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## Exploring the Nature of Language Anxiety: Experiences of NonNative EnglishSpeaking College Students in the United States

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Exploring the Nature of Language Anxiety:  
Experiences of Non-Native English-Speaking College Students in the United States

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Curriculum and Instruction  
Language Education

by

Noriko Ito

B.A. Doshisha University, 1998  
M.Ed. Southeastern Louisiana University, 2002

August 2008

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To my parents,  
Mr. Bungo Ito and Mrs. Mieko Ito

who gave me the inspiration, opportunity, and unconditional support  
for my academic endeavor and personal growth

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## Abstract

The thought of learning another language makes some people cringe, while others display neutral to positive reactions. To understand the complex experiences of students learning a new language, this study investigated the affective psychological development encompassing language anxiety (LA) among non-native English-speaking college students in the United States (US). The purpose of this study was to identify LA, while keeping in mind that some of the LA experiences may be moderate to none, and to explore the nature of this phenomenon. Ten university students from nine different countries were interviewed concerning their experiences learning and functioning in English in the US. While only a few studies have reviewed the nature of LA encompassing the possible existence of facilitating LA, this study investigated both the positive and negative effects of anxiety on second language learning. The answer to the research question, “How do college students in the US whose native languages are not English experience LA?” was pursued by using qualitative analyses. The results indicated a new construct of LA, identity frustration, and its relationships to the other LA constructs already specified in the literature. The study also suggested the timing when students cease to translate between the two languages to be the point where they experience a lower level of LA. In addition, four other themes emerged. They are culture-related LA; the recursive nature of LA; relationships among self-expectation, self-confidence, and LA; and facilitating LA, termed *euphoric language tension*.

Keywords: language anxiety, foreign language, second language, EFL/ESL, college students, phenomenological approach

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

“Foreign language is not my thing.”

“It is intimidating to take language classes.”

These are some of the comments I often hear while conversing with my peers, when our topic of conversation encompasses my area of focus, language education. As a non-native speaker of English myself, I have experienced learning and functioning in a foreign/second language. To me, those comments are intriguing, since I did not seem to have gone through the same negative feelings toward language learning that they represent.

By exploring the experiences of students learning English as a Second Language (ESL), I hope to identify the existence of their Language Anxiety (LA), as well as its mechanisms. In addition, by investigating the relative lack of LA in students' experiences and the possible existence of facilitating LA, I hope to add a new perspective to the literature.

LA is defined as a “complicated psychological phenomenon peculiar to language learning” (Young, 1992, p. 157), and a “response to a condition in which the external element is or is perceived as presenting a demand that threatens to exceed the student's capabilities and resources for meeting it” (Williams, 1991, p. 25). Also, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) identified language anxiety as “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128) in a foreign language learning context. When I reflected on my own foreign/second language learning experiences, I was not certain if a part of my language learning experience was represented in the definitions. Is LA something experienced by only a small

number of people? How do students experience LA? If there seems to be little or no LA experienced by a student, how can it be explained?

According to Horwitz (2000), as many as one-third of the students who study foreign languages at universities in the United States (US) experience some LA that can vary in intensity. Also, LA is reported to be one of the most serious problems in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and ESL (Moslehpour & Chou, 2004). Some research studies report the stories about people who do almost everything in order to avoid learning a new language (e.g., Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 2003). In addition to the knowledge from the literature, a first hand incident made me think seriously about the extent of the effects LA can have on students.

I was advising one of my students at a university where I work when the student said, “I made sure that foreign languages are not required for my degree, you know, I called the college advisor to confirm it before I picked my major.” “Well, why?” I could not help asking him. He replied, “Because it’s just this...foreign language thing, it freaks me out. I really don’t want to be in that situation!” After this interchange, I had no choice but to acknowledge the existence of LA in some students and the extent of its effects, the notion that LA could be so strong that it affects students’ choice of a major in the university.

While I was becoming familiar with some students’ LA experiences, my question remained. Is LA always a negative experience? How would I describe my own language learning experience in terms of LA? Did I not experience LA; or is there some other explanation for it?

Although a majority of the researchers have focused on the negative effects of LA (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003), some studies have shown the existence of a beneficial LA. In 1975, Chastain suggested that a little stress is beneficial in language learning, while too much anxiety is detrimental. Also, Kim (2001) discussed the distinction

between debilitating LA and facilitating LA by equating facilitating LA to a small amount of would-be debilitating LA. Kim explained that when the level of anxiety becomes higher, facilitating anxiety turns into debilitating anxiety. Kleinmann (1977) also reported that facilitating LA exists as one affective measure and it positively influences learners' behavior in a target language. While more studies placed the two kinds of anxiety as made of the same construct in different magnitudes, Alpert and Haber (1960) speculated that the two constructs of debilitating and facilitating anxiety may be uncorrelated. Their study suggests that facilitating LA is not a small scale of debilitating LA; it has its own construct. If this is the case, what is facilitating anxiety, and how is it experienced? Are there certain aspects of language learning where we should be focusing in order to identify the nature of and difference between facilitating and debilitating LA? And, more fundamentally, why do students feel especially anxious when it comes to learning a new language?

According to Tse (2000), studying another language is different from learning any other subjects taught in school because it involves students learning to shape themselves in the ways of an unfamiliar culture. Also, Dornyei (2003) suggested differentiating language learning from other school subjects because of its socially and culturally bound nature. Since language is essential and extremely influential on individuals' lives, learning a new language directly threatens students' self-concepts and views of the world (Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Saito, Horwitz, and Garza (1999), students develop anxiety with unfamiliar scripts and unfamiliar cultural material. Beginners who are trying to express themselves in a language other than their own may feel intimidated by the fear that they may not convey their ideas adequately.

Even after students have learned the rules and vocabulary of the language, understanding the cultural context underlying the text is essential in order to master the language (Horwitz,

2000). According to Pappamihiel (2002), nonnative speakers are limited in their ability to make situational appraisals, not only by linguistic difficulties, but also by cultural difficulties.

Mechanisms of language learning cannot be fully understood without taking into account the target culture, as well as the learner's native culture (Barnitz, 1986). With two or more different cultures influencing each other in the course of language learning, teaching a language so that it complements rather than competes with the other is crucial (Canagarajah, 2006). Learning a new language and understanding the culture behind it in a school setting can be an overwhelming task for many students. The thought of not making themselves understood in the way they wish is intensified by the large number of unknowns. This can put a tremendous amount of pressure on students, eventually developing into a continuous LA.

In contrast to the LA experiences that are detrimental to students' language learning, Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) define the beneficial effect of LA as euphoric tension. By placing themselves in a completely unfamiliar situation, students experience euphoric tension, which brings the opportunity for students to reinvent themselves. This feeling of becoming someone else allows students to become less worried about the subject (Horwitz et al., 1986), and eventually helps students to open up new social horizons (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

Although Spielmann and Radonofsky's (2001) study targeted the experiences of English speaking students learning French, and many others (e.g., Horwitz et. al., 1986; Young, 1992) tend to focus on the LA of learning various target languages other than English, I find it relevant to discuss them in my study, which targets students learning English. Regardless of which language students are trying to master, disoriented feelings students may experience due to the lack of familiarity, as stated previously, are universal. In addition, because my study is focused on the experiences of students learning ESL, some findings may only be relevant to students who

are learning in ESL contexts. By discussing the differences between EFL and ESL in their relation to LA in the next section, I want to provide readers some idea of my study's implications to EFL, ESL, and other language learning contexts.

Kojic-Sabo and Lightbown (1999) studied the difference in students' approaches to vocabulary learning and their relationship to success. They reported that ESL students scored higher on learner independence than EFL students. Learning comes more naturally to ESL students because they can take advantage of the environment to engage in independent learning activities, whereas the situation hardly lends itself to learning for EFL students; they need to positively seek such opportunities. The same authors also reported that learner initiative and independence are crucial for higher English proficiency. Combining both findings, their study indicates that ESL students have an advantage over EFL students in starting the process of learning, which may possibly affect each group's LA experiences differently.

Cha (2002) also reported students' different learning experiences in ESL and EFL situations. She compared Korean students in Korea and Delhi, India, and reported stronger motivation for learning among ESL students, as well as better performance. Heavy error tendency was reported among EFL students in terms of the effect on communication. This indicates that EFL students may be more prone to communication apprehension than ESL students due to the types of struggles they are reported to go through. Saito and Ebsworth (2004) confirm this notion by reporting that EFL students had a slightly higher communication apprehension level than ESL students, which led to negative attitudes towards participation during class activities. They also reported that the fear of making mistakes in front of other students was stronger among EFL students compared to their counterparts in ESL. These tendencies may be traced back to the reported difference in closeness between teacher and



students. According to the same authors, distant and often one-way classroom communication with the teacher was found to be common in EFL classrooms, as opposed to a more friendly and personal communication in ESL classrooms. The latter setting seems to promote a more relaxed and open atmosphere, which is consistent with students' preference reported in Saito and Ebsworth's (2004) study. The reported ESL classroom characteristics also correspond to the type of classroom atmosphere indicated as reducing student's LA (see Samimy, 1994).

Some native language support was also reported to be helpful, especially at early stages of proficiency (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004). Saito and Ebsworth stated that by allowing such a strategy, rather than mandating "English only" classrooms, teachers can communicate to students the message that learners' views and feelings play an active role during the learning process. Used in ESL or EFL classrooms, the strategy has the potential for increasing students' self-confidence and consequently reducing LA.

Another important difference Saito and Ebsworth (2004) discussed in their study was the difference in student motivation. They stated that more EFL students tend to take English to fulfill a requirement, while more ESL students consider English as necessary for their future. The authors did not indicate any implications of the motivational difference on LA. For ESL students, the fact that English plays an important role in their future could be a great motivation; at the same time, it could be an overwhelming pressure. For this reason, the question of whether there is a direct connection between students' motivational difference and their LA experiences remains unanswered.

In contrast to the studies that differentiate ESL and EFL, Warschauer (2000) pointed out a shift in the relationship between ESL and EFL, due to the change in the global economy. He states that the very growth of English causes learners to struggle between global networks and

local identities, consequently leading them to create their own local version of English rather than conform to standardized English spoken in countries like Great Britain and the United States. By having their own version of English, it becomes no longer a foreign language, but a second language. Warschauer stated that “there will be a growing basis for learners around the world to view English as their own language of communication rather than as a foreign language...” (p. 515). He further pushes this point by stating that because of this trend even native speakers of English may need to become learners of new dialects. The rapid increase of speakers of English as an additional language will shift the original emphasis from “authenticity (i.e., following native speaker norms)” to “authorship (i.e., creating texts within structured environments)” (p. 524), which in turn blurs the distinction between ESL and EFL. When EFL comes closer to ESL, how does this phenomenon affect learners’ possible LA experiences? In a world where a foreign language is becoming a not-so-foreign language, students’ fear of the unknown may be reduced. By having an authorship of English, rather than seeking its authenticity, learners of the language may regain a sense of control rather than losing one, hence may experience less anxiety while learning English.

Overall, the studies suggest that ESL students may be less prone to experience debilitating LA, as compared to EFL students, with the exception that motivational differences in ESL and EFL students may or may not affect their LA level. This indicates that the level of LA discussed in some of the literature may not be identified in my study by targeting ESL students as participants. However, the goal of this study is not to pinpoint students’ LA experiences, but to understand their psychological processes, which may or may not involve LA. Because ESL students generally exhibit a higher level of proficiency in English, their learning experiences encompass a wider span of learning stages from beginner to near-native levels. By targeting ESL

students, this study allows me to investigate the long-term affective development of English learners, as opposed to a short term language learning process experienced by EFL students.

To understand the complex experiences of students learning a new language, this study investigates the affective psychological development encompassing LA among non-native college students in the US. The purpose of this study is to identify LA, while keeping in mind that some of the LA experiences may be moderate to none, and to explore the nature of this phenomenon. The following research question is explored.

#### *Research Question*

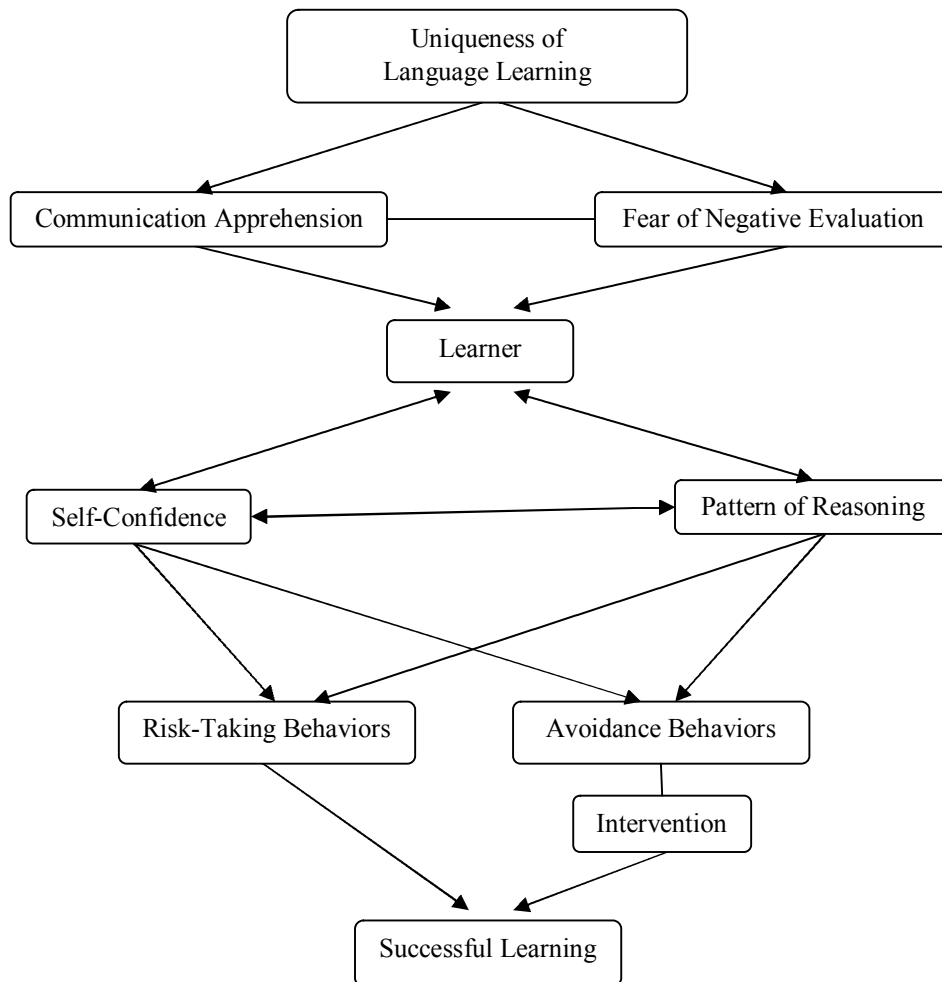
How do college students in the US whose native languages are not English experience LA?

#### *Conceptual Framework*

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), conceptual frameworks are “simply the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated” (p. 20). Since researchers function as the main instrument in qualitative studies (Glense, 1999), understanding my knowledge bases, from where I started my study, is as important as being familiar with the instrument used in quantitative studies. The influential sources cited to explain the following concepts are discussed further in detail in Chapter 2.

In developing my conceptual framework shown below, I placed *learner* in the center. Above the learner lie two components of LA, *communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation*. The placement of the two variables shows my assumption that the two variables directly influence a learner, as well as the notion that the two variables, in fact, represent LA. My rationale for the placement of the two variables comes from the literature. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), LA is represented by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and

test anxiety. Test anxiety is not included in the conceptual framework because I agree with the later studies that consider test anxiety as a part of general anxiety, rather than one of the components of LA (e.g., Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). LA's direct impact on students' learning is reported in many studies. Horwitz et al. and Phillips (1992) reported students' avoidance behaviors and frustration, respectively, due to LA.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

Directly above communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, I placed *uniqueness of language learning*. This indicates my belief that there is something particular to language learning that causes students to experience communication apprehension and/or fear of

negative evaluation. Studying languages is different from learning any other subjects in terms of its socially and culturally bound nature (Dornyei, 2003; Tse, 2000). Horwitz et al. (1986) reported the nature of language learning as posing a potential threat to students, which in turn helps develop LA. The fear that they may not convey their ideas adequately is intensified among beginners in language classes. Moreover, being required to understand the cultural context underlying the text adds another challenge to language learners (Horwitz, 2000). Canagarajah (2006) reported that teaching a language in a way that complements rather than competes with the students' native language and culture is crucial, because no one can be a blank slate in the course of learning a language and culture. The thought of not getting the message across and feeling inadequate can make students feel a loss of control. The large amount of pressure they experience eventually develops into continuous LA.

Directly below the learner, I have two boxes labeled as *self-confidence* and *pattern of reasoning*. The conceptual framework indicates that these two variables affect the learner directly and his/her LA experience indirectly. I am aware that there are more variables that may affect students' learning and LA, but these two variables were the ones I was interested in.

Siew-Lian Wong (2005) reported that ESL students tend to have low self-efficacy in terms of their language skills, which makes them reluctant to engage in English-referent academic tasks. Also, Lalonde and Gardner (1984) reported that anxiety was mediated by high self-confidence. These two studies suggest the possibility of successful language learning by reducing the anxiety that improves self-confidence or vice versa.

I included the pattern of reasoning as one of the affecting variables because I was intrigued by Dweck and Wortman's (1982) study that investigates the learned helplessness of students. According to Dweck and Wortman, anxiety is experienced only by a group of students

who share certain characteristics. An anxiety provoking situation is interpreted differently by successful students and unsuccessful students, thereby producing different results. When looking for a reason for their failures, successful students tend to attribute those failures to their lack of effort. In contrast, unsuccessful students tend to attribute their failures to something uncontrollable, such as their IQ scores. My concept map shows that there is a connection between how students perceive a pressure (LA) and deal with it in two different ways.

Depending on learners' self-confidence and pattern of reasoning, their reaction to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation can be divided into two categories. They are *risk-taking behaviors* and *avoidance behaviors*. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), learning a new language can provide students with a feeling of being someone else, which in turn promotes their risk-taking behaviors needed to succeed in the class. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) defined a similar phenomenon as the "personality-altering nature of the language leaning experience," which exempts students from the overwhelming sense of vulnerability to language learning (p. 269). There are opposite effects attached to the act of learning languages as well. The negative consequences of experiencing LA can be represented by avoidance behaviors such as skipping classes (Horwitz et al., 1986), and choosing a different major in order to avoid taking foreign language classes (Bailey, Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 2003).

In order to bridge the avoidance behaviors to *successful learning*, I placed *intervention* between them. According to Bailey, Onwuegbuzie and Daley (1999), students who preferred to learn in a group showed lower levels of LA. Students' less defensive attitudes within the peer tutoring program were observed (Cortese, 1985). Also, discussing the goals of activities in the classroom (Barkhuizen, 1998) and creating a relaxing atmosphere (Samimy, 1994) are reported to be effective in reducing anxiety in language learning settings.

To further clarify my point of view, below is the list of definitions of the key terms used in the discussion of my study. The main studies consulted for the definition are indicated after each description.

### *Definition of Terms*

1. Avoidance Behaviors: certain behaviors students develop in reaction to the strong anxiety experienced in the course of language learning that will hinder students' normal participation in the class (Horwitz et al., 1986)
2. Euphoric Language Tension (ELT): feeling of finding a new aspect of the student's personality, sometime labeled as facilitating anxiety, through the experience of learning a new language and culture (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001)
3. Language Anxiety (LA): complicated psychological phenomenon peculiar to language learning (Young, 1992)
4. Risk-Taking Behaviors: certain behaviors students exhibit in the course of language learning that characterize the challenging nature of the performance in order to achieve the level of proficiency in the target language (Kleinmann, 1977)

LA is a complicated phenomenon known mostly as having negative effects on students' learning. Only a few research studies have suggested its positive effects. In the next chapter, LA and ELT will be discussed along with student behaviors associated with the experiences, as well as other areas concerning LA.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

To understand the complex experiences of students learning a new language, and to investigate students' language anxiety (LA)-related affective psychological development, eight main areas of literature were reviewed. The criteria for inclusion of the literature in the review are as follows: (a) Does it discuss LA? (b) Does it discuss the affective aspect of language learning? (c) Does it talk about the mechanism of anxiety? The first priority was given to articles that meet the criterion (a) because of their highest relevancy to my research. To gain a broader knowledge affecting LA, and anxiety in general, criteria (b) and (c) were also included.

The first area of literature I will discuss in this section is the negative effects of LA and avoidance behaviors, which provides the rationale for conducting the study by indicating the impact of the study on the population affected by LA. The second area focuses on students' LA experiences that could be categorized as positive. In order to prevent the negative impression the word "anxiety" may convey to readers, facilitating anxiety was named *euphoric language tension* (ELT) in this study. The possibility of students' experiencing ELT in the process of language learning was explored side by side with risk-taking behaviors observed in language learning situations. The third area focuses on the mechanisms of LA. Discussion in this section includes identifying LA within the theories of anxiety and its development. The fourth section is devoted to locating LA within the larger map of language learning. This information is intended for the readers to be able to identify LA, not as isolated experiences, but as experiences embedded in the process of language learning. The fifth area explores the components of LA. Among the components of LA, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and their possible counterparts, socially-oriented anxiety and academic-oriented anxiety, are



discussed. The sixth area investigates the relationships between native language competence and LA. Sparks and Ganschow's (1991) linguistic coding deficit hypothesis (LCDH) is examined in relation to LA in this section. The seventh area examines the relationships between self-confidence and LA. Their direct relationship is reviewed in terms of their connections to successful language learning. The last area explores other possible individual factors affecting LA.

### *Negative Effects of LA and Avoidance Behaviors*

The majority of studies in this field find that there are some aspects of LA that are detrimental to students' achievement (Bailey et al., 1999; Casado & Dershiwsky, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2000; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Moslehpour & Chou, 2004; Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003; Saito et al., 1999). Students with high levels of anxiety in language classes are unlikely to participate fully in the class. Moderate to severe avoidance behaviors, which Young (1991) once identified as "disaffiliative behaviors" (p. 429), are observed as a coping mechanism among students experiencing LA. LA can cause students to become quiet in the classroom, where as they would otherwise be talkative (Horwitz et al., 1986), to freeze-up during class activities (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999), to be frustrated about not being able to express what they know (Phillips, 1992), to have higher absence rates (Horwitz et al., 1986), and, ultimately, to avoid taking foreign language courses altogether in the future by changing their majors (Bailey et al., 2003). Even an event proven to be beneficial, such as visiting a target country, could cause students to develop an inflated fear of negative evaluation due to their perceived expectation from the instructor for them to be more proficient than others (Kitano, 2001).

One of the first major studies in LA was conducted in 1986 by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope. The LA of 75 American university students in introductory Spanish classes was examined using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The FLCAS was developed by the authors of the study and was designed to elicit students' self-reporting of anxiety over various aspects of language learning. It contains 33 items, each of which is answered on a five-point Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The possible score range is 33 to 165. The higher score indicates a higher level of anxiety. The instrument's internal reliability, Cronbach alpha of .93, as well as the test-retest reliability of  $r = .83$  were reported. No validity was reported at the time of the study. Horwitz et al. concluded that significant LA is experienced by many students in response to some aspects of language learning. They suggested communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety as relevant components for conceptualizing LA. Although they mentioned a few instances of positive effects of LA, the study's focus was on debilitating LA and its connection to students' avoidance behaviors.

