

# **L2 Learners' Anxiety, Self-Confidence and Oral Performance**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the relationships between L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance. The participants were 132 Korean college students who enrolled the English conversation classes in 2004. Questionnaires related to anxiety and self-confidence were given to the students and their oral performances were assessed in terms of IATEFL's criteria. Factor analysis indicated that communication anxiety, criticism anxiety, examination anxiety were the main components of anxiety, while situational confidence, communication confidence, language potential confidence and language ability confidence were the components of self-confidence for Korean learners of English. The results of the analyses showed that there were significant effects of anxiety and self-confidence on L2 learners' oral performance: The higher anxious the students were about speaking English, the lower scores they gained on their oral performance; The higher confident they were, the higher oral performance they showed. The correlation analysis of anxiety/confidence and the elements of oral performance showed that confidence was more closely correlated with the L2 learner' attitude and interaction including communication strategies and social conversation skills of oral performance, while anxiety was more negatively correlated with the L2 learner's range of oral performance such as vocabulary and grammar.

## **1. Introduction**

More and more attention has been drawn to the individual variations in language learning since 1970s. Individual variations can be attributed to cognitive and affective sides of language learning. Accordingly, both cognitive and affective sides of language learning may be considered in order to achieve successful language learning and teaching, However, actually, until now, research and attention have been concentrated on cognitive aspects of the learner.

Affect in language learning involves various aspects of emotion, feeling, attitude of the learner. Affective sides of language learners may influence the learners' language learning processes, positively or negatively. Thus, a right understanding of affect in foreign language learning can lead to more effective language learning and teaching.

Anxiety is one of the most negatively influential affective variables, which prevents learners from successfully learning a foreign language. It makes language learners nervous and afraid, which may contribute to poor aural/oral performance. One of the personal factors, which are highly correlated with anxiety, is self-confidence. Self-confidence involves judgments and evaluations about one's own value and worth. Self-confidence can be negatively influenced when the language learner thinks of oneself as deficient and limited in the target language. On the other hand,

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high self-confidence can be positively correlated with oral performance (Heyde, 1979). Further, highly anxious learners might deal with their target language task differently from one another, depending on their self-confidence.

With the advent of communicative language teaching, English education in Korea has been changed to focusing on improving communicative ability. As a result, Korean learners of English are struggling to improve and develop their English communicative skills, in particular, listening and speaking skills. Meanwhile, affect in language learning and teaching has been emerged and considered as an important side with the cognitive side of language learning. Among affective variables, anxiety and self-confidence are representative barriers Korean learners of English are facing in communicative language classroom.

Thus, this study takes an aim to investigate the relationships of anxiety, self-confidence and Korean learners' oral performance in English. First, the components of anxiety and self-confidence will be explored through factor analysis. Then, the correlations between anxiety/self-confidence and oral performance will be examined and then the relationships among anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance will be analyzed by ANOVA.

## **2. Literature Review**

Every human being possesses some extent of self-confidence, self-esteem, and belief in one's own abilities in carrying on one's own task, although the extent is different from each other<sup>1</sup>. Men grow with the development of a concept of self from experiences with themselves and others and the external world around him. And a sense of self-esteem may be derived from assessing the self in relation to others and the external world. According to Coopersmith (1967), "self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that individuals hold towards themselves. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior."(p.5).

Three levels of self-esteem have been mentioned in the literature: Global, situational, task self-esteem (Brown, 2000, p.145). Global self-esteem is the general assessment one makes of one's own worth or value over time and across different situations. Thus, it is, in a sense, an overall self-appraisal. Situational self-esteem involves one's self-appraisal in specific traits such as intelligence and athletic ability, or particular situations such as education, work, and home. Task self-esteem refers to one's own assessment in particular tasks of particular situations. For example, within second language acquisition domain, task self-esteem might relate to particular language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Research on self-esteem and second language acquisition has shown that it is an important affective variable in successful second language acquisition. Heyde (1979) examined the effects of self-esteem on oral performance by American college students learning French as a foreign language.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, self-confidence and self-esteem are interchangeably used.

