

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The effect of language learning anxiety on the learner of Turkish as a foreign language: The case of Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

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Accepted 21 July, 2011

**There exist quite many studies on the anxiety especially when it comes to the effect of foreign language learning anxiety on the learners. These studies show that there is a huge amount of foreign language learning anxiety impact on the learners. The present study focuses on the influence of foreign language anxiety on the Indian learners that take the elective course, Turkish I and II at Jawaharlal Nehru University. The results show that the anxiety level is low and the level of achievement in Turkish is quite high.**

**Key words:** Foreign language, anxiety, Turkish.

## INTRODUCTION

### Anxiety and foreign language anxiety

Anxiety is defined as the situation of incentive which happens through physical, sentimental, cognitive changes when one is faced with a motive (Taş, 2006). Anxiety is one of the most well-known and controversial concepts in psychology. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993: 2) in their studies have shown that anxiety has a great role in language learning. They imply that the self-confident students do not show foreign language anxiety and in case they do, the level is not too high to prevent them from learning (Brown, 1994: 141). In our country, there exists a system in which teaching grammar is regarded as the equivalence of teaching language. Demircan (1988: 45) states that grammar though not explicitly explained by the teachers is easy to teach, measure, and assess. The results of Horwitz (1986: 560), Horwitz and (1986: 125) show that many are stopped mentally when they learn a foreign language. Another finding in this study is that even those that are motivated and willing in math, science and music lose their motivation when learning a foreign language because they find it stressful learning a language in the classroom. We try to find out how the foreign language anxiety affects the learning motivation.

Allwright and Bainley (1991: 144-175) think that mother tongue has a role in the increase in the level of foreign language learning anxiety. They also believe that even in their mother tongue courses as in such courses as math, science and music, the students feel the anxiety in foreign language classes. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989: 257) advocate that the students get the feeling of anxiety from bad experiences, misbehaviour and prejudices created against that language rather than start to learn foreign language with anxiety. Littlewood (1984: 58-59) is of the opinion that foreign language is taught in natural environment otherwise this environment turns into the one that makes students feel negative about the language. In the classroom, if they can not pronounce well what they learn, they feel that they are ridiculed by their friends, criticized and corrected by their teacher. The language learners that feel diffident and anxious are psychologically introverted for communication in foreign language, which causes the interruption in learning unless this case stops.

MacIntyre (1995: 245-248) states that anxiety affects listening, learning and comprehension which are second language activities and that students become concerned

about miscomprehension or misinterpretation of language rules. Daly (1991: 3) points out that the reason why language learners that feel anxious about language have difficulty in writing is that they get excited when writing just because they feel obliged to strictly obey the rules of proper writing. Önerand (1986: 230) state that culture has a great role in anxiety. They add that anxiety in Turkish culture is a common feeling that is widely approved.

It has always become a widely discussed issue how and in what ways language is learned. There exist some factors that affect the way the people learn a second language; social environment, the level of interaction e.t.c which are external factors and language transfer, comprehension e.t.c which are internal (Doğan, 2008: 50). Besides, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) claim that individual differences have a lot of impact on language learning as in other subjects. Individual differences are age, gender, amount of experience in language learning and expressing own mother tongue correctly. Language competence, motivation, behavior, learning strategies, anxiety, concern and the memory power are regarded as individual differences and affect language learning (Scovel, 1978: 129-132). Horwitz et al. (1986: 25-128) point out that the students that have anxiety in foreign language are forgetful and have difficulty in concentration. These students are reported to sweat during the course and deal with their dresses. They are late or never participate in the course, hand in their assignments in time, or get ready for the course. It is observed that sometimes although they study hard, there is no considerable progress in their situation. Anxiety often brings about some physical symptoms like headache, nausea, stress, and inexplicable myalgia.

To put it in a different way, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993: 2-3) stress that the students with anxiety regard learning a second language as a disturbing experience. Therefore, they do not willingly participate in the indoor and outdoor activities and they do think that they will get social pressure when they make mistakes. Many researchers like Horwitz and Cope (1986: 125-132) believe that foreign language anxiety should be thought separate from that experienced in other courses. They explain that foreign language learning process consists of complicated experiences. The process requires the composition of their perceptions, beliefs, emotions and behaviour with classroom but it is not possible to claim it for children. As children do not develop self-perceptions, recognition and control mechanism, they do not get anxious about foreign language. As they are not aware of the rules when they use the language, they are not afraid of making mistakes. So, they easily adapt (Brown, 1994: 141).