In addition to the Horwitz et al. (1986) study, other researchers have concluded that the nature of language learning could affect students in a way that alienates them from their own background. Therefore, when anxiety is limited to the language learning context, LA falls into a special category that separates it from other types of anxiety (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). The literature suggests the need for special consideration by teachers in order to effectively deal with LA in language learning situations. My study explores how the unique nature of language learning affects students' LA, and, ultimately, affects their patterns of learning behaviors.

### *Euphoric Language Tension and Risk-Taking Behaviors*

While numerous other studies have consistently found negative correlations between LA and students' achievement (Bailey et al., 1999; Casado & Dershiwsky, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2000; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Moslehpour & Chou, 2004; Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003; Saito et al., 1999), Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) explored, in their qualitative study, the idea that there may be potentially beneficial effects of this pressure-induced phenomenon currently labeled LA. They considered the option that some degree of LA may be desirable and perhaps even crucial to students' success.

Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) used the term *euphoric tension* in their study to represent the phenomenon in which students discover the “opportunity to re-invent themselves” (p. 269) while learning a new language. To emphasize the fact that this phenomenon is unique to the language learning situation, I term the experience *euphoric language tension* (ELT) in my study. ELT has been identified in some studies as the feeling of being someone else (Horwitz et al., 1986), a phenomenon which motivates some students to face a challenging novel task (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Also ELT represents the “personality-altering nature of the language leaning experience which exempts students from the overwhelming sense of vulnerability to language learning” (Spielmann & Radnofsky 2001, p. 269).

The above definitions of ELT promise the promotion of behaviors needed to become successful in language learning, especially in conjunction with a relaxing classroom atmosphere. For example, students with a high level of ELT may face communication apprehension in classroom as a motivation, since they see the pressure as a chance for them to show a new aspect of themselves. On the contrary, students without ELT experiences may take the same pressure in language classrooms as a threat to their self-concepts and an invasion of their pre-established

comfort zone. The two different scenarios can be seen in Kitano's (2001) study, which reported two different outcomes of the effect of visiting the target language country. On the one hand, by visiting a country in which the target language is spoken, students performed well because of the fact that they had the opportunity to experience something others did not, which may have allowed them to feel more advanced than their classmates. On the other hand, some students in the same situation developed an inflated fear of negative evaluation due to their perceived expectation that the instructor expected them to be more proficient than others. The first outcome could be due to a high level of ELT while the second outcome could be attributed to a high level of LA.

When ELT gives students the excuse to be brave, it can promote risk-taking behaviors that are necessary to communicate in a new language (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Research studies reported that one of the consistent characteristics of successful language learners was to be risk-takers; therefore, language learning involves some types of risk-taking if students want to achieve a sufficient level of fluency (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Rubin, 1975). Despite the reported benefits of risk-taking behaviors, however, some studies show that students in language classes tend to be unwilling to participate in the classroom while using the target language unless they are certain that they are correct (Kleinmann, 1977; Samimy, 1994). If students are ready to participate in class voluntarily and willing to take the risk of making mistakes in class, their proficiency in the target language, especially their speaking ability, may improve (Samimy, 1994). To overcome students' hesitations to participate in classroom activities, Samimy suggested that a relaxing atmosphere may minimize the communication apprehension and, in turn, may promote risk-taking behaviors in class.

Because experiencing ELT involves a feeling of being someone else, it may be similarly treated as an influencer on students' risk-taking behaviors. As Kleinmann (1977) also suggested, further research is needed on risk-taking behaviors in language learning. My study explores the nature of ELT and its surrounding effects. The investigation includes the relationship between ELT and risk-taking behaviors in contrast to the relationship between LA and avoidance behaviors in language learning.

### *Mechanisms of LA*

According to Spielberger (1966), anxiety can be categorized into *state anxiety* and *trait anxiety*. State anxiety is represented by a transitory condition whereas trait anxiety refers to a rather stable individual tendency. While many researchers agree that LA falls into the category of state anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Williams, 1991; Young, 1991), some suggest that there should be a third category for classifying LA (Abu-Rabia, 2004; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The third category is termed *situation specific anxiety*. If a learner is experiencing situation specific anxiety, the learner is "usually worried, physically insecure, and unable to engage in situational learning" (Abu-Rabia, 2004, p. 712). Situation specific anxiety is temporary and the experience is limited to a specific context for individuals.

Learning a new language does not necessarily always induce LA experiences in students. Therefore, there must be mechanisms in place that break down the process of LA development among individuals. According to the expectancy-value theory of anxiety (EVTA) by Pekrun (1992), basic assumptions concerning anxiety formation can be discussed in four stages. First, at the *situation-outcome expectancy* stage, students decide if there is any negative event to be expected. If the answer is no, students will not experience anxiety; if the answer is yes, they progress to the second stage. The second stage relates to *intrinsic/extrinsic valences*. At this stage,

students evaluate the extent of the potentially harmful event. At the third, *action-control expectancies* stage, students evaluate the capacity of the preventative action they can take. The final stage is the *action-outcome expectancy* stage where students compare the information they gathered on the second and third stages. At this stage, if a student perceives that the threat surmounts his/her preventative skills, the student will experience anxiety because he/she feels the threat truly exists.

Pekrun (1992) examined the anxiety-achievement relations characterized by feed-back loops. In his EVTA model, the anxiety generated in the fourth stage affects the third, *action-control expectancies* stage, resulting in a lower estimate of students' preventative skills. In contrast, the nonexistence of anxiety at the fourth stage will result in the endorsement of the higher estimate of their preventative skills at the third stage. Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) explain that the former pattern occurs because anxiety consumes students' cognitive resources to cope with the threat. Similarly, Eysenck (1988) discusses the tendency of anxious individuals being overwhelmed in learning. According to him, anxious students selectively allocate processing resources to threatening stimuli by focusing on self-evaluative worry rather than the task-relevant content; therefore, they have less available working memory for learning. Furthermore, another research reported that anxious students' resources tend to be preoccupied with somatic concerns (Tobias, 1979). With fewer resources to cope, students become more vulnerable to anxiety. By students perceiving themselves as incompetent, even low levels of challenging stimuli can produce anxiety. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) reported that the simple perception of ability affects students' classroom participation. In conjunction with LA, low self-confidence can affect their classroom performances.

According to Dweck and Wortman (1982), anxiety is experienced only by a group of students who share certain characteristics. Also, Eysenck (1988) reported that there are individual differences in processing stimuli, which result in high and low anxiety. Dweck and Wortman classified students into two categories according to their pattern of reasoning. Students who tend to blame their unchangeable traits (such as IQ) for their unwanted results are classified as self-focused, whereas students who attribute their lack of effort to their failures are classified as task-focused. They reported that self-focused students tend to have lower self-confidence compared to task-focused students. In addition, self-focused students are more prone to have anxiety than task-focused students because self-focused students “tend to misinterpret external situations negatively, blame themselves for the situation, have stronger fear of negative evaluation, and have a negative attitude toward a given task” (Dweck & Wortman, 1982, p. 114).

Dweck and Wortman (1982) gave an extensive description of unsuccessful self-focused students; however, there were few descriptions of successful task-focused students. Their study was focused on describing the differences between two groups (self-focused and task-focused) without practical implications as to how we can identify the factors that encourage or discourage students to become task-focused or self-focused. Within a language learning context, it is possible that the pattern of reasoning identified by Dweck and Wortman contributes to the mechanisms of LA and students’ behaviors. Self-focused students’ stronger fear of negative evaluation could lead to the display of avoidance behavior while the higher self-confidence of the task-focused students may encourage their risk-taking behaviors that promote success in their language learning.

Furthermore, Scovel (1978) reported that even a high level of anxiety facilitates language learning when the task is at a beginner level. This means that a high level of stimuli can positively affect learning as long as students are able to locate the resources to deal with the stimuli. Therefore, if students are likely to succeed because of a less demanding skill level, it promotes learning despite the fact that the situation may be anxiety provoking. The confidence earned by this success can free up the working memory previously preoccupied by the worry (Eysenck, 1998), which further strengthens students' chance of future success. For the same reason, the same level of anxiety could be detrimental if the task was difficult and the students' experiences resulted in failure. Eysenck's analysis suggests that instructors should focus on the basic skills first to foster students' facilitating anxiety, while highlighting difficult skills as important may invite debilitating anxiety. It may be true that just the right amount of anxiety facilitates performance (Scovel, 1978); however, the level of the difficulty of the task is relative to the students' ability. Since more tasks can be classified as easy for students with higher intelligence compared to students with lower intelligence, anxiety would be expected to be a more positive experience for higher intelligence students.

As far as effective classroom practices dealing with LA are concerned, Pekrun's (1992) causal analysis revealed several cause-effect connections. For example, according to his analysis, unpredictability fosters anxiety. If a threat cannot be assessed, even a student well equipped with preventative skills may experience anxiety. In order to prevent unnecessary anxiety in the classroom, Pekrun suggests that educators should provide a physically and psychologically non-threatening environment. In particular, he recommends that teachers be upfront and discrete about their rules in the classroom in order to avoid students developing excessive anxiety. Having a structure in a classroom gives students information about the impact of an event (e.g.,



an exam). Phillips' (1992) conclusion that familiarizing students with the evaluation procedure is effective in minimizing LA supports Pekrun's suggestions. Another suggestion Pekrun found for improving classroom practices is the modification of relevant belief systems. In the EVTA, experiencing anxiety depends on students' evaluation of the situation and ability. In other words, students' perceptions can play a more important role than the actual situation does. Pekrun believes that habitualized anxiety can be mediated by building up a positive expectancy-value belief system.

In my study, the mechanisms of LA are examined through a focus on two different aspects. The first focus is the relationship between students' perception of the task difficulty and LA, and the other focus is the relationship between students' goal settings and LA in ESL learning situations.

#### *Where Does LA Fit Within the Spectrum of Language Learning?*

The answer to the question lies in the theories of language learning that explain the existence of affective delimiters in language acquisition. Affective delimiters refer to individual preferences for the types of input accepted according to students' conscious and unconscious motives or needs (Dulay & Burt, 1977). Nagle and Sanders (1986) reported that affective variables can impede language learning. Some of the issues such as students hitting the learning curve before reaching native-like proficiency and having difficulty improving their language skills can be attributed to the affective factors that delimit the input data. Krashen (1981) called the function of affective delimiters the "affective filter." He stated that affective factors such as motivation and anxiety could filter out certain aspects of the input in the second language acquisition process. When the affective filter is in effect, little or no information intake can get through in order for a student to reach the acquired competence, hence little or no acquisition

will take place due to the filtering effect. For example, an overly anxious student may learn little regardless of his/her true potential because any information will be blocked at the input level.

While Krashen's (1981) affective filter mentions the effect of anxiety on language learning only at the beginning learning process, Tobias's (1979) theory placed a second affective filter right before students' knowledge output, indicating that the interruption of learning could occur not only at the input stage, but also at the output stage. He states that this represents the situation where "students claim to have studied diligently yet *freeze up* on tests" (p. 576). The second affective filter placed toward the output stage could filter out a student's ability to express ideas in a new language; therefore, the product may not represent true knowledge and potential. Furthermore, the issue of students' affective status influencing their language learning in three stages has been addressed in more recent studies.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) suggested that the effects of LA on learning should be investigated in input, processing, and output stages. Anxiety at the input stage can be explained as a feeling of uneasiness experienced by students when they are introduced to new language learning materials such as vocabularies, grammar rules, and pronunciations. Anxiety at the processing stage can be explained as apprehension experienced by students when they are trying to organize and store the knowledge. Anxiety at the output stage can be explained as fear experienced by students when they are attempting to speak or to write in the target language. In a similar study, the results indicated that students are more likely to experience anxiety during the output stage compared to input and process stages in language learning (Bailey et al., 1999). This suggests that even when students are doing well during the first two stages, they may feel anxious at the third stage, where they have to show their target language capability. The fact that

researchers recognized the effect of LA in different stages suggests that consideration for LA is needed throughout a student's learning process.

My study explored the possibility of an affective filter existing throughout the language learning spectrum, especially before an utterance in the second language. Krashen's (1981) concept of overmonitoring was incorporated for a possible explanation of students' LA experienced immediately before the demonstration of their learned knowledge in ESL contexts. Possible placement of the affective filter during the output stage in addition to the input stage may provide a meaningful explanation to students' behavior of overmonitoring, which will be discussed further in the next section.

### *Components of LA*

The constitution of LA and how it affects students' learning processes have been the interest of numerous researchers and focal point of various investigations (Horwitz et al., 1986; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Saito et al., 1999). According to Horwitz et al., LA is represented as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Yet, later studies consider test anxiety as a part of general anxiety, rather than one of the components of LA (Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined communication apprehension as "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people" (p. 127); fear of negative evaluation is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that the others would evaluate oneself negatively" (p. 128). While Horwitz et al.'s view of LA constructs is still influential in language studies, Pappamihel (2002) introduced a new approach, which classifies LA into academic-oriented anxiety and socially-oriented anxiety. Although Pappamihel did not provide clear definitions for the different types

of LA she introduced, both Horwitz et al. and Pappamihel seem to suggest similar constructs for LA. In this section, Horwitz et al.'s concepts of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation are explored along with Pappamihel's socially-oriented anxiety and academic-oriented anxiety in order to gain a comprehensive view of the components of LA.

### *Communication Apprehension*

One important aspect of language learning lies in the fact that mastery of the language itself is not usually the ultimate purpose. In other words, understanding a language is not necessarily the goal but proper use of the language within particular contexts is. Within the new culture, knowing its language is a necessity if one wishes to come to a full understanding of the subject. Without knowledge of the target language, students feel that they are deprived of the means to express themselves and to understand others, which generates communication apprehension. According to Chen and Chang (2004), because of the social aspect of language learning, the fear of not being able to communicate appropriately becomes intensified in language learning settings. Without target language skills, students feel isolated since expressing themselves becomes more difficult in an unfamiliar language.

With the notion that language is a tool, not a goal, MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement and Noels (1998) suggested that the main purpose of language learning should be to promote students' willingness to communicate in the target language. The more students are willing to communicate, the more successful the learning will be. The fact that a lower level of anxiety was observed among students with a higher level of willingness to communicate (Yashima, 2002) underscores the effectiveness of reducing LA by diminishing communication apprehension.

Also, the age of the student is an influencing factor in language learning. As students' own language starts to stabilize, a new language becomes harder to acquire. Onwuegbuzie et al.

(1999) reported that being older was one of the characteristics shown by students who scored the highest level of LA. The reasoning was that in addition to the difficulty older students may have in language pronunciation, their tendency to place greater emphasis on accuracy than younger people may have affected the result. Furthermore, because adults usually see themselves as more capable than their younger counterparts, these assumptions are challenged when their performances are evaluated based on unknown linguistic and socio-cultural standards (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Another manifest of students' communication apprehension is seen in some research studies mentioned previously where researchers investigated LA in three stages (Bailey et al., 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). They reported that students showed a higher level of output anxiety compared to input and processing anxiety. The fact that students feel more anxious at the third stage, where they have to use target language knowledge to communicate, indicates the existence of communication apprehension as a main component of LA. Saito et al.'s (1999) report that students especially fear oral performance in language learning supports these findings. MacIntyre and Gardner also stated that certain tasks that demand communication in the target language are more likely to provoke anxiety among students in classrooms. To answer why students feel more anxious about communicative tasks than learning tasks, Sato (2003) explains the irreversibility of students' performances. Tasks at the output stage require students to show what they have learned. The knowledge presented cannot be erased once it is public, whereas at the input and the processing stages, mistakes are correctable without others noticing them.

#### *Fear of Negative Evaluation*

According to Neuman and Koskinen (1992), language proficiency is determined by a function of the amount of comprehensible input received. Because how information is processed

to become input influences the intensity of the LA experienced among students, knowing the process is beneficial for understanding LA.

People acquire their own language in very different ways from the ways they learn other languages. Vygotsky (1962) claims that people acquire their native languages through a “spontaneous concept” as opposed to a “scientific concept” (p. 117). The spontaneous concept is embedded into one’s mental development as opposed to learning a new language through school instructions such as grammar, syntax, and conjugation. A possible advantage of conscious learning is that it can be a rather fast process, since there are some systematic guidelines to follow. However, conscious learning may give students the feeling of being constantly evaluated. Acquiring proficiency in their native language and understanding the culture did not have to occur in such a compressed and hurried manner. Because of the expectation that students are to progress steadily, foreign/second language learning is susceptible to students’ fear of negative evaluation.

In native language acquisition, communication needs come first before the learning of structure, while structures are taught first in foreign/second language learning for learners to apply the knowledge to communication (Rubin, 1975). Ellis (2002) claims that the typical route of native language acquisition is a result of a human categorization ability to figure out the sequences and frequencies that happen unconsciously. In contrast, learning a new language involves the repetition of learned skills. Learning mostly occurs through exercises in text books compared to the unconscious experiences in real life. According to Bialystok (1978), repeated practice of learned knowledge can become acquired knowledge. However, the question of whether the end-products of these processes can be the same remains unanswered.

In his monitor theory, Krashen (1981) differentiated language learning from language acquisition. Language acquisition happens unconsciously while language learning occurs consciously. Language acquisition is the process a child goes through when “getting” his/her native language. Language learning, on the other hand, is a product of conscious practice such as classroom grammar exercises and writing tasks. Learned language knowledge supplements acquired knowledge and, at the same time, is used as a monitor for acquired knowledge. Krashen introduced three types of monitor users for language learning. They are (a) overusers— those who overmonitor their language use because they feel that they must know all the rules and will not perform unless they know the rules perfectly, (b) underusers— those who entirely depend on “feeling” when they perform, and seem to be immune to error correction, (c) and optimal users— those who use the monitor only when it does not get in the way of communications.

Krashen’s monitor user categorization gives further explanations to Gregersen and Horwitz’s (2002) study that reported the difference between anxious and non-anxious learners in relation to students’ characteristics of perfectionism. Even high achievers are reported to suffer from LA (Horwitz, 1996). Because of their intense striving to be flawless, perfectionists tend to overmonitor their performance and are more vulnerable to the fear of negative evaluation. Perfectionists are more likely to view language learning as requiring a demonstration of fluency rather than the opportunity to explore (Horwitz et al., 1986). Because of the nature of language learning, which can make students’ fear of negative evaluation greater than in other subjects, language learning can be much more anxiety provoking to students who have the tendency to strive for perfectionism.

Although his theory is widely accepted, Krashen’s monitor theory is not without opposition. According to McLaughlin (1978), automatic processes (Krashen’s equivalent of

acquisition) take place *after* the earlier use of controlled processes (Krashen's equivalent of learning) in second language learning. This suggests the reverse order of the learning system in the monitor theory. Rubin's (1975) report that structures are taught first in language learning so that learners can apply the knowledge to communicate supports McLaughlin's reverse monitor theory. In fact, the idea of an affective filter introduced in Krashen's study may fit better with the reverse monitor theory because conscious learning is more likely to be affected by motivational and anxiety factors than by unconscious acquisition. In other words, the affective filter's existence itself becomes questionable if all the initial input was treated as unconscious in second language learning.

#### *Socially-Oriented and Academic-Oriented LA*

Pappamihel (2002) conducted a mixed-methods study examining middle school Mexican-born students enrolled in an ESL program. Her study compared the students' anxiety experienced in ESL classes and mainstream (regular) classes. She claims that for non-native speakers, their ability to make situational appraisals is not only limited by linguistic difficulties, but also by cultural difficulties. Even students who are linguistically fluent may not assess the classroom atmosphere appropriately and may experience LA. The study results indicated that students experience different types of anxiety in different environments. In the ESL class, they tend to be apprehensive about falling behind academically, whereas in the mainstream class, social issues among peers were reported as their main source of anxiety. This demonstrates that academically-oriented anxiety was experienced at the beginning of students' language learning career, and once the students progressed to take classes in the regular classes, they experienced socially-oriented anxiety. However, it must be noted that the results in Pappamihel's study may have been affected by the fact that her sample consisted of Mexican-born students in the US. She



reported in the article that Chicanos students (US-born Mexican descent students) tend to look down on Mexican-born students (Pappamiheil's study participants). Mexican-born students' fear of not being able to blend in to mainstream classes could have overshadowed their academic concerns.

According to Ernst-Slavit, Moore, and Maloney (2002), learners of a new language obtain social language skills within a relatively short amount of time, whereas the required amount of time for acquiring academic language skills is longer and also varies greatly depending on individual cases. More specifically, Cummins (1999) reported that within the contexts of immigrant children language acquisition, conversational language fluency, which he termed basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), can be attained approximately in two years, whereas they need five years or more to reach appropriate academic language fluency (or, in his specific term, cognitive academic language proficiency [CALP]). Cummins further emphasized the existing difference in developmental patterns between BICS and CALP. This indicates that socially-oriented LA may be experienced earlier in the language learning process and may take a relatively shorter time to overcome, while academic-oriented LA may be experienced later in the language learning process, may take longer, and may require intensive effort to overcome. In addition, Cummins' claim suggests the need for separate considerations for socially-oriented LA and academic-oriented LA in children's developmental process. These assumptions are parallel to Saito and Samimy's (1996) findings in which a higher level of anxiety was reported among advanced Japanese language course students, including ones who have been to the country and acquired the language informally. These students could have overcome socially-oriented anxiety during their stay in Japan; however, they may have been experiencing academic-oriented anxiety at the time of the study since the course material had

become more demanding in advanced foreign language classes than at the basic communication level.

Koernig and Apelt's (1997) report stated that "Emotions evaluate our environment and in this capacity are the qualitative aspect of our readiness to act" (p. 34). This indicates that understanding students' LA experienced in different environments helps us understand their readiness for the classroom experience. By identifying the types of LA students are experiencing, it helps instructors to see where their students stand within the language learning spectrum and to determine what kind of assistance they may need in order to make further progress in their studies.

By treating language as a communication tool and not as a subject of study, language comes alive. Understanding the unique nature of language learning points foreign/second language study in a direction more focused on functional fluency rather than on rigorous and detailed grammar rules. Furthermore, it helps people to understand the two main concerns of LA (communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation) identified in Horwitz's (1986) study and how they can be formed among students. Interpreting the two components from new perspectives such as Pappamihiel's (2002) and Ernst-Slavit et al.'s (2002) allows my study to treat LA as a multi-dimensional phenomenon into which a variety of factors feed.

My study addresses the formation and experience of LA among students through the identification of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation while exploring the possibilities for the various influencing factors on students' LA experiences. In looking for patterns, the study focuses on the situational relationships between communication apprehension and socially-oriented LA, as well as the relationships between fear of negative evaluation and academic-oriented LA.

### *Native Language Competence and LA*

Sparks and Ganschow's (1991) linguistic coding deficit hypothesis (LCDH) claimed students' native language difficulties, rather than affective variables, as a main cause of foreign/second language learning problems. In particular, the hypothesis introduced the lack of phonological coding skills, which refers to "the ability to sequence, breakdown, and put together the sound of language" (Sparks & Ganschow, 1993, p. 297), as the locus of language learning difficulties. In 1993, the same authors published a theoretical article, offering further rationale and explanation of the concept of LCDH. In this article, Sparks and Ganschow challenged affective explanations for foreign/second language learning problems, claiming that students' affective differences (such as anxiety) occur as a result of, but are not the cause of, their target language difficulties. Their discussion supported the idea that LCDH is the direct cause of students' language learning problems, not LA; therefore, LA was considered a byproduct of foreign/second language difficulties.

