiness against many unfamiliar tasks popping up in English classes, which, according to the teacher, are actually within students' capabilities. Moreover, the teacher usually provides hints and detailed explanations of these tasks beforehand. However, students felt intimidated at the very point, displaying little confidence and momentum to complete those tasks by using English. Such speaking anxiety led by low self-efficacy aligns with the research findings of several scholars (Mills *et al.* 2006; Lahuerta 2014; Wu 2014)[48], [49], [50].

In classes, there are many tasks that I have never met before. For example, activities like peer assessment of my own recordings and role-playing are new to me. Although the teacher says they are not difficult, I still have a pit in my stomach. (P2)

Many of the activities organized by the teacher are interesting. Although they sound exciting at first, when faced with unfamiliar tasks, I tend to feel hesitant and afraid to speak up. (P5)

Proposing that a class filled with conventional activities hinders students' enthusiasm, Dewaele (2015) [51] advocates that teachers should engage students in novel activities to enhance

classroom enjoyment. One study has also demonstrated that challenging activities by surprise enable students to relish the foreign language classroom much more (Dewaele *et al.* 2018) [52]. However, prolonged exam-oriented educational experiences have made Chinese students more accustomed to conventional teaching methods. Activities with a certain risk of failure, especially those that arise suddenly, increase pupils' sense of uncertainty. Encountered with such activities, students often find it hard to immerse themselves into the lively atmosphere that teachers are trying to create. Their speaking anxiety thus imperceptible surfaces. This finding is also in line with the results of Jiang and Dewaele's (2019) [53] research.

5.5. The Unshaken Oral Test Anxiety: Uncontrolled Apprehension in a Serious Situation

All of the six interviewees are convinced that the listening, speaking, and note-taking techniques for interpreting have come into considerable use for the English oral exams. However, due to the seriousness of the text context, a high level of anxiety emerges as an inevitable consequence.

P3: There is a sense of oppression and tension in my subconscious during exams, which is different from conversations in daily life. When faced with unfamiliar topics, I cannot think clearly and tends to make continuous mistakes or stutter while speaking.

P5: Usually There is ample time for thinking when speaking English. I then feel relaxed. But during exams, time is limited, so I feel anxious. The points written down (using interpreting note-taking methods) are almost forgotten when speaking. I then become much more anxious.

P6: Exams will definitely be more nerve-wracking compared with other situations, as they are directly linked to scores. After speaking for a while during the exam, I may start thinking, "Was what I said correct? It doesn't sound right, does it?" The moment this thought occurs, panic sets in immediately.

The interviews unearth that students feel particularly constrained in the scenario of oral examinations. In other words, they harbor a general fear towards such tests, which stirs a series of anxieties during the output of English. For instance, students may feel nervous about unfamiliar topics, unable to retrieve relevant expressions within the allotted thinking time. This may result in a significant reduction in the complexity, accuracy, and fluency of their utterances — a finding consistent with Kasbi and Shirvan's (2017) [54] study. Besides, owing to the limited teaching hours of interpreting courses for non-English majors, along with the high pressure during oral exams, students are more struggling to strike a balance between understanding recordings, note-taking and memorizing. Hence, failure to correctly decode the semiotic information presented in the notes, eliciting a vicious cycle of "feeling anxious–decoding failure–feeling anxious." Furthermore, the strong association between exams and grades causes students to be particularly care about the correctness of their oral expressions during language output. Constant self-doubt and self-denial ensue. Such negative self-perception also exacerbates speaking anxiety (Woolfolk 2019) [55].

6. Pedagogical Implications from Learners' Perspective

In the third part of the questionnaire and the second part of the semi-structured interview, students are required to contemplate how they and the teacher can allay their speaking anxiety based on interpreting courses. From their own perspective, the predominant answer is "practice". Almost all the students hold a positive attitude towards the technique involved in interpreting training. Yet, to consolidate and internalize these skills, perpetual practice is "a must". To be more specific, students note that they should seize chances to speak English and

utilize these techniques in everyday conversations to engross themselves as much as possible in a native-like environment.

As for students' requirements towards teachers, firstly a pressing need of further refinement of their listening skills stands out in this experiment. In the questionnaire, over 70% students expressed their intense demand of more training of listening techniques and relevant resources, which they perceive could accordingly reduce their speaking anxiety. Indeed, as some researchers suggest, the interplay between different foreign language skills can result in a cross-impact on corresponding emotions (Dong 2021) [56]. Besides providing listening skills derived from interpreting training, it is more vital for teachers to lead students towards the habits of autonomous learning and self-reflection, for in this learner-centered era, teachers should no longer view themselves as learning material providers but guides who lead pupils to feasible learning modes (Zhou & Shu 2019; Deng 2023) [57], [58].

