Do anxious students produce lexically rich words? Evidence from classroombased group speaking task

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that students with a high level of anxiety in language learning had a debilitative or negative effect on their score or performance. In this study, the role of foreign language anxiety on lexical richness - diversity, sophistication, and density in a group speaking task was investigated. The participants' level of anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). After that, the speaking was conducted. Spoken outputs of twenty-seven students with varying levels of foreign language anxiety were transcribed and analyzed using D_Tools for lexical diversity, AntWordProfiler for lexical sophistication, and TagAnt for lexical diversity. It was found that low anxious students had the highest level of lexical diversity. In contrast, students with a moderate level of foreign language anxiety had the most sophisticated and dense words. Practical implications into testing were recommended to ease tension or nervousness in a group speaking task.

Keywords

Foreign language anxiety; Lexical richness; University students; Speaking task

Background of the study

In a speaking task inside the English classroom, foreign language anxiety (FLA) can be manifested when students mumble, produce stuttered words, or become a "babbling baby" (Price, 1991). Cognitively, some students would experience difficulty in vocabulary retrieval, which could result in incorrect words. Due to forgetting words and errors, the student may lose confidence and resigns from the speaking task. Ultimately, such action negatively impacts student's the performance or score, hindering the student from attaining his or her language goals (Eysenck, 1991). To some, FLA could lead to traumatic experiences in English language learning.

In foreign language learning, herein referred to as English, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) proposed three factors of FLA, including test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension. The above factors were elicited from a 33-item self-report measure called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Some items covered worries in committing mistakes in the language class, feeling of tension during language test, feeling nervous when the learner does not understand the words, and feeling overwhelmed by the number of rules when speaking a foreign language. Subsequent factors of FLA were modified based on the differing contexts of the study. For example, Aida (1994) found four factors: speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, fear of failing class, comfortableness in speaking with native Japanese. and negative evaluation toward the Japanese class. MacIntyre (1992) found social evaluation apprehension, academic evaluation anxiety, and disdain for language classes among French language learners. Several scholars initiated adaptations and modifications. In Thailand, Paranuwat (2011) deleted seven items and added five in FLCAS to suit the context of the study. Accordingly. six dimensions were found: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, fear of being less competent than others, negative attitudes toward the English language class, and beliefs about English language learning. Some specific worries among Thais were differences between what was prepared before the test and the test and the number of pronunciation rules and words to learn to speak English. Despite the concerns about the FLCAS, for example, non-inclusion of items related to reading and writing skills (Kim, 2002), the survey instrument is widely used to date.

Previous studies have utilized quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method designs to ascertain the effects of foreign language anxiety. Quantitatively, the level of learner anxiety and FLA factors are commonly reported (see Aida, 1994; Kim, 2002). Qualitative studies have also established sources of FLA (Ipek, 2016; Liu, 2014). Among Chinese and Taiwanese in their home countries, Liu (2014) coded test-related anxiety as a significant anxiety-provoking situation as compared with sitting and listening to the lecture. Another specific situation is speaking performance in public. When abroad, their anxiety is mainly provoked by inadequate language skills speaking. writing, listening, and oral in communication and presentation. Recently, mixed-method gained traction to triangulate results from quantitative and qualitative measures, such as survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Regardless of design, several debilitating effects were shown consistently in learner language performance and cognitive, social, affective states, and physiological states (Lou, 2013).

Liu (2014) coded effects of FLA among Chinese students in the US, including performance (poorer performances on any tasks), mentality and emotion (never felt relaxed; being alert and attentive), and motivation (low in spirits. depressed, self-doubt). The above results correspond to Lou's (2013) review of FLA effects, such as debilitative effects on academic, cognitive, social, affective, and personal aspects. One of Price's (1991) interviewees remarked, "I'd rather be in a prison camp than speak a foreign language" (p. 104).

Kormos and Dornyei (2004) reported that students with a positive attitude had more accurate performance than those with low-task attitude students. In a group speaking task, the partner's attitude toward the task, language anxiety, and motivation affected the number of arguments produced. To the researcher's knowledge, none has delved on lexical richness – diversity, sophistication, and density produced in a group speaking task of engineering students with varying levels of foreign language anxiety. It can be assumed that a lower level of anxiety leads to better performance or outcomes in language learning, for example, lexically-rich spoken outputs.

