

**ANXIETY AND INHIBITIVE FACTORS IN ORAL
COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM:
A study of third year English Language
specialists at the Catholic University in Viseu**

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Introduction

Although one should avoid making the sweeping generalization that talking equals learning, and forcing students to participate when they are not ready, one cannot deny that participation is very important in language learning. When students produce the language that they are studying, they are testing out the hypotheses which they have formed about the language. When they respond to the teacher's or other students' questions, raise queries, and give comments, they are actively involved in the negotiation of comprehensible input and the formulation of comprehensible output, which are essential to language acquisition. (Tsui 1996: 146)

Anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension. (Arnold and Brown 1999: 8)

This paper is about anxiety in oral communication in the classroom and has its origins in my personal motives as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and the practical needs of our students.

First, the personal motives. For the last nine years, I have taught in various schools, and for the last five I have been teaching second and third year English Language classes at the Portuguese Catholic University in Viseu. Irrespective of the level of students and types of institutions in which I have worked, I have tried during this time, and I stress tried, to foster a classroom environment which has been conducive to learning, fun, thought-provoking, communicative, challenging, stimulating, pleasurable and to which, hopefully, students would want to return.

The practical needs are those of our present university students. The great majority of our students on the Portuguese-English, German-English and French-English courses want to be teachers, the

great majority go on to be teachers, and a sizeable proportion of these become English teachers in Portuguese secondary schools so being communicatively competent is and will be, therefore, of great importance to them. Even if these students do not want to be English teachers, they will still have to pass their teaching practice in English to graduate and become a teacher of their preferred language.

In short, I have tried to help our students to acquire the skills they will need as English teachers in an enjoyable and stimulating learning environment.

In terms of personality, ability, group dynamics and exam results groups of second and third year university students do, of course, differ greatly but generally speaking I have found, like Tsui, that "Getting students to respond in the classroom is a problem that most ESL teachers face" (1996:145). It is a problem that I have increasingly focused on, reflected upon and tried to solve, and it has given rise to the research question of this paper: "Given the vested interest that our students have in communicating in English, why are many of them noticeably reluctant to speak English in the classroom?"

Given my belief that I have generally managed to establish relatively good relationships with students, I have become particularly interested in the idea that our students, for whatever reasons, may be inhibited or anxious about communicating in the classroom and that this inhibition and/or anxiety may be contributing to their reluctance to speak in English as a Foreign Language lessons.

One of the presuppositions of this paper, then, is that our students are, to a greater or lesser extent, anxious about speaking in the classroom, and that this anxiety may be contributing to their reluctance to participate orally in English classes. The other presuppositions that inform this paper are that speaking facilitates language acquisition, and a classroom in which anxiety and other inhibitive factors are significantly reduced will facilitate a healthier learning environment.

The main objectives of this study, therefore, are to try to determine the degree to which anxiety and other inhibitive factors contribute to students' reluctance to speak in the classroom, to try to identify the situations in which such factors arise, and to study them in relation to speaking in the classroom.

The following section reviews the literature considered to be of relevance for this study and attempts to show how certain constructs, definitions and instruments that have been developed and

operationalised within the research on anxiety have been of particular relevance to this study.

The context of the study, methodology of data collection and analysis, discussion and implications of the findings are then presented.

The conclusion and limitations form the final section of this study.

Review of the Literature

Research on affect in language learning has flourished and grown to such an extent over the past twenty years that it has come to be seen as a crucial factor at the very heart of language acquisition research. For a considerable period of time the affective domain was regarded as the poor relation of the cognitive domain in language learning, but recent research and opinion has done much to redress this imbalance. Damasio asserts, for example, that "...certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality" (Damasio 1994:Xiii, quoted in Arnold and Brown, 1999: 1). Arnold and Brown (1999: 1) have suggested that when the affective side of learning is joined with the cognitive side "...the learning process can be constructed on a firmer foundation." In an attempt to define this domain the same authors consider affect to be "...aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behaviour (ibid: 1).

