

# LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN ORAL COMMUNICATION OF SAN BEDA COLLEGE ALABANG STAFF AND EMPLOYEES

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the factors that language anxiety can possibly stem from, both within the workplace environment and out of classroom in the wider social context, and has recommended a variety of strategies to cope with it. The past researchers, considering it a complex and multi-faceted psychological phenomenon, have suggested using a variety of perspectives and approaches to investigate the subject. This study used a qualitative semi-structured interview format and survey questionnaires to investigate this language phenomenon. A total of twenty five staff and employees participated. The findings suggested that language anxiety can originate from employees' self-perception, their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties, and target language cultures, interlocutors and from fear of negative criticism.

Feelings of anxiety, apprehension and nervousness are commonly expressed by practitioners in speaking the second/foreign language. These feelings are considered to exert a potentially negative and detrimental effect on communication in the target language. The use of modern communicative language teaching approaches in the language classrooms and the wide-spread use of English Language have increased the demand to learn good communication skills but existence of such feelings among staff as well as professionals may prevent them from achieving the desired goal.

In the workplace, the ability to communicate effectively strongly influences one's personal advancement and success. Thus, in the global marketplace of today, many employers believe that the ability to communicate orally is the most important job-related skill. Regardless of language, country, education level, effective communicators should be developed in the workplace particularly in the school setting which is the seat of dynamic social interaction.

The research was conducted to discover the factors affecting the language proficiency of selected staff and employees of San Beda College Alabang (AY 2009- 2010) College Department.

Problems:

1. What factors, in order of priority, act as filters among San Beda College Alabang employees in the use of the English language in the workplace?
2. In what situations do staff of San Beda College Alabang feel anxious or uneasy using the English language?
3. What measures can be taken to ease language anxiety in the workplace?

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The study was conducted using qualitative, descriptive and quantitative methods of research. A total of twenty five staff and employees participated. Three instruments were used for this study, a background questionnaire, the modified 35- item English Language Workplace Anxiety Scale (ELWAS) and an essay/ interview. The background questionnaire contained questions about the participant's age, position, and field of study. The modified 35- item (FLCAS) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was modified in order to make the questionnaire suitable to the school- based setting .

The yes-no answers in the trial survey were tallied. The answers to the last two questions were strictly categorized for the common reasons why the staffers were afraid to speak in English in their workstation. Then, all common responses were summed up. The responses of the staffers to the ELWAS were tabulated. Points were assigned for each scale. The scores were interpreted as follows: Strongly Agree – 5, Agree – 4, Sometimes – 3, Disagree – 2, and Strongly Disagree – 1. The percentage was computed for each scale.

The 35 statements were categorized into five different filters. The items were also tallied according to the following: lack of self-confidence (LSC), limited vocabulary (LV), mispronouncing words (MP), humiliation (H) and negative criticism (NC). The categorized statements or filters were tabulated. The mean for each statement was computed.

Finally, a range with descriptions for each mean was created. The scores of the mean in the Likert- scale were assigned by using the midpoint between two consecutive numbers. The midpoint was applied because there were equal distances between two points so as to have fair answers (Ex. 1.5 is the midpoint between 1 and 2).

1.0	– 1.500	– Strongly Disagree	– native speaker of English (LI)
1.501	– 2.500	– Disagree	– filter down (confident)
2.501	– 3.500	– Sometimes	– filter up (mental block)
3.501	– 4.500	– Agree	– (Victim)
4.501	– 5.00	– Strongly Agree	– (Language anxiety disorder) (LAD)

For the multiple-choice survey questionnaire, the number of responses for each letter was listed in a frequency table. Then, the percentage was computed and the result was rounded off. The percentages were represented in a bar graph. For the survey-questionnaire and multiple-choice type with a provision for their own responses- the number of responses per letter was listed in a frequency table.

The respondents' response were read and categorized. The results were counted based on the three given choices, which were whether they will respond to the party in English, Filipino or Taglish. The contents of the mini-essays were carefully read and analyzed. The similarities of the responses were also noted. Similar responses were combined. A group or category for each response was created and tabulated. Additional findings from books, journals and the internet were used to supplement the staffs' response. All related materials were then summarized.

