## The Influence of Foreign Language Anxiety on Language Attitudes among ESP Students

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### Abstract

This paper is a practical undertaking dealing with a sociolinguistic aspect of language attitudes based on research data obtained from first year students of Tlemcen Preparatory School in Technology and Techniques; henceforth (EPST). Learners' evaluations are discussed to investigate their opinions on the learned foreign languages in accordance with their language anxiety. The findings indicate that first year students experienced fear and lack of confidence when performing foreign language class work. They also felt negative evaluation, even though, the respondents expressed the idea that French and particularly English are necessary to have access to science and knowledge. It was widely recognized that the ability to communicate in French as well as English was a desirable skill, whether to further a career or merely for personal use. Gender difference appeared clearly when English was better evaluated by girls, mainly at the level of actual performance. Consequently language anxiety, however, may hinder the learner's progress and level of proficiency in the target language.

### ملخَّـــص

تعد هذه الورقة عملا ميدانيا يتناول الجانب الاجتماعي اللغوي لمواقف اللغة استنادا إلى بيانات البحث التي تم الحصول عليها من طلاب السنة الأولى في مدرسة تلمسان التحضيرية في التكنولوجيا والتقنيات. (EPST) وتناقش تقييمات المتدربتن للتحقيق في آرائهم بشأن اللغات الأجنبية المستفادة وفقا لقلقهم اللغوي. وتشير النتائج إلى أن طلاب السنة الأولى شهدوا الخوف وانعدام الثقة عند أداء عمل لغة أجنبية. وقد شعروا أيضا بتقييم سلبي، على الرغم من أن المجيبتن أعربوا عن فكرة أن اللغة الأجنبية وخاصة الإنجليزية ضرورية للوصول إلى العلم والمعرفة. ومن المسلم به على على نطاق واسع أن القدرة على التواصل باللغتن الفرنسية والإنكليزية هي مهارة مرغوبة، سواء في تعزيز مهنة أو لمجرد الاستخدام الشخصي. وظهر الفرق بتن الجنستن بوضوح عندما كانت اللغة الإنجليزية تقيم على نحو أفضل من قبل الفتيات، ولا سيما على مستوى الأداء الفعلي. وبالتالي، فإن القلق اللغوي قد يعوق تقدم المتعلم ومستوى إتقان اللغة المستهدفة.

### *Introduction:*

This article investigates the results of first year Preparatory School students' language learning anxiety and its influence on their language attitudes. This work is conducted in the Preparatory School in Sciences and Techniques in Tlemcen. The students have French as the medium of instruction; they learn scientific modules such as: mathematics, physics and chemistry. They also learn English and French an hour and a half a week in first and second years. This language teaching is related to science and technology.

It involves 20 (twenty) female and 20 (twenty) males students. It should be noted that they come from different regions in Algeria, that is, the investigated cohorts are heterogeneous. The proficiency of these languages is not regarded as the goal of learning per se but is seen as a means to achieve personal and cultural goals. It is suggested that language learning anxiety can have an influence on language attitudes as far as French and English learning are concerned. English and French for specific purposes are important as school modules, particularly as it is a subject that gives access to world science, documentation and higher education. Moreover, the learners need to improve their communicative skills to learn the other modules and succeed in attaining the needed knowledge. It is hypothesized that the more positive learners 'attitudes are the lower foreign language learning anxiety is expressed. Furthermore, this work examines whether gender factors is effective on foreign language anxiety of students.

### *1. Language Attitudes Theoretically:*

Some of the main points of interest of social psychology of language consist of investigating what people believe about the distribution of language varieties in their own speech community, what attitudes they have towards these varieties and how they have arrived at and implement those beliefs.

One can assume that language learning as well as attitudes are related to socially based language selection. An individual is confronted to a source of interest, and then involved at the socio-cognitive parameter. Thus, the speaker starts manifesting a behaviour that is closely related to the linguistic attitudinal evaluation. This characterises the preference or rejection of a given

linguistic variety in a given learning situation

### *1.1 Language Attitudes:*

Language attitude analysis is dealt with in terms of value judgements or people's reactions towards mother tongues and educational media taught in institutions (schools and university). In other words, favourable and/or unfavourable opinions on languages are analysed.