Alongside this surge of interest in affect, studies in anxiety have also increased. Anxiety is one of the many internal factors that are part of the learner's personality and can clearly be placed within Arnold and Brown's general definition of affect.

However, trying to define and measure anxiety for research purposes, is not a straightforward task. Scovel's (1978) seminal paper on anxiety came to the conclusion that studies on anxiety up until that time had in fact been inconclusive and inconsistent due to these twin problems of definition and inconsistency of instrument application. In addition, anxiety is not easily distinguished from certain other variables and is, therefore, difficult to identify and measure. As Brown (1994: 141) has noted, anxiety is "...intertwined with self-esteem and inhibition and risk taking...", and Arnold and Brown (1999: 8) also acknowledge that:

...the various emotions affecting language learning are intertwined and interrelated in ways that make it impossible to isolate completely the influence of any one of them.

In terms of definition Scovel views anxiety:

...as a state of apprehension, a vague fear...a cluster of affective states, influenced by factors which are intrinsic and extrinsic to the foreign language learner (1978, in Horwitz and Young: 18),

whilst Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, in Horwitz and Young: 27) cite Spielberger's (1983) definition:

Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

While acknowledging both the singular merits and similarities of each definition, for the purposes of this paper I shall adopt the definition that language anxiety is fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language (Gardner and MacIntyre 1993).

Research on anxiety has understandably been interdisciplinary, with psychology and communication studies being two of the areas from which second language researchers interested in anxiety have taken models and key terms.

Anxiety as studied in psychology has essentially been broken down into three categories:

1. Trait anxiety – that is, people who have a more permanent predisposition to being anxious;
2. State or situational anxiety – that is, the actual experience of anxiety in relation to some particular event or act;
3. Task anxiety – that is, people who feel anxious while doing a particular task.

Foreign and second language research has focused primarily on state or specific anxiety seeing learning a foreign language as an experience that may cause anxiety in people who are not normally predisposed to being anxious. This specific type of anxiety is known as foreign language or language anxiety and is linked directly to performing in the target language and is therefore not just a general performance anxiety as identified in communication studies. Research has also focused on task anxiety with results indicating that people feel language-skill-specific anxiety in relation to certain speaking, writing, reading and listening tasks (Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert

1999). The research literature, however, has primarily concentrated on anxiety in relation to speaking, although Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, in Horwitz and Young 1991:29) affirm that counsellors at the Language Skills Center at the University of Texas "...find anxiety centers on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking." One male student, for example, "...claims to hear only a loud buzz whenever his teacher speaks the foreign language" (ibid: 29). Nevertheless:

Difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students seeking help at the LSC. (ibid: 29)

An important contribution to the concept, measurement and understanding of language anxiety, and one which is relevant to this study, was made by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). Because foreign language anxiety involves performance evaluation within an academic and social context, the authors found it useful to draw on three related performance anxieties that had been researched and developed in communication studies. They then attempted to relate these constructs to foreign language learning, more specifically to the foreign language classroom situation:

- 1) *Communication apprehension* – defined as apprehension arising from the learner's inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas.
- 2) *Fear of negative social evaluation* – defined as apprehension arising from the learner's need to make a positive social impression on others.
- 3) *Test anxiety* – defined as fear or apprehension over academic evaluation.

Whilst recognising the categories as a potentially useful instrument to approach the concept of language anxiety, the authors still exercise caution:

Although communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation provide useful conceptual building blocks for a description of foreign language anxiety, we propose that foreign language anxiety is not simply the combination of these fears transferred to foreign language learning. Rather, we conceive foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. (1986, in Horwitz and Young 1991: 31)

This uniqueness and the way that the learner of a foreign language can, at any moment, be confronted with a “limited” self that bears no relation to their “true” self, leads the authors to conclude that foreign language anxiety is different to other anxieties learners may experience, such as in maths or science:

Probably no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does. (ibid: 31)

One of the problems in approaching and attempting a study of language anxiety, therefore, seems to be its unique properties. Nevertheless, this study, which is firmly based on the language learning process in the classroom, has found these categories to be a useful instrument in approaching the construct of language anxiety.

