Chapter 19

Foreign Language Anxiety's Impact on Immigrants and Refugees:
Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been tested from myriad different angles with many different populations in varying locations and contexts. The research demonstrates that FLA has a consistent, moderate negative impact on the learning and performance of a foreign or second language. Those learning in a formal setting (e.g., university students) have by far been the most investigated population within FLA research. Those living in the target second language group environment, who learn and utilize a second language outside of a formal learning setting, particularly immigrants and refugees, have also been shown to be impacted by FLA. This chapter first examines past reviews of the literature on FLA. Next, examples of FLA's impact on individuals outside of formal learning settings and then FLA's impact on immigrants and refugees are examined in order to discuss the similarities and differences between FLA's impact on different populations within various learning settings.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the phenomenon of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) by first, investigating past reviews of the literature on this topic since the late 1970's up to the current point in time. Second, this chapter investigates FLA's impact upon adult second and foreign language learners outside the classroom (i.e. outside of formal learning settings) (Merriam and Bierema, 2014). Finally, this chapter investigates FLA's impact on adult second language learners who live in the target language group environment (e.g. immigrants and refugees) in order to consider how FLA impacts specific populations of

adult learners outside of formal learning settings, be it similarly or differently. To that end, iconic FLA researcher, Horwitz (2001), stated:

In recent years, I have grown more interested in the experience of second language learning than in the simple prediction of its success. While language anxiety appears to be an important variable in explaining differential success in language learning, I feel that it is even more important in understanding the frustration and discomfort too many people endure when learning a second language… language anxiety is fundamental to our understanding of how learners approach language learning (p. 122)

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXEITY IN THE LITERATURE

Scovel's (1978) hallmark literature review was influential in bringing to light the mixed and puzzling results elicited by studies, up to that point in time, on anxiety and its influence on foreign and second language learning. First, he accomplished this by pinpointing past researchers' problems in defining and keeping key terms straight. Second, he identified the varying measurement instruments along with different anxiety measures they employed which consequently lead to (mis)interpretations of the data they had gathered.

Thereafter he delved into and then established, in more clear ways, what anxiety is and how it can be understood and made manifest regarding its relationship with and influence upon foreign and second language learning. Furthermore, he zeroed in on the importance and need of language researchers to utilize clarity in terms of the type of anxiety they are measuring, thereby alleviating the quantity of variables, the lack of which could potentially negatively influence and weaken the study's results. Scovel (1978) also posited that anxiety's influence is more of a factor in adult foreign and second language learning as opposed to its informal and unconscious counterpart, foreign and second language acquisition, based on Krashen's (1976) Monitor Theory. Scovel (1978) was indeed successful at clearing the air, to a large extent, on the topic of anxiety and its impact on foreign and second language learning inasmuch as his literature review paved the way for high amounts of future research by guiding researchers to take care in specifying the specific type of anxiety they were to measure.

In following Scovel's (1978) advice, a few key terms will now be set out before moving forward. Second language is often used as a blanket term for both foreign and second language (for specific examples see Horwitz, 2001, p. 122; Littlewood and William, 1984, p. 2; Purpura, 2016, p. 190; Young, 1991, p. 434). For all intents and purposes of this chapter, foreign language learning and performance is used in reference to the learning and performance of a target language in a learner's home country where it is not their first language (L1) (e.g. when a German is learning or utilizing English in Germany). On the other hand, when a learner is in a different host country where the target language is not the same as the learner's L1, where they live in a second language group environment, it is used for reference in this chapter as second language learning and performance (e.g. when a German is learning and or utilizing English in England).

Additional important definitions for this chapter come from Merriam and Bierema's (2014) discussion on the differences between formal, nonformal, and informal learning settings. Formal learning settings correspond to learning sites with educational bureaucracies (e.g. colleges and universities) whereas nonformal settings correspond to more short-term and voluntary learning settings which take place in public places and are sponsored by specific organizations and agencies (e.g. job training). Informal

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