Later in 1996, Sparks and Ganschow conducted a study that further expanded the idea and supported LCDH. The difference in their stance in this article compared to the article written three years earlier seemed to be that they were no longer claiming native language difficulties as the direct and only cause of students' foreign/second language difficulties. Instead, they seemed to suggest that weak native language skills provoke LA, which could negatively influence the process of foreign/second language learning. The participants in the study were 168 female high school students enrolled in first-year foreign language classes. The researchers administered four achievement tests concerning native language skills and one aptitude test concerning foreign language learning. Students were later grouped into high, average, and low achievers, according to the test scores. The researchers examined the results in relation to the teacher's perceptions of

students' academic skills, affective characteristics, and final course grades. Sparks and Ganschow reported that teachers rated students who scored higher on the native language and foreign language aptitude measures as having stronger foreign language skills as well as lower anxiety. Also, end-of-the-year grades were higher for those students. In conclusion, the researchers claimed that students' LA experiences may be related to their levels of native language skills and foreign language aptitude. However, their report was more focused on the relationship between foreign language difficulties and students' level of native language skills. Sparks and Ganschow concluded that the study's overall results supported LCDH.

In this view, several points need to be addressed. First, Sparks and Ganschow (1996) used teacher ratings as one of the dependent variables. By doing so, it is possible that the procedure may have influenced the result favorably for the researchers' support of LCDH. The teacher may have gained a favorable impression of a student's foreign language ability because of his/her communication ability in his/her native language demonstrated prior, during, or after the class. In other words, because the study used teacher impressions of students as a measure, participants who had a better command of their native language may have had an increased chance of conveying a better impression of their foreign language ability.

Second, Sparks and Ganschow (1996) did not consider the idea that LA may cause students to perform poorly in spite of their actual potential. Because LCDH sees LA only as a result of, and not a cause of, language difficulties, the hypothesis supports a one-way explanation of the anxiety-achievement relations, not the circular "feedback loop" system characterized within the EVTA by Pekrun (1992) introduced earlier in this literature review. It is likely that LA can be provoked by having difficulties learning the native language; however, it should not exclude the idea that anxiety contributes to such difficulties to begin with (MacIntyre, 1995).

The viewpoint that the relationship between anxiety and achievement is not a one-way relation but rather a feedback loop is supported by other researchers. Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (2000) called the cycle of high anxiety, low self-esteem, and low achievement a “self-fulfilling prophecy of foreign language anxiety” (p. 12). Also, MacIntyre (1995) illustrated the relations among anxiety, cognition, and behavior in the form of recursive relations affecting each other in a loop. He commented that LCDH underestimates the influence of affective variables such as LA. Not considering affective variables as the cause of students’ foreign/second language difficulties may be “a significant omission” (p. 97) on Sparks and Ganschow’s (1993) part.

According to Agmanova (2002), knowledge formed on the basis of the native language plays an essential role in utilizing new information in the new language. As Sparks and Ganschow (1996) claimed, it is most likely that native language learning experiences have some influence on foreign/second language learning. However, the idea that all foreign/second language problems, including LA, can be attributed to native language difficulties needs to be examined with caution. The possibility that LA is both the cause and the result of students’ second language difficulties is explored in my study.

#### *Self-Confidence and LA*

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), language learning could be a threat to a learner’s self-confidence. No other field in education possesses as much of a potential threat to its students’ self-confidence (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Because trying to function in a new language deprives students’ of their normal mode of communication, students’ fear of being perceived as incompetent by the teacher is accelerated (Aida, 1994). The fear ultimately negatively affects students’ self-confidence, which feeds into more intense anxiety. The negative effect of LA can

start a negative cycle of low self-confidence and low achievement in language learning (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Onwuegbuzie et al. (2000) later reported that students with a low self-confidence tend to underachieve compared to students with a high self-confidence in language learning. This self-fulfilling prophecy could affect many students' achievement considering the fact that students may feel more vulnerable in language learning settings. Students with low self-confidence tend to have a stronger fear of negative evaluation, which affects their target language achievement negatively, which in turn strengthens the idea of their low self-confidence.

Not only students with low self-confidence, but also students with unrealistically high self-confidence may do poorly when it comes to language learning. According to Daley, Onwuegbuzie, and Bailey (1999), who compared students' self-enhancement bias and self-derogation bias in relation to language achievement, students with self-derogation bias tend to show a higher level of LA, while students who had self-enhancement bias tend to be lower achievers. Daley et al. did not state whether the anxiety of the self-derogation results in higher or lower achievement. However, this study shows that not only having a high self-confidence but also having a self-confidence that matches with the student's ability is important for being a successful learner. This result partially contradicts MacIntyre, Noels, and Clement's (1997) suggestion that self-enhancement bias would probably facilitate language learning while self-derogation bias would impair progress. Further investigation on this subject is needed for better understanding of the mechanisms of effective language learning.

Pajares and Johnson (1993) stated that self-confidence is the answer to people's different behaviors when they have comparable knowledge and skills. Similarly, the majority of researchers agree that there are relationships between students' levels of self-confidence and

classroom performance (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Pajares & Johnson, 1993; Rueda & Chen, 2005; Siew-Lian Wong, 2005). Researchers also often report an existing connection between LA and students' classroom performance (Bailey et al., 1999; Casado & Dershiwsky, 2004; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2000; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Moslehpour & Chou, 2004; Oya, Manalo & Greenwood, 2004; Rodríguez & Abreu, 2003; Saito et al., 1999). Addressing direct causal relationship between LA and self-confidence, Lalonde and Gardner (1984) reported that LA was mediated by high self-confidence. At the same time, MacIntyre et al. (1997) reported that anxious students tend to underestimate their competence. Furthermore, in Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert's (1999) study, low self-confidence was treated as one of the components in LA.

Is it that students experience LA, which causes their low self-confidence, or low self-confidence increases the chance of students experiencing LA? Young (1991) described the relationship as, "When beliefs and reality crash, anxiety results" (p. 428). Since the nature of language learning tends to trigger some unrealistic beliefs such as "it is important to speak with an excellent accent" (Horwitz et al., 1986), the gap between belief and reality turns into LA. Horwitz et al. also reported that a majority of students in foreign language classrooms perceived their language skills to be weaker than others. This indicates language students' special vulnerability to low self-confidence. Students who are likely to experience LA tend to begin language learning with a self-perceived low ability level.

While Young's (1991) report can be interpreted as identifying LA as a result of low self-confidence, MacIntyre et al. (1997) reported anxious language learners' tendency to focus their attention to perceived inadequacies. He suggested that because students with LA often choose not to communicate, they are reducing the chance for improvement in language skills. Furthermore, frustration caused by less than desired progress in learning can result in students'

low self-confidence. MacIntyre et al. called this situation the beginning of a vicious cycle, where anxiety can cause low self-confidence and low self-confidence causes an even higher level of anxiety.

To indicate the strong relationship between LA and self-confidence, one of the research studies found that perceived competence and LA were more closely related than are perceived competence and objective achievement (MacIntyre et al., 1997). This indicates that low self-confidence can be traced back more effectively by examining students' LA than their actual achievement. In other words, high achieving students could experience low self-confidence due to LA. Furthermore, Cheng et al. (1999) reported that self-confidence was a better predictor of LA than actual achievement. This means that a high achiever could experience anxiety if their perception of ability was low. Both of the studies indicate crucial involvement of LA in the development of students' self-confidence.

In order to describe the relationship among self-efficacy, LA, and achievement, Siew-Lian Wong (2005) provided some explanations with her study by exploring ESL pre-service teachers' language learning strategies and language self-efficacy. Siew-Lian Wong pointed out ESL students' tendency to have low self-efficacy in terms of their language skills, which makes them reluctant to engage in English-referent academic tasks. She suggested that in order for ESL students to overcome their lack of confidence in their ability to utilize English, teachers need to use affective strategies such as anxiety reduction in the classroom. One thing that must be noted here is that all the participants in Siew-Lian Wong's study were pre-service ESL teachers in Malaysia. Considering the tendency of the Asian ESL students to underestimate their ability (Rueda & Chen, 2005), the fact that all participants in the study were Asian may have influenced the author's conclusion. Although Siew-Lian did not isolate LA as a possible cause of low self-



esteem, her recommendation of affective strategies in solving the problem suggested the direction of anxiety reduction, higher self-esteem, and ultimately, higher achievement. Previously reported examples of effective affective strategies in reducing LA are providing a relaxing atmosphere (Samimy, 1994; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005) or non-threatening environment (Cheng et al., 1999), introducing group work, (Bailey et al., 1999; Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Christison, 2004; Cortese, 1985; Sato, 2003), and communicating clear objectives of the course (Barkhuizen, 1998; Young, 1991).

My study explores the connections between students' self-confidence and LA experiences in different ESL learning situations. The relationship between the particular types of LA discussed under *components of LA* and the level of students' situational self-confidence are also investigated.

#### *Individual Factors Affecting LA*

According to Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret (1997), there are multiple paths for students to achieve language fluency. For some, the road to achievement may be anxiety free. For others, it may be impossible to avoid encountering LA on the path because of their starting point in relation to the goal. Dewaele (2002) reported that students' socio economic status is one of the determinants for experiencing LA in classrooms. Other researchers examined students' personalities in relation to LA, and how each different characteristic leads to different achievement outcomes (Oya et al., 2004; Wilson & Lynn, 1990).

According to Rueda and Chen (2005), students of Asian heritage tend to be more anxious in classrooms in the US. Uba (1994; as cited in Rueda & Chen, 2005) reported that high pressure from the parents of Asian students to be academically successful was a possible source of anxiety. Ohata (2005) looked at Japanese students' native cultures as an influential factor in

experiencing LA. His study explored the issue of LA from the perspective of five Japanese students learning English. He reported that in addition to the considerable linguistic differences between Japanese and English, Japanese strict cultural norms and expectations may be the influential factors that make Japanese students vulnerable to LA. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2005) reported Chinese students' tendency to experience strong communication apprehension. In their study, a Chinese student commented on her feeling of uneasiness among other students as "seeing the same thing differently" (p. 287). This indicates the student's LA experience due to cultural differences.

While certain aspects of language learning are reported to provoke LA (Dornyei, 2003; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz & Garza, 1999; Tse, 2000), consideration of other factors such as the ones discussed above could broaden the scope of understanding the phenomenon. The literature indicates that LA is a complex psychosocial phenomenon with many paradoxical research reports on what it is, how it is experienced, who is more prone to it, and how it relates to other variables in language learning. By identifying the patterns of students' LA experiences and their connections to other factors, my research seeks to present language educators a clearer map of students' LA experiences.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

#### *Research Design*

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to carry out this study. The rationale for choosing a qualitative approach comes from my views on qualitative research and its relationship to the purpose of the study. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader—another researcher, a policy maker, a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers” (p. 1). Because my topic, language anxiety (LA), deals with people’s feelings in a certain context which may be unique for each individual, the data should not be isolated from the contexts in which they occur. By listening to respondents’ stories about their experiences regarding LA and analyzing them as data, the information can still be connected to real-life contexts. Also, qualitative data, I believe, can provide a deeper implication as to how a phenomenon is experienced than numerical scores on the level of anxiety. People’s feelings cannot easily be quantified. Since my goals are to know what is happening in people’s minds, the influence of LA on their feelings, and their affective mechanisms when they face the learning of a new language, qualitative methods accommodate such goals.

Phenomenology is defined as “the study of objects appearing to the consciousness as they seem to be” (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 554). It sees the world we live in as created by the consciousness. My understanding of this approach is influenced by the ideas identified in Schutz’s social phenomenology (Holstein & Gublium, 1998), Schön’s reflective practice (Quicke, 2000), and van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology. Especially, my study recognizes the notion of lived experience and phenomenological wonder described by van Manen (1990,

2002), except that I believe in a collaborative construction of lived experience described by Holstein and Gubrium as opposed to using schools of scholastic thought in the interpretive process.

### *Lived Experience and Phenomenological Wonder*

According to van Manen (2002), any human experience can be the subject of phenomenological research. The object of the study is to identify the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Because it is in individuals' consciousness that the real and present world acquires meaning, paying attention to the conscious subjective life enables people to perceive various phenomena. The notion of consciousness as a crucial concept in phenomenology is supported by van Manen's (1990) statement that individuals are not automatically who they are; being who they are can only be achieved by consciously attempting to find out who they are. Constructing vivid, evocative descriptions of human behaviors, intentions, and reflections as people experience them in the world offers the opportunity for gaining a deeper insight that brings individuals into more direct contact with the world.

The phenomenological approach embraces the notion of multiple truths by admitting that no single interpretation of human experience will ever be perfect. It admits the fact that yet another deeper description is always possible. Phenomenological writings do not lead us to absolute truths, or objective observation. Rather, they bring us closer to the obscure, evasive nature of human existence in everyday life (van Manen, 2002).

Van Manen (2002) believes that phenomenological inquiry is deeply connected to a philosophical inquiry; evoking readers' wonder lies at the heart of the phenomenological approach. Therefore, for a phenomenological text to invite us to gain a deeper understanding of

human experiences, it must invite us to wonder. By inviting a dialogic response from the reader, a phenomenological text elucidates our sense of lived life. This approach concerns “how the world is put together in a way that makes sense to the individual; that is, how it accords with their interests and priorities and legitimates one course of action rather than another” (Quicke, 2000, p. 256). At the same time, a phenomenological approach preserves the notion that the information a researcher gains from a study is a product of interaction. It is not only the participants’ reality but rather the participants’ and researchers’ merged reality constructed by their interaction.

In phenomenological research, a researcher is a writer for a tentative text, inviting readers to dwell in their interpretive, reflective space. The resonance in between the phenomenological text and readers’ dialogues represents the measure for a good phenomenological description (van Manen, 2002). The objective of this approach is not to suggest to others factual discovery, but to have them imagine the research implications to their own lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, the approach aims to explicate how objects and experience are meaningfully constituted and communicated in the world of everyday life (Holstein & Gublium, 1998). Constructing a phenomenological writing that transforms a reader into a writer so that each reader rewrites the text again at every reading is a phenomenological researcher’s challenge (van Manen, 2002).

When so many of our experiences are lived unconsciously/subconsciously, phenomenological researchers pay attention to what it means for participants to live through a certain phenomenon. Also, by not ignoring but incorporating the researcher’s lived experience into the study and its reflective analysis process, the whole speaks to the parts and the parts become the whole. In my study, I investigated what LA is, how it is experienced among

participants, and what its impacts are on students learning English by interpreting the data as generated by the participants of the study. Phenomenological research design allows me to answer the question of how the phenomenon happens, while treating participants' and my subjectivity as a topic of investigation in its own light, not as a detrimental aspect in the study (Holstein & Gublium, 1998). By exploring the nature of LA through a phenomenological approach, I gain a co-constructed insight into what this phenomenon actually is and how it is experienced among the participants.

*Autobiographical Disclosure: Myself as a Research Instrument*

According to Glesne (1999), researchers function as the main instrument in qualitative studies. Researchers analyze the collected data through their thought processes. In other words, findings in qualitative studies are the researchers' interpretation of the collected data. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to understand their own biases and other possible influencing factors on the topic when interpreting the data. By writing about my childhood recollections and educational/professional path regarding language learning and education, I would like to introduce who I am as a research instrument for my study.

My fascination with foreign cultures and languages comes naturally because I come from a long line of teachers. Because of my father, who is fluent in English, French, and Japanese, there were always guests in our house who spoke foreign languages. Some of my earliest memories are of me sitting at my father's knee, listening intently to the flow of conversation that was comprised of strange and mysterious words. At the time, my mother told me that those strange and mysterious words were what people called "English," and that it was a different language from my native Japanese.

Encouraged by my childhood experiences as well as my desire to follow the footsteps of

the founder of my alma mater (Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan), Joe Nijima, I dreamed of one day studying in the US. More than 140 years ago, Mr. Nijima strongly desired to come to the US to learn the ways of the new world. It was at a time when Japan had just opened up to the outside world after nearly 300 years of national isolation. Seeking study outside of Japan was still heavily restricted by the government. Mr. Nijima attempted to stow away on a ship several times. When he did finally make it to the US, he studied at Amherst College. Armed with his new knowledge and Western way of doing things, he started Doshisha English School in Kyoto, after his return. The school became one of Japan's top universities and has inspired me to further enrich my education in the US.

At Doshisha University, we had a large population of *returnee students* (Japanese students who spent two years or more abroad due to their family arrangements); therefore, it was not unusual to overhear people talking to each other in English on campus. Because my language skills at the time were only enough to recognize some words and phrases, such an encounter intimidated me, while at the same time strengthened my determination to be fluent in multiple languages someday.

After I completed my undergraduate work at Doshisha University in political science, I sought an opportunity to participate in a volunteer program abroad. I chose a program that sent me to the US as a Japanese teacher. Because it was a volunteer program, I was given no information concerning where in the US I would be teaching, until I was told by the program administration that I would be sent to McComb, Mississippi. With only the knowledge that Mississippi was somewhere in the Southern US, I arrived at the New Orleans International Airport in the summer of 1998. I remember riding in my host family's car from the airport. I was very cold and wanted to ask the host mother if she could turn down the air conditioner. My best

attempt was to say, “Could you lower the function of the air condition?” I was a little embarrassed by not knowing the proper phrases to use, but was encouraged by the fact that she did turn down the air conditioner in response to my request. I continued to make many mistakes using English, but before long I was fairly confident that I was able to make myself understood. In retrospect, two factors that may have helped me to acquire the language at the pace I did are that I was not afraid to make mistakes and that I received constant positive feedback. I was teaching kindergarten through eighth grade at that time, and I did not feel the pressure to impress the children with my language skills. Also, when I started teaching in McComb, I often received comments that my English skills were better than the other Japanese teachers’ who worked in the school system before me, and that I was continuously improving.

The year that I spent teaching in rural Mississippi allowed me to think about myself, and to help me discover what I wanted in life. By placing myself in a completely different culture, I could reflect on my own background, as well as the country I was visiting. It allowed me to better understand how the environment in which I have grown up had affected me in my everyday life.

In my lessons in McComb, I tried many different ways of introducing Japanese to the students. I used more visual aides for the younger group (kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup> grade) and more detailed explanations of grammar rules to the older group (7-8<sup>th</sup> grade). It seemed that the younger group was learning Japanese as if it were just like any other subject as opposed to perceiving Japanese as foreign. In Krashen’s (1981) words, the younger group appeared to be *acquiring* the language while the older group was *learning* the language. Also, I had the impression that the younger group did better in speaking, while the older group did better in writing.



My appointment was almost over before I grasped the learning patterns of students in different age groups. My desire to stay in close contact with the students led me to stay in the US and pursue a graduate degree at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) in Hammond, Louisiana. I was interested in what determines students' language learning skills. I was also interested in students' thought processes as linked to their learning patterns, and how those individual thought processes can inhibit learning. Therefore, I chose to major in counseling for my graduate degree.

Shortly after I started my master's study at SLU, I read a quote by John Dewey on a bag from the university bookstore. It read, "Education is not a preparation for life. Education is life itself." While I agreed, I had not given serious thought to this previously. It is true that the process represents what the product is about. You cannot separate one from the other. For example, while I was going through the counselor education program as a student, I felt as if I was being counseled as a client. I was given an opportunity to see myself in a different light. As I progressed through the program, I came to a greater understanding of myself and my goals. I felt that education was part of my life, as well as part of the reason that I was who I was.

One of my professional goals is to be a well-rounded educator who understands patterns of learning and how students are likely to encounter difficulties. Understanding patterns entails knowing what can hinder the learning process as well as what can enhance the effectiveness of learning. I want to be a teacher because of the opportunities in this profession to make a positive impact on people's lives. As previously introduced in Dewey's words, I believe teachers have a tremendous influence on students' learning experiences. As a teacher, I may play an important role in determining whether education is going to be just a passing point in students' lives, or it becomes part of life itself.

As a person who has experienced the joy and challenges of learning a new language as well as assimilating into a new culture, I believe that the joy can be overwhelmingly greater than the challenges. This does not mean that I am underestimating the difficulties students may encounter while learning other languages. By helping students to understand the causes and results of LA, I believe I can guide them one step closer to overcoming LA.

The American science fiction novelist Frank Hebert once said, “The beginning of knowledge is the discovery of something we don’t understand.” The experience of living and working in a different culture will continue to give me new ideas and sometimes create challenging confusion. The challenges, however, are the chances to improve ourselves. By identifying the things we don’t understand, I believe, we are one step closer to overcoming them.

#### *Participants*

The participants for the study were 10 foreign students, whose native languages were not English, from four different universities in Louisiana. Both undergraduate and graduate students were included. The participants’ ages ranged from 25-50. Among the 10 participants, 4 were male and 6 were female. The participants were from nine different countries: two were from Costa Rica, and there was one participant each from Brazil, Burkina Faso, the Czech Republic, Germany, Japan, Korea, Lithuania, and Taiwan. Background information about nationality, age, area of study (e.g., business, education, etc.), and length of time spent in the US was collected directly from each participant at the time of the interview (see Table 1 for participants’ complete background information).

Table 1

*Information on Participants*

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Years in US	Area of Study
Carla	F	29	Costa Rica	4	Music
Ausra	F	28	Lithuania	8	Sociology
Suki	F	40	Korea	6	Education
Svetlana	F	29	Czech Republic	5.5	English
Emeterio	M	25	Costa Rica	7.5	Engineering
Kenichi	M	34	Japan	10	Education
Hans	M	30	Germany	5	Business
Mei	F	50	Taiwan	15.5	Education
Davi	M	33	Brazil	1.5	Education
Habbie	F	26	Burkina Faso	2.5	Business

*Note.* Names are all pseudonyms.

*Procedures*

*Internal Review Board Approval*

Before I started contacting potential participants, I obtained approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the University of New Orleans. I prepared the application for conducting research involving human subjects and submitted it to the IRB on April 3, 2007. The approval letter was sent electronically on April 26, 2007, by the chair of IRB to my e-mail address. The IRB identification number for my study is 01apr07 (see Appendix A: Human Subjects Approval Form).

### *Recruitment*

The snowballing method was used to recruit the participants. My acquaintances who showed interest in participating in my past projects were contacted. Each potential participant was asked if he/she could recommend anyone who met the criteria (a college student in the US whose native language is not English) for my study. This procedure was repeated until the number of participants reached 10. There was no public posting for the recruitment. No incentives or compensations were offered in exchange for participation. In order to minimize the bias in the data and to protect participants, no student who was in a position to be evaluated academically by me was recruited.

### *Informed Consent*

Before the beginning of each interview, a document acknowledging informed consent (see Appendix B: Informed Consent Form) was given to the participant. I went over the form with the participant, and the participant was asked if he/she had any questions. After it was clear that the participant understood what my research entailed, he/she was asked to sign two identical consent forms. One was given to the participant for his/her record; I kept the other. Participants were notified before the interview that they may stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

### *Recording Device*

A digital voice recorder was used to record all of the interviews. The data were downloaded to a computer after each interview. After the transfer of the file, the record was erased from the device. I assigned a login password to the computer storing the data to ensure the confidentiality of the interview information. The records were transcribed and kept in a digital

data file format for possible future publication. Identification information of all the participants was removed at the time of transcription.