Lexical richness, according to Read (2000) is a term measuring the effectiveness of vocabulary use covering four dimensions such as lexical diversity, lexical sophistication, lexical density, and the number of errors in written and spoken outputs. Thawarom and Singhasiri (2020) argued that lexical richness predicts speaking task performance. In line with the previous findings reported, in this study, we argue that anxious students may produce a "variety of basic and sophisticated words" (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim, 1998, p. 101) in a group speaking task among Engineering students.

To this end, the present study aimed to explore the lexical richness of words produced by anxious English language learners during a group speaking task. One research question is answered – *What level of lexical diversity, lexical sophistication, and lexical density do anxious students produce in a group speaking task?*

Methodology

The data was collected from a foundation English course in a university in Thailand. One aim of the course is to develop students' communicative skills, and one of the tasks is a group speaking task. In this task, students were put in groups of four randomly. They were informed of the topics a week before the test. During the test, they were asked to select a random topic and prepare 7 minutes before the speaking activity. After the preparation stage, they were given another 7 minutes to perform the activity.

The corpus of spoken outputs was transcribed from the recordings of 27 participants who volunteered and consented to take part in the study. Twelve participants had high anxiety, fourteen with moderate anxiety, and one with low anxiety (see Table 1). Before the speaking task, their anxiety was measured using Paranuwat's (2011) modified FLCAS (see Appendix A), the most relevant measure anxiety measure concerning foreign language anxiety of Thais.

Table 1. Participants and their level of anxiety

Participant	M, SD	Level of anxiety
1	4.32, 0.03	High
2	4.03, 0.03	High
3	3.90, 0.05	High
4	3.81, 0.03	High
5	3.77, 0.04	High
6	3.77, 0.03	High
7	3.71, 0.05	High
8	3.71, 0.04	High
9	3.65, 0.03	High
10	3.58, 0.02	High
11	3.55, 0.03	High
12	3.52, 0.04	High
13	3.48, 0.04	Moderate
14	3.32, 0.03	Moderate
15	3.26, 0.02	Moderate
16	3.23, 0.02	Moderate
17	3.16, 0.03	Moderate
18	3.13, 0.03	Moderate
19	3.13, 0.03	Moderate
20	3.10, 0.05	Moderate
21	3.13, 0.02	Moderate
22	3.10, 0.04	Moderate
23	2.94, 0.04	Moderate
24	2.94, 0.03	Moderate
25	2.90, 0.04	Moderate
26	2.74, 0.03	Moderate
27	2.06, 0.04	Low

Procedures of data analysis

After transcribing the video recordings, the transcripts were read and reread to correct typos in the texts. As speaking is concerned, every utterance was counted as a word, so it was included in the text. Some foreign words (Thai) were manipulated according to their meaning. For Suranivate 13 was example. changed to SuranivateThirteen as it is one word and it is the name of the place. Then, the files were converted into text files so that the software is compatible with data for analysis. To measure the quality of vocabulary use or lexical richness in speaking among students with different anxiety levels, three different tools were employed to measure each facet. Data analysis is explained as follows.

Measuring lexical richness

Lexical diversity was measured by using D_Tools (Meara & Miralpeix, 2015), an online freeware. This program works by calculating the means of segmental TTR samplings. That is to say, by taking a set of 100 samples of 35 words each from the text, a mean type-token value for each of these samples is computed. The program then takes 100 samples of 36 words, 37 words, and 38 words, and so on up to 50 words and computes the mean TTR for each of these samples. The means of TTR then is compared to the best-fitting value of D in Malvern and Richards' theoretical model. In addition, the tool reports an error figure to indicate the closeness of model data and the actual data. The error score that is more than 0.01 indicates that the model is not a good match for the data. The program reports a value of D, which can vary between 1 and 120. Low D values indicate that the source text contains a lot of repetition and is not lexically rich; meanwhile, the high values of D indicate that the source text is lexically rich and tends not to repeat the exact words repeatedly (Meara, & Miralpeix, 2016, p. 33). The error statistic tells how close the data matches the model, and this figure should not be bigger than 0.01.

