

# Coping strategies for reducing English language speaking anxiety in the Balkans

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**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** tujejezikovno poučevanje/učenje, poslovna angleščina, tujejezikovna anksioznost, strategije za zmanjšanje govorne anksioznosti, retroaktivni fokus na jezikovnih problemih, Balkan

**POVZETEK** – Učenci in učitelji jezika uporabljajo različne strategije za zmanjšanje tujejezikovne anksioznosti. Obstoječe študije parcialno obravnavajo strategije, zato želi raziskava zapolniti raziskovalno vrzel. Raziskave nakazujejo, da je anksioznost najbolj prisotna pri govoru v tujem jeziku, zato se raziskava osredotoča na govorno anksioznost. Cilj je bil ugotoviti, katere strategije za zmanjševanje govorne anksioznosti v angleškem jeziku uporabljajo študenti in učitelji poslovne angleščine na visokošolskih ustanovah v Sloveniji, Hrvaški, Bosni in Hercegovini, Srbiji, Črni gori in Makedoniji. Rezultati so pokazali, da se vsi intervjuvani učitelji in večina študentov, ne glede na državo, zavedajo tega problema. Učitelji študentom pomagajo predvsem z zavestnim poudarjanjem tekočnosti govorjenja ter s proaktivnim ali retroaktivnim fokusom na morebitnih jezikovnih problemih, in sicer predvsem s tehniko takojšnjega, nemotečega preoblikovanja napak. Študenti prevladujoče uporabljajo negativne strategije, kot so kratki odgovori, vztrajanje v pogojeni "fosilizirani" angleščini, neodzivnost, molk, izogibanje očesnemu stiku z učiteljem in izgovarjanje na izmišljeno bolezen.

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**KEYWORDS:** foreign language teaching/learning, business English, foreign language anxiety, strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety, retroactive focus on form, Balkans

**ABSTRACT** – Teachers and learners of foreign languages employ different strategies in their attempt to reduce foreign language anxiety. Since in the existing studies the strategies employed are only dealt with fractionally, this study is an attempt to more expansively present those used by both foreign language teachers and learners and thus fill the gap. Focusing only on speaking anxiety; the goal of this study is to determine and interpret business English teachers' and learners' strategies for minimizing English language speaking anxiety at tertiary educational institutions in Slovenia, Croatia, the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. The results indicate that teachers try to assist learners mainly by consciously striving for fluency and utilizing proactive and retroactive focus on linguistic form. Regarding the latter, the emphasis is on implicit, auditory recasts instead of direct correction. The learners generally apply negative avoidance strategies, such as resorting to short, "fossilized" replies, unresponsiveness, silence, avoiding eye-contact with the teacher, fictitious illness and skipping classes.

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety is an important factor affecting the learning of foreign languages (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994), a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Young, 1990), referring to "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with foreign language contexts, including speak-

ing, listening and learning” (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994, p. 284). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) were the first to treat foreign language anxiety as a separate distinguishable phenomenon, defining it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). They identified three interrelated components of foreign language anxiety: *communication apprehension*, defined as “a type of shyness characterized by the fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al. 1986, p. 127), *fear of negative evaluation* which refers to the “apprehension about others’ evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively” (Horwitz et al. 1986, p. 128) and test anxiety, which covers the examinations of the language learning process and is “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (p. 128). Horwitz and her colleagues (1986) also argued that all three components of foreign language anxiety have a negative impact on foreign language learning. Since speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening aspect of foreign language learning (Horwitz et al. 1991; Price, 1990; Young, 1990; Öztürk and Gürbüz, 2014), this study focuses on foreign language speaking anxiety.

Scientists agree unanimously that both teachers’ and learners’ perception of the phenomenon is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the teaching/learning process as only a wider range of such insights can advance more effective teaching/learning (Brown et al., 2014). Since the existing studies on coping strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety mainly deal with the perspective of learners (e.g., Pappamihiel, 2002; von Würde, 2003; Tsiplakides and Keramida, 2009) or teachers separately (e.g. Young, 1991; Tsui, 1996), this study aims to investigate the perspectives of both learners and teachers of business English (BE) at tertiary educational institutions who must possess not only the knowledge of the real content (general English), but also knowledge of the carrier content (i.e., economics). The goal of the study is to disclose and detail BE teachers’ and learners’ strategies for diminishing foreign language speaking anxiety at tertiary educational institutions in Slovenia, Croatia, the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia.

## **2. Theoretical background: Coping with foreign language learning anxiety**

Coping in a broader sense is expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict (Zeidner and Endler, 1996), in our case English language speaking anxiety. Coping mechanisms are commonly termed coping strategies or coping skills (ibid.).

### *Strategies for the reduction of personal and interpersonal anxieties*

Young (1991) reports, having examined numerous studies that are based on teachers’ apperception of learner anxiety and the use of various strategies to help

them verbalize their anxiety and identify their irrational beliefs or fears, that they are all founded on the postulate that if students can recognize their irrational beliefs, they will be able to interpret anxiety-provoking situations in more realistic ways and eventually opt for approaching rather than avoiding an anxiety-evoking situation. Pappamihiel (2002) found that avoidance was the most common coping strategy, although some learners, especially female, devised elaborate methods to participate indirectly. Some learners, with high levels of anxiety, also pretended that there was no one else around and ignored the class and the teacher. Positive strategies of this type include partaking in supplemental instruction or support groups, working with a tutor, joining a language club, doing relaxation exercises, and/or practicing self-talk (Young, 1991). For Tsui (1996), creating a collaborative learning atmosphere in the classroom, as well as establishing a good relationship between learners and teachers seems to be a decisive factor in overcoming foreign language anxiety.

