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**Adolescents' L2 Speaking Anxiety:  
Review of the Literature and Implications**

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Review of the Literature and Implications**

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**Report**

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This report addresses the importance of discussing adolescent learners in regard with their anxiety about foreign or second language (L2) speaking performance. To find implications on how to help adolescents reduce or overcome speaking anxiety in the language classroom, the report reviews extensive literature on 1) the distinct adolescent features that contribute to the development of shyness and communication apprehension; 2) the concept, component sources, and impacts of foreign language learning anxiety; and 3) the causes and effects of L2 speaking anxiety in language learning situations. Based on the review, the report provides implications from studies about language teaching and learning practices to alleviate L2 learning and speaking anxiety. These suggestions focus on meeting adolescents' needs in terms of 1) improving self-esteem, 2) developing coping skills about anxiety, and 3) facilitating a safer and more supportive classroom environment.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **a. Background Information**

My career as an English educator began in Korea, where students are mandated to learn English speaking from elementary to high school due to the huge societal interest in developing the ability to communicate in the target language. While teaching at a Korean middle school from 2009 to 2012, I noticed many students' aversion to speaking English in the classroom. My students often withdrew from participating in speaking activities, which triggered negative feelings and emotions. They used to say that they felt uncomfortable and nervous when attempting to speak this foreign language. It is understandable that Korean students generally have low levels of familiarity with spoken English because of limited opportunities to use the language to communicate with English speakers in their daily lives. Also, many students complained that speaking English was frustrating because it raised awareness of the gap between the oral proficiency level of native English speakers and their own, and thus decreased their self-confidence. Some students even believed that learning English speaking was pointless because they thought that they could never reach the level of native speakers.

Working with these struggling and highly skeptical students sparked my curiosity about a possible connection between their negative attitudes for learning or speaking English and the simple fact that adolescents tend to be self-conscious. Particularly, my attention was brought to their common concern over how they would be evaluated by peers and teachers. I frequently witnessed my students becoming nervous about speaking in front of the class and receiving public attention. Most of my students, whether they had good or bad peer relationships, were extremely sensitive to peers' judgment and the image that they portrayed. Thus, they tended to be extremely self-conscious about their English speaking performance in relation to others'

performance due to high peer pressure. For example, some students with lower proficiency levels were worried that classmates would make fun of their errors or of their awkward pronunciation. On the other hand, those who could speak almost native-like English tried to hide their competence because they were afraid of being the target of jealousy and perhaps being excluded from their peer group. Also, many of my students were heavily concerned about test results, which provoked anxiety and fear of failure during test performance. The speaking test anxiety caused some students to blush and talk in a whisper when delivering a speech to the class regardless of their success in paper-based tests. It also caused students to keep silent during group discussion activities even when they were outgoing and chatty outside the classroom. Because of school practices that emphasize rankings or standardized test scores rather than progression over time, Korean students undergo severe competition with peers and are easily susceptible to the trap of perfectionism. Indeed, a number of my students would self-criticize or undervalue their achievement unless they received perfect scores.

My curiosity about Korean teenage students' negative attitudes toward speaking English developed into a desire to understand deeply the role of negative affect such as anxiety in foreign language learning during adolescence. I wanted to know if adolescents' experience of anxiety in the language classroom would critically affect their future language learning. My middle school colleagues and I used to discuss the challenge of engaging our students in communicative activities because of their prevalent tendencies to become shy and anxious about speaking out in English. The majority of my shy students showed low interest in classroom participation or gave up making an effort to practice oral skills. While observing the detrimental impacts of anxiety in English learning, I came to realize a crucial need to pay attention to the psychological aspects of language learners in order to make clearer sense of the complexity of language learning and find

better ways of helping learners improve speaking skills. Based on this realization, I decided to seek theory and empirical findings from around the world that could help me better understand the speaking anxiety of adolescent foreign language learners.

## **b. Preview of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to report on my exploration of an extensive literature on adolescent development and foreign language learning anxiety, and to suggest implications on how to alleviate the speaking anxiety of teenage language learners. In the following section, I review the literature on three specific topics: a) adolescents' native language (L1) communication apprehension, b) foreign language learning anxiety, and c) second language (L2) speaking anxiety. The literature review aims to distill what we already know about the role of anxiety in human psychological development and language learning situations. The first part of the literature review explores how numerous changes around puberty can cause shyness and how this trait may affect adolescents' communication. The second part of the review discusses concepts, sources, and the effects of foreign language learning anxiety. The final part examines perceptions of language learners with high levels of speaking anxiety and reports on empirical findings on the impact of L2 speaking anxiety on language learning and performance. Following the literature review, the report offers several teaching and learning suggestions on how to reduce adolescent L2 speaking anxiety, based on implications from numerous studies. These suggestions are tailored to special needs of adolescents in terms of a) building positive self-esteem, b) developing coping strategies for anxiety, and 3) creating less anxiety-provoking classroom environment. Lastly, the report concludes with an overview of the key findings and my final thoughts about adolescent students of EFL in Korea.