## **FINDINGS:**

Surveys and interviews clearly presented the factors that act as filters to language anxiety among staff and employees. One of the prominent factors noted in this study is the lack of self- confidence of the respondents in speaking the English language towards their superiors, colleagues and in public speaking situations. This filter is shown and understood to be caused by lack of exposure and practice of the language. The statements provided by the respondents revealed that employees seldom had any exposure to the language since they are more at ease with Taglish in dealing with their peers and superiors as well as in public speaking situations.

This was likewise shown in the statements provided by the participants as well as the interview administered by the researcher in this study. As a result, the respondents are also having problems about the lack of facility of the language .Furthermore, many researchers have pointed out that the skill producing most anxiety is speaking (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991) This anxiety comes in part from a lack of confidence in o general linguistic knowledge but if only this factor were involved, all skills would be affected equally. What distinguishes speaking is the public nature of the skill, the embarrassment suffered from exposing language imperfections in front of others (Arnold, 2000: 3). Hence, a survey showed that though San Beda staff and employees are fluent in the English language, they experience some kind of anxiety when it comes to speaking that is public in nature. Past researchers have posited that anxiety in oral communication is produced by cognitive interferences based on self-related cognitions, e.g. their self-perceptions, self- esteem, perceived scholastic competence, beliefs about language learning, etc. (Krashen, 1985; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999: 228; Horwitz et al., 1986: 128-129). In this light, the background profile of

the participants revealed that some of the respondents may have experienced some kind of language anxiety even before they have started in their respective workplaces.

Furthermore, the results of the interview also reflected the trend of communication today which is the use of Taglish in transacting business or communicating with their colleagues and students. Most of the twenty five (25) respondents, answered that they communicate or transact business using Taglish instead of English or Tagalog. It is a noted fact that even in the academe, students, teachers and members of the administration are now constantly using Taglish in spite of the implementation of the English Speaking campaign between and among the students and employees as a medium of communication in the workplace. Indeed, the speakers of these mixed codes are mostly young and urban, frequently highly educated, and always multilingual. (Paper presented, Edgar W. Schneider, 2008).

Majority of the respondents expressed their inability and sometimes even acknowledged their language anxiety problem. These staff and employees may be good at other skills but, when it comes to speaking the English language, they claim to have a 'mental block' against it (Horwitz et al., 1986: 125).

Hence, summarizing the results of the survey and interview .The Following conclusions are cited:

1. Most of the respondents manifest debilitating anxiety that leaves the respondents with low self- image. Fear of being embarrassed is also a noted cause of anxiety among the employees.
2. Most of the staff and employees although well versed in the language are apprehensive in using the target language due to fear of negative evaluation and sometimes the pressure on the part of the employee that English proficiency may affect their performance in the workplace.
3. The language anxiety among the employees was found to be the result, as well as, the cause of insufficient command of the target language. It may be experienced due to linguistics difficulties employees' face in using the target language.
4. Descriptive statistics showed that the level of anxiety among the employees is relatively high. This is shown in the analyses of responses, which was indicated by an overall weighted mean of

3.570 which means, Victim of Language Anxiety Disorder (LAD). Many practitioners claim that they have a mental block against speaking a foreign language in their workplace (Horwitz et al., 1986).

5. To sum up, the most outstanding causes of this language phenomenon are the following: anxiety in committing mistakes, (negative criticism) lack of self- confidence, grammar and pronunciation, and lack of English vocabulary. Other causes are, poor self- perceptions, and the preference of the employees to the Taglish language.
6. The situations where employees most comfortable with are: speaking English to their superiors through the telephone and speaking in Taglish with their colleagues and superiors.

### **Suggestions and Recommendations:**

#### **How to Reduce Second Language Anxiety ( SLA)**

Staff- Support Services such as:

1. Measure Second Language Anxiety and language proficiency of incoming staff and employees.
2. Set- up a Second Language Support Office which can be used for intrapersonal reflection on the language application and practice, to track feelings of apprehension and to arrive at a more realistic, positive sense of their progress. Finally, to develop realistic communication goals. ( Cope- Powell, 1991)
3. Oral Skills Training that will provide seminar/ workshop outside the workplace in speaking skills and effective attitudes towards the English Language. Thus, these should provide training and learning opportunities to ensure effective employee performance, quality of work life, and professional growth of all employees.
4. Staff and employees exposure to language by implementing a policy of using English as medium of communication in the workplace. "Speaking good English comes as a result of using the language in natural situations on top of formally learning it".( Krashen's Theory of second language acquisition)
5. Implement a regular English proficiency workshop to the staff and employees, where activities offer them the chance to gain confidence in their own skills.

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