doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4–2-43-55
rudn.tlcjournal.org

Original Research

The fear factor: Xenoglossophobia or how to overcome the anxiety of speaking foreign languages

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Date of submission: 19.01.2020 | **Date of acceptance for publication:** 4.06.2020
Recommended citation format: Böttger, H., & Költzsch, D. (2020). The fear factor: Xenoglossophobia or how to overcome the anxiety of speaking foreign languages. *Training, Language and Culture, 4*(2), 43-55. Doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4-2-43-55

The article approaches a ubiquitous as well as a rarely adequately addressed problem area of learning and teaching foreign languages. It concentrates on xenoglossophobia, the fear of speaking foreign languages. Why do avoidance strategies as well as phobias develop during childhood especially in the foreign language classroom whenever it comes to the productive usage of the English language? Psychological, pedagogical, didactical as well as language related and neuroscientific findings are analysed and interpreted in order to help answer central questions like the above. The theoretical indications are further supported by a fundamental pilot study based on the productive language usage of foreign language students (n=108) and the according reflective and prospective analysis. The second part of the article brings all these findings together and outlines language didactical, meaningful, positive preventive, diagnostical, and therapeutic opportunities for intervention in the foreign language classroom.

KEYWORDS: *xenoglossophobia, language anxiety, amygdala, language learning, didactical intervention*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Neurobiological home of anxiety

The human brain is a highly complex organ. It allows humans to think, act, feel, laugh, speak, create, and love. Yet, the core mission of the brain is to sense, perceive, process, store, and act on information from the external and internal environment to ensure survival. In order to do so, the human brain has developed an efficient and logical bottom-up organisational structure. The bottom regions (e.g. brainstem and midbrain) control the basic vital functions such as respiration, heart rate, and blood pressure regulation. The top areas (e.g. limbic and cortex areas) monitor more complex functions such as thinking and emotional regulation. During infancy and childhood, the development of the brain follows this bottom-up structure: The most regulatory, bottom regions of the brain mature first, followed by adjacent but higher, more complex regions. The developmental process is mainly guided by experience. The brain develops and modifies itself in response to each and every

experience, good as well as bad (Perry & Marcellus, 2020; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000): Neurons and synapses, the connections among these brain regions, change in an activity-dependent way. This very early use-dependent developmental process is the first key to understanding the impact of fear on the process of language acquisition, especially foreign language learning (Engels et al., 2007).

The more a certain neural system is activated, the more it builds an internal representation of the experience corresponding to that specific neural activation. This is the basis for learning and memory. Age, however, makes a difference – due to the plasticity or receptiveness to environmental input: The sensitive brain of a child is more malleable but also more vulnerable to experience than a mature brain. In order to develop normally, different regions of the brain require specific kinds of experience, e.g. visual input while the visual system is organising. These times during development are called critical or sensitive periods. In all, with optimal experiences, the brain develops healthy, flexible, and diverse capabilities.

Disruptions of timing, intensity, quality or quantity of normal developmental experiences, however, cannot be avoided and are common, as well. Nonetheless, it might have a devastating impact on the brain's development and function, when occurring too often, regularly, and not falling back below a certain intensity level. It then can insidiously create bad feelings like fear, anxiety, or worry.

Fear is an emotional, physical response or reaction to a clear foreseen and present danger of harm and affects the ability to focus and think. Anxiety arises as a negative emotional response to anticipated events and has cognitive as well as controlling elements (Horwitz, 2010). The cognitive aspect is what interferes with academic performance. Therefore, the ability to concentrate, focus and think are also affected. Worry generates potential negative outcomes, often as a result of an elaborate cognitive process. It has more to do with thinking than with feeling and negatively influences the ability to concentrate and think. In this paper, worry as a clearly subliminal, non-dangerous, and normal but also only temporal human state of mind can be neglected and will not be further addressed.

1.2. The pre-frontal cortex and the amygdala

Two neural systems are mainly involved in language related fear and anxiety: the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala (cf. Figure 1).