How, then, can we identify foreign language learners who experience anxiety? Symptoms may include:

... apprehension, worry, even dread. They have difficulties concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. They exhibit avoidance behaviour such as missing class and postponing homework. (ibid: 29).

Oxford (1999) amasses an impressive list of likely signs of language anxiety which includes: low levels of verbal production, lack of volunteering in class, playing with hair, nervously touching objects, lack of eye contact, failing to interrupt when it would be natural to do so and image protection or masking behaviours such as exaggerated laughing, joking, smiling and nodding.

How does this type of anxiety affect language learners’ performance and achievement in the target language? The literature strongly suggests that anxiety is a negative correlate of language achievement. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) go as far to say that anxiety is in fact the strongest negative correlate of language achievement. Krashen (1982) sees anxiety as contributing to the affective filter, making language learners unreceptive to language input, which in turn impedes language acquisition. Allwright and Bailey (1991) suggest that the policy of only allowing students to use the target language in the classroom may diminish learners as human beings because it deprives them of their normal means of communication:

... this sort of deprivation seems apt to breed anxiety about communicating with others and just the sort of anxiety that will get in the way of doing well both in the class and out of it, since it could inhibit the learners' use of the target language and thus deprive them of the potential profit to be obtained from practising what has been learned. (Allwright and Bailey 1991: 173)

Learners' perceptions of themselves also seem to play an important role in anxiety in the classroom (MacIntyre, Noels and Clément 1997, Foss and Reitzel 1988). Foss and Reitzel found that communication apprehensives whether speaking their native language or learning a second or foreign language tended to have low self-esteem, perceived themselves as less worthy than others and thought their communication was less effective than their colleagues. They state:

With second language learners, there are the additional feelings of incompetence about grasping the language in the first place and about the inability to present oneself in a way consistent with one's self image. In both forms of anxiety, negative self-perceptions set in motion a perpetuating cycle of negative evaluations that may persist in spite of evaluations from others to the contrary. (Foss and Reitzel 1988: 440)

Studies have also shown negative correlation of anxiety with grades in language courses (Horwitz 1986) and performance in speaking tasks (Young 1986). There seems, then, ample evidence to suggest that anxiety has a negative influence on language performance. Nevertheless, some researchers have pointed to the fact that anxiety may exert a positive influence on language achievement.

Scovel (1978) made a distinction between *facilitating* anxiety and *debilitating* anxiety. The former helps the learner to "fight" the new task or structure and is often seen as that state somewhere between anxiety and nervousness that keeps us alert and gives us a competitive edge. Debilitating anxiety on the other hand, causes us to "flee" the new task or structure and hence leads to avoidance behaviour. Bailey's (1983) diary studies led her to conclude after reflecting on her own language learning experiences that many of her own references in her diaries had origins in her competitiveness. Bailey commented that this competition could arise either from wanting to do better or be as good as her classmates, or from an "ideal image" in her mind of what a good language learner should be like. These factors could lead either to facilitating anxiety, that is, she tried to do better, or debilitating anxiety, that is, she skipped class or avoided the task. Bailey says:

In formal instructional settings, if such anxiety motivates the learner to study the target language, it is *facilitating*. On the other hand, if it is severe enough to cause the learner to withdraw from the language classroom (either mentally or physically, temporarily or permanently), such anxiety is *debilitating*. (Bailey 1983, in Seliger and Long 1983: 96)

Ehrman and Oxford (1995, cited in Oxford 1999) also found evidence that such facilitating anxiety improved the performance of high language proficiency and self-confident language learners. Horwitz (1990), however, found that anxiety was only helpful for relatively simple learning tasks, but not for complex learning processes such as language learning.

The literature, however, generally indicates a negative influence of anxiety on language achievement, although divided opinion would suggest that more research is needed in this area.

