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**ORAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND  
AFFECTIVE FACTORS: SELF-ESTEEM AND  
INTROVERSION/EXTROVERSION**

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In The Name Of God

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*1. V. E. C.*

*Dedicated to my parents*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ORAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AND AFFECTIVE FACTORS: SELF-ESTEEM AND INTROVERSION/EXTROVERSION**

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The present study intended to propose a causal model of factors that would predict Oral Communication Apprehension (OCA) of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language. To conduct the study, 135 male and female University students majoring in English were selected. Five variables including: learners' self-esteem and introversion/extroversion (as independent variables), their gender and proficiency level (as moderator variables) and their oral communication apprehension (as the major dependent variable) were selected. To collect the data necessary for the study a language proficiency test and three questionnaires were used. Statistical analyses revealed that all the independent and moderate variables predicted the participants' OCA. Furthermore, extroversion was found to be the strongest predictor of OCA. Results of the t-test and one-way ANOVA revealed that females and students of the lowest level of proficiency experience a significantly higher level of OCA. Finally, the correlational analyses of the study indicated that the relationship between OCA and self-esteem was stronger for females and students of the mid level of proficiency and the relationship between OCA and introversion/extroversion was stronger for males and students of the low level of proficiency. The findings are finally discussed.

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## **List of abbreviations**

- OCA: Oral Communication Apprehension  
L2: second language  
FL: Foreign Language  
SE: Self-Esteem  
CA: Communication Apprehension  
EFL: English as a Foreign Language  
ESL: English as a second Language  
FL: Foreign Language  
SLA: Second Language Acquisition  
PRCA: Personal Report of Oral Communication Apprehension  
FLA: Foreign Language Anxiety  
FLCA: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety  
GSE: General Self-esteem Scale  
RSES: Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale  
WTC: Willingness to Communicate  
EAP: English for Academic Purposes  
EPQ: Eysenck Personality Questionnaire  
ETS: Educational Testing Service  
TOFEL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Preliminaries

The affective side of learners is probably one of the very strongest factors in language learning success or failure. Interest in affective factors is not new. “Already implicit in the writings of Dewey, Montessori, and Vigotsky in the first part of this century, it gained importance with the growth of humanistic psychology in the 1960s” (Arnold, 1999, p. 5).

Affective factors are those that deal with the emotional reactions and motivation of the learners which have a direct effect on learning itself. According to Brown (2005), there are “two facets of the affective domain of second language acquisition”. The first one is the “intrinsic side affectivity: personality factors within a person that contribute in some way to the success of language learning” (p. 134). These factors include self-esteem, inhibition, extroversion, risk-taking, empathy, and anxiety. The second facet encompasses extrinsic factors which are sociocultural variables. In this case the language learner brings into contact the two cultures (both of the first and the second cultures) along with learning a second language. The affective side of language learning has been attracting more and more attention in recent years. Results of the studies carried out with undergraduate language learners in the late 1990s into affect in language learning have indicated “substantial links among affective measures and achievement” (Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret, 1997,

p. 344) and have highlighted the “interdependent role that linguistics, cognition and affect play in FL and SL learning” (Yang, 1999, p. 246).

Hilgard (1963 cited in Brown, 2005. p. 134) believes that “purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected unless a role is assigned to affectivity”. Of course, it should be noted that the affective side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side; “When both are used together, the learning process can be constructed on a firmer foundation; neither the cognitive nor the affective has the last word, and, indeed, neither can be separated from the other” (Arnold 1999, p. 7).

In fact a broad understanding of affect in language learning is very important because attention to affective aspects can lead to more effective language learning. Andres (2003) points out that when dealing with affective side of language, learners’ attention needs to be given both to how we can overcome problems created by negative emotions and to how we can create and use more positive facilitative emotions. The most innovative techniques and the most attractive materials may be rendered inadequate, if not useless, by negative affective reactions involved in the language learning process.

There are a number of variables that are commonly associated with the emotional side of human beings. From among them, oral communication apprehension (hitherto OCA), self-esteem (hitherto SE) and introversion/extroversion (extraversion) are but three important affective variables that concern us in this study.

