Teachers' Anxiety about Using L2 in EFL Classrooms

Abstract

A lot of research on learners' anxiety has been done, but the study on teachers' anxiety seems to be overlooked. According to Spielberger (1983) anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry. Teachers' anxiety may influence teaching performance in many ways, by causing teachers to worry, feel uncertain, and have tensions while teaching in the classroom. From the researchers' experience, we have observed that one reason that causes anxiety is when teachers use L2 and students show some signs that they do not understand or cannot follow their instructions. Some teachers may decide to switch from L2 into L1 as they are worried that using L2 alone can not facilitate learning. This study, thus, aims to examine whether teachers truly have anxiety when using L2 in EFL classrooms and what causes them to have that anxiety. The subjects are Thai teachers at King MongKut's University of Technology Thonburi, Thailand who teach the first fundamental English course. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are employed. The results from this study may help us understand the state anxiety of the teachers.

I. Introduction

A. Background of the Study

The main focus of all English courses at the Department of Language Studies, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) is to prepare students to be able to fully participate and learn in an English-medium environment. Therefore, teachers at the university are required to use English as a means of teaching English in class. Unfortunately, there are some groups of undergraduate students whose English proficiency is very low. Therefore, some teachers may face anxiety problems about using English in class because the students may not comprehend what the teachers try to convey. However, there is no evidence confirming this anxiety. This inspired the researchers to find out whether or not the teachers really have anxiety using English with low English proficiency students.

B. Literature Review

In general, anxiety was seen as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1983). Dörnyei (2005) indicates two types of anxiety: trait anxiety (a stable predisposition to become anxious in a cross-section of situations) and state anxiety (the transient, moment-to-moment experience of anxiety as an emotional reaction to the current situation). For this study, we aim to investigate the state anxiety that occurs occasionally in specific situation i.e. English class.

Since the mid 1960s scholars have considered the possibility that anxiety interferes with second language learning and performance. The findings from early research on the correlation between anxiety and foreign language learning were still in a mist until 1978. According to Scovel (1978), several studies show negative, positive, and even no relationships between anxiety and second language achievement resulted from the use of different anxiety measures. He then suggested language researchers be specific

about the types of anxiety they are measuring (Horwitz, 2001). Since then, researchers have been careful to specify the types of anxiety they are measuring and a definition of language anxiety has been more clearly explained.

Horwitz et al. (1986) state that a specific type of foreign language anxiety refers to a distinct complex of self perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) see second/foreign language anxiety as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning. It is widely accepted that many learners experience anxiety in second/foreign language classrooms, especially when speaking the target language (Horwitz et al., 1986; Hilleson, 1996; and MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994).

Although numerous studies on second/foreign language anxiety have been conducted throughout forty decades (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young 1991; Hilleson, 1996; Oxford 1999; Kitano 2001; and Lin, 2005), most of those studies reveal only learners' anxiety towards learning the target language. There are a few studies related to teachers' anxiety in using English in class. For example, Hock (2003) studied about the anxieties of preservice teachers' in using English to teach mathematics. The results reveal that although the preservice teachers' main anxieties concerned the use of English as the medium of instruction, the teachers were also anxious about how mathematical meaning was constructed. Hock's study aims to measure teachers' anxiety in particular subject. It strikes the researchers to examine teachers' anxiety of using English in EFL classroom.

II. Purposes of Study

The aims of this study are to find out whether Thai teachers truly have anxiety when using English in class and what cause them to have that anxiety.

III. Methodology

A. Subjects
The subjects of this study were 32 Thai lecturers of English who taught LNG 101: Fundamental English I, which was the first course for the weakest groups of students whose English subject scores in the National Admission Examination were lower than 50 out of 100.

B. Research Instruments
The questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used in this study. Apart from being the first measure that taps into learners' anxiety towards language learning, it has been used widely and translated into different languages (Chu, 2008 and Oxford, 1999). The questionnaire consisted of four main sections: a multiple choice section asking for the subjects' personal information, a 5-point rating scale concerning the subjects' opinions towards situations that caused anxiety, a 5-point rating scale concerning techniques the subjects used to reduce anxiety, and an open-ended question asking about other techniques they used. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was piloted.

To confirm the teachers' anxiety, a semi-structured interview with 4 open-ended questions was also employed. The first two questions were used to check if the teachers really face a problem of anxiety and how they handle it. The other two questions aimed to check if the teachers viewed their anxiety as negative or positive factors in language teaching and to find out the major teaching aspects that caused students' difficulties when the teachers used English. Six teachers were selected to be interviewed according to the results of the questionnaire; three of them had anxiety and the others had no anxiety.