Context of study

While the non-anxious student may blissfully mispronounce some words, skip over others, and change the structure and even the meaning of some materials the anxious student may focus too much on what “should” be done. The “shoulds” may, in the end, get in the way of becoming conversational in a language. (Daly 1991, in Horwitz and Young 1991: 9)

Since speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening aspect of foreign language learning, the current emphasis on the development of communicative competence poses particularly great difficulties for the anxious student. (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, in Horwitz and Young 1991: 36)

This short study is about anxiety in oral communication in third year university students in English Language classes in Portugal. Although it is clear that anxiety is the focal variable in this paper, five more variables were considered to be of significant relevance: speaking activities, motivation, self-esteem, inhibition, and risk taking. It should be noted that other variables exist in the literature, but considering the aim and scope of this short study, it would seem reasonable to suggest that these variables, while not comprehensive, are relevant and not limited in this context.

First, the fact that speaking activities is a variable would seem to be justifiable in a study on anxiety in speaking.

Second, our students have chosen their respective degree courses and the majority would like to be teachers. They are well aware that not only will they have to pass the English courses to progress but they will also have to succeed in their teaching practice in English to obtain their teaching qualification. Furthermore, the Portuguese education system places great emphasis on the students' final mark, in this case, out of twenty. In fact, the students obtaining the best marks are first in-line for employment in state schools. In addition, employment prospects in Portugal at the present moment in time are limited and the competition is intense. Therefore, it is assumed that motivation as a variable in this study is also germane.

Inhibition, self-esteem and risk taking, are so closely interrelated with anxiety, as acknowledged in the literature, that no significant attempt was made to isolate them. Nevertheless, each remains a fundamental concept and each is defined for the purposes of the questionnaire which was used in this study as the method of data collection. It is worth quoting Beebe (1983) at length here:

I have long believed that the good language learner is one who is willing to take risks. Learning to speak a second or foreign language involves taking the risk of being wrong, with all its ramifications. In the classroom, these ramifications might include a bad grade in the course, a fail on the exam, a reproach from the teacher, a smirk from a classmate, punishment or embarrassment imposed by oneself. Outside the classroom, individuals learning a second language face other negative consequences if they make mistakes. They fear looking ridiculous; they fear frustration coming from a listener's blank look, showing that they have failed to communicate; they fear the danger of not being able to communicate and thereby get close to other human beings. Perhaps worst of all, they fear a loss of identity. Given these realities, we must conclude that all second and foreign language learning involves taking risks. (Beebe 1983, in Seliger and Long 1983: 126)

While eloquently capturing the possible consequences of risk taking in language learning, Beebe's description also illustrates how anxiety, low self-esteem and inhibition go hand in hand with language learning. It also presents us with a typical dilemma in language learning. If you are not anxious, inhibited or low in self-esteem, you may well be after or while attempting to learn a second or foreign language; on the other hand, if you are anxious, inhibited and low in self-esteem, then these personality characteristics may be exacerbated after or while attempting to learn a foreign or second language. In relation to Beebe's comments on the differences that exist in and outside the classroom, however, I would beg to differ. I recognise that the experiences of a second language learner who learns outside the

classroom and may actually be a member of the target language community may be significantly different from someone who learns in a formal institution. Nevertheless, I believe that the consequences that Beebe says someone may face as a result of risk taking outside the classroom, apart from, maybe, a loss of identity, *may* and *do* happen *in the classroom*. As a language teacher who tries to initiate genuine communicative practices within the classroom based on everyday situations and which to a considerable extent involve speaking, I would say that our students are often confronted with such possible consequences.

Cohort and data collection

My special interest in this study is to try to identify the reasons why our students are noticeably reluctant to speak in the classroom. To attain this objective I designed the questionnaire on the presuppositions of this paper, my experience as a teacher and a reading of the anxiety literature.

As an EFL teacher, I would like my students to communicate in an effective learning environment. Reducing the levels of anxiety or inhibitive factors that may exist would be a step towards facilitating learning in our classroom.