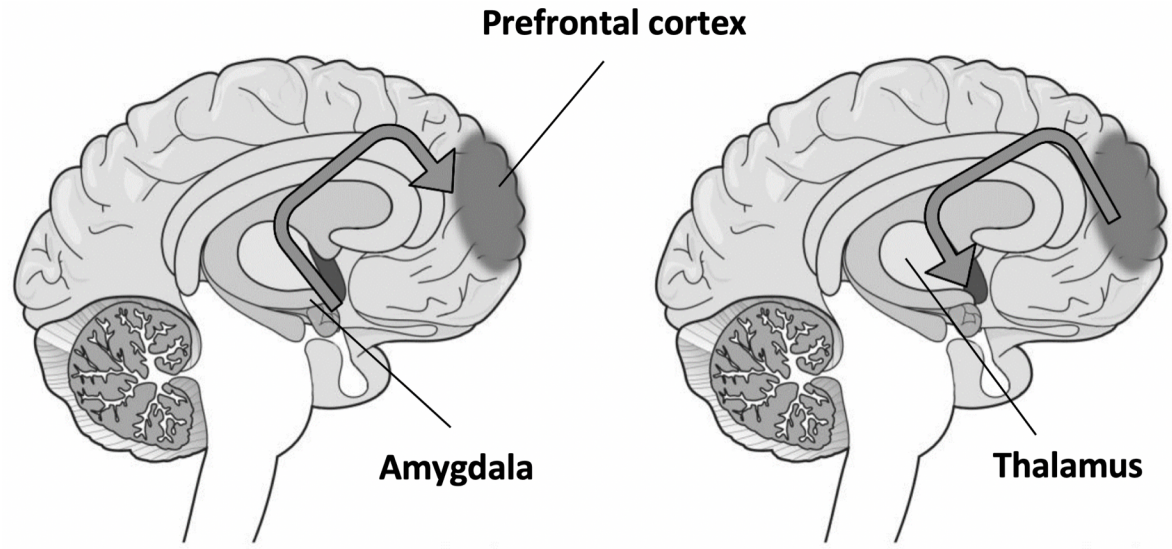

Figure 1. Sources of fear and anxiety in the brain and their interdependence (Böttger & Sambanis, 2017)

By introducing the Amygdala first, it can be summarised that this part of the brain creates, maintains, or modifies anxiety and fear responses. Situated within the limbic system, the amygdala works from a less conscious part of the brain. The amygdala makes way for the direct impact of fear and anxiety: it receives information from the thalamus before the cortex does and can activate the sympathetic nervous system due to triggers that might be unknown to the cortex. This, for example, can be a stimulus that has been previously associated with emotional reactions and is therefore a part of the emotional memories. When anxiety starts there, interventions based in the cortex, like logical thinking and reasoning, will not help reduce the upcoming or existing feeling. Amygdala-based anxiety can mostly be identified by certain characteristics: It occurs suddenly, creates strong physiological responses, and seems to leave the borders of the proportion to the situation. Ultimately, the amygdala does not need any involvement of the cortex, which makes the whole process so difficult to comprehend. The prefrontal cortex, the so-called Thinking Brain, is responsible for cognitive action like reasoning, conscious memories, awareness, detailed information, and concentration. From a functional point of view, the differences towards the amygdala are big, the connections yet close: Anxiety responses can also be initiated in the cortex by alerting the amygdala to potential or imagined dangers. And, what is more, amygdala reactions can – with a little time gap – be relativised by the cortex, when the danger turns out to be harmless on a second glance. The cortex, however, provides another anxiety pathway, independent of external information: Thinking or ruminating hypothetically about a prospective, but unreal future along with a bad case scenario is often the basis of a self-fulfilling prophecy. What one imagines to possibly go wrong combined with catastrophic images in one's mind, will probably happen.

The two areas in a contrastive nutshell as in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Contrastive overview of language related fear centres

AMYGDALA	PREFRONTAL CORTEX
– responsible for emotions – generates, receives, or changes anxiety and anxious reactions – operates unconsciously – physical alarm system, perpetually scans for incoming signals of danger – affects the nervous system, hormones, and the prefrontal cortex (PFC) – generates anxiety without the influence of the PFC and even overrules it – anxieties are 'learned' and negatively connoted	– Thinking Brain – responsible for cognition – responsible for consciousness – functions as executive (evaluation and analysis) – promotes reasoning and logical thinking – conscious memory (retrievable) – contains detailed information – capable of learning to control the amygdala (aim of prevention and therapy) – produces hypothetical bad case scenarios

1.3. Age plays a crucial role

Age, again, plays an important role in the development of the two areas' relationship: the prefrontal cortex is not completely developed until the age between 20 and 25, so that it cannot precisely suppress emotions such as fear or anxiety yet (cf. Figure 2). That has to do with a process called myelination: The communication velocity between the neurons is determined by the thickness of the myelin sheaths around their connections. These are nerve fibres, known as axons, 1 millimetre to 1 meter long, which transmit electrical nerve stimuli between each other with an average speed of approx. 250 mph. Myelination, the gradually coating of the axons, allows brain areas, that are far apart, to connect – e.g. the limbic system and the cortex. This development has a designated direction, from back to front all the way to

doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4-2-43-55
Volume 4 Issue 2, 2020, pp. 43-55
rudn.tlcjournal.org

'Therefore, teenagers usually prioritise their emotional processing over their cognitive processing due to the fact that they use their limbic system more strongly during their adolescence as it has already developed further. The mind is literally not capable of controlling the rest of the brain, which can be fruitful for creative language processes'

the cortex (cf. Figure 2) (Gogtay et al., 2004). Similar to the development of the prefrontal cortex, myelination is a maturation process that continues until the age of around 27. Only then all functions in the prefrontal cortex are fine-tuned, connected, concentration and focusing are fully available, and emotions can be controlled in most cases.