### *Interview*

I conducted an approximately 45- to 76-minute individual interview with each of the 10 participants. The conversations were digitally recorded during the individual interviews. Demographic questions were asked at the beginning, followed by more specific research questions. Before the initial interview, I prepared a list of potential questions considering the literature of LA, the purpose of the study, the results from the pilot study conducted in a similar manner, and other questions based on a respondent's characteristics. The list was presented to a panel of five experts in the research area for possible revisions and was approved by the IRB before the data collection began. The interview questions included:

1. Tell me about your experience learning English.
2. Tell me about your best experiences learning English.
3. In the situation in which you experienced such feelings, who was present? What were you trying to accomplish?
4. Can you give me some examples or metaphors to describe the feeling?
5. Tell me about your worst experiences learning English.
6. In the situation in which you experienced such feelings, who was present? What were you trying to accomplish?
7. Have you ever felt anxious learning English?
8. What were your thoughts when you felt anxious?
9. How would you compare the anxious feeling experienced while learning English to the anxious feeling in other situations such as taking a test?

10. How would you rate your confidence in English?
11. Tell me about any changes in your feelings associated with English over time.
12. Did the feelings change in different situations?
13. Are there any other feelings you associate with learning English? Could you describe them as fully as possible?
14. What does being able to use English mean to you?

The list of questions was revised as the data collection progressed, depending on the emerging themes from the earlier phases of data collection, to create a better flow of conversation.

I met with each participant at least twice for the data collection (the first time was the interview, the second time was a follow-up member-check session) except in the case of Carla, whom I was unable to reach for a follow-up session. I felt that all the participants were helpful, eager to provide their experiences for the research, and honestly answering my questions.

#### *Reflective Notes*

In order to preserve access to fresh self-reflections on each interview, I wrote my thoughts in a diary format within two days of each interview. In addition to my affective status during the interviews, the notes included situational information, as well as basic researcher-participant relationship for each interview. The reflective notes helped me to recognize biases that might have affected the interview and analysis process.

#### *Data Analysis*

The results of the individual interviews were analyzed by using a qualitative framework. The six-step procedure reported by Miles and Huberman (1994) was employed. The steps I followed were:

1. Data Collection

2. Data Reduction
3. Data Display
4. Conclusion Drawing
5. Conclusion Testing
6. Final Reporting.

### *Data Collection*

The data obtained through interviewing the students ranged from 45.05 to 76.05 minutes long. It was transcribed verbatim and presented in two columns, placing the transcription in the left column and leaving a blank column on the right for initial within-case analysis (see Appendix C for an example). Pseudonyms were assigned to all the participants to protect their confidentiality.

### *Data Reduction*

Each transcript was analyzed within-case initially. Cross-case analysis followed the initial analysis in order to derive wide ranging, more generalizable explanations.

For within-case analyses, the data were micro-analyzed sentence by sentence, word by word, when necessary. First level coding was done by assigning tags or labels to units of meaning in the transcription. The second level coding (pattern coding) was done by grouping first level coding into a “more meaningful, parsimonious units” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Between the two different levels of the coding system, the first level coding had a more descriptive purpose, whereas pattern coding had a more explanatory, interpretive, and inferential purpose. By using the pattern coding technique, I looked for interconnecting themes within the data collected in order to establish a better understanding of the nature of LA. Parallel to pattern

coding, the memoing technique was used to write down ideas about codes and their relationships as they were revealed as I was coding.

### *Data Display*

Once the transcribed information was reduced to the component parts by coding, I created displays to arrange the data into a conceptual structure. In order to obtain a larger view of what was happening, I started from a less complicated display with minimal structure such as *partially ordered displays* (see Appendix D for an example), then moved on to more structured displays such as *time-ordered displays* and *conceptually-ordered displays* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once I gained the picture of what was happening, I further proceeded to consider why it was happening. During this process, I watched for biases by constantly asking myself if I am creating interpretations by seeing what I wanted to see, as described by Miles and Huberman. I went back and forth between my conceptual framework introduced previously and the transcripts with occasional consultations of reflective notes on each interview to produce displays. Causality between variables in the study was explained using displays such as the *explanatory effects matrix* and the *causal network* (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After the dynamics of each case was understood and sufficient themes had emerged from within-case analysis, the themes from all the cases were cross-examined for cross-case analysis on both shared and unique themes. The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to increase generalizability and to develop more powerful explanations of the relationships between key variables of the study. Multiple cases were compared by using the displays such as *case-ordered descriptive meta-matrix* and *summed indices* that allowed me to see the differences as well as similarities among cases easily. Cause-effect relationships of the cross-case variables were investigated by creating displays such as *case-ordered effects matrix* and *antecedents matrix*



(Miles & Huberman, 1994), which made it possible for me to gather random individual variables into a cohesive flow of causality in groups.

### *Conclusion Drawing*

Data displays created during the previous steps were written into an analytical text to explain the display to the reader. The conclusion drawing techniques adopted from Miles and Huberman (1994) used in my study include (a) noting patterns and themes, (b) counting, (c) making comparisons, (d) partitioning variables, (e) finding intervening variables, and (f) building a logical chain of evidence. More descriptive techniques (such as [a] and [b]) were used in the beginning analysis, more explanatory techniques (such as [e] and [f]) were used later in the conclusion drawing process. While noting patterns and themes, I tried to see new evidences of confirming patterns as well as disconfirming ones. The counting technique helped me see the existing data as it was and stay analytically honest. Although numerical expressions tend to be avoided in qualitative research, it was useful for testing my subjectivity.

While making comparisons, I looked at the different variables as well as the different cases. I used partitioning of variables as the conclusion drawing proceeded, when I felt a need for differentiation within one variable for more effective explanation. Some of the data I collected were understood much more realistically when several other variables were in consideration. I used the *finding intervening variable* technique to find other variables that may have been in the picture, which better explained the results of the study. Finally, the logical chain of evidence was built by constructing the initial sense of the main factors into an evidential trail. The tentative relationships assumed during the early data collections were tested against the yield from the later data collections.

### *Conclusion Testing/Trustworthiness*

An ongoing cyclic validation process was integrated into all phases of the study to test any conclusions drawn during the study. Rolfe (2006) claimed that the search for common criteria for establishing validity in qualitative research is futile due to the elusiveness of the definition of qualitative research itself. However, I agree with Creswell and Miller's (2000) counter argument that regardless of their different perspectives, qualitative researchers must seek some ways to demonstrate that their studies are credible and worthwhile. Based on this point of view, I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) in order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of my study. The conclusion testing techniques adopted from Miles and Huberman (1994), the validity procedures introduced by Creswell and Miller, and the techniques for establishing trustworthiness reported by Lincoln and Guba were used to meet those criteria.

*Credibility.* In an effort to establish a more appropriate set of general criteria in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced *credibility* as an equivalent for the conventional term, *internal validity*. It is also called *authenticity*; the term indicates the probability that the findings of a study are found likely by the researcher, participants, and readers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used the following techniques to ensure the credibility of my study: (a) persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), (b) triangulation, (c) following up surprises and checking out rival explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and (e) member checks.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that focusing on the elements that are most relevant to the phenomenon in detail during the data collection and analysis provides a depth to the researcher's interpretations and, therefore, enhances the credibility of the study. The interviews

were transcribed verbatim, including seemingly unimportant grunts and fillers (i.e., ‘ah,’ ‘you know’). I examined the relevant portion of each transcript sentence by sentence, word by word, if necessary.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), triangulation is a “validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). The focus on convergent evidence during the triangulation process is widely accepted. The way I adapted the triangulation process in my study, however, followed a different conception of the triangulation introduced by Mathison (1988). This alternative perspective takes into account not only the convergent, but also the inconsistent and the contradictory evidence when triangulating. I compared and contrasted the multiple data from different participants not only looking for convergent evidence, but also inconsistent and contradictory evidence. I believe this provided more meaningful and context embedded explanation to the phenomenon. Triangulation is used not to improve the validity of the findings but to improve the validity of my explanation to the findings in my study.

Because of my concept of triangulation discussed above, it was natural for me to employ a pair of techniques, namely *following up surprises* and *checking out rival explanations* (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for conclusion testing. In the event that unexpected results were found, I reflected on the bases of the findings to consider the revision. Revised findings were tested against existing data. I kept several possible explanations in mind until one of them became increasingly promising. This way there was less danger that I would selectively scan the information for supporting evidence for a particular result.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). This technique adds credibility to a qualitative study by giving

participants a chance to react to the data and analyses. I performed one-on-one member checks in person with all participants except with Carla, who was unreachable. The participants became my co-researchers, clarifying meanings and interpretations of their experiences. The member-checking sessions lasted between 60 to 150 minutes. In the case that misinterpretation of the participant's experience was found, I corrected the description as explained by the participant. We discussed vague expressions found in the interview transcription and in my analysis, as well as concepts that represented a major theme that required further discussion and clarification. Member checks provided the opportunity to see the data through a different lens than my own (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It minimized what Miles and Huberman (1994) called "a vertical monopoly" (p. 262) effect, often inevitable for a qualitative researcher who defines the problem, recruits the participants, collects the data, analyzes the data, and reports the results in written format on his/her own.

*Transferability.* Transferability is the qualitative equivalent for *external validity* in conventional term (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994) called this criterion "fittingness" (p. 279) because it concerns how well the study's findings fit to other contexts. Examining the transferability of the study answers the question, "How far can the findings be generalized?" I used the following techniques to enhance the transferability of my study: (a) providing thick, rich description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and (b) theoretically diverse sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In qualitative studies, it is not the researcher who specifies the external validity of the qualitative study's findings; it is established at the receiving end (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to make this possible, I provided the readers with as much detail as possible about the procedures and the progress of my study. By including a vividly detailed description of what was

going on during the study, transferability could be established through the minds of readers who could apply the information to a certain setting or situation, and who could reach a conclusion. Also, I interviewed participants with diverse backgrounds (see Table 1) to enhance the transferability of my study.

*Dependability.* The equivalent to the term *reliability* used in conventional studies can be specified as *dependability* in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Miles and Huberman (1994) added the term *auditability* in parallel. Ensuring dependability concerns “whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (p. 278). I used the following techniques to support the dependability of my study: (a) checking for representativeness, and (b) weighing the evidence, (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

By checking for representativeness, I put the possible bias of relying too much on information from a responsive and insightful respondent to test. At the same time, I took into consideration that there may have been a difference in quality among the data collected due to the characteristics of the respondents, the setting of the data collection, and the timing of data collection. By weighing the evidence at the time the data were collected, I subsumed the quality of the data into the conclusion testing.

*Confirmability.* In conventional studies, the *objectivity* of the research is established by intersubjective agreement and meticulously designed methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba called the qualitative equivalent for objectivity *confirmability*. Confirmability in qualitative studies is represented by the researcher’s relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged biases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used the following techniques to ensure the confirmability of my study: (a) acknowledging and describing entering beliefs early in

the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000), and (b) the use of researcher reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My conceptual framework and my self-disclosure are presented to provide information about myself as a research instrument. By doing so, I intend not only to be explicit to readers, but also to become self-aware of my personal assumptions and biases. The term, “bracketing” (p. 47) is explained as a qualitative technique for suspending researchers’ preconceived notions (van Manen, 1990). I wrote reflective notes after each interview to record my thoughts and opinions concerning the study. The notes were consulted throughout the analysis process to help bracket possible biases reflected in my conclusion drawing.

### *Final Reporting*

The final report was written for four different types of audiences. The first audience is myself, the second audience is fellow researchers, the third audience is teachers, and the fourth audience is the general public who is interested in the subject. The final report will serve as a record of what has been done as well as a suggestion for future research for me. By documenting the analytic steps methodologically, decision rules for important analytic steps were made explicit in the final report so that fellow researchers will be able to perform secondary analysis of the same data or replicate the study. Implications of the findings were included in the final report for teachers and general audience to relate my study’s findings to everyday teaching/learning situations.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

#### *Overview*

In this chapter, I will present the data collected through each interview and follow-up session. As a researcher using the phenomenological approach, the process of writing the information for this chapter was considered to be a part of data analysis.

*Carla – “When I am ashamed, it is really hard for me to learn or do anything.”*

Carla is a graduate student from Costa Rica (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). She stated that after about two years in the US, she felt that she had a “pretty decent level” of English; however, she went through some difficulties on different occasions at the beginning. She mentioned, “When I am ashamed, it is really hard for me to learn or do anything. That overwhelms me, all the time. That happens to me since I was little. If you make me feel ashamed, that’s it.” Carla explained that the reaction to her performance from the people around her makes a big difference in her feelings and her subsequent performances. As an example of her positive experiences, Carla mentioned that if the person with whom she is communicating was patient and had a non-judgmental attitude, she felt at ease and she felt encouraged to learn more. On the other hand, as an example of a negative experience, she told me about an experience in class.

...like every time I opened my mouth, he would say, “No. That’s wrong.” “You don’t say it like that.” or “No. The accent is not there.” So every time I had to talk to him, the words just didn’t come out of my mouth. And every time I tried to talk, my head would be like, “You are going to do it wrong.” “You gonna say the wrong phrase and he is going to correct you in front of everybody.” And that was what happened every time.

Carla also expressed her frustration that her hardship as a foreigner is not understood, by saying “Because they [some native speakers] don’t understand how it feels to go and have no clue what’s going on....” When she explained the feeling of being “clueless” in the US and how it affects her behaviors, she mentioned the example of not being able to communicate and feeling culturally lost. Carla stated,

Because you go to Walgreens and try to buy something and they tell you blabla. “Oh my Jesus. What did she say?” And you have to say, “What?” And they look at you like, “How come that you didn’t understand me?” And you have to ask, “Excuse me. Can you repeat?” You probably have to ask two or three times....

Carla also stated that she could be lost, not only with the language but also with the culture:

...in Costa Rica, a lot of people are using credit cards already, but you never do your credit card thing....The cashier takes the card and does everything for you.... So, over at Walgreens...I have something says ATM, credit and debit. I really don’t know what’s going on. And this person gives me a look, an evil look. Like, “How come you don’t know how does this work.” And she just turns the thing and answers for you and gives you the receipt and lets you go.

When I asked how these incidents affect her, she answered

Of course I feel ashamed. I always do when that kind of things happen. I feel anxious of course. I feel a big, big, huge necessity to take everything and go home. “What am I doing here?” “Why didn’t I stay home?” “I did understand everything there.”

At the same time, she also said, “I also feel the necessity to overcome the challenge. You know, like, they didn’t understand today but next time I come here, I am gonna get it.”



Carla explained that before she could feel the energy to overcome the difficulties, she would first get discouraged from the incident. She mentioned, “I get mad at myself for not being able to do things that are just regular, normal everyday things.” Later during the interview, Carla explained this feeling more in detail. In addition to her claim that she could be more creative in Spanish, she expressed her diminished sense of independence:

I claim myself independent. I claim myself like a really precise and clean person when I do my job and everything. And then all of a sudden, I have this wall that is the language. I go and am not be able to do something simple.... So I am not independent any more. And I cannot do the job as precise without someone telling me 50 times how to do it because I didn't get it the first time.

Carla talked about the effort that she used to have to put into communicating in English and how it changed later on. She stated, “I had to pay attention. I had to really, really detail the inflections of the voice if they are asking me something, if they are being nice...that comes from paying a lot of attention....” The situation seemed to have changed since then. She described her recent approach to English differently:

I feel confident. I feel more relieved. I release more tension. Before I start talking, I don't have to plan every single phrase that I am going to say so it makes sense. Now I can put them together as I go.

Carla expressed that as she spent more time in the US, she became more confident about the whole experience. When I asked if she had experienced anything significant as she improved her skills in the US, she stated that at some point being able to communicate in English came to her as a surprise. To describe this feeling, she used sentences such as “Oh, my gosh, I am understanding.” or “Wow, I can spell in English without going lost.” The expressions included

the nuance that she was pleasantly surprised to see what she could do. Carla mentioned that “[Being able to speak English] makes me surprised some times.... It surprises me because, me and English and saying the words in English, there is no problem. My brain knows where to go. It surprises me a lot.”

One thing I noticed about Carla’s interview was that she differentiated her self-confidence according to her situations. For everyday life situations, she gave herself a score of 10 (highest score), whereas for academic situations such as reading and writing, she gave herself the lower score of nine and seven respectively. She stated that everyday situations require lower language skills, hence she is “not scared anymore.” At the same time she feels that she needs some improvement in her academic language. Her frustration in her academic language ability seemed to arise when she compared herself to native students. Carla mentioned, “I read lots and lots all the time. But you cannot, even I started now reading a book every day, there is no way I can put 20 years of reading in Spanish together in 4 years of English.” She also mentioned, “I was learning new words. I just cannot learn them in the same way than someone who was born here learns them.” In addition, Carla talked about her initial self-expectation when she first came to the US, and how it created her frustration. She stated, “I thought, okay, I learn the language. I deal with it. In a couple of years, I am gonna improve this much. Huge improvement.... My expectations were really high.” Because of the high expectations, she stated that she used to blame herself for all the communication failures in English. After realizing that some of the difficulties in communication were the result of cultural differences instead of language challenges, she expressed that she felt more relieved.

Carla explained that her self-expectations and goals concerning the English language shifted as she spent more time in the US. Carla stated, “You know, I am who I am. I come from

the place that I come from. ...getting rid of my accent is not a priority.” She explained that “sounding native” is no longer one of her goals. In addition to realizing that not all the miscommunications were her fault, shifting her priority may have contributed to reducing her frustration over her progress learning English.

*Ausra – “As Lithuanians, we have been exposed to a lot of Russian and some Polish too.*

*So... It was not that difficult to learn.”*

Ausra is a graduate student from Lithuania (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). She expressed her confidence in English from the beginning of the interview by saying, “When I came here, I had all of it. I was as good as I thought that I could be. So it wasn’t anything extraordinary.” She mentioned that she felt well prepared when she arrived. Even though using English became “not a big deal” over time, she stated that she could recall a moment when it was something special:

Actually, I do remember one moment. We had a foreign person teaching English...and it was probably the 7<sup>th</sup> grade or something. I talked to her on the phone, and my mom heard it and she was so proud of me. Yeah, I remember that moment. I was like, “Oh my gosh, yeah, I can talk, and it’s not a big deal!” I felt so happy that everything went fine because I was stressed that I won’t be able to explain the whole thing and I did.

Ausra explained that her joy probably came from the fact that she felt proficient enough to convey a message in English. Also, when I asked about the stress and worry, Ausra mentioned,

I was always having the feeling in my mind that I was translating things. Whereas now, I think I am up to the point where you don’t have to translate it. You just think it. The worries were that you think of a word, and you cannot come up with the word.

She stated that she was worried about letting herself down by not being able to express herself the way she wanted.

In regard to her experience in the US, Ausra mentioned that she did not experience any acute anxiety because of her advanced language proficiency. However, she stated that she understands the difficulty of coming to a different country, which causes people to feel completely helpless. She mentioned, “It is like being out of your comfort zone, because what you know is no longer valid.” Ausra also stated that being fluent in the language did not exempt her from experiencing cultural anxiety. By example, she provided the following episode:

I was looking for an apartment and I called this lady. ... First, you don't know this difference between *free and available* and *free of cost*. So I was like, “I am looking for a free apartment.” And she doesn't get me and I don't get what she doesn't get and we were both frustrated. She was like, “Ma'am?” and I was like “What do you mean Ma'am?”

She explained that her goal was to convey her message. She was frustrated because she was not getting the message across when she felt it was so clear. She described the experience as the “whole frustration with the cultural nuances” and stated that “the language were like blocks’ to convey the message.” In addition to her being unfamiliar with the culture, Ausra mentioned that she felt that people were not accustomed to foreigners, which made her feel awkward rather than accepted. She stated that learning the language was just one part of being fluent. She also needed to learn the culture and how to apply the language. Even then, she stated, “And after so many years here, you think really, I am confident enough, but still there are some situations to worry you. You don't know exactly how to apply a word or two.”

In addition, Ausra mentioned that portraying one's best through English could be challenging, which could cause her to experience anxiety. She stated,

You want to be perceived at least as who you are. If not, you want to portray your best. And then, if it gets misconstrued just because of the language, you see it and you feel it, but still, you cannot convey what you want because of the insufficient vocabulary or the meaning that is different culturally.... That is a big anxiety.... It is out of your control almost.

This statement indicates her concern that she could be negatively perceived because of her foreignness to the English language. Ausra stated that her accent is a big part of the foreignness, and she acknowledges that having an accent sometimes works against her self-image. However, she stated that it is not something she wants to get rid of. She feels that her accent is almost like a part of her identity and she worries that getting rid of her accent may be equal to discarding her background. She stated, "...it can be another point of stress if you are torn between this, like, two identities, like at work you are somebody and at home, you are somebody else. Like a mask...."

As for Ausra's self-confidence in regard to the English language, she stated that English was always one of her favorite subjects, and she was always excited about learning something new. She described English as something that made her feel better about herself. She stated that coming to the US changed her relationship with English. She felt that English became a requirement rather than a subject to learn; therefore, it was like a tool. She described how she became more skillful in using the tool as follows:

...now I have this as a tool where I am confident enough. It is a tool for me to use, rather than before I had to focus on how to use it.... Now I can just get through to whatever message I want to craft rather than still focusing on English itself.

The statement indicates the change in Ausra's confidence level and the way she processes English. At the beginning, conscious effort was required for her to use English, which seemed to have been occupying her brain. Later on, as her self-confidence rose, using English became an unconscious effort, which freed her brain for something else, such as crafting the message quickly.

*Suki – "I was vulnerable, threatened, anxious, and stressed."*

Suki is a graduate student from Korea (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). The data indicate that she has experienced a high level of language anxiety (LA). During the follow-up session, my observation was confirmed by the participant. She stated, "You know. I feel that I might have gone through more anxiety...." To describe some of her experiences in the US, Suki used strong words such as *painful, horrifying, struggle, and crisis*. She stated, "Everything was so different from what I used to see in Korea. So that made me think like a baby or who had to start learning everything, you know. So it was very, very extraneously stressful and awful." She also said,

I realized that my self-esteem was relying on what I could do, what I was doing. In Korea, I didn't have any problem, but here, since I am like a baby, or you know, dysfunctional adult, you know, that really was challenging my self-esteem and challenging my identity. In terms of self-esteem, she mentioned that being a "dysfunctional adult" made her upset with herself, creating self-doubts about her capability. One of her self-doubts is expressed in the statement, "Whenever I feel frustrated...I was questioning if I ever be able to get to the point that I can speak fluent enough as other, you know, native speakers." Suki described her challenge of communicating through English as follows: "It takes much more energy and it takes more time to get to the point that I wanted to point out. So like, even though I tried it too, the problem is

that it doesn't make sense to others." The data indicate that Suki experienced a high level of language anxiety at the beginning of her stay in the US. She described how a strong LA once made her change her course of study. She explained that she had to change what she was studying because of the fear she would not do well in the field. Suki stated, "I had to leave...if that anxiety stayed with me for long time, I would have been what it was like paralyzed." As she spent more time in the US, however, she started to feel support and acceptance; therefore, the anxiety level went down.

In addition, she pointed out that her struggle was not just about the vocabulary or the language, but the entire cultural experience. Before she came to the US, she stated that she had never thought about herself in a multicultural setting, which made her more vulnerable in adjusting to the diverse US culture. One of her episodes reads,

In terms of psychological context, here in the US in a new culture, I really didn't have any clue. Like when people were smiling at me, I needed to think what it means. Because sometimes people were smiling, but their smile was overwhelming, you know. Not really like gentle smile. Sometimes people smiling at me made me think that, "Well, this person is trying to maybe overpower me. Otherwise how come the smiling looks like that?"

The statement indicates how a simple gesture of smiling could be misconstrued by a non-native student and can cause feeling of uneasiness.