The driving principle behind the method of data collection was that of obtaining honest answers. Four female students studying for the degree in English and German volunteered to participate in this study by answering a questionnaire. They were the only students who volunteered. The group of students were friendly and comfortable with one another, and furthermore had no knowledge of the research I was undertaking. The students, out of respect for their anonymity, are referred to as numbers in this paper.

Students one and three although of Portuguese nationality, consider their mother tongue to be German, having spent most of their lives in Luxembourg and Germany respectively. Student four has had considerable contact with British native speakers and British culture. She lived in England for three years and her father still lives there. All of the students have excellent attendance records: up until the date of the questionnaire, out of a possible twenty lessons, student one had missed one lesson, student two two lessons, and students three and four had not missed any lessons. Students have English Language classes twice a week and the lessons are two hours in duration.

Students on the English-German and French-English courses have lessons together and the total number of students enrolled on the course for 2000/2001 was 37. The average number of students attending each class was between 25 and 28. Their evaluations for the academic year 1999/2000 were as follows: student one's final mark was 12 (written exam 14, oral exam 8); student two's final mark was 11 (written exam 11, oral exam 10); student three's final mark was 10 (written exam 10, oral exam 9) and student four's final mark was 11 (written exam 11, oral exam 10). The written exam is worth 66% of the final mark and the oral 33%. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen open questions, each one intended to elicit information related to a particular variable. Nunan (1992: 142) has remarked,

While responses to closed questions are easier to collate and analyse, one often obtains more useful information from open questions. It is also likely that responses to open questions will more accurately reflect what the respondent wants to say.

Nunan here was referring to written answers. In the present study this principle was taken one step further by getting the students to answer the questions orally and by audio-recording their answers, thereby freeing them from the sometimes restrictive and mechanically written answers that questionnaires can often generate. The questionnaire was written in Portuguese and the students answered the questions in Portuguese. To enhance the quality of the recording, students recorded their answers by speaking into a hand-held microphone. They were able to make as many contributions as they wished to each question before moving on to the next. For example, if a student had already answered a question but wanted to add something else to what she had previously said after hearing the other respondents' contributions, then she could do this if she so wished. The students were given fifteen minutes to familiarise themselves with the questions and to clarify any doubts with myself before the recording of their answers. I was not present during the recording of the answers. The answers to the questionnaire, which in total lasted fifty minutes, were subsequently transcribed. It was hoped that these factors – a small group of students who were friendly and familiar with each other, the relative freedom of responding to a questionnaire orally as opposed to writing answers, being able to speak in Portuguese, and my absence – would encourage a greater degree of honesty in the students' answers.

Questionnaire – Instrument of data collection

To obtain the information pertinent to this study a questionnaire was devised in which fifteen open questions were designed to elicit responses related to particular variables. Each variable was placed into one of three categories:

1) *Ideas and Notions about the English Language* – the general ideas and preconceived beliefs that students have and which influence their attitudes towards the English Language, the culture (either British and/or American) and the representatives of the culture.

2) *Intrapersonal Relations* – the knowledge and perceptions that students have of themselves as students and how they perceive their skills and capabilities which in turn will contribute to their levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation and development of strategies at an individual level.

3) *Interpersonal Relations* – the way in which students interact with their classmates and the teacher in the classroom which in turn will contribute to their levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation and development of strategies as a member of the larger social group.

The table below illustrates the variables in each category, and the number in brackets indicates the question on the questionnaire designed to elicit information about the respective variable.

Table of categories and variables		
Category 1 Ideas and notions about language	Category 2 Intrapersonal relations	Category 3 Interpersonal relations
a) Contact with native speakers (6) b) Personal significance (10)	a) Inhibition/ Insecurity (1) b) Lack of inhibition (3) c) Motivation / enjoyment (5) (11) d) Importance of communication (12) e) L1 / L2 comparison (13)	a) Self-esteem (2) b) Test anxiety / social anxiety (4) c) Speaking activities (7) d) Social anxiety (8) e) Competitiveness and anxiety (9) f) Teacher qualities teacher/student relations (14) g) Social anxiety (15)

The following are definitions of the variables in each category.