Therefore, teenagers usually prioritise their emotional processing over their cognitive processing due to the fact that they use their limbic system more strongly during their adolescence as it has already developed further. The mind is literally not capable of controlling the rest of the brain, which can be fruitful for creative language processes (Böttger & Költzsch, 2019). However, strategic, long-term as well as short-term planning and interventions are not or only to a limited extent possible (Böttger & Sambanis, 2017). This has an impact on the handling of fear and anxiety – children and teenagers are hence especially vulnerable and require a special form of protection.

1.4. The importance of understanding

Generally understanding where and how fear and anxiety begin, i.e. knowledge of the language of the amygdala, is the first means of taking correct steps to interrupt the process of increasing amygdala activation and negative bodily responses (cf. Pittman, 2015). A mental intervention is possible, when fear and anxiety signals (beginning in the cortex with uncomfortable thoughts) provide only little but nonetheless precious time in order to change mental predispositions oneself. This presupposes already learned, self-effective mental and physical strategies like self-programming, self-talking or taking deep breaths. This in turn may help in preventing the activation of the amygdala and decrease upcoming cortex-based anxiety at the same time. Repetition and experience concerning this procedure is essential for being successful sustainably.

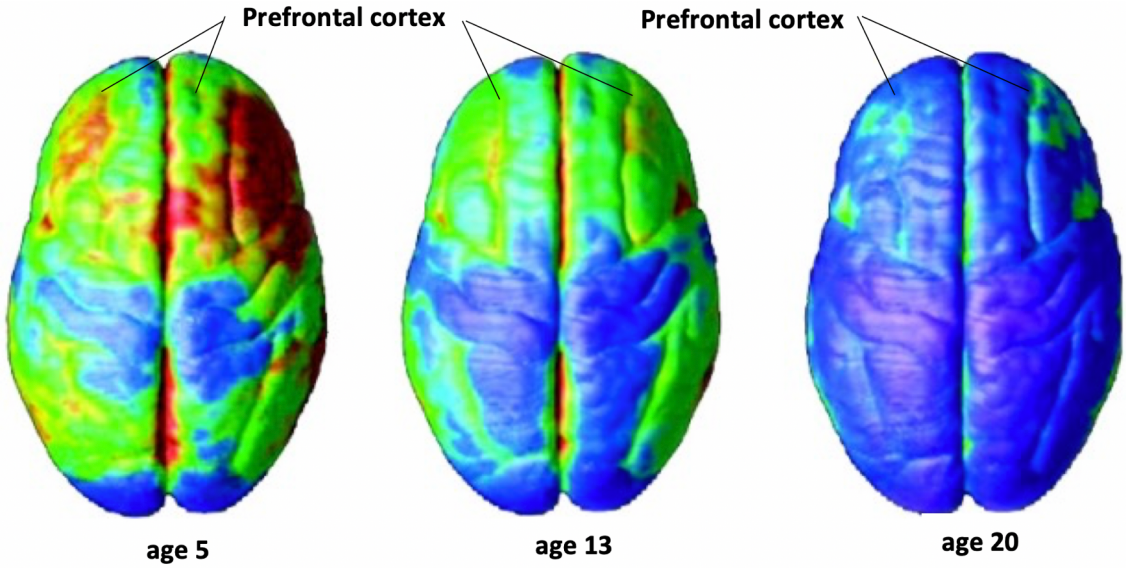

Figure 2. Development of the cortex' functions: The PFC

2. XENOGLOSSOPHOBIA: A SPECIAL CASE OF ANXIETY

2.1. Definition and description

Anxiety can produce physiological responses interfering with the ability to concentrate and learn – especially languages. Specific thoughts or preoccupations can suddenly – dependent on individual triggers – invade learning processes and redirect attention to a parallel and negative world of thoughts. Anxiety is capable of motivating avoidance strategies which in turn can lead to self-exclusion from the learning community, to a delay of studying and simply the avoidance of doing homework or class assignments. Anxiety can, as a result, interfere with the teacher's professional ability to accurately assess a student's knowledge or skills. If the affected learning process is language learning, it is a matter of a very specific type of anxiety, xenoglossophobia – the fear of speaking foreign languages.

Xenoglossophobia derives from the Greek: *phobos* meaning 'fear', *xeno* meaning 'foreign', *glosso* meaning 'language' or 'tongue'. Psychiatrically speaking, xenoglossophobia belongs to the group of specific phobias (Horwitz, 2001). It describes the abnormal and exaggerated fear of foreign languages. In the course of the sickness, people tend to avoid not only the studies of foreign languages but also speakers of said languages. They feel embarrassed when they have to speak English in classrooms. Travelling to foreign countries is also refrained due to similar reasons. Hence, xenoglossophobia restricts daily life constantly and can lead to the development of more in-depth states of anxiety or even depression. This can be seen in form of physical reactions or experiencing stress response symptoms like a pounding heart, rapid breathing, stomach distress etc. The effects for the language classroom are multiple: For example, when students cannot sit still on their chairs in a classroom, when they nervously play with their pens, when they cannot utter sounds calmly, naturally and clearly in classroom conversations, they show anxiety. They are also often not willing to start any conversation or even don't like to participate in communications, they remain silent in discussions, speak fast and finish quickly facing large audiences like in front of their classmates.