### *1.1.1 The Notion of Attitude:*

According to Oxford English dictionary, attitude is defined as a "way of thinking or behaving" (1993:65).

The word attitude derives from the Latin root 'aptus', meaning suited or fit. As far as the sociolinguistic sphere is concerned, N. Dittmar (1976:181) defines language attitudes as follows: '' Language attitudes ask questions on the assessment and evaluation of speakers of linguistic varieties. ''

Language attitudes can be considered as long term phenomena that pertain to social psychology. This raises an issue of how linguistic varieties are evaluated. Fasold (1984:158) explains the evaluation of a language variety as follows:

The evaluation of a variety is the fruit of experiences, products of a whole series of historical, social, economic, political and cultural implications that continuously interact with one another, turning the objective into subjective.

Social psychologists are interested in observing language study, not only as objective socially neutral instruments for conveying meaning, but as varieties  linked up with the identities of social or ethnic groups that  have consequences for the social evaluation of, and the attitudes towards languages.

### *1.1.2 Language Attitude Theories:*

Social psychology of language has shown criteria involved in the speakers' judgements of languages. As pointed out in Fishman and Agheyisi (1976:81-82)[1], "Validation of attitude study is problematic because of the very nature of attitudes as properties of the psychological or mental pro-

cess."In fact, one problem in evaluating the role of language attitudes is the difficulty in measuring the attitudes themselves. In other words, to what extent does the scale of evaluation reveal useful information for the investigation? The development of a questionnaire on attitudes is not a simple task. Thus, the following question can be asked: Do informants express their honest feelings/opinions or simple attitudes they think are more acceptable when they are asked direct questions in interviews? Labov (1966) discovered that people do not necessarily speak the way they say they do. Hence, one can consider that the study of language attitudes remains probabilistic. Most people are not consciously aware of the combination between linguistic criteria and judgements, so it is preferable to elicit people's responses indirectly.

Language attitudes studies are based on both mentalist and behaviourist theories. This raises more issues of how to understand the relation of attitudes with language learning. So it is necessary to examine the views of social-psychologists and see how their approaches tackle characteristics of attitudes pertaining to social phenomena.

### *1.1.2.1 The Mentalist Theory (Allport, 1954):*

For holders of such a view, attitudes are as Allport[2] (1954:45) describes them "a mental neural state of readiness organised through experience exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual response to all objects and situations with which it is related". Attitudes cannot be observed directly, but must be inferred from the subject's introspection. This viewpoint includes the questions that attitudes can be derived from given data that are quantifiable in a given way. For instance, many studies have demonstrated that the quality and prestige of language varieties depend on the knowledge of the social connotations which they process. That is, "the use of dialects would be expressions of social preference, which reflects an awareness of the status ingrained in the speakers' minds." (Fasold, 1984).

### *1.1.2.2 The Behaviourist Theory (Bain, 1928):*

According to the behaviourist theory, attitudes are determined by observing actual behaviour in social situations. For instance, Bain2 (1928) asserts that "attitudes are regarded as a hypothetical construct that can be revealed

by verbal responses to a given set of stimuli". Attitudes, then, can be held to indicate other forms of behaviour that have a relation with preferences of a given language in everyday activities. For instance, an individual's favourable attitudes can be reflected in some activities or behaviour, such as a selected language in TV watching and radio listening as well as a selected variety in a given speech situation. Similarly, Edwards (1982:191) suggests that attitudes towards a language are often the reflection of attitudes towards members of various ethnic groups. He claims that "people's reactions to language varieties reveal much of their perception of the speakers of these varieties".

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) stress the importance of the nature of intergroup relations in the discussion of language attitudes and uses. For instance, language attitudes vary as the nature of intergroup relations changes. When relations change, status relationships and therefore perceptions, attitudes and uses, change too. It is hypothesized that a person who identifies himself with the target language and the group that speaks it would hold favourable attitudes to this language and to the group.