She showed that self-esteem correlated positively with the students' scores in oral performance measures. MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, and Noels (1998) suggested that self-confidence significantly contributes to the learner's willingness to communicate in a foreign language. According to them, affective factors such as motivation, personality, intergroup climate, and self-esteem underlie willingness to communicate, and the factor of self-esteem including overall self-esteem in L2 and situational self-confidence in communication play an important role in determining the learner's willingness to communicate.

Anxiety is a complex affective concept associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Scovel 1978, p. 134). Recent research on anxiety and language learning distinguishes foreign language anxiety from trait anxiety, which is one's general and global disposition, focusing on specifically on the situational nature of language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128 cited in Aida, 1994). Three components of foreign language anxiety has been identified and examined: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. L2 communication apprehension is a person's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Test anxiety is apprehension over academic evaluation. Test anxiety may be generated by deficits in students' learning and study skills. Or it can be caused by students' poor performances in the past. The third component, fear of negative social evaluation, is defined as apprehension about others' evaluation from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others.

Studies on anxiety have reported different effects of anxiety on second or foreign language learning and performance (Aida, 1994; Chastain, 1975; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Philips, 1992).

Aida (1994) examined the relationships of foreign language anxiety and students' performance in Japanese learning for native English speakers. She used Horwitz et al.'s construct of foreign language anxiety as a research framework and partially supported the validity of Horwitz et al.'s Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). However, test anxiety, which was Horwitz et al.'s component of foreign language anxiety, was not supported. Based on these findings, she suggested that test anxiety might not be specifically germane to foreign language anxiety.

Philips (1992) showed that there is a relationship between language anxiety and oral performance, reporting that the more anxious the students were, the lower performance they displayed in oral tests. Besides, the anxious students expressed their negative attitudes toward oral tests. The results of the study suggest that language anxiety can make an effect on the learner' performance and his or her attitudes toward language learning.

Chastain (1975) examined the correlation between ability and affective factors including test anxiety and foreign language learners' course grades. In the study, the results in the correlations of test anxiety and final grades were not consistent across languages. While test anxiety was a

significant predictor for Spanish, it was negatively correlated with French audio-lingual class. For these results, he suggested that some anxiety about test might be helpful for language learning, while too much concern about test may bring about harm in language learning. This implies that anxiety cannot be regarded simply as a negative factor for successful language learning and that to some extent anxiety may lead to better language learning outcomes, making the learner have an optimal tension for good language learning.

### **3. Research Questions**

With this background of the literature the present study addressed the following questions.

1. What are the main components of self-confidence and anxiety for Korean learners of English?
2. What relationships are there between anxiety/self-confidence and oral performance for Korean learners of English?

### **4. Method**

#### **4.1 Participants**

The participants of this study were 132 Korean college students attending English conversation classes. Their majors were mixed and the range of their age was from 20 to 27. They have learned English from middle school like ordinary Korean students of the same age. They have been taught English by Korean teachers through the grammar-translation method and the audiolingual method. Thus they did not have much experience in speaking to native speakers/each other in English. This English conversation course they enrolled at that time was substantially their first class they were taught English through English by a native English teacher.

#### **4.2 Data Collection**

The questionnaires about confidence and anxiety about English oral performance were given to the students in class during the spring semester of 2004. The students were informed that the questionnaires were being given in an effort to understand how they think and feel about their English learning and to gain some insights on the more effective teaching procedures for the future students.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 items about anxiety and confidence related to English oral performance (Appendix A). The 11 items of self-confidence related to English education were developed on the basis of the previous literature and 19 items of anxiety were adapted from Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986). Students' oral performance was assessed in terms of IATEFL criteria: Range, ease of speech, attitude, delivery, and interaction. Range involves vocabulary and grammar, while ease of speech indicates the learner's fluency in using the target language. Attitude is

related to self-confidence, motivation, reduced anxiety/nervousness. Delivery involves volume, pronunciation, intonation, word-stress, speech-rhythm, while interaction does body language, communication strategies, and social conversation skills.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Main components of self-confidence and anxiety for Korean learners of English

First, the reliability of the questionnaires was examined. The reliability coefficient of the self-confidence questionnaire was .89 and that of the anxiety questionnaire was .93, which shows the items of questionnaires were reliable enough for this study.