2.2. How xenoglossophobia develops

Xenoglossophobia does not arise by itself. Speaking is a very complex neuromuscular activity, which needs to be learned over years and must constantly be practiced, especially regarding foreign languages (Böttger, 2014). The phonological production or rather the articulation can be taken from the image below (cf. Figure 3). It begins in Broca's Area (1) and moves on to the motor cortex in which the motoric process of the articulation (2) and the motoric operational control (3) take place. The auditory feedback and the phonological monitoring, a type of cognitive self-control and correction of one's own speaking, occur in the upper temporal lobe (4). In addition, there are a number of smaller muscles that are required to enable speech production through the human lips. That such a long way contains various sources of error goes without saying.

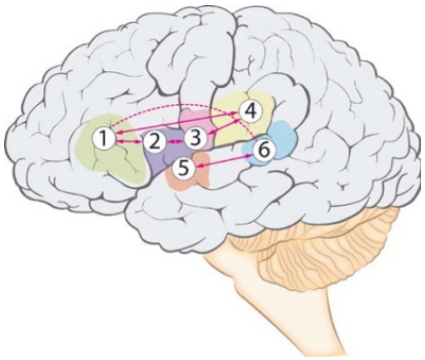

Figure 3. Oral language production in the brain (Böttger, 2014)

A process simultaneous to speaking, namely speech perception or much simpler listening, is decoded in the language-processing and listening centres of the brain. The sound – also one's own voice – arrives in the ear and reaches the primary listening centre in the auditory cortex (5). From there the vocal message is sent to Wernicke's area (6) for phonological, grammatical, and semantic detection as well as decryption. Besides the neuronal processing, non-linguistic factors are also involved in a decryption process, i.e. conditions and information from a situation in which a statement is made. Redundancy plays an important role in decoding spoken language. It describes the difference between the amount of information a message could theoretically have and the amount that it actually possesses. Spoken language has a very high level of redundancy; it is generally estimated at around 50 percent of what has been said. During phone calls and in face-to-face communication, parts of the phonological information are often disturbed, drowned by external noise or even not transmitted at all, in parts or as a whole. Native speakers are so familiar with the coding system of their language that they can reconstruct a message from an incomplete transmission. However, anyone who learns a foreign language from early on must first acquire this ability. It is most important for receptive communication, particularly essential when understanding translated TV programmes, listening to recordings or information transmitted through loudspeakers (e.g. at airports) and telephone calls in the foreign language. For non-natives, nonetheless, the decoding process in a foreign language, carried out automatically and simultaneously to speaking itself, poses various risks due to even more sources of error and thus possible causes of anxiety.

Speaking requires memory capacity as well as specific strategies. Both the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex are involved in this remembering procrss. Memorising and reproducing language is highly communicative and especially the ability of being able to remember something has further significance as an own speech strategy: Only those who can recall what the interlocutor has said are able to establish actual communication in conversation, which, apart from the exchange of content, also contains intercultural and affective components, for example, initial conversation strategies of asking questions, agreeing, and the like. Memorising means to memorise and retain language material such as words, sentences, etc. The linguistic content which is to be recalled must firstly be understood in order to be able to deal with it. Although the brain is quite capable of memorising even without knowledge of the content, this is not sufficient for participation in communicative situations. Communicative speaking altogether is a very complex structure consisting of the sub-competences hearing/listening, understanding, remembering, and speech production.

3. A PILOT STUDY: XENOGLOSSOPHOBIA AND ITS IMPACT ON PROSPECTIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

As said above, xenoglossophobia is not only a phenomenon experienced in childhood or teenage years but rather remains up until adulthood (also cf. Fondo, 2019). What is more, the fear of speaking foreign languages is not only found in certain social groups but, interestingly enough, also in those which tend to be viewed as free of these anxieties, e.g. foreign language teachers.

A fundamental pilot study examined 108 prospective foreign language teachers studying English. As there are scarcely any findings regarding anxiety among foreign language speakers or learners respectively and especially little among experienced foreign language learners as well as speakers, the aim of this study was to take initial steps into this specific field of anxiety in order to give first indications. In the realm of a quantitative online survey, the participants were asked rudimental questions concerning their use of the English language as well as feelings, concerns, or fears connected with the matter. Below is the complete question catalogue of the survey questionnaire.