## **II. Literature Review**

### **a. Adolescents' L1 Communication Apprehension**

From the lifespan perspective, adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood wherein young people face numerous biological, emotional, and social changes. With the onset of puberty, children experience growth in their body and hormones that makes their bodily appearance and functions change into those of physically mature adults. Cognitive development enables adolescents to do abstract thinking and feel new emotions about their sexuality and social relationship. For example, an increasing ability to reflect on self-concept against internalized standards can lead adolescents to feel more complex and self-conscious emotions such as pride and embarrassment from simple basic emotions such as happiness and sadness (Bosacki, 2005). However, teenagers are generally vulnerable to stress and anxiety because of the incomplete development of the prefrontal cortex, which is the center for emotional stability and the last part of the brain to mature (Willis, 2006). Therefore, they are generally weak at risk management because they lack coping skills (Jensen and Snider, 2013). In addition to these bodily and cognitive changes in each individual, adolescents also encounter numerous changes from surrounding environments. They are required to take responsibility for their future life and learn social norms and roles for successful adaptation to society. In terms of social relations, they gradually become independent from their families and their identity is greatly influenced by school environments, especially by peer relationships.

In the face of such enormous individual and social changes, adolescents are given an important life task: identity formation. To make a successful transition to adulthood, they need to adapt themselves to what these changes demand by forming a revised sense of themselves, or identity, which includes a set of thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes, and behaviors that define a

person's self (Lerner, 2005). Adolescents follow different paths of identity formation depending on their willingness to accept the challenge of self-definition and be committed to searching for new roles and values. For example, while some paths can lead young adults to achieve identity, other paths may lead them to waver on role adoption in a prolonged 'moratorium,' have them 'foreclose' on easily available and socially acceptable identity, or involve them in 'identity diffusion' (Erikson, 1968). While constructing their identity, teenagers tend to build their self-concepts around what their peers, parents, and teachers say and set unrealistic expectations about their self-image for being a more likable person. Adolescent identity development can be also influenced by some aspects of the context including history, culture, and the economic and political structure of their society, neighborhood, and school (Lerner, 2005).

While going through the process of developing a self-identity, many adolescents experience emotional upheaval caused by identity crisis. Identity crisis occurs when they feel unsure about how to best integrate their changing selves with the surrounding world and fail to find an appropriate role that satisfies both their personal and societal demands (Erikson, 1959). This phenomenon is associated with adolescents' tendency not to be open-minded toward new views on their self-concepts that include their perceptions and images of their own uniqueness in social, competence, affect, physical, academic, and family aspects (Cobb, 1992; Bracken, 1992). They are likely to grow inhibitions that prevent ideas, experiences, and feelings that threaten their values and beliefs (Brown, 1981) even though their self-concepts may lack experiential support and validation. Such tendency may be due to the overwhelming pubertal changes that young people have to encounter and explain to themselves. However, this can keep them from revising their old wrong beliefs.

Identity crises during adolescence can greatly affect self-esteem. For example, adolescents' self-esteem is less likely to grow if they experience fewer successful resolutions of each crisis (Constantinople, 1969). The concepts of self-esteem include not only those about how much one values and accepts the self but also how much one feels valued and accepted by others. Teenagers with healthy self-esteem tend to feel positive about themselves, appreciate their own worth, and take pride in their abilities and accomplishments whereas those who have low self-esteem usually feel negative about their own beliefs and abilities and feel as if no one will like them (The Nemours Foundation, 2012). Many young people are susceptible to self-esteem problems especially when they have a hard time finding their identity: who they are and where they fit in the world (The Nemours Foundation, 2012). Although self-esteem is something changeable throughout one's life, low self-esteem during adolescence can make one's self-concept become less stable and decrease self-confidence to cope with other crises in the rest of the life span (Lerner, 2005).

Experiencing identity conflicts can also bring about higher self-consciousness. Self-consciousness refers to “an inherently unpleasant state” which is caused by a person's perception of “a discrepancy between the self-image that is sought and the image that is projected to others” (Harris, 1990, p. 68). During identity construction, many adolescents try to make sense of themselves by continuously comparing themselves with peers and conforming to standards of a popular clique to which they desire to belong (Lerner, 2005). However, they have to undergo many trials and errors to adapt their newly formed self-images to the person they hope to be. These experiences can lead a number of teenagers to raise concerns over their self-images and accordingly, develop shyness (Carducci & Golant, 2000). Indeed, increased self-focused attention can trigger negative affect, less self-confidence in conversations, and lower self-ratings

of social skills, which account for the growth of shyness (Crozier, 2001). Shyness is one's transient or stable tendency to be timid or reserved (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). This trait is explained by its unique cognitive, somatic, and behavioral characteristics. Those who experience shyness have been commonly described in psychological research as having self-consciousness, worrying about what others might think, remaining silent, avoiding social interactions, and showing some physiological symptoms such as blushing and perspiring (Crozier, 2001).