### 1.2 Educational Implication:

Many factors contribute to attitudes, motivation and standards, it is important that teachers do not base their work on theoretical assumptions about their learners without trying to discover their genuine motivations, attitudes and environments in a relation to language learning. To learn a language is not to acquire knowledge of the use of this language only, but is to associate one's thoughts, motivation and beliefs with this medium.

### 1.2.1 Lambert's Position:

A pioneer in the exploration of learner attitudes in relation to language learning, the Canadian psychologist Wallace Lambert (1964:181) identified two types of orientation: integrative and instrumental.

An instrumental orientation to learning stresses the utilitarian value of L2 proficiency, of which getting a pay raise or a better job or a good grade in school are examples. In contrast, an orientation is said to be integrative if it reflects an openness toward another culture group, an openness that may

include a desire to be accepted as a member of that group.

The point is that the purpose for which a given language is learned can have an impact on the learner's judgements about languages. Hence, the present research aims at discovering language learning –instrumental orientation- influence on learners' language attitudes whereby the individual's opinions are taken into account. Besides, another issue can seek not only what people think about languages but what they do as well. This can be sought in activities people perform such as the newspapers they read, the TV programmes they watch as well as the variety they use in speech situations for given topics.

According to Lambert (1964), attitudes have been considered in terms of the following components:

1- The cognitive component refers to one's beliefs about objects and situations.

2- The affective component refers to the amount of positive or negative feeling one has towards such a situation.

3- The conative component refers to one's behavioural intentions, or to one's actual behaviour towards the object.

The above criteria are concerned with the individual's behaviour, feeling, thought and manner of acting. A person classifies a language on the basis of these criteria which can be considered as an "evaluative scale". The evaluation of languages lies in the conscience of individuals, forming part of their cognitive world; they are made up of a series of opinions shared by a group. Thus, it can be suggested that the greater degree of student unfamiliar and ambiguous evaluation of foreign languages is, the more unfavourable attitudes are held.

### *1.3 Gender:*

Male and female indices are included in most sociolinguistic studies since the sex variable is an important social attribute in social interaction. This may be due to the fact that men and women are biologically different and are therefore attributed different social roles. Hence, one can suggest that sex

roles affect speakers' attitudes towards languages. For instance, a remarkable pattern has emerged in languages that have a distinction between non-standard and standard forms (Labov, 1966). In fact, females use high prestige standard forms more often than males do. Thus, 'the sex prestige pattern' has been found in many studies such as that of Labov (1990) which discusses examples from English, Canadian, French, Spanish and other studies. This pattern is explained by Hudson (1998:193) as follows:

The sex prestige pattern: In any society where males and females have equal access to the standard forms, females use standard variants of any stable variable which is socially stratified for both sexes more often than males do.

Females are attracted by 'sophisticated' speech. Generally speaking, sociological studies have demonstrated that women are more status-conscious than men. For this reason, they are, presumably, more sensitive to the social significance of linguistic media (Trudgill, 1974).Gender and prestige can be related in studies of the speech patterns. In British English Peter Trudgill observed that more working class women adopted the standard dialect than men. Other areas in which this has been observed include New Zealand and Guangdong in China. Trudgill suggests that for men, there is covert prestige associated with speaking the working class dialect. In fact, he observed that men speak a `less' prestigious dialect than that which they actually spoke. According to this interpretation then, Trudgill (1978:122) noticed that «women's use of prestige features simply conforms to the ordinary sociolinguistic order, while men deviate from what is expected.» Whatever the cause, women across cultures seem more likely than men to modify their speech towards the prestige dialect. Though women use prestige dialects more frequently than do men, the same gender preference for prestige languages does not seem to exist. Henceforth, it can be hypothesised that males may show more foreign language learning anxiety than females do.

### *1.4 Foreign Language Anxiety:*

Foreign language anxiety has been a topic of interest and research in recent years (Ellis, 2008) mainly the 1980s witnessed the breakthrough in the studies on foreign language learning anxiety (Wang, 2014). This phenome-

non is an important factor that can influence language attitudes. According to Maclntyre and Gardner (1994), foreign language anxiety ''the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening and learning '' is different from a general feeling of anxiety, therefore, it keeps learners from reaching their goals (Horwitz, 2001). One can suggest that learners with high anxiety often show unfavourable attitudes towards the foreign languages.