Lexical sophistication was analyzed by utilizing a program called AntWordProfiler (Anthony, 2014). This software generates a vocabulary profile in a text against three default vocabulary level lists, GSL_1st_1000, GSL_2nd_1000 (West, 1953), and AWL (Coxhead, 2000). The output is presented in prescriptive statistics according to the level (default) lists, plus words that do not belong to the default lists. Therefore, this program measures the lexical sophistication of the text. The end product shows the numbers of tokens, types, and groups (families) as well as a percentage of each vocabulary level, i.e., GSL_1st_1000/ GSL_2nd_ 1000/ AWL and Non-listed. In addition, the program provides a list of vocabulary of each level, and a list of sophisticated words can be explored.

The last aspect of lexical richness, lexical density, was obtained by calculating the number of content words against the total words in a text. To do so, a software TagAnt (Anthony, 2015) was employed. This software is a tagging tool based on TreeTagger, which assigns a Part-Of-Speech (POS) tagger to each word in a text file and allows users to see both content and functional words in a text. The number of content words was calculated as the percentage of lexical density.

Results and discussion

In this section, results of lexical diversity, lexical sophistication, and lexical density were shown. The high anxiety group had produced 1,835 words, 2,431 from the moderate (mid) anxiety group and 125 from the lone low anxious participant.

Lexical diversity



Figure 1: Lexical diversity of high anxiety group

Figure 1 shows the text produced by the high anxiety group of students was moderately rich as the D value is 36. The error figure is reported as 0.005, indicating the match of the data and the model.

Figure 2 displays the text produced by the mid anxiety group of students was moderately rich as the D value is 36.8. The error figure is reported as 0.003, indicating the match of the data and the model.

Figure 3 shows the text produced by the low anxiety group of students was moderately rich as the D value is 41.4. The error figure is reported as 0.00, indicating the match of the data and the model.



Figure 2: Lexical diversity of mid anxiety group

35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 4 541 0.758 0.755 0.747 0.747 0.737 0.733 0.735 0.73 0.723 0.726 0.729 0.756 0.75 0.75 0.757 0.758 0.755 0.748 0.745 0.74 0.75 0.73 0.729 0.726 0.722 0.719 0.715 0.712 0 STATISTICS total words=128 D=41.4 error=0	8 49 50 709 0.704 0.703 708 0.705 0.702
ata 0.758 0.755 0.747 0.747 0.737 0.735 0.725 0.726 0.726 0.756 0.756 0.756 0.756 0.757 0.726 0.727 0.726 0.727 0.726 0	709 0.704 0.703 708 0.705 0.702
000 075 075 075 076 076 076 077 075 072 072 072 072 077 075 077 0 STATISTICS total words=125 D=41.4 error=0	106 0 105 0 102
S IAIIS IICS total words-125 D-41.4 error-0	

Figure 3: Lexical diversity of high anxiety group

Lexical sophistication

Table 1 shows the vocabulary profile spoken by the highly anxious students, consisting of three GSL 1st 1000, vocabulary level lists -GSL_2nd_1000, Academic Word List (AWL) plus the optional off-list. The total number of words (tokens) is 1,835, where the main source of words is drawn from GSL 1st 1000 (82.78%), followed by GSL_2nd_1000 (3.98%). Only 15 tokens (0.82%) fall into AWL. Within 1,835 words, there were 307 different words (types). 178 word types belong to GSL_1st_1000, 33 word types fall into GSL_2nd_1000, and 8 word types are AWL. The total number of words makes 275 word families that 149, 30, 8, and 88 belong to GSL_1st_1000, GSL_2nd_1000, AWL, and offlist.

Table 2 displays the vocabulary profile spoken by the mid anxious students, which consists of three vocabulary level lists GSL 1st 1000, -GSL 2nd 1000, Academic Word List (AWL) plus the optional off-list. The total number of words (tokens) is 2,431, where the main source of words is drawn from GSL 1st 1000 (82.06%), followed by GSL_2nd_1000 (4.28%). Only 19 tokens (0.78%) fall into AWL. Within 2,431 words, there were 340 different words (types). 193 word types belong to GSL_1st_1000, 45 word types fall into GSL_2nd_1000, and 7 word types are AWL. The total number of words makes 301 word families that 161, 38, 7, and 95 belong to GSL_1st_1000, GSL_2nd_1000, AWL, and offlist, respectively.