Allwright and Bailey (1991: 175) claim that foreign language anxiety should differ from other kinds of anxiety. The aim of foreign language learning is not helping people acquire different conducts as in learning mother tongue. However, the learners of language find

themselves in a different atmosphere in all aspects, which might be a threat to their identity and self-image. Hence, learning a language becomes an element of freight and anxiety rather than excitement. Generally, as second language learning or foreign language acquisition takes place in the class, the students get even more anxious. They feel nervous in this environment just because they think they lack knowledge in the pronunciation and the syntax of the language they learn. If people do not feel at ease in language learning environment, a psychological barrier to language emerges and if the amount of anxiety is more than a certain level, this situation becomes an important obstacle in language learning process (Littlewood, 1984: 58-59). MacIntyre and Gardner (1995: 93) state that speaking activities increase the level of anxiety because during speaking the learners of foreign language have to interact with other people. Many researches in this respect have revealed that not only the speaking activities but also other skills like listening, reading and writing can all cause anxiety. Rogers (1989: 3) points out that the reason why students feel anxious about writing in foreign language is that they feel insufficient to do so. Vancı-Osam (1996: 1-19) is of the belief that learning a foreign language is an experience that reveals the anxiety for everybody. Kaya (1995: 45-46) that studies the relation of foreign language learners' motivation, anxiety, self-confidence and therefore their introvert and extravert characters with their participation in classroom activities have revealed that the students highly motivated, self-confident and extravert participate more in the classroom activities than the others. Aydın (1999) states that students in his study acknowledge that their anxiety about language results from personal reasons especially when they see speaking and writing skills negative, compare themselves with others and have higher expectations, misbeliefs about language learning.

Öztürk (2003: 45-47) who studies on student based foreign language learning anxiety advocates the anxiety results from the students' lack of self-confidence, being compared with others and from their views on the language. The discussions and researches on the effect of anxiety on foreign language learning sparked by Horwitz and Cope (1986: 128) still continue today. They discuss that it becomes more and more important to learn a foreign language nowadays in all areas and those that are aware of the fact are more anxious. Ganschow and Sparks (1996: 199-201) studied foreign language anxiety and mother tongue learning competences, the effect of the attitudes toward foreign language on women's learning a foreign language. From this study, one can conclude that students' learning their own mother tongue competences as well as their positive attitudes and behaviour toward foreign language affect the level of anxiety. The study also shows that the students whose level of anxiety about foreign language is low are more successful in learning a language.

## Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to determine the effect of foreign language anxiety on the learners of Turkish as a foreign language.

## RESULTS

In this section, the findings obtained through the responses given by the students to the 20 item Turkish anxiety scale were studied and interpreted. According to (Table 1) 41.5% of the students agree (39.2% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 42.8% do not agree (32.1% disagree, 10.7% strongly disagree) 15.4% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in Turkish language". From these responses, one can conclude that only a small number of students are confident in speaking Turkish and their level of anxiety is intermediate because a grand proportion (42.8%) disagrees on the item.

45.1% of the students agree (41.6% agree, 3.5% strongly agree), 46.3% do not agree (38% disagree, 8.3% strongly disagree), 8.3% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I do not worry about making mistakes in Turkish lessons". From these responses, one can conclude that the students have responded in parallel with the answers given above because the proportion of "Agree" and "Disagree" is close and it can be said that the students are partially anxious about making mistakes in Turkish.

28.4% of the students agree (26.1% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 61.8% do not agree (39.2% disagree, 22.6% strongly disagree), 9.5% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in Turkish lessons". From these responses, one can conclude that most of the students are confident in learning a foreign language and do not worry. 26.2% of the students agree (26% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 61.9% do not agree (50% disagree, 11.9% strongly disagree), 11.9% neither agree nor disagree on the item "It frightens me when I do not understand what my Turkish teacher is saying in the foreign language." From these responses, one can conclude that the level of anxiety of the students is lower.

20% of the students agree (14.2% agree, 5.9% strongly agree), 68.9% do not agree (38% disagree, 30.9% strongly disagree), 10% neither agree nor disagree on the item "In Turkish lesson, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course." From these responses, one can understand that the students have interest in the course and are highly motivated and also the level of anxiety is lower.

60.7% of the students agree (50% agree, 10.7% strongly agree), 25% do not agree (14.8% disagree, 1.2% strongly disagree), 14.2% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I am usually at ease during tests in Turkish lesson" From these responses, one can see that the

students do not worry about Turkish language exams.