On the opposite side of Suki's difficulties, however, she also talked about the experiences that made her feel stabilized and connected. She stated, "When, you know, classmates and professors began to understand, I mean at least they appeared, seemed to be able to understand how I felt, that was really, you know, I think this was one of the greatest support." This indicates that Suki's feeling of helplessness was eased by feeling understood and accepted. Also, Suki

mentioned that, speaking the English language makes her feel more open and transparent, because the language itself does not dictate her way of expression like her native language does. She expressed that by using English, she felt relieved from the rules of her native language.

Interestingly, although her overall LA might have decreased over time, Suki seemed to have experienced some ups and downs in LA. She mentioned that when she was a master's student in the US, she felt that it was acceptable to concentrate on delivering her message and to ask for help. Therefore, once she was confident that she could communicate her message to other people, she felt relieved. However, after she became a student in the PhD program, she stated that she felt she should be functioning at a higher level, such as sensing the nonverbal language cues and understanding the context during communication. This change of goal seemed to have caused her another wave of LA by pointing out the possible limitation in accomplishing the new goal and provoking her self-doubts. Suki mentioned, "...my English could be a trap or trick, you know, could be kind of a hindrance." She indicated that her English ability became a high concern requiring even greater skills, which made her anxious. Not only did the essential goal change, but Suki stated that the type of work that is required had changed also. Suki explained that some of her previous tasks were coursework or knowledge based, which she could prepare beforehand. The new tasks required higher levels of interpersonal skills that could be accessed more spontaneously. Situations that are less controllable, represented in the latter case, could have contributed to Suki's new set of anxiety.

In addition to the types of tasks she must deal with, Suki expressed that the reaction of the people around her affected her level of LA as well as her subsequent actions. She stated that if she felt that the person with whom she was communicating was measuring her at the same



level as native students without any consideration, it would make her defensive and feel pressure to make no mistakes. In contrast, if she felt accepted, she could be more open and less defensive.

*Svetlana – “I always liked learning the language. So I don’t think  
I had really terrible experiences.”*

Svetlana is a graduate student from the Czech Republic (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). From the beginning of the interview, Svetlana expressed her positive view of American language and culture. She stated, “I really like the English language.” Also, she said that she had many American friends in the Czech Republic. To answer my question about learning English, Svetlana said, “I just always wanted to be able to communicate with them [American friends] the way I was able to communicate with my Czech friends in Czech. I guess I wanted to have or to be able to retain my personality.” She stated that it is hard to be herself when she is expressing herself through English. In addition, Svetlana mentioned that while she was still learning the language she faced what she called a “communication problem.” She stated, “It was really hard for me to understand what the teacher was saying or what anybody else in the classroom was saying for that matter.” She recalled this experience as being tough, demanding, and challenging. Once she was able to communicate in English, however, Svetlana stated that she experienced a great amount of joy over a particular experience. She described, “...I was having a sort of relatively fluent conversation with a person that I didn’t understand at the beginning, you know.... That was a special moment.” After she explained, she labeled this particular experience as the feeling of being “freer,” being “out of the box,” and “breaking the barrier.”

To further describe the feeling of breaking the barrier, Svetlana stated that she used to do a “mental translation” when speaking English, which for her felt like a barrier. She explained,

...there is a stage when you do some mental translation in your head from your native language to the target language. And I think that kind of barrier is really hard to break just for anyone. And it takes a really long time if you are living in your old country and just learning the language in a classroom environment. But if you are forced to live in a country where the language you are trying to learn is being spoken, then, that type of barrier is much easier to break and it takes less time.

Svetlana stated that at that moment, which she described as special, she realized that she was not doing an inner translation. By not translating from Czech and starting to think in English, she expressed that, "It is much easier to express yourself because you don't have to go through the extra step." Moreover, she stated that when she was at the translation stage, it limited her, even in the way she acted or behaved with other people. The fact that she was translating hindered communications from taking place on an immediate level. She explained, "Because, like, in face to face conversations, people normally don't expect you to do that translating and wait two minutes for you."

When we were on the topic of the experiences that made her anxious, Svetlana mentioned that she felt certain kinds of uneasiness, but many of her experiences were not quite represented by the word, "anxiety." She stated that instead of being anxious, she was rather frustrated. She described her frustrated feeling as not knowing how to express herself in the language. Svetlana stated, "[you are frustrated] because you are expected to react and you cannot really react in any way that makes sense to you..." In a different episode, however, she mentioned that a similar situation did not result in frustration. She stated, "I wouldn't say that I was anxious then because I knew that I was ultimately going to, you know, arrive at some conclusion that we would understand each other." In the latter example, she stated that she was free from what she

perceived as a set expectations from the environment. Svetlana also mentioned that the reason she did not experience frustration in the latter episode was that she felt patience and understanding from the people with whom she was communicating. She stated,

The first day in class, I had this friend who moved her desk next to mine and she started talking to me. She saw that I was from a different country, didn't understand. So she started drawing pictures and she would repeat things a million times....Everyone was really, really nice, I mean, they knew that I was from a different country.

The statement indicates that Svetlana recognized her disadvantageous situation as a non-native speaker, although by feeling understood about her background, she had less fear of misrepresenting herself.

Compared to the time when she had just arrived in the US, Svetlana stated that she is now a lot more confident. At the same time, she acknowledges the limitation of expressing herself through English. She stated, "I can pass for an American in certain situations until the people actually speak with me for more than 10 minutes and realize that I am not from here." When I asked if she wanted to be mistaken as an American, Svetlana replied,

I think that I subconsciously want to in certain situations and it's an odd thing. And I really should not be saying that...because I feel like I am discarding my Czech heritage....

The funny thing is that I am not really discarding the Czech heritage but it is funny to be both, you know.

During the follow-up session, Svetlana mentioned that learning to speak English is not actually limiting her expression, but instead she is gaining another voice to express herself. Having both a Czech-self and an American-self allows her to act freely from the constraints associated with her native language.

*Emeterio – “I feel that every time I go out the door, I have to prepare myself to speak English.”*

Emeterio is an undergraduate student from Costa Rica (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). He stated that studying in the US has been a good experience and he feels lucky to be here. He explained that the experiences are good because he realizes that he is improving his English skills as well as getting to know the culture. Through English, he stated that he will have more opportunities. It is his chance to improve himself and to become more open-minded.

Emeterio expressed that he had more difficulties at the beginning of his stay in the US. He mentioned, “When I got here, it was very difficult for me to understand the Southern dialect.... It was very frustrating to not understand people because you cannot communicate in a very good manner.” He explained what was on his mind by saying,

Like when somebody doesn’t understand me and I am trying to look for the words, I got nervous. So it is even harder to find the right words when you are nervous. And that makes me very anxious....And it is also embarrassing to me when someone doesn’t understand you....

Emeterio mentioned that after a while in the US, expressing himself became a lot better, but he still had some concerns. He stated, “Communicating the message is not that hard, you know. That is not hard. But being yourself speaking English is very difficult to me. To me, it is like two different ways of expressing and communicating.” Emeterio differentiated the situations where he was just trying to get his message across and where he was trying to express himself on a deeper level. For example, he stated that he felt more confident using English in everyday situations like restaurants and supermarkets. In those situations, all he needed was the skill to get his message across. On the other hand, in social settings or in the classroom, he felt less

confident and more anxious because of the pressure. He stated, “You have all these native English speaking people around you and they might judge you because, you know, you might mess up a word or something like that and they might laugh.” Emeterio also stated, “I don’t have to prove myself in certain situations, but I have the feeling I have the need to prove myself in other situations so maybe I can get respect from other people.”

In terms of being himself, Emeterio stated, “The frustration comes when you are trying to express yourself the same way you are used to doing in Spanish. When you try to translate it in English, it is very difficult to speak in the same way.” He further explained his struggle by saying,

The interaction is not the same. Because I have to think and choose my words in English to say something, you know, not in Spanish. In Spanish, I can just feel it and say it and that is it. But if I feel it in Spanish and had to translate that in English, it is not going to sound the same. The words are not going to feel the same.

In addition, he indicated that switching languages affects his self-confidence. He stated, “The way I think about myself in Spanish is different than it is in English.” To elaborate how he feels when he is speaking in Spanish compared to speaking in English, he said, “Oh yeah, I feel more capable of being understood, accomplishing what I want to do, ahm, interacting with people, more sociable. Yes, definitely, I feel more uninhibited....” Emeterio explained that recognizing this gap of capability makes him very anxious and he wishes to get to the point it is no longer an issue. He indicated that speaking English requires a lot more attention because of the fear that he might “mess up easily.” By not translating, he thinks that the feeling of awkwardness would be eliminated. Emeterio stated,

I want to be, sometimes, I want to get to that level of being so comfortable with speaking English that I can be, you know, I don't even have to think about translating things. I have to talk and that's it.

Emeterio described that switching from Spanish to English is like turning a switch on and off. He feels that every time he goes out the door, he has to prepare himself for the switch. "Being in the English mode is an uncomfortable feeling for me," he stated. He further stated, "It used to be, and I used to feel a lot of pressure before. Not anymore. Now it is just uncomfortable...." One factor that contributed to the change in his feelings may be the fact that he became more confident in his ability to function in English. In addition, he stated that he feels satisfied with his language level because it is a good enough level for him to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. He is concerned that becoming native-like in English may overwhelm his identity as Costa Rican. Therefore, he would rather be imperfect in English than to lose his roots in his native country.

*Kenichi – "I was really scared if I can make it here and how much  
I can really improve my English."*

Kenichi is a graduate student from Japan (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). He expressed that his English skill was very limited before he came, and he had a difficult time adjusting to the new environment during the first few years after his arrival. He used phrases such as "skill was limited," "had not much opportunity to practice," and "didn't have a good foundation" to describe his language ability at the time of his arrival. Kenichi stated, "After I came here, I found that I couldn't talk.... I couldn't communicate with teachers and I couldn't fully understand what the teachers were saying in the lecture." Therefore, this situation

made him “disconnected from other people.” As a result, he mentioned that he was frustrated and worried. Some of his main frustrations were expressed in the following statement:

Because I couldn't speak English well, I felt kind of diminished. In the United States, if I cannot speak English well, they just think I am stupid. And, ahm, also that I think my Japanese culture is not very treated as on the same level. So I really felt diminished culturally too....

This statement describes two sources of his worries. One is the language difference; the other is the cultural difference. As an example of a situation that contributed to his language worries, Kenichi offered,

I wasn't able to come up with good worded questions and the teacher was not pleased. That kind of made me feel, I was trying to speak up and they didn't really understand what I was saying. And it kind of made me more defensive.... Some teachers are, like really, I don't know, I don't feel kind of being supported.

After the incidence, he mentioned that he felt stupid about himself and embarrassed, which discouraged him from speaking up again. He stated,

I can try to speak English and people understand and be able to engage with me and I feel much confidence and less anxious. But if I try to speak English and some people are not very nice. Some people just don't care and are ignorant and very unsupportive. If those kinds of things happen, I really feel bad and more anxious to approach again.

The negative experiences seemed to have fed into Kenichi's self-doubts. Kenichi stated that the negative experiences made him worried about how much he could improve his English in the future, and ultimately, if he could make it in the US.

To explain his cultural frustration, Kenichi stated, “I felt okay with myself in Japan. I never thought about racial difference kind of things. I came to the United States, and I felt that I am not treated as equal.” Later on, Kenichi mentioned that this uncomfortable feeling of inequality would decrease when he felt better about himself. Kenichi mentioned,

For me, if I just feel better about myself being as Japanese in the United States, I think it is kind of make me much more comfortable to communicate with other people or American people. I think it’s not just English but, ahm, kind of cultural adjustment plays a really big role for me.

He mentioned that he is beginning to feel okay with his background and he is able to be proud of himself being Japanese, yet still he feels culturally inferior in the US. Kenichi expressed his struggle locating his new identity in the US, which made him vulnerable and uncertain. Part of his struggle was represented by the concern about his accent. He stated that he feels that his accent is standing in his way of being seen as competent and being accepted.

In terms of chronological experiences, Kenichi said that he felt especially anxious during two different periods after he came to the US. The first was when he had just arrived and had difficulties communicating with people; the second was when he started his professional training at his university. During the first wave of his anxious feelings, Kenichi stated that he was required to concentrate on communicating, which exhausted his capability at the time, but once the process became natural, the anxiety diminished. He stated,

Ahm, first time I came here, it was really a struggle and I was always conscious how well I can speak English. But now that English comes very naturally, it is kind of more like automatic. So I don’t need to worry about it. I can use my brain energy for something else.



When he was over the first wave of anxiety, Kenichi described that he experienced a great amount of joy in certain communicative situations. He stated,

One of the really positive things was that I found myself communicating with the people from different countries and also American people. I haven't had much of those experiences, and being able to do that made me feel better about myself. Ahm, it was very exciting being able to communicate. Even though I was not a good communicator at that time, it was very rewarding.

Kenichi explained that in Japan, being able to speak English is equated to one's social status as an accomplished individual. Therefore, being able to use English made him feel confident about himself. He described the excitement as follows. "Hey, I can really speak English fluently, like I was dreaming of since I was small. And now, I am talking to foreigners!" In the statement, the feelings of being surprised and being proud of himself are represented.

Once Kenichi passed this stage, he encountered the second wave of anxiety. Kenichi stated, "I think it is now that just improving the English is not enough...." He also stated,

So after a while, once I kind of get used to it, the anxiety kind of got lower. I am not really worried about English anymore. But I was more worried about if I can make a good grades in the classes....

Kenichi explained the change in his feelings as follows:

...English was first for the survival, I think, and to make it in the United States. It was just like the basic stuff. But after a while my English got that level that I was able to catch up with the classes and got some friends, so. My English level was enough to function at that level, so I didn't really feel the worry that much at that moment. But once I started

my professional training, the English skill communication became really a critical component to make it in my degree so I got some different kind of pressure....

This statement indicates that the first kind of anxiety he experienced during the beginning of his stay in the US was different from the anxiety he experienced later on. It suggests the temporal, recursive nature of LA.

*Hans – “I can get around, but I still get frustrated at times  
when I cannot exactly say what I want.”*

Hans is a graduate student from Germany (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). He expressed that he is fairly confident about his ability in English. He stated that it is rather difficult to recall any negative experiences. He mentioned,

I have been here for a while and I think I have at least a fairly reasonable level of English. I can get around. I still get frustrated at times when I cannot exactly say what I want or convey what I want. But for the most part, it works pretty well.

Hans provided his rationale for his lack of anxiety by saying,

... maybe I don't feel anxious because, I mean, in Europe, we are generally exposed to many different languages.... My father is from Belgium so part of my family, when I was growing up, spoke French. I haven't grown up bilingual, but...I have always been exposed to different languages.

Hans further explained that the exposure to different languages prepared him, to a higher degree, for the situation where he can only imperfectly communicate. Therefore, he never felt really that anxious in the US.

Hans stated that the only episode he could think of, at the time of the interview, where he felt anxious was a certain translation job he accepted some time ago. Hans expressed that the job

turned out to be more demanding than he expected; therefore, it pointed out his limitations in regard to his English ability. He described, “I was frustrated because it kind of went to my limits, I mean, I was pushed beyond my ability....” Hans also added, “I thought I could do better than that....” In addition to this experience, he described a situation where he felt frustrated while he was doing mental translation on the spot. He stated, “When you have to concentrate or focus on taking in the information and translate into English, any additional thoughts would mix me up.” He explained that he became capable of thinking in English rather than translating from German later on. Before he reached that point, while he was translating, he explained that extra thoughts such as “Can I do it?” would come into his mind, which negatively affected his performance. Hans described the change in his thought process as follows:

I probably have to be less conscious about talking and speaking or conveying what I want to say. Early on, especially at the beginning, starting to study here, I had to make more of a conscious effort to repackage my message and convey my message. I think I can talk more freely today.

He also mentioned,

So I think...I can better improvise today than I could when I started out here speaking English. Then, there was still the separation between planning and execution in terms of what I was going to say. Today, that falls more together.

The statement indicates his increased vulnerability to anxious thoughts during the stage of translation, as well as the increased security without such thoughts after gaining the fluency to think in English.

In addition to the frustration experienced during the “translating stage” just described, Hans expressed another kind of frustration he has yet to overcome. He stated,

German is my native language. I am certainly not somebody who has that good of a command, but I can express everything I want and I can do it fairly well to the point. But with English, I feel more frustrated because I feel that I am not even at the level that I am in German. So I am more limited in English in my ability to express myself to the point precise and eloquent than I am limited in German.

He further explained this feeling of frustration by saying,

...for me it is very hard to get emotions from somebody else. Like in my native language, I have a better grasp of the context of communication. So reading between the lines and interpreting how somebody means something in English, it is far more difficult for me. And that is at times also frustrating....

These statements indicate that recognizing the gap between what he is capable of in his native language and in English causes him frustration and possibly lowers his self-esteem. He stated that he feels as if he had never developed the ability, or he is at the very beginning of developing the ability, to read between the lines in English.

As for his self-evaluation of ability in English, Hans mentioned that he feels confident in his ability because he is able to get his point across and be effective in his communication, although he does not consider himself as having mastered the language. He differentiated the ability to be eloquent from getting the message across effectively, categorizing the former as a higher level skill. Hans stated that in a casual setting he may only need the skills to be effective and get his message across, whereas in a more professional setting, being eloquent has a very high value in addition to the ability to get his message across. He mentioned, "...if you have not mastered a language that well, you cannot just switch this formal or informal...." This indicates that Hans recognizes the need for higher skills in certain situations. He expressed that being

“eloquent” is not only being proper, it is being proper in a particular setting. He described an episode where he felt that “click” with American culture and the language, which brought him the sensation of an expanded ability in English:

...when I have picked up an idiom or an expression here and you said in a context that is fitting and you see that people are either surprised that you used that expression as a foreigner or they laugh. It is one thing that is very common here in Louisiana, or in the Southeast, is this “y’all.” I have used it two times...that is kind of fun. Because, you know, you can hit the mark with somebody from the States. So and, you know, it kind of clicks and you feel you have a better grasp of the bandwidth [of the language] because it really fits in the context....

The statement indicates his joy in accomplishing something unexpected by others, as well as reaching a point beyond mere delivery of his message in English.

*Mei – “I was usually the quiet one in the class. I was afraid of speaking in front of Americans.”*

Mei is a graduate student from Taiwan (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). She stated that she likes learning languages because it is through language that she can learn about the outside world. She expressed that there are some terms that became natural to her to say in English instead of in her native Chinese. Because she had spent some time in the US, she stated that she can express herself in a way she could never do in her native language. Through such encounters, she said, “I feel that my knowledge and my experience are expanding.” This feeling of “expansion” seems to indicate that she goes beyond the boundary provided by her native language. She stated,

For example, some emotional expressions, I feel more comfortable to say, to express my emotions in English than in Chinese. When I am using Chinese, I feel I am more Chinese and Chinese are usually more conservative. And we don't express things too emotional. Mei expressed that it was only after she became comfortable in the new environment that she could enjoy the feeling of expansion and improvement, and it did not come so easily in the beginning of her stay in the US. She stated, "[At the beginning,] I was usually the quiet one in the class. I was afraid of speaking in front of Americans." She also stated, "Whenever I was not able to communicate well...I would feel ashamed and I think people would laugh at me and would look down on me." In addition to those concerns, she stated that she was worried that she would ruin the reputation of the Taiwanese people if she did not represent her well. Mei mentioned that not speaking up was not only because of those worries that affected her self-confidence negatively, but also because of some cultural differences. She explained that in her native culture, having the characteristics of being a good listener and being compliant are valued more than having independent opinions. In addition, she stated that the ways of communication differ between cultures. Mei provided an example of how cultural difference can hinder effective communications:

In the first year of my master's program, I was applying for a social security card and I didn't know where to apply for it. So I made a few phone calls and finally, I called the social security department or something. And then they were giving me directions. And the lady told me that building was called federal building, but I was not able to recognize it. I kept saying *cederal*, *cederal*? So she was trying to help me. She said F as in Frank, F as in Flower or something like that. But at that time I was not able to tell and I didn't know that's how people help me to know the spelling. And then I kept saying *cederal*,

*cederal* and she was so mad. ...I think the problem was that I didn't know when she said F as in Frank, it was the way to know the spelling.

The statement indicates that her struggle was not limited to the language issue, but also included the lack of cultural knowledge. Mei stated that many of her problems may have been related to not knowing the culture.

To answer my question of whether she felt prepared when she arrived in the US, Mei stated, "I never thought I was prepared. Well, actually, because I thought I was not prepared, so I came here in the hope that I would learn to speak better." She mentioned that by coming to the US, English shifted from being a subject of study to a necessity and a part of her life. Because of this shift, she stated that she experienced some anxiety. One example was when she could not speak much in class, despite the fact she felt she was expected to speak more. She explained that because she felt she was still adjusting to the environment, she was not ready to speak up. Mei also stated that different reactions from people around her could contribute to experiencing or not experiencing anxiety. She mentioned,

I think most of the time it depends on the people that I encountered with. Also the attitude affects me. If that person is nice and patient, I feel better and I can express myself better. But if that person is kind of impatient or showed kind of discrimination, then my performance goes down...because, well, I am nervous. It seems that the more anxious that I want to express myself or the more anxious I want to do it well, the more incompetent I feel.

Mei stated that it is a vicious cycle. She became nervous when she wanted to do it well, which caused her to perform worse; the worse performance made her even more nervous. There were

some exceptions, however. She stated that there was a time when she did not feel nervous and it surprised her that she was able to express herself so well. She recalled,

Then, I believe my classmates did not expect me to say that much in the presentation....

But then all of a sudden, I was talking loud in the class and I was not nervous. That surprised me too. So that it just seemed natural, I started talking and I was able to say what I wanted to say.

As a result of this experience, Mei said that she felt happy. Also, she felt more confident with her English ability. In contrast to the feeling she was experiencing during this particular situation described as “natural,” she stated, “It seems that in the past, English was something external. It wasn’t in me.” She also stated, “It seemed, ahm, it [English] was not so close to me. So it seemed that there was a gap or something in between my performance and my ability.” She stated that to describe it in a metaphor, the experience of making English external to internal was like building a bridge. While the bridge was not complete, she stated that she experienced some frustration.

Mei mentioned,

Most of the time, most of the situation in which I could not use English to express myself I know if I was saying in Chinese, of course I can express it much better. Maybe not to a perfect level but definitely it will be much better.

The change occurred in her feelings when she was no longer required to think in Chinese and then translate. Mei reflected,

In the past, most of the time I needed to think in Chinese and then translate in English.

And during that translation process, more of my, more of my ideas were lost. But then, when I am able to use English more fluently, I feel most of the time I don’t have to think



much. I don't have to think in Chinese and then translate it. So it just become, the percentage is increasing that I use English to think and to express myself.

She explained that while she was "translating," she had to deal with a lot of uncertainty. During the translation process, she expressed that self-doubts arose because she was not sure if she was translating the right way.

At the time of the interview, Mei stated that she felt fairly confident about her English ability, but at the same time she recognized some room for improvement. She stated,

Currently, most of the time, I can express myself, although it's not native-like. But I believe people understand me.... I don't experience much difficulty communicating with people. But still, I know it's definitely not native like, and there still are a lot of expressions that I cannot use. But I think it's acceptable.

The statement indicates that her confidence comes from the fact that she has accomplished one level of English by being able to make herself understood. As for the other measure of her English ability, "sounding native-like," however, she feels that she does not have the ability. She expressed the attitude that it would be nice to have that ability but she is comfortable without it.