C. Data Analysis
The subjects' responses were analyzed descriptively by calculating average scores to determine what trends the data suggested about the teachers' perception towards their anxiety and the techniques they used to reduce their anxiety. In the open-ended sections of the questionnaire and the semi-structure interview, similar items were grouped.

IV. Data Presentation

A. Data from the Questionnaire

Figure1. Teachers' Anxiety
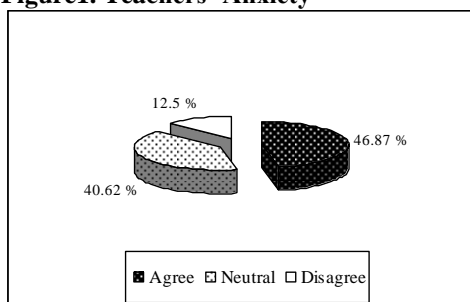
4.21-5.0 = Strongly Agree
3.41-4.20 = Agree
2.61-3.40 = Neutral
1.81-2.60 = Disagree
1.00-1.80 = Strongly Disagree

As can be seen from Figure 1, 46.87% of the teachers worried about using English to teach low proficiency students in language class as the mean was 3.44-4.17, while 40.62% of them felt neutral (2.61-3.39). However, a few of them (12.5%) did not worry (2.22-2.56). The levels of teachers' anxiety towards various situations of using English in class with low English proficiency students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Anxiety towards Various Situations

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Level
1	Students don't understand when the teachers use English in language class.	4.06	0.8	Agree
2	Students show some signs that they feel bored e.g. yawning, sleeping, sitting quietly etc.	3.90	1.01	
3	Using English to teach low proficiency students in language class.	3.84	0.92	
4	Students do not pay attention to me e.g. chatting with their friends, doing other work.	3.84	1.11	
5	Students cannot follow my instructions in English. They cannot do the task according to the steps given.	3.81	0.69	
6	Students show some signs that they don't understand the teachers e.g. frowning, scratching their heads.	3.66	0.87	
7	Students won't understand the lesson that the teachers have already taught when a few of them ask me to explain it in L1 (Thai).	3.53	0.95	
8	Students won't understand the lesson, for example, a few of them start asking questions about the content that I have already explained in English.	3.44	0.91	
9	Teach grammar rules in English.	3.41	1.21	
10	13. I feel worry when I have to use metalanguage (technical terms used when we explain grammar rules) in the class.	3.28	1.02	Neutral
11	8. I feel anxious whenever I see some students ask their friends to explain the lesson that I have already taught in L1.	3.22	0.87	
12	15. I worry when I give consultations to my students in English.	3.16	1.3	
13	18. I feel worry when I have to use English to give feedback or error treatment to my students.	3.06	1.26	
14	10. I feel worry when I have to explain the meaning of vocabulary in English.	2.97	0.97	
15	12. I worry when I use English to manage the classroom e.g. grouping the students.	2.47	0.76	
16	16. I have anxiety when I ask questions or elicit some ideas from	2.41	0.95	

				Disagree
	my students in English.			
17	17. I worry when I have to use English to answer students' questions. I think they understand me.	2.41	1.01	
18	14. In class, I worry when I have a small talk with my students in English.	2.16	0.92	

Table 1 shows that the teachers generally felt worried when they knew that they had to use English to teach low proficiency students as the mean was 3.84. They also worried when they knew that their students did not understand them when they used English in class as the mean was 4.06. The other situations in which the teachers felt anxious (3.41-3.90) were shown through students' behaviours and interactions such as showing some signs that they felt bored, did not understand, and could not follow instructions in English e.g. yawning, frowning, chatting, doing other work, asking the teachers to explain the content in L1, etc. Moreover, the teachers revealed that they were worried when they had to teach grammar rules in English (mean of 3.22).