The eleven items of self-confidence questionnaire were analyzed by factor analysis. Main components analysis was employed to identify underlying dimensions of self-confidence for Korean learners of English. Four factors were produced with eigenvalue greater than one, which accounted for 72.7 % of the total variance. Table 1 shows the loadings of variables on factors, communalities and percent of the variance.

Table 1  
Factor Loadings, Communalities ( $h^2$ ), Percents of Variance

Item	Factor 1	2	3	4	$h^2$
C 5	.829				.777
C 6	.773				.690
C 3	.740				.607
C 10		.853			.764
C 11		.839			.803
C 12		.818			.748
C 19			.883		.801
C 18			.798		.786
C 20			.636		.675
C 1				.721	.682
C 2				.697	.666
% of the variance	36.1	14.3	12.8	9.42	
% of total variance accounted for by the 3 factors					72.7

The first factor included three items, which accounted for 36.1 % of the total variance. The items included in the first factor were related to the learners' self-confidence in English educational situation, so the first factor was assigned the label of Situational Confidence.

Examples of Factor 1: Situational Confidence (S-C)

C3 I'm a good student.

C5 I am an important member of my group.

C6 My group needs me to come to class every week.

Three items were loaded on the second factor, accounting for 14.3 % of the variance. The

examples of the items included in this factor were "I don't feel shy speaking English to my classmates," "I don't feel shy speaking English to my foreign professor", and "I don't feel shy speaking English to my Korean professor". They were concerned with communicating in English. The factor 2 was labeled as Communication Confidence.

#### Examples of Factor 2: Communication Confidence (C-C)

- C10 I don't feel shy speaking English to my classmates.
- C11 I don't feel shy speaking English to my foreign professor.
- C12 I don't feel shy speaking English to my Korean professor.

The third factor included three items, which accounted for 12.8 % of the total variance. The items included in this factor were "I think that I will get a great TOEIC score someday", "I think that I will speak perfect English someday," "I think that I will get an A or A+ in this class." These indicate students' confidence in their English ability of the future. The third factor was assigned the label of Language Potential Confidence.

#### Examples of Factor 3 Language Potential Confidence (P-C)

- C19 I think that I will get a great TOEIC score someday.
- C18 I think that I will speak perfect English someday.
- C20 I think that I will get an A or A+ in this class.

The two items were loaded on the fourth factor, which accounted for 9.4% of the total variance. They were related to students' confidence in their present English ability and English learning ability. The fourth factor was named as Language Ability Confidence.

#### Examples of Factor 4 Language Ability Confidence (A-C)

- C1 I can learn to speak English.
- C2 I am a good English speaker now.

It can be summarized that self-confidence consists of the four factors for Korean learners of English: situational confidence, communication confidence, language potential confidence and language ability confidence.

Factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying dimensions of anxiety by grouping homogeneous items. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation was run on 19 items related to anxiety. Three factors were produced with eigenvalue greater than one, which accounted for 63.3% of the total variance. Table 2 shows the loadings of variables on factors, communalities and percent of the variance.

Table 2  
Factor Loadings, Communalities ( $h^2$ ), Percents of Variance

Item	Factor 1	2	3	$h^2$
A 5	.804			.694
A 6	.782			.678
3	.779			.681
2	.769			.665
4	.675			.626
1	.673			.634
13	.582			.618
8		.812		.705
9		.760		.604
7		.755		.653
18		.629		.634
11		.569		.577
12		.556		.564
19		.532		.484
10		.500		.537
14			.818	.698
16			.815	.675
15			.794	.721
17			.710	.576
% of the variance	44.3	11.1	7.9	
% of total variance accounted for by the 3 factors				63.29

Six items were loaded on the first factor, accounting for 44% of the variance. Items included in this factor are the following.

#### Examples of Factor 1 : Communication Anxiety

1. I feel scared when my foreign professor talks to me in English.
2. I feel scared when my Korean professor talks to me in English.
3. I feel scared when my classmates talk to me in English.
4. I feel scared when I speak English to my foreign professor.
5. I feel scared when I speak English to my Korean professor.
6. I feel scared when I speak English to my classmates.