Toward the end of the interview, Mei stated that being able to speak English gives her a sense of superiority. She mentioned, "When I am in Taiwan, being able to speak English gives me a sense of superiority. It seems that I am better, higher than the other people...because most of the people in Taiwan do not speak English well." When I asked how it changed when she came to the US, she answered that over here, English became a necessity but being able to speak English still adds to her self-confidence. She stated, "Over here, I think it's more about confidence. It gives me the assurance that I can take care of myself and I can do well here." This indicates that Mei sees her experience in the US as sort of a validation process for her ability to

be able to use English as a tool. Therefore, successful experiences have added to her self-confidence.

*Davi – “You are going to have your accent for the rest of your life;  
you better be comfortable with it.”*

Davi is a graduate student from Brazil (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). He stated that he had always been interested in English and had a positive attitude toward learning. He saw that the ability to be able to use English gave him opportunities he otherwise might not have. Davi stated that whenever he was able to use English as a tool to communicate with someone, he was excited to see “it really works.” He experienced that it is a skill that is useful in the real world. He also said that English is a tool for real life, but it separates him from the life associated with his native language. He mentioned, “It is almost like being in a game/play mode, you know.” Davi stated that most of his experiences related to English have been positive, yet he experienced some difficulties at the beginning of his stay in the US.

Davi mentioned that when people understood him, it made him comfortable and confident. However, when he experienced communication problems, he felt frustrated. He described, “...you know, you have your accent and people don’t understand you. And you are frustrated because as an English teacher, you expect everyone to understand you.” He also stated that the communication problems can be caused by some cultural differences. He stated, “So, when you first come here, you don’t get all the meaning. That doesn’t occur very easily for you.” Davi provided an example of an experience where he was seen as very rude because he was unable to pay attention to the US cultural norm. He explained,

... I was really in a hurry to get on the bus, and I was tired. Back home, we are like, when the bus comes, you just make sure that you get on there.... So there was this lady in front of me, I kind of cut the line and went upfront.... And the other lady said, 'You cannot just cut in front of people!'

To provide a closer look at the episode in terms of its cultural aspect, Davi explained, "When you are tired, sometimes, you don't behave in the culture anymore. You go back to the default, which is your own culture." This statement indicates that he needed extra attention to be in what he called an "English mode." However, being tired did not allow him to do so. He stated,

Sometimes, you are very tired and you even speak to someone in your native language.

Because, I don't know, I think it's not so natural just be in the culture. You kind of act it out. Because, I don't know, I think some of the things are not so automatic to me.

According to Davi, the process of registering the English mode as an automatic response takes time and practice in the culture. He expressed that when he was unsure about the language and its cultural norms, he felt he was more exposed to anxiety. He stated that at the beginning of his stay in the US, it was especially difficult to speak in English in front of people. He mentioned, "I had something to say, but I really didn't know very well how to say it, so sometimes I felt a little frustrated." Davi further explained this situation by saying, "You have a thought and you start expressing yourself. And you still have something to say, but you kind of stop right there. You don't keep going." When he couldn't express himself well, Davi stated that he was interrupted by different thoughts, such as telling himself to start over. This kind of situation does not happen to him any longer, he said, "I am very confident now that I have achieved a really high standard. I write very well, I can do presentations, and I can communicate well."

Another thing the interview with Davi indicated was that when self-expression suffers because of the language barrier, self-perception suffers as well. Davi talked about a situation in a grocery store where his attempt to communicate was unsuccessful. He stated that he felt he was negatively interpreted by the cashier. He said, “maybe her perception was like, ‘he is a foreign guy who is taking advantage of my country’ or something like that....” In terms of representing himself well, Davi stated that it was challenging at the beginning for him to express himself well in front of native speakers. He described his worries, “I thought maybe my speech was not so fluent....” He also stated that he used to blame himself for the communication failures. He mentioned, “... the only reason that I thought they didn’t understand me was because I didn’t speak it correctly....” He expressed that he had a very high self-expectation and sometimes that caused him frustration. He described the situation as follows.

It didn’t matter what place I went, grocery store, Walgreens, or McDonalds, any place. If there was something I didn’t understand, and then I felt frustrated because I thought that I should understand.

He also stated, “I thought, ‘I am an English teacher, I am supposed to communicate well with anybody.’ And if they didn’t understand me, it was my fault.” Davi stated that learning English is like a trip to another island. People learn to cross the sea and learn different aspects of the new land once they reach the other island. As an English teacher in Brazil, he felt like he has taken this trip and come back to teach others. His statements indicated that his frustration came from the feeling that his experience, having made this trip, was invalidated. Davi stated that he later discovered he wasn’t necessarily wrong, but sometimes it was a matter of his accent that interrupted the communication. He mentioned that he was no longer frustrated once he

discovered that incidents of miscommunication do not directly reflect on his inability to use English.

Davi also stated that the change of his goals influenced the change in his feelings. He explained,

One change was that I didn't have to mimic native speakers any longer. You know, you kind of have this idea that you are going to get to that level. Then you realize, no, this is not how we learn, this is a different thing. And when you get to that point, you feel better about yourself. Also, you don't have to worry so much about your accent anymore. ...people don't understand you even if you have a native-like accent. Sometimes they will not understand you because they may have come from a different region or something. ...as an English teacher, I have a high standard for myself. But I think I have become more comfortable now.

Davi stated that even though his English is not perfect because of the things he may never be able to overcome, he is fairly confident because of the fact he can communicate. He said, "Like pronunciation, you are going to have your accent for the rest of your life. You better be comfortable with it." He also stated, "If you change the standard, just make some adaptations. I think that's better. It will have a more positive effect."

In terms of what LA is, Davi stated that it is a short-term and recursive anxiety to him. He described,

It's kind of temporary. You are experiencing, and then, it's over. You may have a negative experience now when you don't understand somebody or they don't understand you, but then, much later, you will understand somebody; they understand you back.

He also stated, "...the language or culture anxiety, I think that comes back and forth.... Now and then, there is a new situation and it makes you anxious." He explained that LA is something he can overcome, but it comes back. In his words, this is because, "There is always something, you know, it's just a part of being a foreigner."

*Habbie – "We all have the same anxiety about saying the right thing."*

Habbie is an undergraduate student from Burkina Faso (for complete information about the participants, see Table 1). She stated that she has always been interested in English. She seemed to be very determined, and described her stay in the US as an adventure. She stated her language learning motto as "being not afraid of making mistakes." When I asked about her language background, she said that she speaks French and four other languages from her native country where they have more than 150 local languages. She mentioned that she also lived in Senegal, which she described as a place where a mix of French and many other languages are spoken.

Habbie stated that most of her experiences in the US have been very positive, because she feels that people in the US are very supportive and understanding. As some examples of the events that have made her feel supported, she described professors' comments. "...she said, 'don't be too hard on yourself because you are doing better than people who were born here, studying all their life in English.'" She also mentioned, "And some of my teachers kept saying, 'everybody has an accent, even us, we have accents. When we go to the north or when you go to another state, they will say that you have an accent. So, everybody has an accent.'" Habbie stated her overall impression of people in the US, in terms of accepting foreigners, in the following way:

We all have the same anxiety about saying the right thing. And since we had that idea about people laugh at you when you don't say things right, we are afraid to speak. But I realized here that people [in the US] don't laugh even if you don't say the right thing so....

In contrast to the overwhelming supportive atmosphere she had experienced, she stated some examples of her negative experiences when she was in a French speaking environment. She mentioned,

If you say something wrong in French, they will laugh at you. French people are bad.... It is not encouraging. When somebody laughs at you, the next time, you will be like, "Should I say it?" You be more reserved. You wouldn't want to speak again.

Because of the relative lack of such negative experiences, Habbie stated that she started to feel less anxious and more confident. She explained,

At first, because I was feeling, I thought that people would laugh at me. And my accent is different. If I asked questions, I was worried that maybe I will not say it right and the teacher might not understand me. But as semesters went by, I started being confident asking my questions in class. Sometimes I even make jokes in class.

In terms of her self-confidence and people's reaction, she added,

...the fact that they don't laugh when you are talking even if your accent is weird, the fact of not laughing makes you feel confident. "Okay. Next time I can ask my question. These people did not laugh at me." So you feel like you are not left out. You can ask your questions anytime you want.

She stated that people around her made her feel confident about herself. Furthermore, when she started to realize that she could make herself understood, even with her accent, she felt less

anxious. She said, "...now I am kind of less anxious about my accent when I am talking, because I realize that a lot of people can understand me."

There was one incident, however, where she experienced the return of anxiety, which she thought she had overcome. Habbie explained,

There was one class that I took.... In that class, I was participating a lot, but she [the teacher] did something that made me like go back in my, how do you say, I became reserved. Because there was one time we took an exam. I had a good grade, but there was a question that I missed, and I wanted to know why. I was confused when I was taking the exam. I raised my hand and she did not even let me finish my question. I don't even think she heard me. Because when I used to ask questions in this class, she would ask me to repeat it, sometimes twice. But when I raised my hand, when I started, she said, "I am sorry that is how it is supposed to be. We cannot do anything about it." I felt stupid.

She stated that this incident made her question her English ability. Habbie described, "This is what I told myself. 'She did not understand what I was saying. She didn't want to.' I was like, 'Okay.' But after that, I spent a week not talking in this class." The statement indicates that the incident prompted her self-doubt, and ultimately discouraged her active participation in the class.

In terms of her language preparedness, Habbie stated that she felt she had a good foundation when she arrived in the US, and one of her goals was to improve her English skills even more. She mentioned that one of her best experiences was to recognize her own progress. She gave me an example where she wrote a poem in English for a class. Upon receiving positive feedback from the instructor, she stated, "...I said, 'Wow, I cannot believe that I am writing in English and somebody found it so good about it!' ...It was like a dream." She expressed that she was actually surprised to have been able to do what she had done. She had a similar reaction



when she talked about her participation in class. She mentioned, "...He said that we had the highest scores in participation. I said, 'Wow, did I participate that much in the class?' I was happy and said wow."

In a broader sense, Habbie stated that being able to use English makes her proud of herself. She described the reason as the following: "Well, like, it adds more to whom I will be able to communicate with. And how many ways I can express myself.... I can choose which way I want to express myself." She also added, "I feel like my area of communication, like, my radius of communication has expanded."

In contrast to the feeling of expansion of capability, Habbie stated some of her earlier experiences represented limitations. She expressed her worry concerning her accent by saying, "My accent, that was my only anxiety. Like, when I wanted to speak in front of people, I would first apologize saying, 'You have to excuse me for my accent. I am sure it will be weird.'" When I asked her what concerns she had about her accent, she replied, "I worry that maybe they don't understand what I am saying." To put her worry in context, Habbie told me about an episode where she experienced this type of anxiety. She explained,

There was one time, I went to the credit union. And I said like, "deposit" and the lady was looking at me like, "What?" And I kept saying and she couldn't figure out what I was saying. So there was a deposit slip in front of me. I took it and showed it to her. And she said, "Oh, deposit." And I said, "Okay." I kept pronouncing the word after I got the answer, like, "okay, deposit, okay, deposit."...Every time I wanted to say something I was worried about them not understanding what I was saying.

Habbie also expressed a slightly different worry from the example stated above. She stated, "...when you are not native, sometimes you are afraid of not knowing which word to

choose, to say the right thing.” She stated that she once called her classmate “fat” when she didn’t really understand the negative connotation of the word. While she was telling me the incidence, she expressed her concern about giving a wrong impression to the classmate because of her incorrect word choice. She stated, “Maybe I said it wrong, but I didn’t mean to say that...”

Furthermore, Habbie expressed that some of her frustration did not involve other people; rather, it was generated within herself. She explained, “Sometimes, when I am speaking, I get stuck looking for a word to say. I need to keep my expression to flow, like, non-stop. I need to say things without stopping and looking for the right word.” The statement indicates that anxiety was caused by the gap between the expression she wanted to convey and the expression she was able to deliver. Including this feeling of her expression not representing her true capability, the different types of anxieties Habbie and others experienced will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

During the interviews, the participants provided information about when they felt anxious and when they did not feel anxious in addition to the different situations where they felt anxious. I extracted key concepts from each interview with which to compare and contrast differences and similarities. The participants’ explanations of their experiences and my analysis are combined and provided in the next chapter by theme as a way of drawing conclusions.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

In this concluding chapter, I will talk about the themes emerging from my research process. They will be integrated into the existing literature for further discussion. The limitation of the study, future directions, and conclusions are introduced in the final sections in this chapter.

#### *Themes*

From the very first interview of my study, I analyzed every piece of information I gained through talking, listening, typing, and drawing. As the interviews and analyses progressed, the new data were added to the pool of information I had gained to that point, then they were re-considered for further analyses. By the end, this cyclic procedure produced six themes concerning non-native students' language anxiety (LA) experiences in the US. The first theme, *three components of LA*, is based on Horwitz et al.'s (1986) study. A new component, that of identity frustration, was added in an effort to better explain my participants' LA experiences. The second theme is *technical linguistic ability and cultural language ability*. The participants' consistent claims that linguistic fear itself cannot explain their LA experiences focused my attention on this theme. *The recursive nature of LA* is the third theme. This theme emerged from one participant's self observation, which later was proven to explain others' patterns of LA experiences. The fourth theme, *self-expectation, self-confidence, and LA* was advanced from the literature to explain the connection between self-confidence and LA. My study identified self-expectation to be one of the intervening variables crucial for the explanation of the self-confidence-LA relationship. The fifth theme is *bridging thought and second language*. One participant's metaphor for her effort in overcoming LA and the Vygotsky's book, titled *Thought and Language*, inspired the emergence of this theme. The last theme is *euphoric language*

*tension*. It is based on Spielmann and Radnofsky’s (2001) report concerning the positive effects of language learning, which explained participants’ consistent positive reaction to certain language learning situations in my study.

*Three Components of LA*

The data indicated that the participants’ LA experiences can be categorized into three components according to their goals of the particular interaction at the time and their expectation measures of self and from others. Table 2 indicates the deciding factors of students’ LA experiences.

Table 2

*Deciding Factors of Students’ LA Experiences*

LA Component	Goals	Affected by
Communication Apprehension	to get message across –to survive	surrounding expectation
Fear of Negative Evaluation	To be seen as competent –to be successful	surrounding expectation
Identity Frustration	To be comfortable with who they are when functioning in English	self-expectation

*Note.* LA = Language Anxiety

The first category is communication apprehension. This fear of not getting one’s message across is best represented in Habbie’s statement, “We all have the same anxiety about saying the right thing.” Horwitz et al. (1986) described this fear as provoking students’ shyness. The second category is fear of negative evaluation. This worry of not being able to express oneself and of being seen as incompetent is best represented by Ausra’s statement, “You want to be perceived at least as who you are, if not you want to portray your best. And then, if it gets misconstrued just because of the language, you see it and you feel it....” Horwitz et al. defined this fear as the

“expectation that the others would evaluate oneself negatively” (p. 128). The third category is identity frustration. This is a new component defined in my study as a part of LA. It was added to the other two LA components already defined by Horwitz et al. to better explain the experience of non-native students in the US. Identity frustration is best represented by Emeterio’s statement, “The frustration comes when you are trying to express yourself the same way you are used to doing in Spanish. When you try to translate it in English, it is very difficult to speak in the same way.” In the next section, I will look at each component in more detail.

*Communication Apprehension.* Communication apprehension was expressed by all the participants except Hans, who claimed that he did not experience any anxious feelings in everyday situations because of his level of English, already established by the time of his arrival in the US. It was also often described as a beginner’s worry since many participants used qualifiers such as “at the beginning,” and “when I got here,” to explain the experience. The main worry of communication apprehension was indicated as not communicating the right message due to the cultural/language barrier. Examples of communication apprehension experiences included everyday situations such as those in banks, grocery stores, and classrooms.

The goal of the participants who experienced communication apprehension was making themselves understood to accomplish their basic activities. Because all the participants were students, classroom situations were considered as part of their routine activities. When their goals were met (successful communication), the students did not experience anxiety. When their goals were not met, students experienced communication apprehension. Kenichi contrasted successful and unsuccessful situations and their influences on his self-confidence:

I can try to speak English and people understand and be able to engage with me and I feel much confidence and less anxious. But if I try to speak English and some people are not

very nice. Some people just don't care and are ignorant and very unsupportive. If those kinds of things happen, I really feel bad and more anxious to approach again.

Because the formation of communication apprehension involves others with whom the students communicate, I consider it an outward LA. The relationship between communication apprehension and self-confidence is discussed further in a later section of the study.

*Fear of Negative Evaluation.* The fear of negative evaluation is also an outward LA since students' relationships with others determine its existence. A fear of negative evaluation was experienced in situations where students could not express themselves as well as they were expected to. The experience was identified in all interviews. Emeterio stated, "You have all these native English speaking people around you and they might judge you because, you know, you might mess up a word or something like that and they might laugh." Svetlana stated, "[you are frustrated] because you are expected to react and you cannot really react in any way that makes sense to you...." Svetlana also stated that when she did not feel the expectation of others to perform on a certain level in English, she did not experience fear of negative evaluation. She stated, "I wouldn't say that I was anxious then because I knew that I was ultimately going to, you know, arrive at some conclusion that we would understand each other." This indicates that the fear of negative evaluation was experienced when students identified the gap between their expected-self and real-self. Therefore, when students felt that it was okay to imperfectly express themselves, such as in the latter example in Svetlana's case, they did not experience a fear of negative evaluation.

The difference between communication apprehension and the fear of negative evaluation was identified in their goal settings. Communication apprehension was experienced in situations where student could not get their message across to accomplish their daily activities, whereas a

fear of negative evaluation was experienced in situations where they could not portray themselves at their best, due to cultural/language difficulties. This suggests that the performance goal, when communication apprehension was experienced, was focused on basic/survival needs. In contrast, the performance goal, when fear of negative evaluation was experienced, was focused on their need to be seen as competent and successful in the US. Emeterio explained the difference by saying, “I don’t have to prove myself in certain situations but I have the feeling I have the need to prove myself in other situations so maybe I can get respect from other people.”

Because to be seen as successful is a more advanced goal than to survive, fear of negative evaluation seemed to have been experienced later during students’ stay in the US than communication apprehension, except in situations when the two were tied together. Mei mentioned, “Whenever I was not able to communicate well, I would feel ashamed and think people would laugh at me and would look down on me.” Kenichi mentioned, “Because I couldn’t speak English well, I felt kind of diminished. In the United States, if I cannot speak English well, they just think I am stupid.” These statements indicate a situation where communication apprehension triggered the fear of negative evaluation. This represents a case in which the students’ self-confidence was negatively affected by communication apprehension, which in turn triggered a fear of negative evaluation due to the worry that they are not meeting the expectations of people around them.

*Identity Frustration.* During the interviews, many of the participants commented that some of their experiences could not be truly represented by the word, “anxiety.” To answer my question if she had felt anxious using English, Svetlana stated, “Wouldn’t that be sort of like being frustrated? Isn’t that the same thing?” Also, Ausra stated, “I had one point of still anxiety or of frustration sometimes....” Hans stated, “I still get frustrated at times when I cannot exactly

say what I want or convey what I want.” These statements indicate that the participants felt the word “frustration” rather than “anxiety” would better describe some of their experiences in the US. Therefore, I labeled the third component of LA identity frustration. Identity frustration is experienced by students due to the gap between their capabilities in their native languages and in English. Carla stated,

I claim myself independent. I claim myself like really a precise and clean person when I do my job and everything. And then all of a sudden, I have this wall that is the language. I go and am not be able to do something simple.... So I am not independent any more. And I cannot do the job as precise without someone telling me 50 times how to do it because I didn't get it the first time....

Suki stated,

In Korea, I didn't have any problem. But here, since I am like a baby, or you know, dysfunctional adult, you know. That really was challenging my self-esteem and challenging my identity.

Hans stated,

...with English, I feel more frustrated because I feel that I am not even at the level that I am in German. So I am more limited in English in my ability to express myself to the point, precise, and eloquent than I am limited in German.

Mei stated,

Most of the time, most of the situation in which I could not use English to express myself, I know if I was saying in Chinese, of course I can express it much better. Maybe not to a perfect level but definitely it will be much better.



These statements indicate participants' frustration due to a diminished capability of expressing themselves in English.

The difference between fear of negative evaluation and identity frustration can be seen in a consideration of the surrounding expectations. Unlike fear of negative evaluation, students were not measuring themselves against others' expectations when they experienced identity frustration. Rather, it was an inner comparison between who they felt they were in their native countries and who they see themselves to be in the US. Because of this, I consider identity frustration to be inward LA as opposed to outward LAs such as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. As Suki stated, identity frustration could affect students' self-confidence negatively, due to a diminished capability of the self in the US. Hans expressed his concern that what he is capable of in English may never be equal to what he is capable of in his native language. For this reason, he stated that overcoming identity frustration may take longer than overcoming other types of LA.

Nevertheless, some of the participants did not express identity frustration and saw similar situations as positive. Habbie expressed that by coming to the US, she felt she was learning and gaining something new as opposed to regaining something she had lost. She stated, "I am not losing anything, rather, by learning English, my area of communication is not limited to French anymore." This statement indicates Habbie's different view of the same situation. When students felt that their past experiences were somehow invalidated by coming to the US, they experienced identity frustration, whereas when the students felt the experience in the US gave them something extra, they did not experience identity frustration. Habbie stated that the comments from her teachers, such as "Don't be too hard on yourself because you are doing better than

people who were born here, studying all their life in English,” made her feel understood and ultimately made her feel confident about herself.

The key to overcoming identity frustration seemed to be connected to students’ comfort level with who they are when they are using English. Emeterio stated that he felt a lot more pressure when he compared himself to native speakers. After realizing that “sounding native” was not what he wanted, he stated that he felt relieved. “It used to be, and I used to feel a lot of pressure before. Not anymore. Now it [speaking in English] is just uncomfortable....” Davi also stated,

One change was that I didn’t have to mimic native speakers any longer. You know, you kind of have this idea that you are going to get to that level. Then you realize, no, this is not how we learn, this is a different thing. And when you get to that point, you feel better about yourself. Also, you don’t have to worry so much about your accent anymore. ...I think I have become more comfortable now.

Mei stated,

Currently, most of the time, I can express myself. Although it’s not native-like, but I believe people understand me.... I don’t experience much difficulty communicating with people. But still, I know it’s definitely not native-like, and there still are a lot of expressions that I cannot use. But I think it’s acceptable.

These statements indicate students’ satisfaction with their capabilities, instead of dissatisfaction with what they perceive as deficiencies. Since identity frustration is caused by the gap between their self-expectation and reality, without the gap students did not experience the frustration.

In most cases, all three components of LA, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and identity frustration manifested themselves in the participants’ experiences.

All the participants expressed their feelings of overcoming communication apprehension, whereas many stated that they still experience identity frustration. My study suggests a relative order in which the components of LA are experienced. Although there may be little to substantial overlap, communication apprehension is experienced as initial LA, followed by fear of negative evaluation and identity frustration.

### *Technical Linguistic Ability and Cultural Language Ability*

The data suggest that participants differentiated their LA experiences either as purely linguistic or culture-related. On the one hand, all the participants seemed fairly confident about their grammatical knowledge of the English language. On the other hand, they seemed to have experienced some difficulties when English was used in a real-life cultural context. I differentiated the two as technical linguistic ability and cultural language ability to explicate participants' claims.