1. Do you have to think before speaking English? 2. Do you make plans before speaking English, e.g. in class? 3. Up until the present day, are

you scared to make mistakes while using English? 4. In general, have you avoided communicational situations in English? 5. Have you ever avoided an English-speaking phone call by not calling, by not answering, or by writing a text message instead? 6. Are there English words that you avoid in conversations? 7. Are there parts of a sentence that you avoid while speaking? 8. Up until the present day, are you sometimes nervous before coming into a class held in English? 9. Do you notice physical reactions (e.g. blushing, perspiration) while speaking English in front of a group? 10. Do you sometimes condition yourself (e.g. pep talk) before speaking English in class or before giving a presentation in English? 11. Looking back, did you feel uncomfortable speaking English at school, especially when called upon suddenly? 12. Are you scared to say something wrong in English? 13. Do you avoid speaking English in class to prevent making a mistake even though you might know the correct answer? 14. Do you sometimes shorten your sentences on purpose in order to avoid verbalising long sentences in English? 15. Do you know someone who would have answered the previous questions with yes?

Remarkably, even the students, who tend to feel confident while speaking English due to their field of studies, experience xenoglossophobia equally. The answers of the pilot study are shown in the graphs in Figure 4 below.

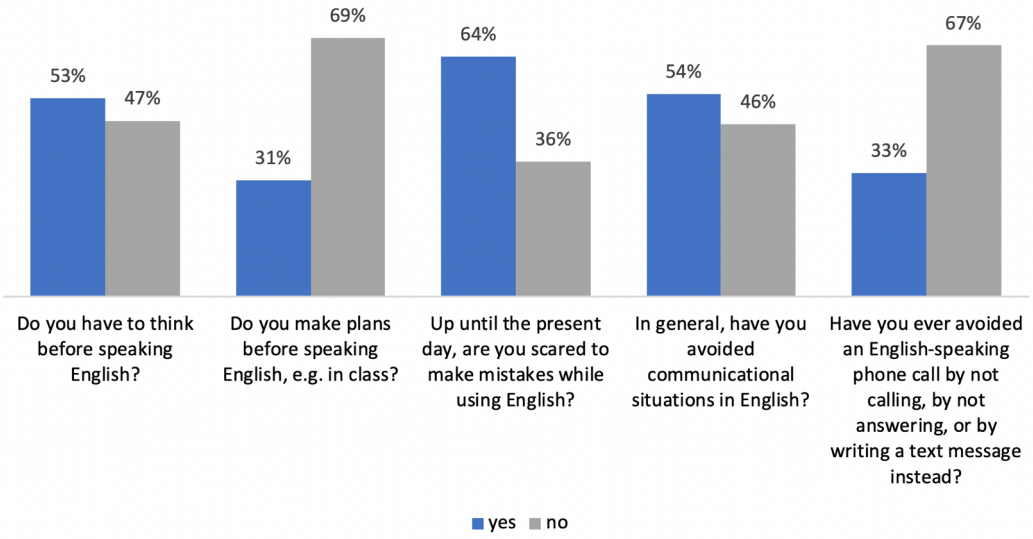

Figure 4. Pilot study: Xenoglossophobia regarding foreign language students (n=108), questions 1-5 (left to right)

53% of the students that participated in the study conceded that they have to think before speaking English. This is fully in line with contemporary language acquisition theory findings, which state that non-bilinguals learn and/or use a foreign language after the age of 6 only against the background of their first or mother tongue (Böttger, 2020, p. 37). The internal 'language plan' before the act of speaking in the foreign language is thus generally slightly delayed. Fears reinforce this 'lag'. Moreover, this aspect is reinforced by a second finding: 31% acknowledged that they additionally had to make some kind of plan before using the foreign language. The third survey result also substantiates parts of the language acquisition theory: the great fear of making mistakes among two thirds of all respondents (64%) makes them weigh up whether or not to say something for a much longer time, communicatively actually too long. However, not only did these prospective English teachers overthink their use of the foreign language but over half of them also admitted to

doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4-2-43-55
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avoiding situations in which they needed to use it. Avoiding speech acts, or simplification of speech, is not only considered a source of error (Böttger, 2020) but is also the maximum negative fear reaction. While 54% of the students stated that they had already avoided communicational situations in which English was necessary, 33% did not pick up the phone but instead wrote a message due to the oral foreign language barrier. The lack of any communicative support through non-verbal signals such as gestures and facial expressions has an anxiety-increasing effect (Figure 5).