Adolescents often show particular patterns of behavior and thinking due to increased shyness. Carducci and Golant (2000) explained that shy adolescents tend to withdraw into their comfort zone where they can reduce pressure from chaotic experiences of identity crisis. According to these authors' descriptions of shy adolescents, these young people are very conscious about their appearance and what they do, say, and wear because of their concern for how much others will like them. They try to blend in with the crowd because they worry about standing out among peers and being rejected or negatively evaluated by them. They even feel awkward about those who are different from them or not in their clique. Shy adolescents also get easily anxious and confused about what to do when they face unpredictable situations such as social interactions. When they feel uncomfortable or uncertain, they do not want others to know about it. Thus, they are usually afraid to express their true thoughts and feelings or try new behaviors in front of others. If such tendencies get reinforced throughout the period of adolescence, shy adolescents may not be able to acquire appropriate social skills that they will need in the future.

Among various adolescent tendencies related to shyness, communication apprehension and silence are some crucial aspects that can explain adolescents' language use characteristics in the school environment. Shyness is not only a predictor of one's tendency to talk more or less but

also a significant characteristic of those who are communication apprehensive (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). Communication apprehension (CA) is a level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons, and it usually appears in the form of apprehension about speaking (McCroskey, 1984). McCroskey (1997) argued that CA is one of the key antecedents of willingness to communicate, which refers to personal orientation to initiate communication with others. He also hypothesized that CA influences one's long-term communication behavior because high CA can have strongly negative impacts on all three components of desired communication learning; for example, it not only inhibits the potential development of communication competence and communication skill but also becomes “a direct precursor of negative communication affect (p. 103).” In school environments, students with higher CA tend to avoid small classes in favor of larger and lecture-type classes, courses with high communication requirements such as oral reports or speeches, and voluntary classroom participation; they are generally perceived negatively by their peers and teachers in terms of competence, anxiety, leadership, and attractiveness (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). McCroskey (1997) classified types of CA on a continuum ranging between extremely trait-like and state-like: pathological, trait-like, generalized-context, person-group, and situational CA. However, he pointed out that individuals are affected by each type of CA to either a greater or lesser degree.

Silencing one's voice, or giving up expressing oneself genuinely, is a common classroom behavior of shy adolescents who experience conflicts with themselves and others in the school. Although silence can have beneficial effect on many teenagers in that it allows them to listen to their inner voice, it usually reflects their negative social experiences and emotions. Some may decide to remain silent when they are called on in class because they have

experienced unfavorable reactions from teachers or peers that provoked self-conscious or anxious emotions under similar situations. Others may not speak out in a peer group situation or say something to a peer frankly to protect their emotions from self-deprecating thoughts triggered by perceived rejection or social evaluation. Basacki (2005) pointed out the significant role of schools in either promoting or impeding adolescents' social silence. She viewed schools as cultural entities consisting of unique values, activities, rituals, and populations that can have powerful impacts on young students' identity formation. She explained that adolescents' self-silence or self-expression can be influenced by the cultural and sub-cultural norms that they learn from social interactions with peers and teachers.

The literature review in this section has focused on finding the connection between some developmental characteristics during adolescence and oral communication apprehension or social silence that adolescents can experience in the school environment. Theories and studies suggested that identity conflicts during such a transitional period can provoke self-consciousness and increase shyness, which may discourage verbal expression in social communications. Another important implication from research is that emotions have a big influence on adolescents' language use; for example, emotions play a crucial role in language development as well as academic learning experience during adolescence, and adolescents' decisions about verbal expression are usually value- and affect-laden. (Basacki, 2005; Denham et al., 2002). These findings leave questions about how adolescents' communication apprehension can be related with their foreign or second language learning in the classroom. If many adolescents tend to be anxious about L1 oral communication with others in the school environment, would they experience even more anxiety in L2 learning and speaking situations? The next two sections of

the literature review will report on the theoretical concept and findings on foreign language learning anxiety in general and on L2 speaking anxiety in particular.

### **b. Foreign Language Learning Anxiety**

Foreign language learners need to take risks when communicating with individuals in the target language because of their incomplete linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. Such difficulty in understanding others and making themselves understood can make these learners feel frustrated or even freeze when they need to use the target language both in and out of the classroom. Numerous studies have found that many students feel anxious when learning or using a foreign language whether they are successful learners or not. The anxiety in foreign language learning is regarded as one of the important affective factors that can influence language learning.

Researchers have indicated that language learning anxiety is classified as situation specific anxiety. Shyness and foreign language anxiety was found to correlate moderately, indicating that the two constructs may have overlapping attributes but are not identical (Chu, 2008). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) first defined foreign language anxiety, which is responsible for students' negative emotional reactions to language learning. They described the three performance anxieties that are related with foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is a type of shyness associated with fear of communicating with people. Test-anxiety is derived from a fear or failure in test performance situations. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively (p. 128)." Anxious foreign language learners tend to fear they will not understand all language input. They easily get nervous and confused when they are speaking in the target language. Learners with language learning anxiety also become

self-conscious due to the fear of making mistakes in the target language and being negatively evaluated by their teacher and competent peers. Horwitz and her colleagues found that anxious students were common among American college students in beginning language classes.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) also provided a tool to measure the levels of this anxiety, called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The measurement instrument consists of 33 items that reflect communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in the foreign language classroom. Respondents indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a five-point Likert type scale. While Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) constructed the FLCAS to measure anxiety in foreign language classroom situations, Woodrow (2006) developed the Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (SLSAS) that can be used for second language learning situations. The SLSAS distinguishes anxiety triggered by in-class and out-of-class communicative situations. The items for in-class communication concern asking questions to a teacher, speaking to a teacher, and participating in group discussion, role-play, oral presentation, and formal discussion. The items for out-of-class communication tested speaking to one native speaker or more than one native speaker, asking questions to a lecturer, answering to a lecturer's questions, and answering to a native speaker's questions. The questionnaire consists of 12 items that ask students to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a five-point Likert type scale.