### *1.3.1 Definition:*

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as ''a distinct complex of self- perceptions, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process''. In communication apprehension, foreign language learners have difficulty not only in speaking but also comprehending messages from others (Horwitz et al., 1986). In other words, learners have difficulty in understanding others or in being understood.

### *1.3.2 Foreign Language Anxiety Theoretically:*

Fear of negative evaluation is closely related to communication apprehension. Horwitz et al. (1986) classifies foreign language anxiety into three components:
1. Communication apprehension, which arises from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas.
2. Fear of negative social evaluation, which arises from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others.
3. Test anxiety, an apprehension about academic evaluation.

In communication apprehension, foreign language learners have difficulty not only in speaking but also comprehending messages from others. This means that learners have difficulty in understanding others or in being understood. Fear of negative evaluation is closely related to communication apprehension (Maclntyre and Gardner, 1991).

Maclntyre and Gardner (1991) found that communication apprehension and fear of social evaluation were the main factors in foreign language an-

xiety, while test anxiety was just a general problem, and it was independent from the foreign language anxiety.

The main cause of anxiety stems from ''learners 'unrealistic or erroneous beliefs about language learning''(Zhang and Zhong, 2012). While some learners think they lack the aptitude or gift to learn a new language (Price, 1991), some believe that two years or less is sufficient for them to become proficient in another language (Horwitz, 1988) without estimating the difficulty of the language learning task, and therefore, they could possibly experience conflict resulted in anxiety.

Learners are required to communicate and speak high expectations in public  that cause anxiety. The fear of falling short of these expectations can hinder the learning process (Rajanthran, 2013). Anxious learners think that their language skills, especially speaking skills, are weaker than their peers' (Young, 1991) because of perceiving speaking ability as the most important. Classroom-related anxiety is associated with instructors, peers and classroom practises. Instructors who believe their role is to correct students constantly, who feel that they cannot have students working in pairs because the class may get out of control and may be contributing to learner language anxiety (Young).

The evaluation or criticisms from peers is also a major cause of anxiety (Cornway, 2007). Young (1991) found that anxious learners thought their skills in language were weaker than their peers' and they were looking down at them. In addition, anxious learners are scared because of a fear of appearing awkward, foolish and incompetent in the eyes of their peers (Jones, 2004).Oral presentation is the most anxiety-provoking classroom activity (Koch and Terrell, 1991), which makes the classroom environment more formal and stressful for the learners. However, Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) reported language learners to be less anxious and stressful in environments which emphasize collaborative activities among the teachers and the students. Students with high levels of foreign language anxiety exhibit avoidance behaviour (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002), it is essential to find out the causes of foreign language anxiety and reduce the undesired effects in foreign language

teaching to create a low anxiety classroom for the learners (Young, 1991).

### *1.4 Participants:*

The informants are enrolled in Preparatory School in Technology and Sciences in Tlemcen1. Students must study two preparatory years, at the end they take an exam; if they pass they are oriented to different technological branches, such as electronics, public works, hydraulics...ect. They have to spend three more years in one of these branches to finish as engineers. These learners study English and French for Specific Purpose (ESP) and (FSP) one hour and a half a week during the two first years; they tackle the study of these languages through a field that is already known and relevant to them. It concentrates on language in context and gives less importance to grammar and language structures. It covers subjects varying from science or computer science to technology and some grammatical structures. For instance, the ESP focal point is that English is not taught as a subject separated from the students 'real world'; it is rather integrated into a subject matter area important to the learners. An ESP programme might, for example, emphasize the development of reading skills with students who are preparing for graduate work in science and technology.