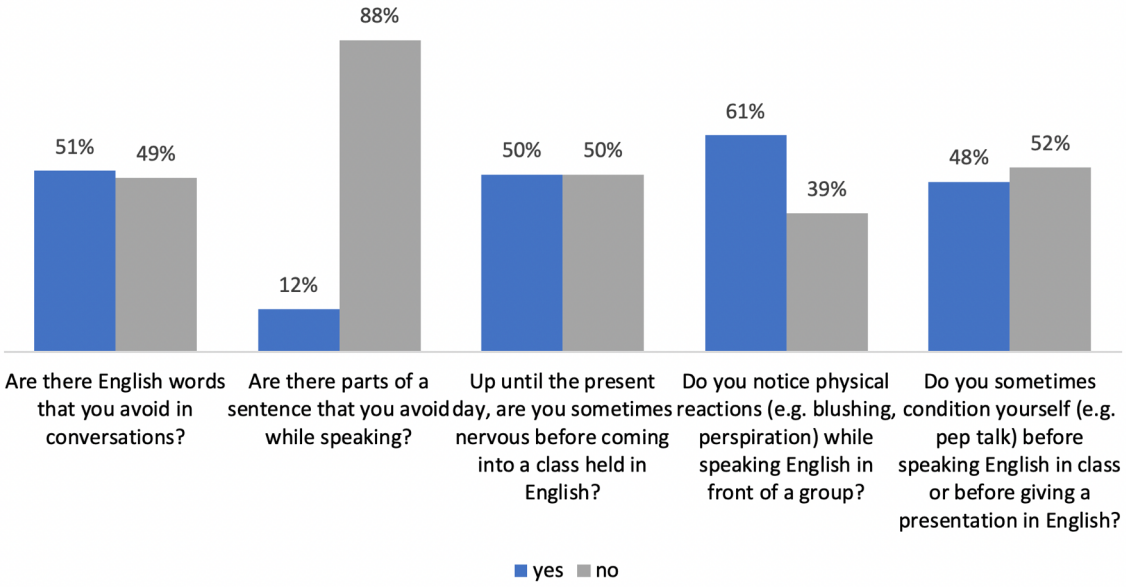

Figure 5. Pilot study: Xenoglossophobia regarding foreign language students (n=108), questions 6-10 (left to right)

51% of all students acknowledged the fact that they avoid certain English words during English conversations. This is mostly due to personal uncertainty regarding the correct pronunciation or meaning of the word. Nonetheless, only 12% confirmed the avoidance of complete parts of a sentence while speaking English. With regard to longer linguistic language units, the previously described effect is significantly enhanced when there is even more uncertainty with respect to the correct sentence structure or the correct grammatical structure. Additionally, half of all students surveyed stated that they are nervous before coming into a class held in English and 61% noted that they had perceived physical reactions, such as blushing or perspiration, before speaking English in front of groups. The physically measurable excitement, which can certainly be a still subliminal fear or positive excitement similar to the 'pre-start feeling' as known from sporting competitions, is positively influenced by self-conditioning in almost half of the respondents (48%) (as shown in Figure 6).

When taking a closer look into the classroom, the so-called 'cold calls' negatively influenced approximately half of all respondents. The fact that 47% of the students admitted that they had felt uncomfortable speaking English at school might confirm the assumption that the fear of speaking a foreign language stems from their previous education during their childhood or respectively their teenage years. Hypothetically, this number is likely to be much higher for learners who are not as English-affine as those interviewed. This could possibly be traced back to the fact that students are scared to say something incorrect, which 69% of the participants in the study admitted. 62% confessed that they did not answer certain questions in class even though they knew the correct answer due to the fear of being grammatically or linguistically incorrect. Even 28% confessed to shortening

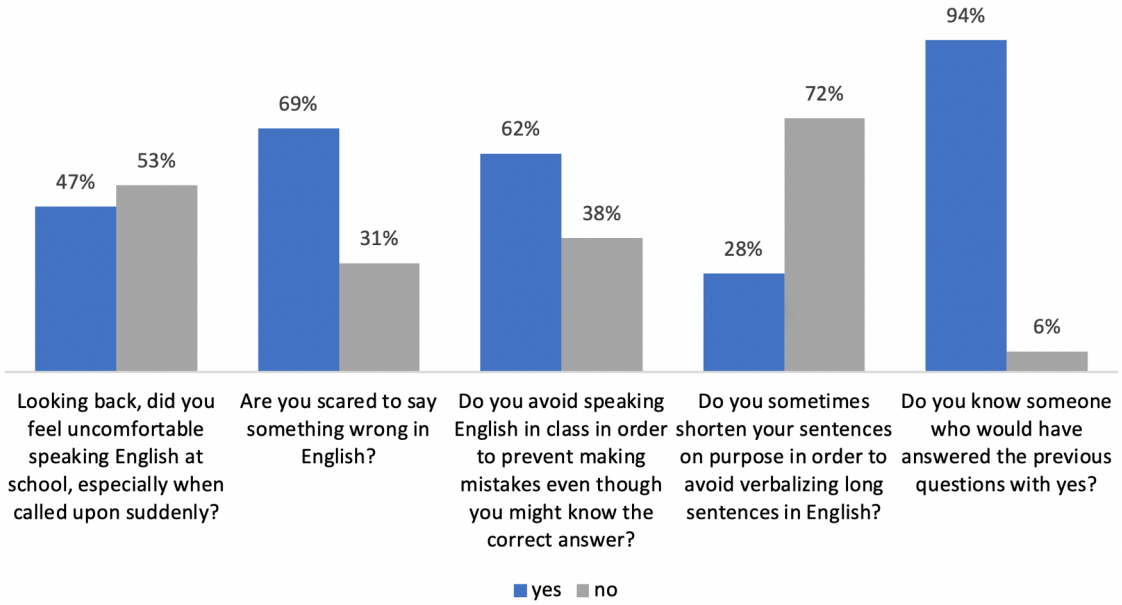

Figure 6. Pilot study: Xenoglossophobia regarding foreign language students (n=108), questions 11-15 (left to right)

