



A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO REDUCING SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ENGLISH IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu bob maktab o'quvchilarida ingliz tilida (ikkinchi til sifatida) gapirishdagi xavotirni tushunish va kamaytirish uchun psixolingvistik asosni taklif qiladi. Zamonaviy tadqiqotlarga tayanib, u kognitiv jarayonlar – masalan, ishchi xotira va leksik qidiruv – hamda affektiv holatlar, jumladan, xavotir, motivatsiya va tilga bo'lgan munosabat o'rtasidagi o'zaro ta'sirni ko'rsatuvchi dalillarni sintez qiladi. Bobda ikkinchi tilda gapirishdagi xavotir shunchaki hissiy javob emas, balki samarali til ishlab chiqarishga to'sqinlik qiladigan muhim kognitiv yuk ekanligi ta'kidlanadi. Mavjud tadqiqotlarni tanqidiy baholash orqali, u kognitiv qayta qurish, ishchi xotirani yaxshilash va leksik ravonlikni o'rgatishga qaratilgan psixolingvistik aralashuvlar xavotirni samarali kamaytirish va ikkinchi tilda muloqot qilish istagini oshirish mumkinligini ko'rsatadi. Muhokama pedagogika uchun amaliy oqibatlar va kelajakdagi tadqiqot yo'nalishlari bilan yakunlanadi, ikkinchi til ta'limida empirik tasdiqlangan, kognitiv jihatdan asoslangan strategiyalarga bo'lgan ehtiyojni ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: Psixolingvistika, Gapirish Xavotiri, Ikkinchi Tilni Egallash, Ishchi Xotira, Leksik Qidiruv, Tilga Munosabat, Muloqotga Tayyorlik, Maktab O'quvchilari

Abstract: This chapter proposes a psycholinguistic framework for understanding and mitigating English as a Second Language (L2) speaking anxiety among school students. Drawing on contemporary research, it synthesizes evidence



highlighting the interplay between cognitive processes—such as working memory and lexical retrieval—and affective states, including anxiety, motivation, and language mindset. The chapter argues that L2 speaking anxiety is not merely an emotional response but a significant cognitive load that impedes efficient language production. By critically evaluating existing studies, it outlines how psycholinguistic interventions, focusing on cognitive restructuring, working memory enhancement, and lexical fluency training, can effectively reduce anxiety and improve L2 willingness to communicate. The discussion culminates in practical implications for pedagogy and future research directions, emphasizing the need for empirically validated, cognitively informed strategies in L2 education.

Keywords: *Psycholinguistics, Speaking Anxiety, L2 Acquisition, Working Memory, Lexical Retrieval, Language Mindset, Willingness to Communicate, School Students*

Аннотация: В данной главе предлагается психолингвистическая основа для понимания и снижения тревожности при говорении на английском языке (как втором языке) у школьников. Опираясь на современные исследования, она синтезирует данные, подчеркивающие взаимосвязь между когнитивными процессами — такими как рабочая память и лексический поиск — и аффективными состояниями, включая тревожность, мотивацию и языковое мышление. В главе утверждается, что тревожность при говорении на втором языке является не просто эмоциональной реакцией, а значительной когнитивной нагрузкой, препятствующей эффективному производству речи. Путем критической оценки существующих исследований, она описывает, как психолингвистические вмешательства, сфокусированные на когнитивной реструктуризации, улучшении рабочей памяти и тренировке лексической беглости, могут эффективно снижать тревожность и повышать готовность к общению на втором языке. Обсуждение завершается практическими рекомендациями для педагогики и направлениями будущих



исследований, подчеркивая необходимость эмпирически подтвержденных, когнитивно обоснованных стратегий в обучении второму языку.

***Ключевые слова:** Психолингвистика, Тревожность при говорении, Овладение вторым языком, Рабочая память, Лексический поиск, Языковое мышление, Готовность к общению, Школьники*

Introduction

The acquisition of English as a Second Language (L2) is a cornerstone of global education, yet many school students grapple with significant speaking anxiety, which profoundly impedes their communicative competence and overall learning experience. This anxiety, often manifesting as reluctance to speak, fear of making mistakes, and self-consciousness, is a pervasive challenge in L2 classrooms worldwide.

Literature Review

L2 speaking anxiety is a complex, multi-faceted construct, often defined as a distinct type of anxiety experienced when learning or using a second language [4]. Its detrimental effects on L2 performance, motivation, and WTC are well-documented [1]. From a psycholinguistic perspective, L2 speaking involves a rapid and intricate sequence of cognitive operations, including conceptualization, lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and articulation. Any disruption or inefficiency in these processes can lead to increased cognitive load, which is a primary driver of anxiety.