Learning environment enhances skills for communication. Students acquire language when they have opportunities to use the language in interaction with other speakers. Thus the teacher can structure effective communication skills in the classroom. ESP and FSP learners study languages when they have opportunities to understand and work with language in a context that they comprehend and find interesting. The aim of the teacher, then, is selecting, designing and organizing course materials, supporting the students in their efforts and providing them with feedback on their progress. It is suggested that the more students pay attention to the meaning of the language they hear or read, the more they are successful, the more they are motivated to speak the target language. Since language learning continues naturally throughout our lives, ESP and FSP learners are constantly expanding vocabulary, becoming more fluent in their fields, and adjusting their linguistic behaviour to new situations or new roles. So they can exploit these innate competencies

in learning English and French. Furthermore, students 'potential is central in designing a syllabus with realistic goals that takes into account the students 'concern in the learning situation. Henceforth, one can suggest that first year students are not well-acquainted with the ESP domain, therefore they can be more sensitive to foreign language anxiety.

### 1.5 Research Objectives:

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions are asked:

1. What is the student anxiety level to each foreign language responded by the students who are in first year preparatory school as beginners?
2. On what underlying criteria do these students base their anxiety?
3. What language attitudes can be revealed?
4. To what degree does foreign language anxiety of students influence language attitudes?
5. Do gender aspects vary among students?

### 1.6 Methodology:

Twenty male and twenty female informants are selected among first year students. A survey model is used for the present study and data are collected using a questionnaire. The adjectives tests and multiple choice questions as well as direct statements are administered in order to discover in a better way the value judgments that students associate with languages. The first part includes personal information. It is worth mentioning that each questionnaire is written in Standard Arabic as the informants are familiar with this medium.

The questionnaire consists of three parts and is as follow:

1- Indirect questionnaires: a- Closed-ended question
                                              b- The adjective test

1-Language Attitudes Tests : (Adapted from Labov's studies (1972), Stewart's classification(1968) and Gumpers (1966).

| a- Closed-ended questions: | Statements: |
|---|---|
| Aims of the statements: | -French is easy |
| 1- To discover people's opinions on the perception of the linguistic side of the language | -English is easy |
| | -French is difficult |
| | -English is difficult |
| 2-Necessity of the learning of French/English at the university | - French/English is necessary for scientific branches |
| 3- Beliefs about English and learning aims | - In Algeria everyone must learn English |
| b- Adjective Test: | - English is one of the most important languages in today's world. |
| 1-To discover what favourable or unfavourable criteria are related to both languages | - It is very helpful in my studies and work that I can find anything on the internet in English. |
| -scientificity | - I would like to know English well enough to be able to give the impression of a well-educated student with good English skills. |
| -religousness | |
| -patriotism | |
| -likeable status | - My aim with English is to make myself understood by foreigners coming from any part of the world. |
| -unlikeable status | |
| -literary status | -scientific |
| -presence of high status | -religious |
| -easiness in use | -patriotic |
| | -friendly |
| | -harsh |
| | -literary |
| | -civilised |
| | -practical |

Table1.1 Multiple Choice Questions and Adjective Test

### 2-Foreign Language Anxiety Test:

The test is a closed-ended question one. The test uses three degrees ranging from agree, no opinion and disagree. It was adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986). This test aims at measuring learner's feelings of anxiety as a specific reaction to foreign language learning in the classroom.

| a- Closed-ended questions: | -I never feel sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class |
|---|---|
| Aims of the statements:<br>-Communication apprehension | -I don't worry about making mistakes in language class<br>-It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language<br>- I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class<br>- I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers |
| -Fear of negative evaluation | -During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course<br>-I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am<br>- I am usually at ease during tests in my language class<br>-I feel confident in a foreign language class |

Table1.2 Closed-ended Questions

## *1.8 Discussion and Analysis:*
### *1.8.1 Method:*

Data was collected using questionnaires without letting the subjects know about the purpose of the investigation. They were administered in Arabic which used to be the learners' medium of instruction. The fieldwork data was collected among young first year students aged between 19 and 22 years, they were 40 respondents, 20 girls and 20 boys. One reason for focusing on first year respondents is that new learners in this kind of institution react more profoundly to the process of language categorisation in relation to their self-esteem and confidence.