Table 3 shows the vocabulary profile spoken by the lone low anxious student, consisting of three vocabulary level lists GSL 1st 1000. -GSL_2nd_1000, and AWL. The total number of words (tokens) is 125, where the main source of words is drawn from GSL_1st 1000 (83.2%), followed by GSL 2nd 1000 (4.8%) and AWL (23.81%). Within 125 words, there were 67 different words (types). 46 word types belong to GSL_1st_1000, 6 word types fall into GSL_2nd_1000, and 15 into AWL. The total number of words makes 63 word families that 42, GSL 1st 1000, 6, and 15 belong to GSL 2nd 1000, and AWL.

	Table 1.	Lexical sop	histication by	high anxi	ety group		
LEVEL	FILE	TOKEN	TOKEN%	TYPE	TYPE%	GROUP	GROUP%
1	1_gsl_1st_1000.txt	1519	82.78	178	57.98	149	54.18
2	2_gsl_2nd_1000.txt	73	3.98	33	10.75	30	10.91
3	3_awl_570.txt	15	0.82	8	2.61	8	2.91
0	-	228	12.43	88	28.66	88	32
TOTAL:		1,835		307		275	

Table 2: Lexical sophistication by mid anxiety group

LEVEL	FILE	TOKEN	TOKEN%	TYPE	TYPE%	GROUP	GROUP%
1	1_gsl_1st_1000.txt	1995	82.06	193	56.76	161	53.49
2	2_gsl_2nd_1000.txt	104	4.28	45	13.24	38	12.62
3	3_awl_570.txt	19	0.78	7	2.06	7	2.33
0	-	313	12.88	95	27.94	95	31.56
TOTAL:		2431		340		301	

Table 3. Lexical sophistication by low anxiety group

LEVEL	FILE	TOKEN	TOKEN%	TYPE	TYPE%	GROUP	GROUP%
1	1_gsl_1st_1000.txt	104	83.2	46	68.66	42	66.67
2	2_gsl_2nd_1000.txt	6	4.8	6	8.96	6	9.52
3	3_awl_570.txt	15	12	15	22.39	15	23.81
TOTAL:		125		67		63	

Lexical density

The lexical density is computed by multiplying the number of lexical words or content words by 100 then dividing it by the total percentage of words.

Tables 4 and 5 show the lexical density of text produced by the high anxiety group of students. The value of lexical density is 42.87%. The text comprises verbs with the highest percentage (17.59%), followed by noun density (14.27%) and adverbs (2.64%). On the other hand, the percentage of the adjective is the lowest in the text (4.36%).

Tables 6 and 7 show the lexical density of text produced by mid anxiety group of students. The value of lexical density is 43.27%. The text comprises verbs as the highest percentage (18.1%), followed by noun density (15.5%) and adverbs (5.76%). On the other hand, the percentage of the adjective is the lowest in the text (3.91%).

Tables 8 and 9 display the lexical density of text produced by the low anxiety group of students. The value of lexical density is 36.0%. The text comprises verbs with the highest percentage (15.2%), followed by noun density (14.4%) and adverbs (4.00%). On the other hand, the percentage of the adjective is the lowest in the text (2.40%).

	Table 4: Lexic	al density	of high	anxietv	group
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Content word	Nouns	verbs	adjective	adverbs	Lexical density
Total words	262	323	80	122	<u>787 x 100</u> = 42.87%
1,836	14.27%	17.59%	4.36%	6.64%	1,836

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No.	Words	Frequency	No.	Words	Frequency
1	like	97	6	study	11
2	go	39	7	class	9
3	university	16	8	name	9
4	neighborhood	15	9	enjoy	7
5	live	11	10	exercise	7

	Table 6: Lexica	al density	of moderate	anxiety group
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Content word	Nouns	verbs	adjective	adverbs	Lexical density
Total words	377	440	95	140	$1052 \ge 100 = 43.27\%$
2,431	15.51%	18.10%	3.91%	5.76%	2,431

Table 7: The first ten content words of the moderate anxiety group

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No.	Words	Frequency	No.	Words	Frequency
1	like	115	6	name	16
2	go	43	7	class	14
3	neighborhood	31	8	think	11
4	live	18	9	university	11
5	study	18	10	dislike	10

Table 8: Lexical density of low anxiety group

Content word	Nouns	verbs	adjective	adverbs	Lexical density
Total words	18	19	3	5	<u>45 x 100</u> = 36 %
125	14.40%	15.20%	2.40%	4.00%	125