According to Chomsky (1971), grammar mastery refers to students' linguistic competence, which is different from perfecting their performance. He stated that linguistic competence contributes to performance; however, it is only one of the factors that interact to determine performance (Chomsky, 1972). He later termed grammatical competence *I-language*, which involves internal, individual, and intentional process of complex phonetic, semantic, and structural properties (Chomsky, 2000). Chomsky differentiated grammatical competence and pragmatic competence by saying, "...the I-languages (grammatical competence) are distinct from conceptual organization and 'pragmatic competence,' and that these systems can be selectively impaired and developmentally dissociated" (p. 26). Similarly, technical linguistic ability in my study refers to students' capability to understand textbook explanations of the language, such as producing grammatically correct sentences and being able to identify the

subject and verb in a sentence. Cultural language ability, however, cannot be enhanced through studying a textbook. My study suggests that learning subtle differences and knowing the most natural expression in a particular situation can only be learned through exposure. Participants' LA experiences induced by a lack of cultural language ability rather than technical linguistic ability were repeatedly expressed during the interviews and follow-up sessions. Ausra stated,

I think one of the worst experiences was the cultural experience rather than the language.

In addition to learning a foreign language, when moving to another country, you actually have to know some of the slang and some of the cultural nuances.

Mei stated, "I think lots of problems are maybe related to culture...." Davi stated, "...language culture anxiety, I think they are kind of related." These statements suggest that the source of students' LA experiences may not be limited to language itself, but may also include some cultural issues. Carla talked about her frustration concerning cultural difference as follows:

...in Costa Rica, a lot of people are using the credit cards already, but you never do your credit card thing.... The cashier takes the card and does everything for you.... So, over at Walgreens...I have something says ATM, credit and debit. I really don't know what's going on. And this person gives me a look, an evil look. Like, "How come you don't know how does this work." And she just turns the thing and answers for you and gives you the receipt and lets you go.

Ausra stated,

I was looking for an apartment and I called this lady. ... First, you don't know this difference between *free and available*, and *free of cost*. So I was like, "I am looking for a free apartment." And she doesn't get me and I don't get what she doesn't get and we

were both frustrated. She was like, “Ma’am?” and I was like “What do you mean Ma’am?”

Mei stated,

In the first year of my master’s program, I was applying for a social security card and I didn’t know where to apply for it. So I made a few phone calls and finally, I called the social security department or something. And then they were giving me directions. And the lady told me that building was called federal building, but I was not able to recognize it. I kept saying *cederal, cederal?* So she was trying to help me. She said F as in Frank, F as in Flower or something like that. But at that time I was not able to tell and I didn’t know that’s how people help me to know the spelling. And then I kept saying *cederal, cederal* and she was so mad. ...I think the problem was that I didn’t know when she said F as in Frank, it was the way to know the spelling.

The above episodes indicate students’ LA experiences due to communication failures in their daily activities. It should be noted that these are examples of communication apprehension that are cultural-related rather than language-related. The participants expressed that the frustration was experienced also due to the gap between their technical linguistic ability and their cultural language ability. To express their frustration, participants often mentioned “Why don’t I get that?” or “I should be able to...” Because all the participants came to the US with previous English language knowledge, they expected to be able to accomplish certain daily activities in English. However, due to their lack of cultural language ability to understand local cultural nuances, students experienced difficulties that resulted in communication apprehension.

Ausra described her learning experience as three fold: “...first, learn the language and you come here and you learn the language and culture and then learn how to apply the

language.” The data suggest that having technical linguistic ability does not exempt students from experiencing LA. Without knowledge of the language and culture, and how to apply the language to the culture, they are subject to experiencing LA (see Figure 2). The findings correspond with Chomsky’s (2000) discussion differentiating students’ I-language (grammatical competence), pragmatic competence, and overall performance.

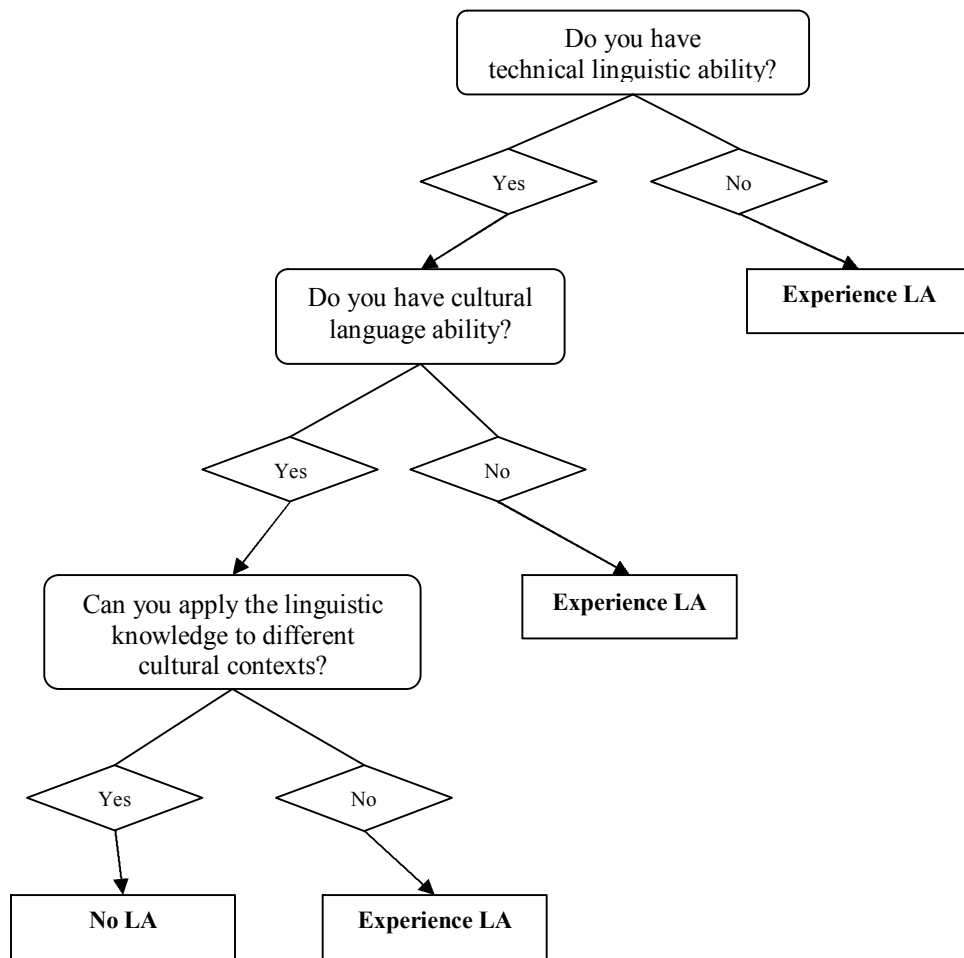


Figure 2: Technical Linguistic Ability and Cultural Language Ability

*Recursive Nature of LA*

During the interview, Davi mentioned one of the most insightful observations about his LA experiences. He stated, "...the language or culture anxiety, I think that comes back and forth.... Now and then, there is a new situation and it makes you anxious." He also stated,

It's kind of temporary. You are experiencing, and then, it's over. You may have a negative experience now, when you don't understand somebody or they don't understand you, but then, much later, you will understand somebody; they understand you back.

These statements add an explanation to participants' communication apprehension experiences and how they tended to be concentrated toward the beginning of their stay in the US. Table 3 indicates the relationships between LA components and its related goals, level of LA, and time flow.

Table 3

*Recursive Nature of LA*

Time Flow	Communication Apprehension		Fear of Negative Evaluation		Identity Frustration	
→	Goal: to get message across		Goal: to be seen as competent		Goal: to meet self-expectation	
<u>Goal Met?</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Level of LA	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓

Note. LA = Language Anxiety

↑ = LA level increase    ↓ = LA level decrease

Since communication apprehension was experienced through situations where students were unable to make themselves understood in English, it could be overcome by gaining technical and cultural language fluency. The qualifiers in participants' statements such as "at the beginning" or

“when I first came here” indicate the previous existence of communication apprehension and the non-existence of such experience later.

However, the fact that they have overcome a certain kind of LA, such as communication apprehension, does not necessarily suggest that they are free from other types of LA. The data indicate that participants’ goal changes could cause LA to come back into their lives. Suki stated, I mean, whether I can express myself or not was more important than what people were thinking and what people were trying to tell me before. So, like, speaking out it was more important than listening to others and trying to figure out what they are thinking. But now at the PhD level, I seem to need to do both. You know, to do that I needed to have enough understanding of the context.

She expressed that the demand for more advanced language skills created her fear of negative evaluation. To explain her fear, Suki stated, “...my English could be a trap or trick, you know, could be kind of a hindrance.”

This indicates that the LA level can go up depending on a student’s goal setting. Kenichi stated, So after a while, once I kind of get used to it, the anxiety kind of got lower. I am not really worried about English anymore. But I was more worried about if I can make a good grades in the classes....

The statement suggests that when he was able to communicate the message through English, he no longer felt communication apprehension. Instead, his goal shifted to being seen as competent in his academic endeavor, which brought him a second wave of LA, fear of negative evaluation.

Another key factor to students’ LA experiences, in addition to goal changes, was the reaction of people around them. Habbie mentioned that one teacher’s reaction in a class brought back her LA, which influenced her to remain quiet in the class.



There was one class that I took.... In that class, I was participating a lot, but she [the teacher] did something that made me like go back in my, how do you say, I became reserved. Because there was one time we took an exam. I had a good grade, but there was a question that I missed, and I wanted to know why. I was confused when I was taking the exam. I raised my hand and she did not even let me finish my question. I don't even think she heard me. Because when I used to ask questions in this class, she would ask me to repeat it, sometimes twice. But when I raised my hand, when I started, she said, "I am sorry that is how it supposed to be. We cannot do anything about it." I felt stupid.

Habbie expressed that the incident made her question her ability to get her message across, therefore bringing back communication apprehension. Similarly, Mei stated,

I think most of the time it depends on the people that I encountered with. Also the attitude affects me. If that person is nice and patient, I feel better and I can express myself better. But if that person is kind of impatient or showed kind of discrimination, then my performance goes down...because, well, I am nervous.

Kenichi stated,

I can try to speak English and people understand and be able to engage with me and I feel much confidence and less anxious. But if I try to speak English and some people are not very nice. Some people just don't care and are ignorant and very unsupportive. If those kinds of things happen, I really feel bad and more anxious to approach again.

The statements indicate connections between the surrounding reactions, LA, and students' subsequent performances. Even in the cases where students felt that they have overcome certain types of LA, people's reactions to their performance can bring back their worries, causing them to re-experience LA.

My study suggests that students' level of LA experience can be best described as a series of ups and downs. A change in students' goals and surrounding reactions can cause once lowered LA level to go up, creating another wave. Each wave can be identified as either communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, or identity frustration according to its nature.

*Self-Expectation, Self-Confidence, and LA*

The literature reviewed in the *self-confidence and LA* section raised the question of the relationship between the particular type of LA and the level of students' situational self-confidence. In my study, the data indicate that LA can affect students' self-confidence. The data also indicate that the levels of both LA and self-confidence can vary depending on students' capability and goal settings. Table 4 indicates the relationships of self-expectation, self-confidence, and LA.

Table 4

*Relationships Among Self-expectation, Self-confidence, and LA*

<u>Self-Expectation</u>	<u>Self-Confidence</u>	<u>LA</u>
High	Low	High
Realistic	High	Low
Low	No Data	No Data

*Note.* LA = Language Anxiety

The notion that learning another language could challenge one's taken-for-granted ability to function was confirmed. The data supported Aida (1994), Horwitz et al. (1986), and Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (1999) claims suggesting language learning as a potential threat to a learner's self-confidence. Since identity frustration occurs when students recognize the gap between their ability in their native countries and in the US, the reduced ability due to language

and cultural unfamiliarity fed into identity frustration and negatively affected participants' self-confidence.

The data suggest that frustration also occurs when students compare themselves to native speakers with the self-expectation to “get to that level.” Carla stated, “I thought, okay. I learn the language. I deal with it. In a couple of years, I am gonna improve this much. Huge improvement.... My expectations were really high.” She expressed that the high expectations sometimes caused frustration. “I was learning new words. But I just cannot learn them in the same way than someone who was born here learns them.” Suki stated, “Whenever I feel frustrated...I was questioning if I ever be able to get to the point that I can speak fluent enough as other, you know, native speakers.” Davi also talked about his high self-expectation and its connection to LA. “I thought, ‘I am an English teacher, I am supposed to communicate well with anybody.’ And if they didn’t understand me, it was my fault.” Davi’s statement indicates that communication apprehension in conjunction with his high self-expectation turned into self-blame. After he had spent some time in the US, however, Davi mentioned that adjusting his self-expectation eventually lowered his LA.

One change was that I didn’t have to mimic native speakers any longer. You know, you kind of have this idea that you are going to get to that level. Then you realize, no, this is not how we learn, this is a different thing. And when you get to that point, you feel better about yourself.

The statement indicates that his original expectation of “going to get to that level” was changed to being an effective communicator after realizing that he did not have to sound native to make himself understood. Once his goal was shifted, his communication apprehension level went down. Davi continued, “Also, you don’t have to worry so much about your accent anymore.

...people don't understand you even if you have a native-like accent.... I think I have become more comfortable now.”

Once the participants' self-expectations were adjusted and they overcame communication apprehension, I recognized an increase in their self-confidences. Kenichi stated, “I am confident because I can communicate if I want. I have the skill to make sure that other people understand me and I can make myself understood.” To explain his confidence, Hans stated, “I think I have a fairly good ability to get my point across and be effective in my communication.” Mei expressed her base of self-confidence as, “Currently, most of the time, I can express myself, although it's not native-like. But I believe people understand me....I don't experience much difficulty communicating with people.” These statements indicate that being able to make themselves understood in English, in other words, a lack of communication apprehension, was seen as one of the benchmarks of their success. This supports Cheng et al.'s (1999) claim of self-confidence as a predictor of LA. The participants' higher self-confidence was recognized in relation to the non-existence of communication apprehension. The fact that they no longer experience communication apprehension gave participants a feeling of independence, which positively affected their self-confidence.

My study suggests a strong connection between students' LA experiences and their self-confidence. In addition, it suggests the crucial involvement of self-expectation in the formation of LA. A high self-expectation that does not match students' performance level seemed to cause frustration, which affected their self-confidence negatively. In contrast, adjusting their self-expectation to match their performance seemed to reduce their LA.

### *Bridging Thought and Second Language*

One of the most frequently used expressions when participants were talking about their LA experiences was the feeling of “translating languages.” Ausra stated, “I was always having the feeling in my mind that I was translating things.” Svetlana stated, “...there is a stage when you do some mental translation in your head from your native language to the target language.” Mei stated, “In the past, most of the time I needed to think in Chinese and then translated in English.” Table 5 illustrates participants’ expressions of before and after they were at the translation stage of learning English.

Table 5

*Comparison of Participants’ Expressions: Before/After the Translation Stage*

Participants	Before	After
Carla	had to pay attention	my brain knows where to go
Ausra	conscious	unconscious
Suki	takes much more energy	-----
Svetlana	distant	immediate
Emeterio	uncomfortable	comfortable
Kenichi	unnatural	natural
Hans	must focus	can improvise
Mei	external	internal
Davi	not automatic	automatic
Habbie	time consuming	faster

*Note.* Names are all pseudonyms.

Most participants stated that translation required a large amount of energy and focus on their part, which deprived them of the capacity to address other necessities of communication. Carla stated,

“I had to pay attention. I had to really, really detail the inflections of the voice if they are asking me something, if they are being nice...that comes from paying a lot of attention...” Suki stated, “It takes much more energy and it takes more time to get to the point that I wanted to point out.” Kenichi stated, “Ahm, first time I came here, it was really a struggle and I was always conscious how well I can speak English.” Hans stated, “Early on, especially at the beginning, starting to study here, I had to make more of a conscious effort to repackage my message and convey my message.” Because the things happening during translation left them with only a limited capacity to function in other tasks, the data indicate that all the participants considered having to translate between English and their native language as having a negative effect on their performances. Habbie stated, “I used to think in French first. It was frustrating, because I used to make more mistakes that way.”

By translating, participants claimed that the process caused communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and identity frustration. Ausra stated, “The worries were that you think of a word and you cannot come up with the word.” Suki stated, “...the problem is that it doesn’t make sense to others.” The statements indicate that their worries revolved around the issue of getting the messages across in English. The data suggest that during the translation stage, they were more subject to experiencing communication apprehension. In terms of fear of negative evaluation, Svetlana expressed her frustration in communication delay, which resulted in the less than satisfactory representation of herself. “Because, like, in face to face conversations, people normally don’t expect you to do that translating and wait two minutes for you.” Hans stated, “When you have to concentrate or focus on taking in the information and translate into English, any additional thoughts would mix me up.” Hans explained that the additional thoughts consisted of the worries that he may not be able to do the task as expected. Also, Mei stated,

“...and during that translation process, more of my, more of my ideas were lost.” The statements indicate that their worries revolved around issues of representing themselves as competent in English, as well as representing their true selves. The data suggest that during the translation stage, the participants were more prone to experiencing a fear of negative evaluation and identity frustration.

Once participants were beyond the translating stage, they expressed experiences to the contrary. Carla stated, “I feel confident. I feel more relieved. I release more tension. Before I start talking, I don’t have to plan every single phrase that I am going to say so it makes sense.” Ausra stated,

...now I have this as a tool where I am confident enough. It is a tool for me to use rather than before I had to focus on how to use it.... Now I can just get through to whatever message I want to craft rather than still focusing on English itself.

Kenichi stated, “...now that English comes very naturally, it is kind of more like automatic. So I don’t need to worry about it. I can use my brain energy for something else.” These statements indicate that once they passed the translation stage, they gained the capacity to function in additional tasks since they no longer needed extra attention just to communicate in English. In addition, the participants stated that overcoming the translation stage brought their expressions more immediacy. Svetlana stated, “It is much easier to express yourself because you don’t have to go through the extra step.” Hans stated,

So I think...I can better improvise today than I could when I started out here speaking English. Then, there was still the separation between planning and execution in terms of what I was going to say. Today, that falls more together.

Mei stated,

...when I am able to use English more fluently, I feel most of the time I don't have to think much. I don't have to think in Chinese and then translate it. So it just become, the percentage is increasing that I use English to think and to express myself.

The vocabulary used to describe their feelings during the translation phase included *unnatural*, *not automatic*, *external*, *distant*, *conscious*, and *time consuming*. In contrast, the vocabulary chosen to express their feelings after the translation phase included, *natural*, *automatic*, *internal*, *immediate*, and *unconscious* (see Table 5).

To explain her effort to overcome the translation stage, Mei stated,

It seemed, ahm, it [English] was not so close to me. So it seemed that there was a gap or something in between my performance and my ability. And then I feel that it seems that I reach closer and simply maybe build a bridge or something to reach it.

The statement illustrates a situation in which her English ability did not allow her to connect her thoughts directly to her expression. During the follow-up session, Mei added that the bridge she described was not a regular bridge; it was like a drawbridge that she could not always cross.

Nevertheless, she stated that the construction of the bridge gave her the feeling that English was becoming more natural to her. The data indicate a close association of the participants' translating phase of learning English with their LA experiences. The time-consuming, conscious effort to express themselves in English seemed to make them more vulnerable to LA than the immediate, unconscious expression of themselves in English (see Figure 3 for visual representation of the relationships among the key factors).



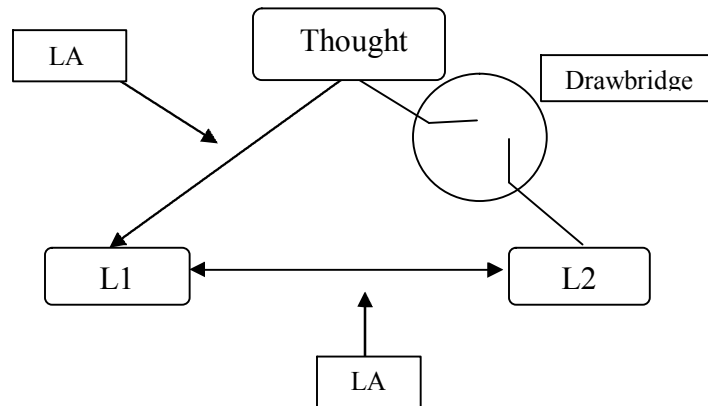


Figure 3: Bridging Thought

In figure 3, I used a double arrow between first language (L1) and second language (L2) to represent the thoughts going back and forth during the translation stage until they settle on the best L1-L2 translation available. The possibility that students may experience LA while they are translating the expressions learned in L2 back to L1 was not investigated in my study. However, I suggest such investigation for future studies.

Even after constructing a bridge directly between their thoughts and the second language (English), Davi stated that certain conditions can bring them back to the translation stage. “When you are tired, sometimes, you don’t behave in the culture anymore. You go back to the default, which is your own culture.” Davi also stated,

Sometimes, you are very tired and you even speak to someone in your native language.

Because, I don’t know, I think it’s not so natural just be in the culture. You kind of act it out. Because, I don’t know, I think some of the things are not so automatic to me.

The statements support Mei’s description of the effort to overcome the translation stage as constructing a drawbridge. Overcoming the translation stage could be temporary depending on various factors affecting a particular situation. The notion that the bridge between one’s thought and second language is a drawbridge further identify the recursive nature of LA.

My study suggests that students are more vulnerable to negative effects of LA while they are at the translation stage. Because of the longer processing route and time it requires, any LA induced thoughts may hinder the processing of thoughts before they are expressed through the second language. The data suggest that certain LAs could be overcome by creating a direct path between one's own thoughts and the second language. However, they also indicate the fragility of such a path, which could be affected by various factors such as fatigue or lack of self-confidence in certain situations.

### *Euphoric Language Tension*

While the experiences of learning language and culture in the US brought some challenges to most participants, the same factors that brought them the challenges seemed to cause positive reactions in learning. By coming to the US and in the process of learning the language and culture, all the participants expressed experiences of their foreignness. As explained in the previous sections, the fact that they had cultural backgrounds and language bases different from the ones in the US diminished some students' self-confidence and challenged their competence in interpersonal functions. At the same time, however, the very same feelings of disconnection from their native cultures brought them the opportunity to expand their experience base. This feeling of one's separate existence was recognized in Horwitz et al.'s (1894) study; however, it was not labeled. They reported, "Ordinarily self-conscious and inhibited speakers may find that communicating in a foreign language makes them feel as if someone else is speaking and they therefore feel less anxious" (p. 127). No further discussion was given on the topic. In my study, I labeled the experience euphoric language tension (ELT) and examined its significance in students' language learning process. Table 6 illustrates participants' ELT expressions.

Table 6

*Participants' Expressions of Euphoric Language Tension*

Participant	Feeling of Being Surprised	Feeling of Self-Expansion
Carla	"Oh my gosh. I am understanding!"	
Ausra	"Oh my gosh. Yeah, I can talk and it's not a big deal!"	
Suki		"I feel more open"
Svetlana		"I felt like getting out of the box"
Kenichi	"Hey, I can really speak English fluently...."	
Hans		"You feel you have a better grasp of the bandwidth"
Mei	"I started talking and I was able to say what I wanted to say!"	"I feel that my knowledge and my experience are expanding."
Davi		"It's almost like being in a game/play mode, you know."
Habbie	"Wow. I cannot believe that I am writing in English and somebody found it so good about it!"	"I feel like my radius of communication has expanded."

*Note.* The names are all pseudonyms.