Category 1:

- a) *Contact with native speakers* – the ideas or beliefs that students have in relation to native speakers as representatives of the language and culture.
- b) *Personal significance* – the importance that students assign to the language, the learning of the language and the culture associated with the language.

Category 2:

- a) *Inhibition/Insecurity* – the degree to which students' egos deal with the language learning process and possible negative consequences.
- b) *Lack of inhibition* – see a) above.
- c) *Motivation/Enjoyment* – the degree of personal incentive and pleasure students feel in relation to speaking English both inside and outside the classroom.
- d) *Importance of Communication* – the degree to which students emphasise communication as being more important than accuracy.
- e) *L1/L2 comparisons* – the extent to which students' L1 interferes with their L2.

Category 3:

- a) *Self-esteem* – the sense of worth, sense of self-confidence and sense of evaluation that students have and make with regard to themselves, and how this sense of self-worth is seen by significant others, in this case, the teacher and classmates.
- b) *Test anxiety/Social anxiety* – the degree of apprehension and worry that is felt by students in relation to being negatively evaluated in academic terms by the teacher/the degree of apprehension and worry that is felt by students in relation to being negatively evaluated in social terms by classmates and teachers.
- c) *Speaking activities* – the preferences students have for various speaking activities in the classroom.
- d) *Social anxiety* – see b) above.
- e) *Competitiveness and anxiety* – the extent to which students are motivated or disillusioned by the anxiety they feel when comparing their oral skills with those of their classmates.

- f) *Teacher qualities; Teacher/Student relations* – the way students perceive interaction between themselves and the teacher, and the qualities that they believe a good language teacher should possess.
- g) *Social anxiety* – see b) above.

Analysis, discussion and implications of the data

In terms of motivation and attitude (questions 5, 10, 11), the students generally manifest positive feelings and ideas towards English. They express the idea that they chose English (and German) because they liked it and not because of its importance, and, although recognising they do not do a great deal outside the classroom to improve their English, they all say they would continue to learn English if it was not such an important language. It is also necessary to take into account their comments on the constraints of time and the demands of other subjects, but there is still evidence of the attitude that they do what is necessary and not much more. There is also the recognition that the importance of English in today's world was a factor that conditioned their choice of degree course. An important source of motivation seems to be their many references to the fact that they will be future teachers of English, or at least during their period of teacher training.

However, despite evidence of such motivational factors, there is clear evidence of anxiety and other inhibitive factors in their answers to the questionnaire. Questions 1, 2, 4 and 8, in particular, elicit significant information in relation to these factors. They are reluctant to speak for fear of not being able to express themselves in English or that their colleagues or teacher will not understand them. They regret having spoken, precisely because these fears were realised. The fear of making mistakes is also central to their perceptions. In fact, the idea of making mistakes pervades many of their answers. For example, in question 5, student 3 says that she likes to participate but only when she is certain that she will not make mistakes. She also says in her answer to question 4 that it is necessary to be corrected. Student 2 in her answer to question 1 says that she tends not to speak if she thinks it will be wrong, but in her answer to question 2 she says that she has never regretted having spoken in class because it is only through making mistakes that they improve their English. There is, then, an awareness of or a certain knowledge of what a good language learner should do, but what is actually done in practice is another matter.

What seems to be strongly influencing their oral contributions in class and is underlying their fears of making mistakes, not being understood by others and not expressing themselves clearly, is the fear of evaluation.

If we look at the table at the end of this chapter, explicit references to evaluation are broken down into Horwitz's three categories. Communication apprehension in itself does not seem to be that influential. The fear of academic evaluation and negative social evaluation, then, are the factors that condition their perceptions and behaviour in the language classroom. Their perceptions are an important factor here. Many references are made to the fact that they will be future teachers (questions 5, 6, 7, 8). They perceive their level of English as lower than it should be and feel this will be reflected in their future careers. These factors would also appear to have an effect on the way they feel about themselves as persons within the classroom. Such comments as "I feel embarrassed" (question 2), "I'm not at ease speaking" (question 1), "I don't like to see people looking at me" (question 5), "I feel bad" (question 8), and "I feel a little inferior" (question 8) indicate some of the ways students may feel when participating in the class.