Some researchers found a positive relationship between anxiety and language learning. Chastain (1975) found a positive correlation between anxiety and the test scores of German and Spanish students in a traditional language classroom setting. He suggested that some degree of anxiety can be helpful to language test performance. Klienmann (1977) also found a positive influence of anxiety on language learning. In his study, EFL learners who scored high



on facilitating anxiety measures tended to frequently use difficult English language structures that were avoided by many other students in various tests. Facilitating anxiety encourages learners to "fight" with a new learning task whereas debilitating anxiety motivates learners to "flee" from a new learning task (Scovel, 1991). However, language instructors should not overlook the possibility that foreign language anxiety can interfere with L2 learning because a number of studies have suggested the debilitating effect of anxiety on language learning. Many researchers have investigated the role of foreign language anxiety in various language learning contexts and found a negative relationship between language anxiety and language achievement (Horwitz, 2001). MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), in their study of 104 college students who spoke English as their native language, showed that French-related anxiety was the cause behind the poor performance in French vocabulary learning and production. Their research findings suggested that Communicative Anxiety has a negative impact on the retrieval of French vocabulary items. Aida (1994) adopted the FLCAS to measure the anxiety levels of 96 American college students who were enrolled in second-year Japanese course. She found that the FLCAS scores were negatively related to final grades on the participants' Japanese performance. Rodriguez (1995) also found a negative relationship between the FLCAS scores and final grades from pre-service teachers of English in Venezuela, who were all advanced EFL learners. Anxiety can affect what language learners say and how they say it. MacIntyre, Noels, and Clement (1997) found that, among 37 adult learners of French, anxious students tended to communicate less information, compared with more relaxed students. They pointed out that more anxious students underestimated their speaking, writing, and comprehension abilities than less anxious students did. These researchers explained that anxious students may be in a vicious cycle where they are

reluctant to communicate, they do not make opportunities to re-assess their communicative competence, and accordingly their anxiety remains high due to their sense of incompetence.

Researchers have investigated possible sources of foreign language anxiety. Young (1991) identified six sources of language learning anxiety: personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and testing. One of the sources that many researchers explored is learners' self-perception. Clement (1986) reported that anxious foreign language learners tend to have low self-confidence. Price (1991) suggested that language learners with high levels of anxiety may have low self-esteem. Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) also pointed out that anxious language learners tended to have low self-concept. Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999) found that three aspects of self-perception, which are course expectation, perceived self-worth, and perceived scholastic competence, predict students' foreign language anxiety. They emphasized the role of self-esteem and self-concept in determining levels of foreign language anxiety. Researchers have also suggested that the beliefs about language learning can be a factor that contributes to foreign language anxiety. Horwitz (1988) investigated language learners' preconceived notions about language learning and claimed that certain misconceptions can interfere with successful language learning. For example, she argued that foreign language learning anxiety can be provoked by the beliefs that put strong emphasis on target language accuracy. Gynan (1989) suggested that erroneous beliefs about language learning can be a source of language anxiety. She found that students may believe that accurate pronunciation is the most important aspect of language learning.

MacIntyre et al. (2002) examined the effects of age and gender on language anxiety among adolescent French immersion students from grade 7 to grade 9. Results of the study

showed that L2 anxiety was significantly higher than L1 anxiety at all three grades, but there was no significant difference in L2 anxiety across the three grades. In terms of gender, 9th grade female students showed significantly lower anxiety than 9th grade male students and 7th and 8th grade female students. Research in foreign language anxiety has helped teachers and students better understand L2 learning, but it lacks empirical studies toward secondary school students because most studies targeted college or university students. Thus, more researchers need to explore how adolescents' psychological development can interact with foreign language anxiety, how foreign language anxiety can influence teenaged students' learning achievement, and how teachers can minimize students' anxiety in the classroom activities and support their fragile language ego. Language learners' affective reactions including anxiety can significantly differ depending on test types, language level, and learning experience. For example, in college-level German courses, Madsen, Brown, and Jones (1991) found that dictation and true-false culture tests were the least anxiety-provoking whereas translation was rated as the hardest and the most unpleasant test. Oral questions and grammar tests produced less anxiety than translation. In the same study, lower-performing students tended to more negatively view all the test types than higher-performing students did. Also, the students showed more positive reactions to oral questions as they developed oral proficiency during the course. Horwitz (2001) pointed out that there may be cross-cultural variation in the levels of learners' foreign language anxiety. Researchers say that language learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) can reflect their cultural background (Wen and Clement, 2003; Yashima, 2002). Woodrow's (2006) study indicated that learners from China, Korea, and Japan where Confucian Heritage Cultures dominate tended to be more anxious about speaking than European and Vietnamese learners did.