The six items in the first factor indicate the learners' perception of anxiety when they are required to communicate in English. Thus, the first factor was labelled as "Communication Anxiety". In particular, we can see that learners' anxiety can be initiated either by expectation of comprehension of spoken English or expectation of producing spoken English. In addition, items of Factor 1 show that learners' anxiety is caused just by communication in English regardless of their partners, native teacher or Korean teacher.

The second factor included nine items and accounted for 11 % of the variance. This was named "Criticism Anxiety", considering that it showed actual and perceived criticism of learners as a

result of communicating in English.

Examples of Factor 2 : Criticism Anxiety

- 7. I worry if I speak better English than my classmates.
- 8. I worry if my classmates speak better English than I do.
- 9. I worry that my classmates will get a higher grade than I will.
- 10. I worry that I'll make a mistake if I speak English.
- 11. I worry that people will laugh at me if I speak English.
- 12. I worry when the professor corrects my English mistakes.
- 13. I worry when my classmates correct my English mistakes.
- 18. I feel more scared in English class than in other class.
- 19. I forget English when the professor asks me a question.

Item 7 shows that in Korean language classroom, criticism may result not only from simple mistakes, but also from displaying higher English speaking ability than their peers'. Criticism is caused by a combination of criticism from sources such as peers, teachers and assessments.

Item 14, 15, 16 and 17 comprised the third factor, accounting for 7.9 % of the variance. It was assigned a label of "Examination Anxiety". The four items in this factor seek to quantify the effects of examinations on learner anxiety.

Examples of Factor 3 : Examination Anxiety

- 14. I worry about general written English tests.
- 15. I worry about English speaking tests.
- 16. I worry about the TOEIC test.
- 17. I worry about my grade in this class.

In Korean, examinations are not only a classroom anxiety but a social anxiety as a result of the weight standardized English tests carry on a job or graduate school application.

The factor solution of the present study provided support for Horwitz et al.'s construct of foreign language anxiety. It has shown evidence that communication anxiety, criticism anxiety and examination anxiety are significant components of foreign language anxiety. In particular, the present study supported Horwitz et al.'s claim that test anxiety is the third component of foreign language anxiety, unlike MacIntyre & Gardner's results (1991) and Aida's (1994). They argued that test anxiety is not specific to foreign language learning based on their results. Aida (1994) suggested that speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are relatively enduring personality traits, whereas test anxiety is a state marked by temporary reactions to an academic or evaluation situation. However, the present results clearly shows that examination anxiety is a significant factor for Korean learners of English.

**5.2 Relationships between anxiety/confidence and oral performance**

The relationships among anxiety, self-confidence and oral performance was examined through correlation analysis and ANOVA. First, the overall correlation between anxiety/confidence and oral performance was investigated.

Table 3  
Coefficients between Anxiety/Confidence and Oral Performance

	Oral Performance
Anxiety	-.312**
Confidence	.471**
Sig.	.001



The correlation coefficient between self-confidence and oral performance was  $r = .471$  ( $p < 0.01$ ), while the correlation between anxiety and oral performance was  $r = -.312$  ( $p < 0.01$ ), giving a confirmation to the natural expectation that there may be a positive relation between self-confidence and oral performance, but a negative relation between anxiety and oral performance. The negative correlation between anxiety and learners' oral performance shows that the higher the students' level of anxiety, the lower their oral performance scores are.

Correlation between the four factors of self-confidence and learners' oral performance was analyzed.

Table 4  
Coefficients between Factors and Oral Performance

Factor	Oral Performance
S-C	.168
C-C	.241**
P-C	.272**
A-C	.126

\*\* means  $p < .01$ .

According to the results of the analysis, Factor 2, "Communication Confidence", and Factor 3, "Language Potential Confidence", were significantly correlated with oral performance under the probability of .01. Particularly, Factor 3, Language Potential Confidence, showed the highest correlation with oral performance ( $r = .272$ ).

The subjects were divided into a higher self-confidence group and a lower self-confidence group based on their total score on the self-confidence questionnaire. Then, ANOVA was employed using self-confidence as the independent variable and oral performance as the dependent variable. The result of the analysis showed that there was a significant effect of self-confidence on oral performance ( $F(1, 122) = 10.369$ ,  $p < .005$ ).