their sentences on purpose in order to minimise their number of errors in verbalisation of the foreign language. The last question shows the iceberg-effect: 94% of those questioned conceded to knowing somebody anxious concerning their oral use of the foreign language English. This circumstance must be investigated in more depth in follow-up examinations as the fear potential seems to be much greater than previously assumed. This first pilot study to explore the scientific field will be followed by a second in-depth study in the year of the publication of this article. This will involve a significant expansion of the group of respondents in all aspects (number, learning experience with foreign languages, etc.) (cf. Figure 6).

As reality therefore shows, xenoglossophobia does not only relate to a certain group of people but is on the contrary a type of anxiety which everyone is affected by, even those who should feel more confident in the foreign language. Interestingly enough, the participants of this study are in general highly aware of their language proficiency and are capable of reflecting upon their language skills more in-depth due to their professional training. Hence, it is of interest to explore the matter further regarding non-language students as well as people who do not work in any language-related contexts. One the one hand, it can be assumed that the level of anxiety rises even further as the subjects would not be as experienced in the foreign language and would therefore be more fearful to make use of it. On the other hand, it is probable that the level of anxiety would drop due to the fact that future language teachers possess a high standard of critical self-reflection and are also used to comparing themselves with other experienced language-users in turn damaging their personal linguistic self-confidence. The results of this study therefore only depict the anxieties of this specific social group, which is why prospective studies are highly required in order to shed more light on the precise reality of xenoglossophobia.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Sources of xenoglossophobia

Language anxiety and foreign language learning are interrelated. Many factors lead to xenoglossophobia in teaching, learning or even related situations (Li & Wang, 2019). The following table was created following the categories of Turula (2002) (cf. Buitrago et al., 2008, p. 28) – academic, cognitive, social, and personal reasons – and was

doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2020-4-2-43-55
Volume 4 Issue 2, 2020, pp. 43-55
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created by the authors after interviews and informal conversations with neuroscientists, psychologists, psychiatrist as well as academic language teaching staff of universities, teacher trainers, teachers, and students in 2020. It doesn't claim to be complete and is to be expanded continuously.

In order to deal with the effects of language anxiety on a didactical basis focusing on possible anxiety prevention precautions, therapy interventions, and also methodological task formats, it is necessary to first identify in-depth and – as a second prospective step in order to draw pedagogical, didactical, and even methodological conclusions – deeply analyse the source of it (Alnuzaili & Uddin, 2020; Abinaya, 2016). The latter, however, is far beyond the scope of this study and will be the main topic of an authors' book forthcoming 2021.

Turula (2002) summarises the sources of xenoglossophobia as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Sources of xenoglossphobia in the ELT classroom (Turula, 2002 – adopted and expanded)

PSYCHOLOGICAL SOURCES	METHODOLOGICAL SOURCES	COGNITIVE SOURCES	SOCIAL-AFFECTIVE SOURCES
– lack of affective support – false perception of emotions – frustration – stressful, negative, nearly hostile environment – lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem – adolescent, peer-related behaviour – restrictions due to schools and teachers – time pressure – loss of cognitive control – feeling of being observed and evaluated – individual expectations – unresolved conflicts – feeling of excessive demands – lack of mindfulness	a) Motivational: – monotonous lessons – boring topics and learning content – little student involvement – difficult tasks b) Pedagogical: – promotion of competition – calling up of students in class ('cold calling') – lack of speaking practice – classroom organisation – evaluation and grading – negative, non-supportive feedback – negative linguistic experiences/failures – disencouraging learning context	a) Metacognitive: – indifference to the learning process and learning formats – excessive testing and evaluation b) Cognitive: – lack of linguistic capacity – lack of contentual/subject-specific competences – lack of lexical and grammatical skills – complex structures and long sentences in task descriptions and dialogues – lack of planning and goal definition – continuous monitoring of personal speech – grammatical difficulties – deficiency regarding vocabulary – lack of competences in the mother tongue/first language – linguistic interferences – perfectionism – neurobiological or mental diseases	– prejudice of peers and teachers – hypothetical judgements by speaking partners (native speakers) – risk of public embarrassment – lack of interest regarding the opinion of the speaker – social-affective isolation – cultural background – negative experiences

The table contains psychological, methodological, cognitive, and social-affective aspects of the topic. These are interdependent as well: psychological effects can also be found within the methodological area (feedback) as well as in the cognitive column (self-monitoring of one's own speech), and, additionally, may influence socio-affective matters like the risk of exposure through mistakes. Another cross-connection could be a lack of self-confidence (psychological) (Ferreira Marinho et al., 2017) and mindfulness (Böttger, 2018), the lack of speaking experience (and opportunities) in English (methodological), vocabulary deficits (cognitive) and cultural background (social).