**a) Beliefs about French and English Learning:**

The results reveal that our male and female respondents seem to agree on the usefulness of both French and English as well as their superiority in the field of science and knowledge. Unlike girls, half of male students express their disagreement as to the use of French in their daily life to give the impression of an educated person, which was not the case with English. Remarkably, both groups show their willingness to communicate with foreigners in both languages. Higher rates were recorded for English as far as this evaluation is concerned. (cf tables1.1 and 1.2)

**b) Language Attitude Adjective test:**

As far as the adjective test is concerned, the majority of both groups find English and French easy. Both media were recognised as scientific, even though, 6 male respondents did not tick this criterion for French. This judgment was probably held to show more prominence for the English language. Both media were not evaluated as religious. Gender difference appeared when 'patriotic' trait is dealt with; as English was recognised as such the majority of boys. However, most of girls did not agree on this. Surprisingly enough, half of males and the same number of girls saw that French was 'patriotic'. This value was held, probably because of the frequent use of French in comparison with English. Both languages were associated with likeable status 'friendly' as well as easiness in use 'practical' rather than the unlikeable one 'harsh' which had very low ratings.

Female respondents seem to prefer to relate English rather than French to high status 'civilised'; as only half of them selected this trait for French. Prestige feature as described by Trudgill (1995) appeared to be selected by females when standard status is tackled for a world language which is English. (cf tables 1.1 and 1.2).

**c) Foreign Language Anxiety Test:**

As far as communication apprehension is concerned students seem to agree on the familiar symptoms in language anxiety which are: a lack of confidence, a reluctance to speak. Actually, the majority of both groups selected 'yes' box for four statements describing fear and hesitation in actual usage of either French or English in classroom courses (Elaine Horwitz,1986).(cf tables 1.3 and 1.4). Nonetheless, students appear to be split into two groups and established a correlation between lack of anxiety and achievement in language as half of girls and nearly the same number of boys do not show fear when they do not understand the teacher in class and speak without preparation in a foreign language course.

Unlike girls more boys prefer to communicate using French, however, lower ratings were shown with English. This, probably, happened because females feel more prestige with English as found in language attitudes. Language anxiety that was expressed above did not seem to be confined when communicating with foreigners is dealt with; as both genders express their wish to communicate in English. Here, positive language attitudes appear to corroborate with language performance.

Moreover, gender feature appears in foreign class participation; as more girls than boys would show willingness to take part in classroom work. This happened, probably, because girls are more involved to an actual 'prestigious' use of the foreign language to develop oral skills.

As far as negative evaluation of the learner's self-competence, more boys than girls do not feel self-confident in a foreign language class. Similarly, when dealing with tests girls are more self-reliant than boys. This idea was not necessarily manifested with students who were good at languages; it could simply happen with girls who were making more efforts to be good

enough. Once more females express more confidence and better easiness with foreign language use than males do.

## *1.9 Conclusion:*

Students learning FSP and ESP seem to be motivated to deal with the foreign languages at the instructional and educational levels. Even though, gender differences are registered, some positive attitudinal criteria reveal that our respondents need and are eager to tackle science and technology in French and mainly in English. Getting over the self-esteem issues implied by perceived doubts requires more practice and participation, but that›s exactly what language anxiety blocks students from doing. What it affects is their willingness to participate in class, which may ultimately affect their performance. Even though, both girls and boys expressed their fear and sometimes discomfort  with foreign language experience in the most general sense, females are still sensitive to foreign language use  and its 'prestigious' status particularly to English.
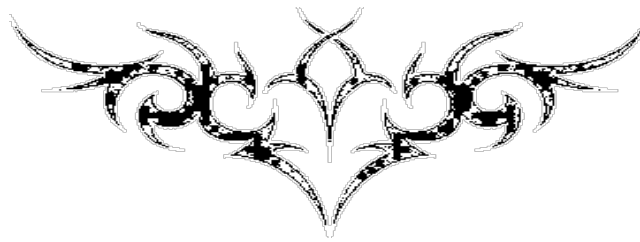
## *Notes:*

(1) et (2) In Dittmar, (1976).

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