### **1.1 Foreign language anxiety**

The majority of second language (L2) learners experience varying degrees of anxiety when asked to express their views in the second language in front of

other people. This is true even when their language abilities are rather high. Anxiety in and of itself is not a bad thing since a certain amount of anxiety can drive a student in the quest to learn a language. However, many language teachers have noticed that there is an excessive amount of anxiety negatively influencing many language learners' behavior and educational outcomes. It is this extreme anxiety that hinders students' performance and that is the subject of this thesis. In large classrooms and when the emphasis is on examinations, the majority of pre-college L2 students seem to learn new language skills for the sole purpose of passing tests. In other words, the development of L2 learners' communicative abilities is often put aside. As a result, many L2 college students lack competency in speaking. This fact makes them unwilling to communicate in the target language for the fear of being ridiculed or, simply, for the fear of being wrong.

A growing body of research has demonstrated that language anxiety is a specific type of anxiety that is most closely related to the acquisition of a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991b). Investigators, recognizing the distinction between language anxiety and other forms of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986 and MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989), have suggested that the anxiety experienced in the course of learning a foreign language is specific and unique. Evidence supporting this contention was proposed by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991a, 1991b), who found that students with high levels of French anxiety tended to experience more anxiety when engaged in activities specifically involving the use of French. Foreign language anxiety is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon (Young, 1991). It can be defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). Actually foreign language anxiety acts as an affective filter that results in the student being unreceptive to language

input (Krashen, 1982). In addition, students with high levels of foreign language anxiety often exhibit avoidance behaviors such as missing class and postponing homework (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers often draw parallels between language anxiety and three related performance anxieties: *communication apprehension* (CA) arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas, *test anxiety* or apprehension over academic evaluation, and *fear of negative evaluation* arising from a learner's need to make positive social impression on others. Of main concern, in this study, is communication apprehension.

## **1.2 Oral communication apprehension (OCA)**

The term 'oral communication apprehension' was coined by James McCroskey and is defined as an "individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). In fact, apprehension is present in all modes of communication. McCroskey (1982, cited in Vasta 2001) states:

High OCA is seen as a potential inhibitor of the development of both communication competence and communication skill and as a direct precursor of negative communication affect. Low OCA, on the other hand, is seen as a facilitator of the development of communication competence and communication skill and as a precursor of positive communication affect. (p. 4)

He believes that individuals with a high level of CA have high levels of anxiety when it comes to communication. They feel more comfortable when alone and isolated. They tend to have lower self-esteem, and have a high level of fear of communicating with others. A person with a low level of CA does possess some uneasiness of communicating, but in general can control it to



some extent. This would probably characterize those who, despite getting a little nervous when making a speech, get over it, and speak fairly well.

The fear of speaking is a real issue that everyone needs to recognize. It does exist and will exist forever without the proper instruction to control its consequences. Oral communication apprehension is present in all sorts of areas. College students experience it when placed in small groups or when presenting something in front of the class. People can experience it when talking to someone in public or in private settings. Wherever communication is needed or present, communication apprehension is also there.

A number of factors have been considered as leading to OCA. McCroskey (1980 cited in Holbrook, 1987) identified seven factors as the causes of OCA. These factors are: 1. Low intellectual skills 2. Speech skill deficiencies 3. Voluntary social introversion 4. Social alienation 5. Communication anxiety 6. Low social self-esteem 7. Ethnic/cultural divergence in communication norms.

Rojo-Laurilla (2005) classifies causes of communication apprehension into two groups of internal and external factors. Regarding internal factors, he relates communication apprehension to different aspects of communication like physiological factors or other internally driven considerations. He argues that results of studies show that students who stutter have higher levels of CA and poorer scores on their self-perceived communication competence as compared to those who do not stutter.