4.2. First steps towards overcoming xenoglossophobia

From a psychological perspective, proven treatments to overcome the fear of speaking English are two kinds of therapies: cognitive behavioural therapy and confrontation therapy.

The first option is one of the most modern psychotherapeutic methods. Here, negative attitudes, thoughts, evaluations, and convictions are identified and slowly but sustainably changed. An example of this is the inner negative belief that 'I don't speak English well enough' can be replaced by a new, much more positive self-belief, such as 'My English is perfectly sufficient for what I want to accomplish'. Other possible coping conceptions for preparing a communication situation can be: I can get through this. This won't last forever; I've handled this before; Just remember to breathe; Take your time. There's no rush. Time is on my side; I will learn from this. It will get easier each time; I'm doing the best I can; Staying calm shows that I am in control.

Single helpful words to be repeated over and over for self-programming are relax, peace, calm, or breathe. This, however, requires several therapeutic steps and at least the support by a psychologist. The negative conviction then takes a back seat and is literally overwritten by the new conviction.

The second option, the confronting procedure (regarding English), takes place in a protected setting, also mentored by a psychological specialist. Being confronted with the anxiety-causing situation those affected can endure fear and, very crucially, that there are no negative consequences at all. As a result, the fear of speaking English can be forgotten again over time.

4.3. Resolving xenoglossophobia

Ideally, the influence of foreign language teachers accompanies either process. The anxiety and fear references mentioned above must be discussed intensively in the future in order to approach a didactical pattern of anxiety-free teaching and learning action. In the meantime, the most important task is to track down these fears in their entirety, to record and discuss them, put them in a suitable order of importance, and thus to produce first cornerstones of a fear-free foreign language didactics, as illustrated in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. Didactical action pattern of anxiety-free teaching

'In a nutshell, providing enough time to speak avoids or reduces stress and anxiety'

4.4. Things to consider

In order to prevent xenoglossophobia three fundamental didactical insights and basics must be considered.

1. Teachers must acquire obligatory knowledge about the difficult speaking procedure, in order to be able to professionally, sensitively, and fairly analyse and evaluate an oral performance. It is necessary to understand that mother tongue and foreign language learning – apart from a few points of contact – are fundamentally different. The main distinction is that learning to listen and speak, to assign phoneme series and supra-segmental elements such as prosody and intonation to meanings of use, social, and later individual life happens very early in life. Along with acquiring the mother tongue, awareness, and concept development take place. This natural process can never be fully repeated later on, when people learn all other languages literally on top of their mother tongue – if not having grown up bilingually. From then on, approximately with the age of five, what should be said is planned in the mother tongue and translated internally, which in turn takes some time of thinking and getting ready to talk. The time factor when learning the mother tongue is significantly different from when learning the first foreign language. This is actually a self-explanatory fundamental idea of English teaching and learning mostly not considered in institutionalised language educational systems with narrow schedules, learning progressions, and linearity. In a nutshell, providing enough time to speak avoids or reduces stress and anxiety.

2. Speaking is dependent upon experience, more specifically upon exercise and rehearsal. Intensive pronunciation training is an important and yet often neglected aspect of English instruction that leads to self-confidence in speaking. Successful pronunciation includes emphasis, intonation, sounds as well as fluency. Even in an early phase of vocabulary learning, the words to be repeated must be imitated correctly in order to face and avert fossilisation. Fossilised word pronunciation is extremely difficult to relearn correctly. Deficits in this respect can later become communication barriers. For instance, the meaning of a word can vary, if a single sound in it is pronounced differently. If it is spoken generally in a vague manner, this can impede the communication partner's attention so strongly that the content of what has been said cannot be understood or can only be understood through inquiries. Failure, again, may first lead to avoidance of communication, subsequently to fear and anxiety.

3. Last but not least, the role model offered by the teachers themselves as professional personalities is of importance. Ultimately, their English-speaking competence determines their learners' success regarding their speaking capabilities.

5. CONCLUSION

All in all, it seems that emotional learning as well as academic learning has to be considered, when it comes to language learning. On the one hand, xenoglossophobia can be decreased through positive exposure provided by, for example, non-restrictive speaking opportunities, enough time, or a lot of practice. Positive language learning experiences with neutral or rewarding learning outcome, opportunities for successful oral performances, and less seemingly and subjectively threatening assignments have to be built on. On the other hand, this form of anxiety can in many cases be simply avoided by abandoning punitive and harsh communicative responses and instead focusing on aspects, such as: (1) corrective feedforward instead of feedback, presented in an informative, not instructive way, avoiding indirect or direct ridiculing or teasing of students through irony or even sarcastic language; (2) a high ratio of positive to negative comments; (3) an effective communication and social problem solving; (4) emphasising strengths and weaknesses in language use in a balanced way. These aspects are the non-negotiable building blocks of xenoglossophobia prevention.

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