Figure2. Frequency of Using Techniques to Reduce Anxiety
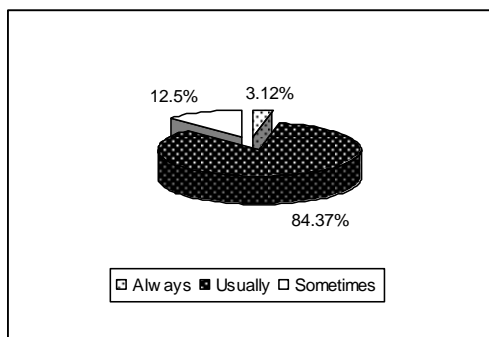
4.21-5.0   = Always
3.41-4.20 = Usually
2.61-3.40 = Sometimes
1.81-2.60 = Rarely
1.00-1.80 = Never

According to the data in Figure 2, all the teachers used some techniques to reduce their anxiety caused by using English with the low proficiency students. The majority of the teachers (84.37%) usually used

some techniques to reduce their anxiety, while some of them (12.5%) always did. However, a few of them (3.12%) sometimes did.

Table 2. Frequency of Techniques Used

Rank	Techniques	Mean	SD	Frequency
1	Give examples when explaining difficult concepts.	4.59	0.56	Always
2	Use simple words.	4.41	0.56	
3	Ask questions to check students understanding.	4.34	0.65	
4	Repeat by paraphrasing.	4.32	1	
5	Use short phrases and short sentences.	4.22	0.61	
6	Repeat what had been said again.	4.22	0.75	
7	8. When I teach, I speak very slowly and clearly.	4.06	0.8	Usually
8	9. I try to use body language to help them understand me.	4.06	0.72	
9	14. I change students' attitudes by telling them the benefits of using L2 in class.	3.84	0.85	
10	12. I avoid using metalanguage but using examples instead.	3.69	1.12	
11	7. I use visual aids to help students understand what I explain to them.	3.56	1.08	
12	4. I write instructions or explanations on the board with simple English.	3.44	1.11	
13	6. I check students' understand by asking some of them to explain or paraphrase what I have taught in L2 or L1.	3.41	0.95	
14	16. I translate what students don't understand in L1.	3.34	0.87	Sometimes
15	15. I use both L2 and L1 but I don't translate.	3.19	0.64	
16	17. I ask some students who understand me to translate what I have said in Thai.	2.78	1.01	
17	13. I leave the topic that I am teaching for a while because I think it is too difficult for my students. I will teach it later on.	2.06	0.84	Rarely

As can be seen in Table 2, the techniques that were always used are giving examples, using simple words, asking questions to check students' understanding, repeating by paraphrasing, using short phrases and short sentences, and repeating what had been said again.

B. Data from the Semi-Structured Interview
The data from the semi-structured interview of the six teachers can be presented according to the following aspects.

(a) Effects of Anxiety towards Teaching
All the six teachers revealed that they considered anxiety as a concern, and this concern created awareness. Because of this concern, they were aware of making sure that students really understood of what being taught. Four teachers also viewed anxiety as both negative and positive factors in language teaching. They explained that the major problem caused by teachers' anxiety was that the planned teaching steps were not followed, while the positive effect was that it encouraged them to be more aware when planning a lesson. It inspired the teachers to prepare to solve the problem in advance.

(b) Situations causing anxiety
All teachers reported that giving explanations in English, especially for difficult concepts, could cause anxiety. Although they used some techniques to facilitate their students' language learning, one teacher gave a crucial point of view that too much support might make students lazy to try to understand the teachers' explanation. According to her experience, she believed that learning English does not mean that students need to understand every single word. On the contrary, they need to be trained to get the gist of what is being taught. In her view, students had to try to achieve their learning goals.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded that although almost half of the teachers felt worried about using English to teach low English proficiency students in class, none felt strongly anxious or strongly unconcerned. The situation that led to their anxiety was knowing that they had to use English to teach low proficiency students in language class and the anxiety increased when they realized that their students did not understand their English. However, having such anxiety was not a big problem because all of them had their own teaching techniques to reduce their anxiety and facilitate their students' language learning. In the researchers' opinion, these techniques are great beneficial, especially to students, because the techniques not only facilitate their language learning, but also promote more opportunity to expose themselves to the target language. On the contrary, if teachers always use L1 whenever their students show some signs of difficulties in understanding their English, where else they can learn the target language. The results of the interview show that teachers' anxiety was also regarded as a concern. Because of this concern, teachers prepared their teaching more carefully. Accordingly, the researchers agree that anxiety can be seen as a positive factor since it encourages teachers to improve their teaching preparation. Therefore, teachers who have anxiety in using English with low proficiency students in class should reconsider their negative perception and make the most of helpful anxiety (Oxford, 2005). However, teachers should be aware of not giving too much support because it may spoil their students. Proper support and training students to be able to understand and acquire English can be a stepping stone that encourages them to achieve their learning goals.

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