This sense of being evaluated may be inferred from their answers to question 7. Students 2 and 3 state their preferences for the class being teacher-led in speaking activities because this way they will be corrected when making mistakes. Student 1, however, states her preference for group work because she does not feel as if she is being constantly evaluated by the teacher. However, Students 2 and 3 may feel more secure and able to avoid exposing themselves to evaluation in teacher-led activities.

In terms of pronunciation, their answers indicate that they think it is important but not all-important. They emphasise the importance of expression and communicating one's ideas rather than correct pronunciation, although reading out loud in class is considered an activity where pronunciation is more important, and where one is more exposed to evaluation by both the teacher and colleagues. Their ideas here are also influenced by having a native speaker as a model for pronunciation, which may as a consequence lead to unfair self-criticism or elevated expectations.

However, in relation to some of their colleagues in the class who speak English fluently (question 9), the participants do not appear to be greatly worried in terms of self-comparisons. There are traces of

competitiveness and both debilitating and facilitating anxiety in their answers but not to a significant degree.

The qualities in language teachers that the participants identify as helping them to feel at ease in the classroom include a playful sense of humour, a willingness to say that he/she is there to help them and not to constantly evaluate them, a willingness to admit that he/she does not know the answer to everything, modesty and an ability to create a friendly environment in the classroom.

The participants' answers to the questionnaire not only provide useful insights into their perceptions of how they feel and what they think happens in the classroom, but also provides me, as their teacher, with a concrete idea of how my role as a teacher is perceived.

It is necessary to recognise, however, certain factors and limitations that may have conditioned the data. First, there is always the danger that they gave the answers they thought the researcher "wanted". Nevertheless, there does seem to be a significant level of honesty in their answers. In question 11, for example, students could have said that they do much more outside the classroom. In question 6, they could have given more importance to native speakers in education. They also seem to have stressed academic evaluation as a source of considerable anxiety for them. Secondly, there maybe a type of "knock-on" effect in their answers, and this may be a weakness in a questionnaire carried out in this way, that is, the participants may have been unduly influenced by what the previous speaker said. However, it is normally through talking about and sharing ideas that we develop and express our own thoughts. Thirdly, considering the size and scope of this study it is obviously difficult to generalise. However, it also seems reasonable to suggest that just because the students do not refer directly to anxiety or inhibitive factors in their answers, it does not mean that such factors are not influencing their behaviour.

It would therefore be of interest to investigate anxiety and other inhibitive factors in students on a larger scale. Such a study could use a variety of data collection instruments such as Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (1983), and classroom observation and follow up interviews.

Taking into account that the majority of our students are going to be teachers, it would seem a worthwhile project to both identify levels of anxiety and inhibition in relation to oral communication and to devise methodological strategies to combat such influences.

The pedagogical implications of this short study are important for foreign language classroom practice. Language teachers faced with

what they see as a generally unresponsive class of individuals who appear reluctant to participate should not assume that lack of motivation and interest are the root causes of such behaviour. Teachers, despite their perceptions and intentions to the contrary, may be facing students who indeed fear both social and academic evaluation in the language classroom, and should be aware that tendencies to experience such fear may well be heightened in large-sized foreign language classes in which classroom practice is firmly based on the promotion and acquisition of communicative competence and its concomitant emphasis on oral activities simulating real-life situations.

A supportive and friendly environment in which students feel they can contribute without being constantly evaluated and in which making mistakes is accepted as a natural part of the language learning process should be initiated and positively encouraged throughout their university course.