She suggested that Confucian values of face and silence could affect students' willingness to communicate.

### **c. Second Language (L2) Speaking Anxiety**

Speaking in the foreign language is a challenging task for many language learners. L2 speakers often produce incomplete utterances in front of others and worry about whether their spoken messages are getting across to listeners. Researchers have found that learners often associate anxiety with speaking activities in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Kim, 1998). For example, according to Price's (1991) interview study, some of the sources of anxiety that anxious foreign language learners indicated were related to speaking activities. All the subjects responded that having to speak the target language in front of their peers was the greatest source of anxiety. They feared for being laughed by other students. They also tended to be afraid of mispronouncing words and embarrassed by their erroneous pronunciation. Many of the subjects mentioned that they were frustrated because they were not able to communicate in a smart way even though they were intelligent adults.

Phillips (1992) found that the six most anxious students in the study showed negative attitudes and affective reactions to speaking tests, regardless of their French competence. For example, they reported that they felt "blank, panicky, nervous, worried, and intimidated" during the oral exam even though they sufficiently practiced the tests in class and had an informal chatting with the instructor at the beginning of the exam. Woodrow (2006) distinguished two types of anxious students according to their anxiety reactions: skills deficit anxious students and inference retrieval anxious students. Skills deficit anxious students tended to link their speaking anxiety to lack of practice on speaking skills. On the other hand, inference retrieval anxious

students tended to feel that anxiety prevented them from remembering and saying what they had previously learned.

Language learning situations focused on communicative practice have some characteristics that provoke communication apprehension (Daly, 1991). First, the degree of perceived evaluation can be great in a classroom setting. Learners get nervous when they believe that their speaking performance is evaluated by their teacher or competent peers. Second, communicative language learning situations can increase the sense of conspicuousness. Communicative activities can make learners anxious because they usually put learners in the focus of attention even when they make mistakes or struggle with the language. Third, novelty and ambiguity in language learning can make learners nervous about communicating during the class. Learners may want to avoid using the foreign language when they are unfamiliar with and unsure of the language, culture, and social norms. L2 speaking anxiety can be influenced by certain types of classroom activities and teachers. For example, Young (1990) examined university-level and high school students' views on speaking-oriented activities, and concluded that the students perceived that the activities that required on the spot and in front of the class performance were more anxiety-provoking than small-group or pair activities. Most interviewees in Woodrow's (2006) study also reported that giving oral presentations and performing in front of classmates triggered the most anxiety. However, these students indicated low anxiety for group discussions or collaborative work. In addition, teachers who criticize students' accents or correct every mistake during performance can increase students' fear of speaking the target language (Price, 1991). On the contrary, students would feel comfortable about L2 speaking when teachers emphasize the importance of making mistakes in the process of learning and focus on students' messages rather than their grammar and pronunciation.

When students get anxious in an L2 speaking situation, their speaking performance may not be successful. For example, Steinberg (1982) compared two groups of second language learners to examine their L2 oral performance: the anxiety-induced group and the group with no induced anxiety. She found that more anxious learners tended to be less subjective and more objective in their speaking production. Young (1991) found a negative relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral performance in the unofficial Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) from sixty American university students who were learning French, German, or Spanish. Her study revealed a significant negative correlation between the OPI and the scores in each of the following anxiety measures: the State Anxiety Inventory, a Self-Report of Anxiety, and the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale of Reactions. However, when language proficiency measures such as a Self-Appraisal of Speaking Proficiency and a dictation test were controlled, there was no longer any significant correlation between the OPI and the anxiety measures. She suggested that language ability can exert more influence on oral performance than anxiety can. Phillips (1992) also examined the effects of foreign language anxiety on speaking test scores and test performance variables. The subjects in her study were 44 college students who were intermediate-level French learners taught by the same instructor. The types of the oral exam were an interview and a role-play, both of which were communicative and open-ended. In the interview, the students freely talked about a given cultural topic that was randomly selected from their textbook. In the role-play, each student was paired with the professor and was asked to act out a given role and lead the conversation. The results of the study revealed a moderate negative correlation between test scores and scores on the FLCAS. In other words, students with higher foreign language anxiety tended to receive lower scores on the oral exam. According to the results, language anxiety was also related to the following oral performance variables: the

number of total words in Communication Unit (CU), dependent clauses, and target structures that students produced during the test. In addition, less anxious students tended to produce more dependent clauses and longer CUs. Woodrow (2006) found a significant negative relationship between both in-class and out-of-class second language speaking anxiety and oral performance in an a sample International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) test, which included a general interview, individual long turn and two-way discussion. Her study targeted an English as a Second Language (ESL) learning environment in Australia. The study participants were 275 international students who were enrolled to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to prepare for university courses in Australia.