Secondly, the balance between teacher assessment and peer assessment is worthy of attention as well. The absence of teacher assessment in certain parts will weaken students' sense of certainty about their performance: participants have voiced that they lack a "template to strive for" and otherwise they would have been "more confident in the and classroom presentation and oral exams." Namely, peer assessment without an ultimate summary by the teacher has blurred her previously-set standards and concerns students in that those standards that will also be referred in oral exams especially in the context of Chinese education (Zhou & Shu 2019) [57]. To better harness peer assessment to lighten students' speaking anxiety in class and during tests, according to several researchers (Liu 2015; Carless & Winstone 2020) [59], [60], students may be granted access to devising the assessment criteria. Moreover, the outcomes of peer assessment are not supposed to be incorporated into grading of quizzes or final exams. According to Zhou and Shu (2019) [57], such a low-risk environment fosters students' acceptance towards peer assessment and they have consciously or unwitting utilized these criteria for self-assessment and self-monitoring of their own speaking anxiety and performance. Then, tailored adjustments will be made by themselves to accomplish self-improvement.

Finally, teachers should ponder on the balance between the use of the native language and English in class. A significant increase in the use of the native language may not reduce students' speaking anxiety. In the questionnaire, nearly 35% of students indicated that loaded use of Chinese by the teacher had a minimal impact on their speaking anxiety. They have demanded increase in the proportion of English to create a native-like environment. Some scholars (Mak 2011; Shi & Xu 2013) [11], [61] do illustrate that the ratio of native language to English usage in foreign language classrooms can affect students' speaking anxiety. The principle of "enough yet not effusive" is advocated (Mak 2011) [11]. In this case, students have sufficient exposure to foreign language input as well as adequate chances to take it in. Based on previous theoretical and practical studies (Lavan 2001; Mak 2011; Kou & Li 2019) [62], [11], [63], in order to further reduce students' speaking anxiety, especially in the classroom context, teachers may consider using the native language in the following situations: introducing specific techniques, terms or concepts, conducting novel classroom activities, explaining cultural differences, providing feedback on student interpreting performance, and illuminating exam rules. With the gradual enhancement of students' confidence and second language proficiency during the interpreting training, in the following aspects, teachers may reduce native language usage (i.e., conveying information chiefly in native language → starting off with foreign language and using native language for explanation → almost pure foreign language): review, checking students' understanding, assigning homework, etc. It is worth noting that teachers are supposed to make adjustments based on the specific circumstances of the course.

7. Conclusion

Via an integration of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, this study has validated the effectiveness of interpreting training in mitigating students' English speaking anxiety. It is found that interpreting training can considerably alleviate students' overall English speaking anxiety in terms of low self-assessment, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation, which is specifically manifested in the following three dimensions:

a) the technique of accent discernment empowers students to no longer "gaze up to" speaking English, but to view it "at an eyelevel;"

b) students' oral expression skills are enriched, allowing them to respond adeptly in diverse contexts;

c) students appropriately transfer the quintessence of accent discernment skills into the scenario of speaking English.

Having received the interpreting training, students themselves regard constant and intentional practice of oral English as an imperative to further ease their speaking anxiety. As for teachers of interpreting courses, based on the findings above and given students' in-class behaviors observed by the author as well as their demands in the questionnaire and interviews, this paper hereby proposes strategies for optimization to further reduce students' foreign language speaking anxiety:

a) Teachers are not supposed to restrict themselves to providers of interpreting training materials, but ought to guide students to nurture habits of self-driven practice and independent reflection;

b) teachers should better coordinate teacher and peer assessment, draw prompt conclusions after peer feedback sessions, and create a relaxing atmosphere for peer evaluation, enabling students to fully internalize evaluation standards for better self-monitoring and improvement of their own speaking anxiety and performance;

c) teachers ought to better balance their usage of students' native language and foreign language in class, gradually reducing the use of the native language in specific teaching segments as the interpreting training unfolds.

It should be admitted that this case study examined limited samples. Hence, its findings and suggestions may lack generalizability. However, this experiment can still serve for some reference. Moreover, coming researchers may consider further exploring the relationship between listening anxiety, ambiguity tolerance, and speaking anxiety, since in this study, after the interpreting training, as is shown in the interviews, students have exhibited a lower speaking anxiety and a higher endurance for novel, bizarre, or self-contradictory information in listening.

Acknowledgements

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