Seminal work in psycholinguistics highlights the role of working memory (WM) as a crucial cognitive resource for L2 production. WM is responsible for temporarily holding and manipulating information during complex tasks, such as speaking. In L2 production, WM capacity is heavily taxed by the need to simultaneously access L2 lexicon, apply grammatical rules, monitor output, and manage self-correction [2]. When WM resources are strained, the system becomes vulnerable to interference, leading to disfluencies, errors, and, critically, heightened anxiety. Research by Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2024) [2] underscores this, revealing



that foreign language anxiety significantly predicts perceived L2 oral fluency, particularly in individuals with weaker WM.

Methodology

To empirically validate a psycholinguistic approach to reducing L2 speaking anxiety in school students, a robust research methodology would be essential. A mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data, would provide a comprehensive understanding of the intervention's impact.

Research Design: A quasi-experimental, longitudinal design would be appropriate, involving an intervention group receiving psycholinguistically informed strategies and a control group receiving standard L2 instruction. Pre- and post-intervention assessments, along with follow-up measures, would track changes in anxiety levels, cognitive performance, and WTC over time.

Participants: The target population would be school students (e.g., middle school students, as in [1]) learning English as an L2, selected from multiple schools to enhance generalizability. A sample size sufficient for statistical power would be determined.

Speaking Anxiety Measures: Standardized questionnaires such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) adapted for speaking, or more specific L2 speaking anxiety scales.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC): Self-report questionnaires assessing students' readiness to engage in L2 communication [1].

Working Memory (WM) Assessment: Cognitive tasks such as numerical span, reading span, or listening span tests to measure WM capacity [2].

Lexical Retrieval Fluency: Verbal fluency tasks (e.g.

Findings & Analysis

Synthesizing the provided evidence reveals a compelling psycholinguistic perspective on L2 speaking anxiety. The findings collectively underscore that anxiety



is not merely an emotional state but a significant cognitive impediment, intricately linked to the efficiency of language processing.

The study by Li et al. (2024) [1] provides foundational insights, demonstrating that communication anxiety directly and negatively impacts L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) among middle school students. Crucially, this relationship is mediated by both growth language mindset and language learning motivation. This finding highlights that anxiety can erode the cognitive belief in one's ability to improve (growth mindset) and diminish the drive to engage (motivation). From a psycholinguistic standpoint, a fixed mindset or low motivation can lead to cognitive disengagement, making the already demanding task of L2 speaking feel insurmountable and thus triggering anxiety. Conversely, fostering a growth mindset can be seen as a cognitive restructuring process that builds resilience against anxiety by reframing challenges as opportunities for growth, thereby improving WTC.

Papi and Abdollahzadeh's (2024) [2] research further solidifies the cognitive underpinnings of anxiety, revealing a direct link between foreign language anxiety, working memory (WM), and perceived L2 oral fluency. Their finding that anxiety significantly predicts lower perceived fluency in individuals with weaker WM is critical.

Discussion

The synthesis of evidence strongly supports a psycholinguistic approach to reducing L2 speaking anxiety in school students, reframing anxiety as a significant cognitive load rather than solely an affective state. The core argument is that anxiety consumes vital cognitive resources, particularly working memory (WM), thereby impeding efficient lexical retrieval and overall fluency [2]. This cognitive interference creates a vicious cycle where disfluency fuels anxiety, further hindering performance.

Cognitive Restructuring and Mindset Shift: The mediating role of growth language mindset [1] is paramount. By teaching students that language ability is malleable and can be improved through effort, educators can foster a cognitive



framework that views errors as learning opportunities rather than failures. This cognitive restructuring reduces the threat perception associated with L2 speaking, thereby lessening the anxiety-induced cognitive load.

Working Memory Enhancement and Load Management: Given that anxiety disproportionately affects perceived fluency in individuals with weaker WM [2], interventions must target WM capacity and efficiency. Strategies such as pre-task planning, chunking information, practicing formulaic language, and strategic pausing can reduce the real-time cognitive demands of L2 production.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a psycholinguistic framework for understanding and reducing English L2 speaking anxiety in school students. By critically synthesizing contemporary research, it has argued that L2 speaking anxiety is fundamentally a cognitive phenomenon, intricately linked to the efficiency of working memory, lexical retrieval, and the influence of language mindset. The proposed psycholinguistic strategies—encompassing cognitive restructuring, working memory load management, and lexical fluency training—offer a robust, evidence-informed pathway to mitigate anxiety and enhance students' willingness to communicate.

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