What factors can make language learners anxious in the classroom where the focus is on developing speaking proficiency? First, students' self-esteem can play an important role in increasing L2 speaking anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) argued that the threat to self-concept of competence can cause self-consciousness and anxiety. Many learners do not want to look foolish and look like a babbling baby (Price, 1991) in front of teachers and peers because they are concerned about making positive social impressions when they speak L2 (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989). Phillips (1992) also pointed out that speaking L2 with limited language skills can have a negative impact on one's self-image because self-image is closely associated with the ability to express oneself in an authentic manner through language. Kitano (2001) found that fear of negative evaluation by a teacher or peers and lower self-perception of speaking ability in the target language were the anxiety sources of college learners of Japanese. Another possible factor that contributes to L2 speaking anxiety is the discrepancy between effort and resulting performance (Phillips, 1992). Learners can experience anxiety when their effort on developing oral skills is not quickly rewarded. They may feel frustrated when their effort does

not bring expected results. However, to master speaking a foreign language is indeed a complex and difficult process that takes a long time. Thus, the fact that developing oral skills is a demanding process may make many foreign language learners have negative attitudes toward practicing speaking L2. On the other hand, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found the relationship between language anxiety and perfectionism. They compared four high-anxious and four low-anxious students in terms of their reactions to their own speaking performance. The subjects of the study were university students in Chile who were majoring in English education. According to the analysis of these students' comments on their own speaking performance, the high-anxious students, who got high scores on the FLCAS, also showed perfectionist tendencies toward their performance. For example, they reported procrastination in their language learning due to high and unrealistic personal performance standards, showed fear of being negatively evaluated by their teachers and peers, and overestimated the seriousness of their mistakes.

Anxiety in L2 communication can influence willingness to communicate (WTC), the tendency of an individual to initiate communication when they are free to do so (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). MacIntyre (1994) developed a WTC model in which a combination of lower level communication anxiety and greater perceived communication confidence can predict WTC and frequency of communication. He showed that this model can be also applied to L2 communication in Canadian contexts. Yashima (2002) replicated and supported the WTC model in a Japanese EFL context. He measured the subjects' communication anxiety in English by asking them to indicate the frequency of feeling nervous in each of four communication situations (public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads) and three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends).



### **III. Implications from Studies: How to Help Adolescents Reduce L2 Speaking Anxiety?**

I argued in the introduction that adolescent L2 speaking anxiety is a topic that requires special attention from both students and teachers. Researchers have found that students tend to feel more nervous in foreign language classes than in other classes and experience high levels of anxiety particularly in speaking situations (Kitano, 2001). Yet, prior research on foreign language learning anxiety mainly investigated college students or adult learners. Although prior scientific research with a particular focus on adolescent learners is limited, educators and researchers are increasingly recognizing the salience of anxiety among adolescent learners (Willis, 2006). According to British Council UK's (2000) survey on teaching EFL to young learners in public schools, the vast majority of countries around the world (44 out of 48) begin English education to children around the age of 11. Thus, considering that foreign language education is required in secondary school curriculums in many countries, I presume that many middle or high school language teachers all around the world would have to deal with their students' anxiety issues. In Korea, where English education is required for elementary to high school students, for example, English teachers are generally interested in helping young students deal with the prevalent pressures and feelings of anxiety during classes.

This chapter will offer three suggestions on how to alleviate L2 speaking anxiety that adolescent language learners experience in the classroom. Since these suggestions are intended to best meet the needs of adolescents, they are based on findings from studies that directly examine adolescents or provide implications that are relevant to understanding adolescents. The first two suggestions will focus on fostering self-esteem and coping skills, which are important anxiety related themes during adolescence compared to other stages in students' lives. Specifically, I will discuss how to help adolescents improve self-esteem and develop strategies to

cope with anxiety in the L2 speaking classes. Finally, I suggest general guidelines for creating an anxiety-reducing environment in EFL classrooms.

### **a. Build Positive Self-esteem**

As mentioned in the literature review part, low self-esteem has been found to be one of the critical sources of foreign language learning anxiety (Clement, 1986; Price, 1991). Our self-esteem is usually damaged when we constantly perceive our self-worth and self-confidence in negative ways or when we feel rejected by someone whose acceptance is important. Secondary school teachers need to pay special attention to students' self-esteem not only because adolescents' lives are greatly influenced by how they feel about themselves (i.e. relationships, academic or sport achievements, mental health, etc.) but also because they easily become self-critical (The Nemours Foundation, 2012).