Next, for the further analysis, the correlation analysis was run on three factors of anxiety and speaking performance. The results are shown in table 5.

Table 5  
Coefficients between Factors and Oral Performance

Factor	Oral Performance
Communication A	-.337**
Criticism A	-.196*
Examination A	.052

\*\* means  $p < .01$ . \* means  $p < .05$ .

As shown in table 5, communication anxiety showed the highest negative relation with oral performance ( $r = -1.337$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that communication anxiety is the most significant component in producing oral performance.

For the second analysis, each student was classified into a high anxiety group and a low anxiety group based on his/her total score on the anxiety questionnaire. After that, ANOVA was performed using anxiety (high vs low) as independent variable and speaking performance as the dependent variable. The result of the analysis showed that there was a significant effect of anxiety on speaking performance ( $F(1, 112) = 8.223$ ,  $p < .005$ ).

For the further analysis, the correlation analysis of anxiety/self-confidence and oral performance was run in terms of range, ease, delivery and interaction (Table.6).

Table 6

Correlation between Anxiety/Self-confidence and Elements of Oral Performance

		Range	Ease	Attitude	Delivery	Interaction
Confidence	Pearson Coefficient	.375**	.323**	.411**	.234**	.425**
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.009	.000
	N	123	123	123	123	123
Anxiety	Pearson Coefficient	-.297**	-.257*	-.234*	-.179	-.235*
	Sig.	.001	.006	.012	.056	.012
	N	114	114	114	114	114

\*\* means the coefficient is significant under the probability < 0.01.

\* means it is significant under the probability < 0.05 level.

According to the results, self-confidence was seen more positively related to interaction ( $r=.375$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and attitude ( $r= .411$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while anxiety was more negatively related to range (vocabulary and grammar,  $r=-.297$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than others.

## 6. Conclusion

This study was concerned with what relationships L2 learners' anxiety and self-confidence have with their oral performance. It showed that learners' anxiety about communication, criticism and examination were the main components of anxiety for Korean learners of English, and learners' anxiety level was negatively related to their oral performance. For self-confidence, L2 learners' situational confidence, communication confidence, language potential confidence, and language ability confidence were the main components of self-confidence. In particular, communication confidence and self-image of language potential were closely correlated with oral performance.

From these findings, it is suggested that for more effectively improving L2 learners' oral performance, the teacher, native or non-native, should pay more attention to learners' affective domains, in particular, their self-confidence and anxiety, and that he/she should try to remove a significant amount of anxiety in students and begin to build confidence in them as they communicate more often in English.

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## Appendix A

### Self-confidence Questionnaire

- (1) Strongly Disagree
  - (2) Disagree
  - (3) Neither Disagree nor Agree
  - (4) Agree
  - (5) Strongly Agree
1. I can learn to speak English.
  2. I am a good English speaker now.
  3. I am a good student.
  4. I am an important member of my group.
  5. My group needs me to come to class every week.
  6. I don't feel shy speaking English to my classmates.
  7. I don't feel shy speaking English to my foreign professor.
  8. I don't feel shy speaking English to my Korean professor.
  9. I think that I will speak perfect English someday.
  10. I think that I will get a great TOEIC score someday.
  11. I think that I will get an A or A+ in this class.

### Anxiety Questionnaire

1. I feel scared when my foreign professor talks to me in English.
2. I feel scared when my Korean professor talks to me in English.
3. I feel scared when my classmates talk to me in English.
4. I feel scared when I speak English to my foreign professor.
5. I feel scared when I speak English to my Korean professor.
6. I feel scared when I speak English to my classmates.
7. I worry if I speak better English than my classmates.
8. I worry if my classmates speak better English than I do.
9. I worry that my classmates will get a higher grade than I will.
10. I worry that I'll make a mistake if I speak English.
11. I worry that people will laugh at me if I speak English.
12. I worry when the professor corrects my English mistakes.
13. I worry when my classmates correct my English mistakes.
14. I worry about English writing tests.
15. I worry about English speaking tests.
16. I worry about the TOEIC test.
17. I worry about my grade in this class.
18. I feel more scared in English class than in other class.
19. I forget English when the professor asks me a question.