Carla stated, "It [being able to speak English] makes me surprised some times.... It surprises me because, me and English and saying the words in English; there is no problem. My brain knows where to go. It surprises me a lot." She also stated that at the time she experienced the feeling, she was telling herself, "Oh, my gosh, I am understanding," and "Wow, I can spell in English without going lost!" Kenichi described his feeling when he found himself communicating with American people as, "Hey, I can really speak English fluently, like I was dreaming of since I was small. And now, I am talking to foreigners!" Similarly, Habbie stated, "...I said, 'Wow, I cannot believe that I am writing in English and somebody found it so good about it!' ...It was like a dream." Mei stated,

Then, I believe my classmates did not expect me to say that much in the presentation. . . .  
But then all of a sudden, I was talking loud in the class and I was not nervous. That surprised me too. So that, it just seemed natural, I started talking and I was able to say what I wanted to say.

These participants' ELT statements have two factors in common. One is their expression of surprise at functioning in English. The other is the participants' descriptions of themselves as being separated from who they are when speaking English. Svetlana stated her excitement about being mistaken as an American by saying, "I can pass for an American in certain situations until the people actually speak with me for more than 10 minutes and realize that I am not from here." She expressed that by being able to speak English, she gained another voice, the voice coming from her American-self. Davi added further explanation to the ELT experience. He stated, "It is almost like being in a game/play mode, you know." These statements indicate that the ability to function in English gave participants an opportunity to be free from the constraints associated with their native languages.

To provide more insight into the students' ELT experiences, Svetlana stated, "...I was having a sort of relatively fluent conversation with a person that I didn't understand at the beginning, you know.... That was a special moment." She explained this special moment as one of the first moments she recognized being translation free. She labeled the feelings as "freer," "being out of the box," and "breaking the barrier." She was breaking the barrier when she stopped translating languages, meaning a bridge was created between her thoughts and expression. The statements suggest a connection between her ELT experiences with overcoming the translation stage. By building a bridge, Mei stated, "I feel that my knowledge and my experience are expanding." Habbie stated, "I feel like my area of communication, like, my radius

of communication has expanded. Hans stated, “Learning the local language and culture expands my circle of ability in English.” The statements confirm Spielmann and Radnofsky’s (2001) report, which noted the opportunity for students to re-invent themselves and open up new social horizons as part of language learning.

In looking for suggested connections between ELT and risk-taking behaviors (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999), the data did not indicate such behaviors existed among the participants who expressed ELT. However, some participants mentioned that being able to speak English allowed them to be more direct and expressive in certain situations. Mei stated,

For example, some emotional expressions, I feel more comfortable to say, to express my emotions in English than in Chinese. When I am using Chinese, I feel I am more Chinese and Chinese are usually more conservative. And we don’t express things too emotional. Also, Suki stated that she feels “more open” when communicating in English because it allows her to escape from the rules of her native language. Instead of suggesting a direct connection, the statements suggest an indirect connection between students’ ELT experiences and risk-taking behaviors. When students feel more comfortable and open, they may be more likely to take risks in their performances.

My study suggests that students experienced ELT when the pressure of functioning in English is met by a perception of a self-expansion rather than a self-limitation. ELT was brought about through the feeling of performance exceeding self-expectations (e.g., “Wow, I cannot believe it!”), as well as feelings of relief from the restrictions associated with students’ native language and culture (e.g., gaining another voice).

### *Integrating the Findings into Existing Literature*

In this section, I examine my study's findings side by side with the areas of existing literature (except the areas of *ELT* and *self-confidence and LA* that were already discussed in the previous sections) introduced in Chapter 2. By going back to the literature, I sought the meaning of the study's findings, not as isolated factors, but as patterns that are connected to the context of the literature. I believe doing so adds depth and breadth to the study's findings.

In the *negative effects of LA and avoidance behaviors* section, connections between the unique nature of language learning, LA, and avoidance behavior were discussed. My study confirmed the connection between certain LA experiences and avoidance behaviors. It also indicated that new language/culture experiences could make students' self-confidence vulnerable. Carla stated,

Of course I feel ashamed. I always do when that kind of things [miscommunications] happen. I feel anxious of course. I feel a big, big, huge necessity to take everything and go home. "What am I doing here?" "Why didn't I stay home?" "I did understand everything there."

Her statement, "I did understand everything there" suggests her identity frustration experience and her immediate solution to "go home." Similarly, Suki described the consequence of experiencing strong fear of negative evaluation by saying, "I had to leave.... If that anxiety stayed with me for long time, I would have been what it was like paralyzed." After experiencing communication apprehension, Habbie stated, "This is what I told myself. 'She did not understand what I was saying. She didn't want to.' I was like, 'Okay.' But after that, I spent a week not talking in this class." The statements confirm Young's (1991) report, which suggests that

disaffiliative behaviors are one of the consequences of students' LA experiences. The statements also confirm LA's effect on students' self-confidence.

In the *mechanisms of LA* section, past research studies that discuss how people come to experience LA were introduced. My study suggests the recursive nature of LA, indicating LA to be transitory and situation-specific, are consistent with the descriptions of state and situation specific anxiety. The study also suggests additional factors to be considered in the expectancy-value theory of anxiety introduced by Pekrun (1992). In his theory, only the evaluation of the task difficulty and one's ability are considered for the formation of anxiety. Instead, the data suggest that what is considered acceptable in a specific situation, both by self and others, plays an important role in LA formation.

To clarify the role played by the expectations of others, I contrasted the two different situations in which Svetlana experienced and did not experience fear of negative evaluation. In the first situation, Svetlana expressed her fear of negative evaluation by stating, “[you are frustrated] because you are expected to react and you cannot really react in any way that makes sense to you...,” whereas in the second situation, the obvious inability to communicate did not cause her fear of negative evaluation. She stated, “I wouldn't say that I was anxious then because I knew that I was ultimately going to, you know, arrive at some conclusion that we would understand each other.” A comparison of the statements clarifies a difference in the perceived expectation. In the first statement, Svetlana felt that she was expected to perform on a certain level, whereas in the second statement she was free from such expectations. The statements indicate that even though she perceived the tasks to be over her ability in the latter situation, a lack of others' expectations prevented the formation of fear of negative evaluation.

The data also suggest that self-expectations can play an important role in formatting identity frustration. When Davi no longer felt that he had to sound like a native English speaker, he stated that he felt better about himself. This indicates that not only the gap between his ability and the reality but also his self-expectation to sound native was causing his identity frustration. My study suggests that expectations, in addition to the evaluation of task difficulty and one's ability, contribute to the formation of LA.

In the *where does LA fit within the spectrum of language learning?* section, Krashen's (1981) affective filter was introduced. Rather than having an affective filter only at the input stage of second language learning as suggested by Krashen, the data indicate that students express LA related difficulties in two situations especially. The first is when they in-take the information; the other is when they out-put the information in English. Carla stated, "I had to pay attention. I had to really, really detail the inflections of the voice if they are asking me something, if they are being nice...that comes from paying a lot of attention..." Suki stated, "I had to focus, so just listening to the professor was exhausting." Hans stated, "When you have to concentrate or focus on taking in the information and translate into English, any additional thoughts would mix me up." These statements indicate that the in-take of information in English required students' extra attention due to the concern that they might not receive the information correctly. This suggests the negative effects of the affective filter during the in-take stage of students' performance.

In addition to the LA they experienced during the intake-stage, Suki stated, "It takes much more energy and it takes more time to get to the point that I wanted to point out. So like, even though I tried it too, the problem is that it doesn't make sense to others." Hans stated, "...at the beginning, starting to study here, I had to make more of a conscious effort to repackage my



message and convey my message.” Habbie stated, “We all have the same anxiety about saying the right thing. And since we had that idea about people laugh at you when you don’t say things right, we are afraid to speak.” The statements indicate that the students needed extra energy to be able to out-put their messages in English. The data also indicate that during that process they experienced LA.

My study supports Tobias’s (1979) theory situating the affective filter during the input and output stages of language performances. The LA experiences during the processing stage suggested by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) were not mentioned by the participants. Due to the non-existence of the data, I am unable to discuss whether LA is experienced during the processing stage of students’ English performance; however, the fact that there is no data implies the low level of LA experienced by students during the processing stage, if any existed. The LA experiences were mentioned most often in relation to participants’ desire to express themselves in English, in other words, to output the message. This confirms Bailey et al.’s (1999) report that students are more likely to experience LA during the output stage than at other stages.

In looking for patterns among the variables introduced in the *components of LA* section, I did not see any direct connection between communication apprehension and socially-oriented LA, or fear of negative evaluation and academic LA as speculated in the literature review. Instead, the data suggest that LA is experienced differently according to a participant’s goal for a particular interaction. Emeterio stated, “I don’t have to prove myself in certain situations but I have the feeling, I have the need to prove myself in other situations so maybe I can get respect from other people.” Kenichi stated, “So after a while, once I kind of get used to it, the anxiety kind of got lower. I am not really worried about English anymore. But I was more worried about if I can make a good grades in the classes....” These statements indicate that what differentiates

communication apprehension from fear of negative evaluation is not their social and academic aspects, but it is what students are trying to accomplish in a particular situation. Most academic situations require students to represent themselves as competent. Therefore, the data suggest that academic-oriented LA could be referred to as fear of negative evaluation in most cases since the goal of the action, where fear of negative evaluation is experienced, is to represent the student as competent. However, socially-oriented LA is not necessarily linked to communication apprehension because simply getting the message across is not always the goal of social situations. In the case of more than superficial social communications, the data indicate that participants experienced fear of negative evaluation or identity frustration rather than communication apprehension.

In the *native language competence and LA* section, Sparks and Ganschow (1996) claimed the existence of LA only as a result of, but not as a cause of, foreign/second language difficulties. My study indicates that LA can be a part of a vicious cycle of students' less than satisfactory performance, which suggests the possibility that LA can be both a cause and a result of language difficulties. Emeterio stated,

Like when somebody doesn't understand me and I am trying to look for the words, I got nervous. So it is even harder to find the right words when you are nervous. And that makes me very anxious.... And it is also embarrassing to me when someone doesn't understand you.

Mei stated, "I think it's a vicious cycle. When I become nervous, the more nervous I am, the worse I do." The statements clearly suggest that communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation were responsible for their worse performances. The data confirmed MacIntyre (1995) and Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (2000) contention that LA can be a cause of

students' difficulties in foreign/second language performances, in addition to being a result of such performances. Therefore, LA becomes part of a vicious cycle.

In the *individual factors affecting LA* section, factors such as personality, socioeconomic status, and cultural background were discussed as possible reasons for some students experiencing greater LA than others. The data indicate that two out of three Asian participants indicated very high levels of LA among 10 participants. This supports Rueda and Chen's (2005) report that Asian students tend to be more anxious in the US classrooms. The suggested reasons for the students to experience LA in my study, however, were not identical to what past research studies have concluded. Rueda and Chen reported high pressure from Asian parents for students to be successful as a possible source of LA. Ohata (2005) reported large linguistic difference and strict cultural norms and expectations as Japanese students' possible source of LA. Zhou et al. (2005) reported large cultural differences as Chinese students' possible source of LA.

In my study, the data suggest that students' sense of preparedness and their previous exposure to different languages influenced their LA experiences in the US. Ausra, who claimed no significant LA experiences, stated, "When I came here...I was as good as I thought that I could be. As Lithuanians, we have been exposed to a lot of Russians and some Polish too. So English wasn't my first foreign language anyway, and it is not that difficult to learn." Hans, who also claimed no significant LA experiences, expressed that 10 years of formal and informal previous English education in Germany prepared him enough to survive in the US. To explain his lack of LA, he stated, "... maybe I don't feel anxious because, I mean, in Europe, we are generally exposed to many different languages...." Habbie expressed her relative lack of LA experiences by saying, "I didn't really have a worst experience. I felt that everything I was doing was good. I was progressing and I was doing better so... I don't feel like I had a worst

experience.” She mentioned that there are more than 150 different local languages spoken in her native country and the diversity was the same in Senegal, where she studied her first two years in college. “...in Senegal, it was a mix of French and many foreign languages. Like Spanish, we have people from Cap Verde. They speak Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages.”

On the contrary, Suki, Kenichi, and Mei, who all share an Asian background, expressed their feelings of unpreparedness when they arrived in the US. Mei stated, “I never thought I was prepared.” Suki stated, “Because my meta-function and the way of my life didn’t work at all, and I had to start from the bottom line” She also stated,

And also, I really never thought, I really didn’t need to think about myself in multiracial setting. Everybody was Korean so I didn’t really need to think about it at all. But here, you know, I was vulnerable, threatened, and anxious and stressful, you know.

Kenichi stated,

I think it is part of the culture and we don’t really speak that much and we don’t really use English in my country.... I used my English only in the English school, I went there, and not much really opportunity to use it, so my language skill was very limited before I came here.

He also stated, “I had almost eight years, I keep studying my English in Japan, but I thought it was not enough. Ahm, after I came here I found that I couldn’t talk and I couldn’t speak.” These statements indicate that participants felt that they did not have a good foundation for their English language and/or culture skills at the time of arrival. The data indicate that they were more vulnerable to LA experiences because of feeling not prepared. The data also suggest that previous experiences in diverse language and culture environments may contribute to a lower level of LA.

### *Limitation of the Study*

My study suggests a connection between participants' native language/culture and the level of LA experienced during their stay in the US. Examining students' LA experiences more in detail, based on their native-target language combinations, would be an extremely interesting and worthy project for future research; however, it is beyond the scope of my study. Although the study had a representation of different ethnic groups (three Caucasian, three Latino, three Asian, and one African), the generalizability of the data is limited due to the small number of participants. Also, the study targeted students who are already in the US. The fact that they chose to come to the US and stayed could be an indication of their tolerance to LA, which may have limited the access to students who experienced higher levels of LA.

### *Future Directions*

By looking deeply into this phenomenon, I discovered LA-related affective patterns non-native students may experience while learning and functioning in English in the US. Although it was not the purpose of this study to find effective intervention for students' debilitating LA experiences, I believe a clear understanding of the phenomenon associated with LA will ultimately contribute to such a discovery. The findings of my research will enhance an understanding among educators as to what they should expect when it comes to students' LA experiences. I anticipate that the findings will stimulate classroom practices to better accommodate students by highlighting their needs and by employing effective interventions for students who experience LA. Also, by targeting students learning English, this research serves the large and growing number of ESL students. This study is unique because few studies have investigated the nature of LA, encompassing the possible existence of what is identified as facilitating LA. By using qualitative methods, this study adds different perspectives to the more

dominant quantitative oriented understandings in the previous studies of LA. Future research should investigate the various possibilities this study suggests in a search for effective LA interventions.

### Conclusions

My study indicates that language anxiety (LA) has three components that can be distinguished according to students' goals for a particular interaction and their expectation measures of self and from others. Communication apprehension represents the worry that students may not be able to get their message across. Fear of negative evaluation represents the worry that students may not be able to present themselves as capable. The third and new component, identity frustration, represents students' struggles due to their decreased capability to function in English compared to what they are capable of in their native languages. The study found that communication apprehension was experienced at the beginning of students' stay in the US but did not remain an issue for them, whereas identity frustration was expressed by some students as their current concerns. In between their different LA experiences (e.g., between communication apprehension and identity frustration), I recognized a change in students' LA levels. My study suggests that once students overcome one type of LA, its level temporarily goes down. However, upon encountering another type of LA, its level may go up again. This suggests the temporality and recursive nature of LA.

The lack of cultural language ability is identified as one of the causes of LA. Although students may not have experienced LA while they were studying English as a subject, my study suggests that when English changes from a subject of study to a tool for communication, it poses a new challenge. My study suggests that even after students have mastered the rules of English,

without a cultural knowledge, students may experience the feeling of inappropriateness because of their failure to function as they are expected to in a particular culture.

The close connection between LA, self-confidence, and self-expectation was suggested. LA can negatively affect students' performance by disturbing their affective status. Their low performance affects their self-confidence, which in turn induces a higher level of LA. My study suggests that the three-factor (self-confidence, self-expectation, LA) relationships are cyclic, rather than one-way. In addition, the study also found that unrealistic self-expectations, such as "must sound native to be understood," influence students to experience a higher level of LA, which negatively affects their self-confidence.

With many factors affecting the levels of LA, the timing when students cease to translate between the two languages was identified as a point where students experience a lower level of LA. My study suggests that the unconscious processing of thoughts directly into the second language induce a lower level of anxiety compared to conscious indirect processing of the thoughts. Students' effort in changing the longer path of self-expression (thought-L1-L2) to the shorter path of self expression (thought-L2) is explained with the metaphor of constructing a drawbridge (see Figure 3). The drawbridge represents the fragility and temporality of the connection. Also, it is compatible with the idea of the recursive nature of LA.

In addition to the investigation of negative LA, my study examined the nature of ELT, which represents a positive reaction to the pressure of functioning in English. Many of students' ELT experiences seemed to have happened when the drawbridge discussed previously was down. The two factors that affected ELT were students' performances surpassing their self-expectations and their feelings of self-expansion.

After the interview, one of the participants stated, “It [the interview] gave me an opportunity to look back at my experiences of learning English and think about them. Because really, in daily activities, you just take it and go with it.” Many of our experiences are let go without being given any thought. Phenomenological research puts those experiences under a spotlight so that they can be meaningfully understood and communicated to other people. As my understanding of LA deepened through conducting the study, I now feel that I can better identify patterns in the experiences that I, myself, was going through as a learner of English. The episode about the ride from the airport in my self-disclosure section can now be understood in a different light. I certainly remember the time when I was apprehensive about saying the right thing, as well as presenting myself at my best in English. At the same time, going through the research process sometimes raised more questions than answers. “When did I stop translating my native language to English?” “Did it happen all of a sudden?” “Is this part of the reason that I am not anxious when speaking English anymore?” Because my intention was not to provide readers with absolute truths that explain everything about students’ LA experiences, but to invite them into my thoughts and to wonder, I hope my study’s findings can start new self-reflective dialogues such as, “I wonder if this is what my student was going through,” and “I wonder if this is why I was so nervous,” among my readers.



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**Appendix A**  
**Human Subjects Approval Form**

**University Committee for the Protection  
of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans**

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*Campus Correspondence*

Dr. Richard Speaker  
Noriko Ito

4/26/2007

RE: Exploring the nature of foreign language anxiety: Cases of non-native college students  
in the United States

IRB#: 01apr07

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of  
New Orleans and federal guidelines.

Please remember that approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes  
to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to  
implementation.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social; or emotional harm), you are  
required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best of luck with your project!

Sincerely,



Laura Scaramella, Ph.D.

Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

**Appendix B**  
**Informed Consent Form**



THE UNIVERSITY of  
NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Exploring the Nature of Foreign Language Anxiety:  
Experiences of Non-native College Students in the United States

Consent Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Richard Speaker in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to explore and discover the dynamics of foreign language learning experienced by the students. By looking deeply into the phenomenon of students experiencing (not experiencing) foreign language anxiety, I hope to find what LA is, and how it is experienced by the students. My target population is college students whose native language is not English who are studying in the United States.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve a 45 minutes - 1 hour interview. I will ask you some questions regarding your language learning experiences. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will be respected with no penalty. There will be tape recording during the interview. The recorded information will only be used for the purpose of the research. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study. There may be no direct benefit, although the insight gained from the interview may be a useful tool for your future language learning. I will be happy to share the notes taken during the interview upon your request.

If you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to ask. I can be reached at 504-261-0425 or [nito@uno.edu](mailto:nito@uno.edu).

Sincerely,

Noriko Ito

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Richard Speaker at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-6534.

## **Appendix C**

### **Example of Transcript and Initial Analysis**



Interview 1

Interview Setting

Date: May 29, 2007

Place: UNO Library

Length: 76.05 min.

Respondent's Profile (background/demographics)

Gender: F

Age: 29

Nationality: Costa Rica

Occupation: Graduate Student

Major: Music (Voice)

Time spent in the US: 4 years

Transcription	Reflection
<p>N=Interviewer R=Respondent</p> <p>N: Okay. Hi, how are you today? R: Fine. Laughs. N: Thank you for participating in this study that I am conducting. And did you have any questions about the confidentiality issues and the consent form? R: No. N: Let me ask you something about your experiences learning English. When, you know, you started and the reasons you came to the US. R: Okay, I've been a music student since I was 7 years old. I started as a violin player and didn't work really well. But by 1995 I started to study voice. My older sister is music major too. Graduated 10 years before I did. Because she is 10 years older than me. And helped me in this all music thing and one of the things she told me when I started this, I should think about going out of Costa Rica and get a master's degree in my area. Because we don't have it back home and then <u>open the doors for doing music</u> teaching back home. So around that time I started thinking about it in 1995 was the time when I started my college education as a music major....an preliminary studies in conservatory but as ...ahm... in the university level I didn't start</p>	<p>The respondent arrived on time. She seemed to be a very easy going person. Except the fact that she has a little Spanish accent, she sounds quite fluent in English.</p> <p>--I have met another Costa Rican student who is very fluent in English. I wonder if there is something special they are doing about English education in Costa Rica.—</p> <p>Older sister's suggestion to go abroad.</p> <p>Motivation to speak English--&lt;Open the doors&gt;?</p>

## **Appendix D**

### **Example of Partially Ordered Within-Case Display**

1. **Carla** –“When I am ashamed, it is really hard for me to learn or to do anything.”

Positive Experiences	LA	Negative Experiences
<p>Accepting, non-judgmental environment</p> <p>Experiences in Costa Rica(Home)</p> <p>Experiences after some time in the US</p> <p>Self-confidence “I feel like a part of a group” “ I know now it’s not my fault”</p> <p>Being able to speak English makes her feel good about herself –“Oh my god. I am understanding!” -feeling of opening up new doors.</p> <p>Positive attitude toward challenges –“I can do it. I just have to try harder”</p> <p>Accepting imperfection Being comfortable with having an accent –it’s OK not sounding like native</p>	<p>Afraid of standing out, being embarrassed</p> <p>Afraid to sound “stupid”</p> <p>Feeling that certain things are beyond her skills</p> <p>Feeling of “I can do this at home!” “I can be more creative in Spanish” English language does not do a justice to her creativeness. Feeling of being the person she actually is -Identity Frustration</p> <p>Do they understand me? Can I understand them? -Communication Apprehension</p> <p>Will I be seen unacceptable, unintelligent? “Not knowing language should not mean that she is not intelligent.” -Fear of negative evaluation</p>	<p>Corrective feedback Criticism</p> <p>Early experiences in the US</p> <p>Lack of self-confidence</p> <p>Feel like an outsider Not being familiar with the local culture Blaming herself for not understanding</p> <p>Feeling of not being understood as a foreigner</p> <p>Get mad at myself – frustrated</p> <p>Comparing her ability to American students’ “I cannot learn in the same way as someone who was born here.”</p> <p>Threatened self-image</p> <p>Unlike everyday language, academic language needs conscious effort to improve</p>

## **Vita**

Noriko Ito grew up in Japan and graduated from Doshisha University with a B.A. in Political Science in 1998. After doing a year of Japanese teaching volunteer work in McComb, Mississippi, she enrolled in a graduate program at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. Upon completion of her M.Ed. in Counselor Education in 2002, she started her career at University of New Orleans (UNO) as an academic counselor, and later enrolled in a doctoral program in 2004. Although her program of study was interrupted by Hurricane Katrina forcing her to finish a semester at a neighboring university and to prepare for her exams in a FEMA trailer, such adversity strengthened her determination to complete her studies. With her continued effort and extraordinary guidance of the faculty members at UNO, she successfully finished the Ph.D. program and was awarded a degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Language Education in August 2008. After graduation, she continued her job as an academic counselor at UNO and initiated an exchange program with Doshisha University in Japan to promote students' inter-language/cultural experiences.