49.9% of the students agree (39.2% agree, 10.7% strongly agree), 32% do not agree (27.3% disagree, 4.7% strongly disagree), 17.8% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Turkish lesson." The results show that when the students are not prepared for the course, the level of their anxiety increases. Besides, it must be considered that the number of those that are indecisive has increased.

30.9% of the students agree (29.7% agree, 1.2% strongly agree), 55.9% do not agree (42.8% disagree, 13.1% strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "In Turkish lesson, I can get so nervous I forget things I know". From this fact, one can conclude that the students compared to other answers given for the other items trust themselves and the level of their anxiety is lower.

27.3% of the students agree (25% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 60.6% do not agree (40.4% disagree, 20.2% strongly disagree), 11.9% neither agree nor disagree on the item "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in Turkish lesson". It can be concluded that most of the students are extremely self-confident and do not worry and some are diffident.

52.3% of the students agree (35.7% agree, 16.6% strongly agree), 34.4% do not agree (29.7% disagree, 4.7% strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I would not be nervous speaking Turkish with native speakers." We see that most of the students are confident in speaking Turkish with natives and are never bored. Some students are diffident as seen in the item above.

38.1% of the students agree (36.9% agree, 1.2% strongly agree), 48.8% do not agree (36% disagree, 11.9% strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I get upset when I do not understand what my Turkish teacher is correcting." From this fact, we can understand that half of the students are not worried about not understanding what the teacher is correcting and are at ease and some are worried as well as introvert as in the other items.

40.3% of the students agree (38.1% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 45.2% do not agree (35.7% disagree, 9.5% strongly disagree), 14.2% neither agree nor disagree on the item "Even if I am well prepared for Turkish lesson, I feel anxious about it." the responses given show that student are more anxious even though the number of those that disagree is more than the ones that agree. 4.7% of the students agree (4.7% agree, 0% strongly agree), 86.8% do not agree (45.2% disagree, 41.6 % strongly disagree), 8.3% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I often feel like not going to Turkish lesson." This item confirms that students enjoy taking Turkish course.

74.9% of the students agree (57.1% agree, 17.8% strongly agree), 11.9% do not agree (10.7% disagree,

**Table 1.** The questions, frequency and percentage of answers related to anxiety in Turkish as a foreign language.

Parameter			Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
No	Item		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in Turkish language	f %	2 2.3	33 39.2	13 15.4	27 32.1	9 10.7
2	I do not worry about making mistakes in Turkish lessons	f %	3 3.5	35 41.6	7 8.3	32 38.0	7 8.3
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in Turkish lessons	f %	2 2.3	22 26.1	8 9.5	33 39.2	19 22.6
4	It frightens me when I do not understand what my Turkish teacher is saying in the foreign language.	f %	6 7.1	16 19.1	10 11.9	42 50.0	10 11.9
5	In Turkish lesson. I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	f %	5 5.9	12 14.2	9 10.7	32 38.0	26 30.9
6	I am usually at ease during tests in Turkish lesson	f %	9 10.7	42 50.0	12 14.2	20 23.8	1 1.2
7	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Turkish lesson.	f %	9 10.7	33 39.2	15 17.8	23 27.3	4 4.7
8	In Turkish lesson. I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	f %	1 1.2	25 29.7	11 13.1	36 42.8	11 13.1
9	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in Turkish lesson.	f %	2 2.3	21 25.0	10 11.9	34 40.4	17 20.2
10	I would not be nervous speaking Turkish with native speakers.	f %	14 16.6	30 35.7	11 13.1	25 29.7	4 4.7
11	I get upset when I do not understand what my Turkish teacher is correcting.	f %	1 1.2	31 36.9	11 13.1	31 36.9	10 11.9
12	Even if I am well prepared for Turkish lesson. I feel anxious about it.	f %	2 2.3	32 38.1	12 14.2	30 35.7	8 9.5
13	I often feel like not going to Turkish lesson.	f %	0 0	4 4.7	7 8.3	38 45.2	35 41.6
14	I feel confident when I speak in Turkish lesson.	f %	15 17.8	48 57.1	11 13.1	9 10.7	1 1.2
15	The thought that my Turkish teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make frightens me.	f %	6 7.1	14 16.6	3 3.5	43 51.1	18 21.4
16	The more I study for a Turkish language test the more confused I get.	f %	2 2.3	13 15.4	12 14.2	34 40.4	23 27.3
17	I do not feel pressure to prepare very well for language Turkish lesson.	f %	9 10.7	40 47.6	8 9.5	22 26.1	5 5.9

Table 1. Contd.