With respect to external factors, he argues that different levels of communication apprehension could also be triggered by external factors such as type of classroom assignment or speech task. He confirms his ideas by citing Witt & Behnk's statement, who statistically tested anticipatory trait anxiety across speech assignments and mentioned that,

Not only do students associate general, trait-like expectations of anxiety by speech type, but they also experience actual state anxiety indicators of differing intensity when faced with differing speech delivery types. (Witt & Behnks 2006, cited in Rojo-Laurilla 2005, p. 17)

According to Rojo-laurilla (2005), another potential external source of CA is the field of study. He mentions results of a few studies which indicate that, for example, accounting majors have higher apprehension toward speaking and writing as compared to other business majors.

### **1.2.1 OCA and SLA**

L2 researchers have hypothesized that affective variables cause individual differences in the L2 learning behaviors, which in turn produce individual differences in the success of second language acquisition since some L2 learning behaviors are productive while others are less productive or counter-productive (Kim, 2004). Recently some attention has been directed toward OCA in second language communication. L2 or foreign language learning is a complex task that is susceptible to human anxiety (Brown, 1994), which is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, and apprehension. Speaking a foreign language in public, especially in front of native speakers, is often anxiety-provoking. Sometimes, extreme anxiety occurs when EFL learners become tongue-tied in an unexpected situation, which often leads to discouragement and a general sense of failure. In spite of substantial advances in teaching methods and techniques, apprehension continues to exist in second/foreign language classrooms. Students in language classes may engage in negative selftalk, ruminating over a poor performance, which affects their ability to process information in foreign language contexts

(MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991a). Some students with high levels of foreign language anxiety even have a mental block similar to that experienced by students studying mathematics. Woodrow (2006) believes that the attention that has been directed to OCA in second language communication is prompted by the speculation that since OCA has clearly been considered as a primary reason for communication avoidance in a first language, it may be even more important in preventing people from communicating in a second language and disrupting their communication when they are trying to do so. According to McCroskey (1985), if a student is apprehensive about oral communication in his second language, it is likely he will avoid communicating and as a result fail to experience the practice so necessary to the development of true competence in the language. "Of particular importance is the fact that this apprehension may stem either from the student's lack of confidence about his or her ability in the second language or from his/her general OCA" (ibid, p.12).

### **1.3 Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is a crucial factor in determining an individual's success in an activity. It is defined as "the set of evaluative attitudes that a person has about himself or his accomplishments" (Morrison & Thomas, 1975 cited in Hensley, 1977 p. 45). "Self-esteem is considered to be the evaluative dimension of the self and is a conscious experience which is accessible to introspection... this may also involve unconscious processes, which may reflect an individual's inner psychic structure" (Michie, Glachan, & Bray, 2001 cited in Tahriri, 2003, p. 2). Coopersmith (1967, cited in Meng & Wang 2006), defines self-esteem as "the evaluation, which the individual makes and maintains with regard to himself to be significant, capable, successful and worthy" (p. 71). Andres

(2003) believes that people derive their sense of self-esteem from the accumulation of their own experience and from assessments of the external world around them. He points out that a person's self-esteem largely depends on the experiences, positive or negative, that they have in their environment, on how they are viewed by the "significant others" and how they see themselves.

According to Qin (2003), self-esteem has been categorized into three levels the first of which is general or global self-esteem which is thought to be relatively stable in a mature adult and is resistant to change except by active and extended therapy. The second is specific or situational self-esteem which refers to one's appraisals of oneself in certain life situations, such as social interaction, work, or on certain discretely defined traits like intelligence, communicative ability, athletic ability, or personality traits like gregariousness, empathy, and flexibility. The degree of specific self-esteem a learner has may vary depending upon the situation or the trait in question. The third level, task self-esteem, relates to particular tasks within specific situations. For example, within the educational domain, task self-esteem may refer to particular subject-matter areas. In an athletic context, skill in a particular sport, or even a facet of a sport, such as net play in tennis or pitching in baseball, would be evaluated on the level of task self-esteem. Specific self-esteem might refer to second language learning in general, and task self-esteem might appropriately refer to the learner's self-evaluation of a particular aspect of the process: speaking, writing, or even a special kind of classroom activity.

Research has shown that a student who feels positively about himself is more likely to succeed. Andres (2003) compiled a summary of many studies and inferred that most indicated that self-esteem is the result rather than the cause of academic achievement. He maintained that self-esteem can be