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COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION OF CHINESE ESL STUDENTS

A thesis completed in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Second Language Teaching
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the communication apprehension (CA) as defined by Horwitz et al (1986) of a group of Chinese ESL secondary students in New Zealand. The relative importance of a number of sources (educational, social, and cultural) of CA which have been identified for Chinese students of English is considered. The relationship between CA, wait time and certain in-class practices such as questioning and voluntary speaking is examined. A further aspect of the study explores the ways in which students can articulate suggestions for coping with CA.

The relative importance of sources of CA is investigated by means of interviews, a ranking exercise and verbal reports. A questionnaire and "classroom" session further corroborate the sources of CA in relation to certain in-class practices and wait-time. Scenarios (hypothetical situations) are used to examine the strategies which these students considered effective for coping with CA.

Results indicated that language distance between Chinese and English contributed strongly to CA among Chinese ESL students because the two languages are substantially different in terms of language structure and use. Culture also emerged as an important dimension in CA in the present study.
and that the students' cultural background affected their learning style, attitudes towards certain in-class practices and expectations in school. It was also found that speaking in front of the class and insufficient preparation were important sources of CA within the classroom. Students reported on both the affective and practical ways in which they attempted to cope with CA.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the methodological and theoretical implications of the study. The present research has highlighted the importance of applying the case study approach to further CA studies. It has also demonstrated that language distance, preparation time and affective variables are among some of the important elements which have been neglected by previous anxiety research. A number of tentative and practical recommendations from the study are proposed together with suggestions for further research.
# TABLE OF CONTENT

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND ............................................................. 1

1.2 LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY AND COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION (CA) ........... 4

1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM .................................................. 6

1.4 THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS .................................... 7

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................. 9

2.2 ANXIETY ................................................................. 9

   2.2.1 Main Types of Anxiety ............................................. 10

      Trait Anxiety ......................................................... 11

      State Anxiety ....................................................... 11

      Situation Specific Anxiety ....................................... 12

2.3 EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY STUDIES ...................... 13

2.4 LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY ......................................... 15

2.5 COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION (CA) ................................ 18

   2.5.1 Definition ......................................................... 18

   2.5.2 General Research Findings ...................................... 19

   2.5.3 Important Instruments in Foreign Language Anxiety Research ............... 21

      Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) .......................... 21

      An Investigation of Students’ Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking ........ 22

2.6 CHINESE LEARNING STYLE ............................................. 24

   2.6.1 Educational Characteristics ..................................... 24

   2.6.2 Cultural Characteristics ........................................ 27
CHAPTER FOUR: THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOURCES OF CA

4.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................... 70

4.2 METHOD FOR ANALYSING DATA .......................... 70

4.3 SOURCES OF CA IN RELATION TO EDUCATION ........... 71
   4.3.1 Subjects' Responses ................................ 71
   4.3.2 Discussion ......................................... 73
       Language differences between Chinese and English .. 73
       Differences in Education Systems in New Zealand and
       the Subjects' Home Countries ................................ 75
       Voluntary Speaking and Teaching Styles ............... 75
       Lack of Emphasis on Speaking in the Curriculum in the
       Subject's Home Countries .................................. 77
       Subjects' Comprehension of English .................... 77
   4.3.3 Summary ........................................... 78

4.4 SOURCES OF CA IN RELATION TO SOCIETY ............... 78
   4.4.1 Subjects' Responses ................................ 78
   4.4.2 Discussion ......................................... 80
       Fear of Negative Evaluation ......................... 81
       Low Self-esteem ........................................ 81
       Different Accents ..................................... 83
       The Concept of Face ................................... 83
       The Pace of Instruction and Asking Questions in the
       Class ..................................................... 84
   4.4.3 Summary ........................................... 84

4.5 SOURCES OF CA IN RELATION TO CULTURE ............... 85
   4.5.1 Students' Responses ................................ 85
   4.5.2 Discussion ......................................... 87
       Voluntary Speaking and Different Teaching Styles .. 87
       Care given to Speech ................................... 89
       Priority given to Education ............................ 90
       Wait Time ............................................. 90
   4.5.3 Summary ........................................... 91

4.6 THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOURCES OF
   CA ...................................................... 91
   Subjects' Responses and Discussion ...................... 91
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.7 SUMMARY</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: CA, IN-CLASS PRACTICES AND WAIT TIME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 METHOD FOR ANALYSING DATA</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 THE QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Subjects' Responses</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 Discussion</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Moderately Relaxed&quot; Activities</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Neither Relaxed Nor Anxious&quot; Activities</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Moderately Anxious&quot; Activities</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 THE &quot;CLASSROOM&quot; SESSION</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1 The Activities</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Work</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Aloud While Seated</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering Unprepared Questions</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 CA, IN-CLASS PRACTICES AND WAIT TIME</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 Voluntary Speaking</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 Speaking in front of the Class</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.4 Insufficient Advance Preparation</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 SUMMARY</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 CONCLUSION</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER SIX: WAYS OF COPING WITH CA</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A .................................................. 164
APPENDIX B .................................................. 165
APPENDIX C .................................................. 169
APPENDIX D .................................................. 176
APPENDIX E .................................................. 177
APPENDIX F .................................................. 179
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1 PROFILES OF SUBJECTS ....................... 45
TABLE 4.1 EDUCATIONAL SOURCES OF CA (GROUP A) . . . 72
TABLE 4.2 SOCIAL SOURCES OF CA (GROUP B) ............ 79
TABLE 4.3 CULTURAL SOURCES OF CA (GROUP C) ......... 86
TABLE 4.4 RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOURCES OF
CA ........................................................... 92
TABLE 5.1 ACTIVITIES ARRANGED BY ANXIETY LEVEL
ACCORDING TO MEANS .............................. 98
TABLE 5.2 CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES ARRANGED BY
ANXIETY LEVEL ACCORDING TO MEANS . . . . 101