18	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in Turkish lesson.	f	3	18	12	41	10
		%	3.5	21.4	14.2	48.8	11.9
19	I get nervous when I do not understand every word the Turkish teacher says.	f	9	21	11	35	8
		%	10.7	25.0	13.1	41.6	9.5
20	I get nervous when Turkish teacher asks questions which I have not prepared in advance.	f	10	30	10	27	7
		%	11.9	35.7	11.9	32.1	8.3

strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I feel confident when I speak in Turkish lesson." These answers show that students in Turkish feel comfortable and are not anxious.

23.7% of the students agree (16.6% agree, 7.1% strongly agree), 72.5% do not agree (51.1% disagree, 21.4% strongly disagree), 3.5% neither agree nor disagree on the item "The thought that my Turkish teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make frightens me." Therefore, it can be said that most students are not worried about making mistakes.

17.7% of the students agree (15.4% agree, 2.3% strongly agree), 67.7% do not agree (40.4% disagree, 27.3% strongly disagree), 14.2% neither agree nor disagree on the item "The more I study for a Turkish language test, the more confused I get." The responses show that most students are not worried about studying hard and have seized the importance of study.

58.3% of the students agree (47.6% agree, 10.7% strongly agree), 32% do not agree (26.1% disagree, 5.9% strongly disagree), 9.5% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I do not feel pressure to prepare very well for language Turkish lesson". The results show that students are content with preparing for Turkish course and are not anxious.

24.9% of the students agree (21.4% agree, 3.5% strongly agree), 60.7% do not agree (48.8% disagree, 11.9% strongly disagree), 14.2% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in Turkish lesson." The results show that most students are quite content with Turkish courses and are not anxious.

35.7% of the students agree (25% agree, 10.7% strongly agree), 51.1% do not agree (41.6% disagree, 9.5% strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I get nervous when I do not understand every word the Turkish teacher says." It is understood that most students are content with Turkish while some are anxious.

47.6% of the students agree (35.7% agree, 11.9% strongly agree), 40.4% do not agree (32.1% disagree, 8.3% strongly disagree), 13.1% neither agree nor disagree on the item "I get nervous when Turkish teacher asks questions which I have not prepared in advance." It

is clear from the responses that when students are not ready for the course, their level of anxiety increases.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that the level of foreign language anxiety of students taking the elective course Turkish I and II and studying at Jawaharlal Nehru University is low. The principal reason of this fact is the students' achievement in Turkish courses and exams. JNU students' arithmetic mean in Turkish in 2010-2011 school terms is quite high (A only 70 –79). It is observed that the level of anxiety of the students is high only when it comes to 7th and 20th items. 49.9% of the students agree on the 7th item "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Turkish lesson" . 47.6% of the students agree on the 20th item "I get nervous when Turkish teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance" .

Taking into consideration the responses of the students, high level of anxiety is related to the fact that they are not prepared for the course. We suggest that the students should be given some time to get ready for the lessons about which they are informed before hand in order to make students relaxed. Though some education experts state that this situation will lead students to tend to memorize or can not be ready to speak spontaneously when they have to do so, they are supposed to inform their students beforehand thinking that the increase in the level of anxiety affects adversely students learning.

In this paper, it was found out that there was negative relation between foreign language anxiety and the students' achievement in Turkish courses. This findings conform to that of Sarıgül (2000: 107) and Öner (2008: 88). In Sarıgül's research (2000), it is indicated that foreign language anxiety is different from ordinary anxiety, proper to the situation, that it emerges in foreign language courses and affects students achievement adversely. Öner (2008) also states in his research that foreign language anxiety has a negative effect on students achievement in foreign language courses. We can suggest from these findings that those that are to teach Turkish as a foreign language provide a classroom,

which is reliable and relaxing for the students because if people do not feel at ease and comfortable, as seen in Littlewood (1984: 58-59), they start to have psychological barriers in their mind and if the amount of anxiety is over a certain level, this fact turns into an obstacle in learning process. Besides, teachers are expected to give students, not being ready for the course, some time to get ready for the lessons about which they are informed beforehand in order to relieve their anxiety and make them relaxed. If teachers do so, they could prevent foreign language anxiety of their students and would facilitate their language learning and help them be away from the environment of anxiety.

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