Table 9: 1	the first ten content v	vords of the low anxiet	ty group		
No.	Words	Frequency	No.	Words	Frequency
1	like	6	6	exercise	1
2	friend	2	7	favorite	1
3	university	2	8	get	1
4	ask	1	9	live	1
5	eating	1	10	love	1

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The results showed that all groups of students mainly produced general vocabulary in their talk. The high anxiety group had produced 1,519 words GSL_1st_1000, from 73 words from GSL_2^{nd} ,1000, and 15 words from AWL. At the same time, the moderate (mid) anxiety group produced 1995 words based on GSL_1st_1000, 104 words from GSL_2nd_1000, and 19 words from AWL. For the low anxious participant, 104 words used in their talk were from GSL_1st_1000, 6 words from GSL_2nd_1000, and 15 words were academic. This result is probably due to the topic of the talk. In this case, the students somewhat conversed informally; the goal of communication is socializing with friends. It can be seen that general vocabulary such as like, go, university, neighborhood, and exercise were employed to ease the conversation. Thus, vocabulary use is not highly sophisticated. However, some academic words were produced when their talk was related to academic when talking about their major and subject of study.

The value of lexical density that the high anxiety group had produced was 42.87% (787 words), the moderate (mid) anxiety group was 43.27% (1,052 words), and the low anxious participant was 36% (45 words). In this case, in informal situations, participants might have omitted nouns as a subject of a sentence and start sentences using verbs. All participants produced the most density in verbs than other content words, while the density of adjectives was the least dense among all content words. At the same time, their conversation was straightforward, and the questions such as where you like to do, what to eat, or what you like to do after the class were direct that they might not have had too many adjectives to modify nouns.

Findings have shown that the low anxious student had the highest D, the most diverse among groups

of anxious students in the speaking task. The mid anxiety group had the most sophisticated lexical outputs and had the highest percentage of lexical density. It can be concluded that high anxious students had difficulties producing lexically rich utterances compared with students who have mid and low anxiety levels. Though correlation was not computed to show the relationship between the two variables, this interesting finding encompasses the debilitative nature of FLA reported previously (see Aida, 1994; Kim, 2002; Liu, 2014; Lou, 2013). However, since this study only included one student with low anxiety, the results may be different if there are more participants with this degree of anxiety. More studies are needed to explore corpus-based analysis of spoken outputs by anxious students and establish correlational relationships between the two variables.

Pedagogical implications

The following are practical implications that may ease the feelings of FLA among test-takers in a group speaking task.

(1) Let the students discuss the topics they are familiar with. Doing so would allow students to use their lexical resources instead of grasping for words during the speaking task.

(2) Give students time to plan ahead of the speaking test. When it is planned, students may feel more confident in performing the task.

(3) If students are put in groups randomly, allow students to become familiar with each other. Allowing students may lessen their fear of negative evaluation from peers.

(4) Provide a list of academic words students are expected to say related to the topic of discussion. The teacher may also demonstrate how to utilize the words in real-life situations. This would help them not to be overwhelmed with words to remember.

(5) Teach communication strategies needed in academic speaking activities. For example, pauses, self-repetition, or fillers are acceptable to a certain degree in authentic speaking situations.

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Appendix

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

Items	Statements
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class.
2	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English language class.
3	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English language class.
4	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.
5	The English language class moves so quickly that I am worried about getting left behind.
6	I keep thinking that other students are better at the English language than me.
7	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English.
8	I worry about the consequences of failing in my English language class.
9	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English language class.
10	I feel worried about the differences between what I have prepared for a test and the test.
11	The more I study for the English language test, the more confused I get
12	I feel like not going to my English class
13	I don't feel confident when I speak in English language class.
14	I usually get nervous during English tests in my class.
15	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.
16	I feel worried about learning English.
17	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.
18	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my English language class.
19	I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.
20	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.
21	Even if I am well-prepared for the English language test, I feel anxious about it.
22	I don't feel comfortable around speakers of English.
23	I get nervous when I am speaking English in class.
24	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.
25	I feel pressure to prepare very well for the English class.
26	I feel overwhelmed by the number of pronunciation rules I have to learn to speak English.
27	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions that I haven't prepared in advance.
28	I feel unhappy when I'm on my way to English class.
29	I'm often afraid that my English score will be less than what I expect.
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of words I have to learn to speak in English.
31	It bothers me at all to take more English classes.