What can teachers do to best keep adolescent students' self-esteem from being damaged during the L2 speaking class? The first suggestion is to improve their self-confidence in L2 oral proficiency. If learners have more positive perception of their ability, they will be less likely to be anxious about the ability or feel frustrated by an experience of failure. Teachers can boost students' perceived self-confidence if they provide students with many opportunities to experience success and feel a sense of achievement. When learners believe that they can succeed if they work hard, their self-confidence will not be negatively affected by failure (Weiner, 1986). Wu (2003) suggested that young learners can become confident about their competence when they experience success in moderately challenging tasks. Learners also need to be encouraged to focus on reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses during the process of language learning and making progress throughout lessons. Researchers recommend that language teachers give students meaningful rewards for their effort, risk taking, and oral achievement to help them

sustain motivation to use the target language and therefore make increased chance to improve (Oxford, 1999; Crookall & Oxford, 1991). Therefore, to reduce classroom anxiety that comes from low self-esteem due to negative self-concept of L2 speaking competence, teachers and students should work together to make a supporting environment where students can succeed in various speaking tasks and try to improve their weaknesses so as to move forward despite failure. Another suggestion for building adolescent students' self-esteem in the second language classroom is to empower them to take ownership of their learning. Learners can improve their self-concept when they are engaged in autonomous learning. Deci et al. (1991) described that autonomy is about "being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions." Autonomous learners usually have good meta-cognitive strategies to reflect on and control their cognitive processes for effective management in their own learning (Lamb, 2010). Research has also shown that self-directed language learning can bring about increased productivity and less frustration (Rivers, 2001). Developing autonomy is particularly important in adolescent development because it can support the willpower of many teenaged students (Jensen and Snider, 2013). Researchers say that adolescents prefer to do a task that they can choose. In other words, they like to make learning situations under their control. If teenaged students are given more opportunities to take responsibilities to manage their own learning process, they will feel a greater sense of achievement that may lead to positive self-esteem. From this perspective, self-assessment can be a useful instrument to foster adolescents' autonomous learning in the language classroom. Self-assessment is described as personal-response assessments of ongoing learning processes and it has been found influential to improving learners' autonomy (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Lamb, 2010). Some researchers and experts in the area of language pedagogy argued the importance of involving learners in constantly self-assessing their speaking performance based

on well-constructed rubrics during and over the classes because self-assessment can raise their awareness of the components of L2 speaking proficiency and help them identify their learning gaps on which they need to work for improvement (Tuttle & Tuttle, 2013). However, Blanche (1988) pointed out that results of self-assessments may be influenced by learners' subjective errors. In the language learning context, Ross (1998) found that learners are weak at assessing their own speaking skills since they may "assess their abilities in the light of their communicative intentions rather than the actual effect of their efforts to convey messages to an interlocutor." Patri (2002) also said that learners' language skills can affect the validity of self-assessments in oral skills. Thus, when teachers attempt to promote students' autonomy through self-assessment, they should train students to evaluate their learning processes based on specific and clearly set goals, carefully monitor their learning progress, and reflect on their learning outcomes.

#### **b. Develop Coping Skills**

Many language learners inevitably meet the challenge of self-control, risk-taking, and tolerance for ambiguity when they perform speaking the target language in classroom situations. As the literature review pointed out that adolescents generally lack these coping skills (Carducci & Golant, 2000; Jensen and Snider, 2013), adolescent learners are more likely to avoid making errors and mistakes, have trouble setting goals for improving language performance, or easily give up learning L2 speaking compared to other ages of learners. According to Chu's (2008) study on Taiwanese students who were enrolled in English courses in a private university, students' reports on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) indicated that non-shy students tended to use English language learning strategies more frequently than shy students did. This can imply that adolescents, who are generally susceptible to shyness, may become inhibited when they try using language learning strategies. It is no wonder that teachers

need to train adolescent students to develop strategies to cope with speaking anxiety experienced in foreign language classroom situations.

Teachers can introduce students to various techniques to manage foreign language anxiety in the classroom. A noteworthy method is called systematic desensitization in which students are gradually and safely exposed to their personal anxiety triggers through their imagination and practice coping skills to become more comfortable in real scenarios (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013). Some other common techniques include positive self-talk, deep breathing, and meditation for relaxation (Horwitz, 1997). Practicing the types of tasks to be tested can be helpful too for reducing testing anxiety (Young, 1991; Phillips, 1992). Also, teachers need to help students acknowledge the existence of anxiety in the process of language learning and identify sources of anxiety (Horwitz, 1997; Phillips, 1992) by engaging students in various discussion and self-reflection activities. For example, students can share their experience related to foreign language anxiety and discuss symptoms and possible solutions; draw an anxiety graph or write dialogue journal with their peers or teacher after every class to reflect on changes in their feelings during the class and situations that triggered or alleviated anxiety, and therefore discover any insight about anxiety management (Crookall and Oxford, 1991). From discussion and self-reflection on personal experiences of L2 speaking anxiety, students can better understand what may be going on in their mind while performing oral tasks. Their increased awareness of the common nature of anxiety can reduce self-blame on their weakness and fear that they are awkward or stupid. Researchers also suggested that teachers need to address language learners' anxiety producing beliefs such as unrealistic expectations of successful performance and negative attitudes toward making errors and mistakes, and give students opportunities to modify their unhealthy beliefs (Phillips, 1992; Gregerson and Horwitz, 2002). If

such misperceptions are never mentioned nor corrected, learners will probably try to avoid a situation where they should use the target language and keep negatively assessing their competence due to the lack of practice and experience of improvement. To prevent being caught in such a vicious cycle, students should reframe their negative or irrational beliefs, and objectively assess their performances based on realistically set goals (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013). With regard to adolescent learners, their increased self-consciousness often leads them to believe that speaking a foreign language with imperfect skills or making errors during oral performance will ruin their reputation in the classroom. In fact, making errors and mistakes play a critical role in the second language development. Thus, teachers should encourage teenaged students to accept the notion that making errors is natural in language learning and focus on making small and big progresses out of these errors instead of pushing themselves to perform native-like or perfect L2 speaking.