		Types of anxiety identified in students' Answers to questions		
	Question related variable(s)	Communicative apprehension	Fear of negative social evaluation	Fear of academic evaluation
1 Question	Inhibition Insecurity	S1, S3, S4	S1, S2	—
2 Question	Self esteem	—	S1, S3	—
3 Question	Lack of inhibition, comfort	—	—	—
4 Question	Test anxiety, social anxiety	—	S4	S1, S2, S3
5 Question	Motivation, enjoyment	—	—	—
6 Question	Contact with native speaker	—	—	—
7 Question	Speaking activities: Individual work Pair work Group work Orientated by the teacher	— — — —	— — — —	S1 — — —
8 Question	Social anxiety : Teacher Colleagues Both	— — —	S1 S4 S3	S1, S2 — S3
9 Question	Competitiveness and anxiety	—	—	—
10 Question	Personal significance	—	—	—
11 Question	Motivation	—	—	—
12 Question	Importance of communication	—	—	—
13 Question	L1 - L2 comparison	—	—	—
14 Question	Teacher/student relations	—	—	S2
15 Question	Social anxiety	—	S3	—

Conclusion

In this study of anxiety in oral communication, significant levels of anxiety and inhibitive factors were found to be present in the data collected. Using the three categories developed by Horwitz et al (1986) as a way of identifying types of anxiety, it can be said that students' anxiety centred on the fear of academic evaluation and negative social evaluation. Other closely related variables may also contribute to their reluctance to speak, such as their expectations for themselves, both as university students and future teachers, and fear of making mistakes. All these factors are interconnected and influence each other and contribute to how participants feel and act in the classroom. If one factor can be said to be decisive in oral communication, however, it is the sense of being academically evaluated, with social evaluation almost as influential.

Although not investigated in this study, it is necessary to acknowledge significant shaping influences *outside* the classroom on anxiety *inside* the classroom – parental expectations and employment prospects among them.

As with other studies investigating personality variables, identifying the causative variable remains a problematical task. That is, do students' perceptions of their language performance and everything that this involves cause anxiety or is it anxiety that affects their language performance?

Based on the limited nature of this study, a reading of the literature and my experience as a teacher I would tentatively conclude that it is a combination of anxiety influencing language performance and vice versa.

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Questionnaire

INQUÉRITO AOS ALUNOS DE INGLÊS DO TERCEIRO ANO DE UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA, POLO DE VISEU, PORTUGAL, SOBRE A COMUNICAÇÃO ORAL NA SALA DE AULA

Respondam e discutam as seguintes questões sobre o tema “Falar Inglês na sala de aula”. Por favor respondam às perguntas com toda a honestidade visto que não há respostas certas. Todo o meu agradecimento pela vossa colaboração.

1. Há alturas em que quer falar e participar na aula mas decide não o fazer? Porquê?
2. Há ocasiões em que se arrepende de ter falado durante as aulas? Tente exemplificar.
3. Acha que consegue falar mais facilmente Inglês fora da sala de aula que dentro? Porquê?
4. Sente-se avaliado oralmente quando participa na aula? De que forma?
5. Gosta de participar oralmente na aula? Explique.
6. Acha que os alunos deveriam ser ensinados por professores ingleses desde o início da aprendizagem da língua inglesa? Se sim, porquê?
7. Ponham as seguintes actividades por ordem de importância justificando a sua resposta:
 - Falar individualmente
 - Falar em pares
 - Falar em grupos
 - Participação oral de toda a turma orientada pelo professor

8. Receia cometer erros na presença dos seus colegas e do professor? Porquê?
9. Quando ouve os seus colegas falar fluentemente Inglês, como se sente? Explícite.
10. Continuaria a aprender a língua inglesa se ela não fosse uma língua tão importante? Porquê?
11. O que faz para tentar melhorar a sua comunicação oral em Inglês fora da sala de aula?
12. Que importância dá à pronúncia na aprendizagem da língua inglesa?
13. Que sons tem dificuldade em pronunciar ou evita quando fala Inglês?
14. Que qualidades encontrou nos seus professores de línguas que o fizeram sentir-se à vontade na sala de aula?
15. Que dificuldades sente quando lê em voz alta na sala de aula?

Adapted from Vieira, F. 1999, GT-PA, 14.