### **c. Create Anxiety-Reducing Classroom Environment**

Building supportive classroom environment is another important aspect of reducing L2 speaking anxiety. Researchers have suggested on how to create less anxiety-provoking atmosphere in the language classroom. Teachers can make personal effort in trying to position themselves as a facilitator or coach (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013); build trust and respect, or rapport, with students (Young, 1990); become a warm and personable teacher (Crookall and Oxford, 1991). Regarding instructional practices, teachers are recommended to avoid putting students on the spot in front of the teacher and classmates and involve them in pair or small group work rather than in the whole class activity (Young, 1990); Reduce competitiveness through collaborative work (Phillips, 1992); encourage risk-taking and tolerance of ambiguity in a comfortable and non-threatening environment (Oxford, 1999); provide students with a

predictable learning environment and necessary instructional support (Wu, 2003). Careful error correction is also crucial to reduce L2 speaking anxiety. For instance, highlighting or correcting students' mistakes or errors is a type of public humiliation, which can severely damage their self-esteem and provoke tremendous anxiety. Some possible alternatives to error correction would include focusing more on the message or successful communication during oral tasks and having students offer constructive feedback each other about their speaking performance and provide positive comments on their achievements. Gregersen and MacIntyre (2013) pointed out the significant role of building friendly and caring community where human bonding is emphasized, in lowering anxiety in the classroom. They suggested that the removal of 'competitiveness, self-comparisons, and a desire to out-do' and 'the presence of role models or supportive conversational partners' are the key aspects of helping students overcome foreign language anxiety.

## **IV. Conclusion**

### **a. Overview of the Report**

I dealt with adolescents' communication apprehension and foreign language learning anxiety, with a focus on speaking performance. An extensive review of relevant theoretical concepts and empirical findings has been presented, and practical implications for teachers have been suggested. Undergoing a dramatically transitional period during which self-identity is constructed, adolescent learners tend to develop shyness about their self-concepts, especially triggering concern for communicating with peers or teachers. Language learners also commonly experience foreign language classroom anxiety, which has a mostly negative influence on their learning process and levels of achievement. Speaking foreign language in the classroom is one of the most salient sources of language learning anxiety, as oral tasks generally involve facing the challenge of revealing oral skills and self-images to others. Increased L2 speaking anxiety can negatively affect learners' willingness to communicate and participate in communication activities, and thus hinder the development of target language communication ability.

Suggestions for reducing adolescent L2 speaking anxiety include building students' self-esteem, training them on how to deal with anxiety, and creating a supportive and welcoming classroom environment for practicing spoken language. However, it should be noted that this report alone cannot substantiate the relationship between language learning during adolescence and L2 speaking anxiety nor predict the effects of applying my suggestions to actual secondary school classrooms. In addition, every individual adolescent has unique personality traits and different language learning characteristics; thus he or she will develop different levels of anxiety. Therefore, more empirical investigations are needed to uncover the complexity of adolescent learners' affect in the foreign language classroom. Nevertheless, both teachers and students



should not overlook the possible impact of adolescents' proneness to self-consciousness on L2 speaking anxiety development. Fear of negative evaluation and rejection, caused by increased self-consciousness, often promotes feelings of anxiety.

### **b. Final Reflection**

Finally, I would like to conclude the report with some reflections and future suggestions directed specifically to my former context of teaching EFL to adolescent students in Korea. At this point of getting toward the end of the report after having spent much time reading, writing, and thinking on adolescent L2 speaking anxiety, I sense that my view on English learners at Korean secondary schools has changed from an inner perspective of individual learners to a more outer perspective. In other words, my attention has been directed to some critical sociocultural factors surrounding this group of learners that may amplify their English speaking anxiety. First, Korean society emphasizes the role of English education as a means for gate-keeping. Accordingly, middle and high schools function as places where students are prepared for standardized English tests with the goal of improving their rankings. Thus, most adolescents feel pressured to learn English in order to compete against their peers and to get better college admissions or job offers. Further, the power relation between English and Korean speakers may also increase students' anger and fear. They could feel hostility against English if they perceive that English—which is commonly considered as a dominant, influential, and powerful language—may threaten or devalue their self-concepts as non-native English speakers. Another possible anxiety trigger may be the product-oriented culture in Korea. Many students complain that they cannot speak English well even after several years of English learning. Reflected in such comments are their tendencies to overemphasize outcomes while under-appreciating the progress and achievement they have made. Therefore, teachers need to help students become

more process-oriented with regard to their English learning instead of focusing heavily on outcomes that they can present to their school or society for evaluation. Students should be also given opportunities to reflect on their experiences of English speaking anxiety, share the solutions with the classmates and teachers, and discover the joy of improvement in speaking skills and small successes in communication during their journey of language learning.

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