### *Learners' beliefs*

To minimize anxiety based on learner beliefs, Horwitz (and Young, 1991) suggested that teachers discuss with their students reasonable commitments for successful language learning and the value of possessing at least some language ability. As students' beliefs about language learning can be based on limited knowledge and/or experience, the teacher's most effective course may be to confront erroneous beliefs with new information.

### *Teachers' beliefs*

To decrease the students' anxiety, teachers need to be sensitized to their role as language teachers in a learner-centred language environment (Young, 1991). This is potentially threatening, if teachers believe that all errors should be corrected since the teacher is the authority figure, who therefore may feel that intimidation seems necessary to motivate students. To decrease anxiety, teachers must never forget that mistakes are part of the language learning process and will be made by everyone (ibid.).

### *Classroom practices*

It is generally accepted that a relaxed and friendly classroom atmosphere as an educational environment is significant in minimizing anxiety. Von Wörde (2003) stressed that students expressed that their anxiety decreases when teachers make the class interesting and fun, using topics and themes relevant to their own lives and interests. A sense of communality in the classroom seems to contribute greatly to a relaxed atmosphere. Anxiety diminishes when students interact in activities that contribute to a feeling of group identity and support outside the classroom. To lessen the anxiety associated with classroom practices, teachers can do more pair and slightly larger group work and tailor their activities to the affective needs of the learners (Young, 1991). Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) observed foreign language classroom activities and realized that the incorporation of project work was especially

useful, because it can provide anxious and non-anxious students alike with abundant opportunities to use a foreign language in a non-threatening context. Students are more eager to participate in oral activities in small groups; therefore such work can be beneficial to anxious students as well as allowing, to some degree, the use of the learners' native language while not demanding that learners speak in front of the class. Teachers should also tolerate and provide a reasonable silent period to allow for necessary language processing, thus giving learners extra waiting time (Young, 1991). According to Horwitz's (2001), classroom levels of affiliation among learners, a lack of competition and a clear task orientation contribute to lower levels of anxiety (Zhang and Zhong, 2012). Tsui (1996) states that it is essential to focus on content and meaning rather than on grammatical form, accepting a variety of answers and allowing the students to check their answers with their peers before offering them to the whole class. However, during only meaning-focused lessons it may be difficult to reduce the students' anxiety and at the same time draw their attention to form/grammatical mistakes. Therefore, teachers may decide on a combination of both meaning and grammatical forms – that is, an instructional type called Focus on Form (FoF), with only brief, incidental instructional attention to linguistic features within a communicatively meaningful context (Doughty, 2003). The most widely used are proactive FoF (choosing a linguistic form in advance to present to students in order to help them complete a communicative task) and reactive FoF (the teacher responding to communication problems occurring after the event). As regards reactive FoF, teachers tend to resort to paraphrasing the students' sentences in order to highlight the mistakes. In other words, they use immediate contingent auditory recasting as implicit unobtrusive exchanges between the students and the teacher as opposed to direct correction (*ibid.*).

Kondo and Yang's (2004) built a systematic typology of strategies used by university students for decreasing foreign language learning anxiety: preparation (e.g., studying hard, trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes), relaxation (e.g., taking a deep breath, trying to calm down), positive thinking (e.g. imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension), peer seeking (e.g. looking for others who are having difficulty controlling their anxiety, asking other students if they understand the class), and resignation (e.g. giving up, sleeping in class). Based on their conceptualization, Kao and Craigie (2013) maintain that positive thinking may be the best coping strategy used when the students are experiencing anxiety. The results also revealed that resignation contributed to higher levels of anxiety than did the use of other coping strategies.

There are a substantial number of studies in the literature that have been carried out to reveal the strategies for reducing foreign language anxiety. However, none of them provide a comprehensive perspective of BE learners' and teachers' strategies at tertiary educational institutions. Therefore, the current study was guided by the following research question: What strategies do teachers and learners of BE in the Balkans employ to minimize English language speaking anxiety?

### **3. Method**

#### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 90 students (53 female and 37 male) in the first or second year at various faculties of Economics in Slovenia (15), Croatia (15), Bosnia and Herzegovina (15), Macedonia (15), Serbia (15) and Montenegro (15), ages 18 to 22. With a view to identifying the potential differences in the use of coping strategies among the students and teachers according to the socio-cultural environment, our research focuses only on BE students of Economics from six neighbouring Balkan countries who have approximately the same number of years of English language study – i.e., between 10 and 12, but they all study first-year BE.

The research also included 35 BE teachers (31 female and 4 male), 5 from each of the six countries, ages 24 to 58, who teach BE to the interviewed students. Finally, also the syllabuses for BE and the instruction itself are comparable in all six countries (Čepon et al., 2014).

#### *Data collection*

To find answers to the research question, in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews were used. In-depth interviews are appropriate for this kind of research because they provide clear, accurate and inclusive opinions based on personal experience (Burgess, 1982). Our goal was to explore the strategies used by teachers and students of BE for reducing English foreign language speaking anxiety in Balkan countries.

### **4. Results**

Research showed that there were no significant differences in answers among the interviewees from different countries. Interviews with the students and teachers showed that to deal with English language speaking anxiety on the personal and interpersonal levels, teachers predominantly used positive anxiety-reducing strategies consciously, while students used mainly negative anxiety-reducing strategies subconsciously. As expected, the students did not seem to be aware of either the teachers' beliefs or the fact that the teachers were employing certain strategies to minimize their anxiety. Even if teachers do pay greater specific overall attention to the issue, the interviews revealed that teacher and student opinions bear a striking similarity regarding the use of strategies for lowering speaking anxiety through classroom practices.

#### *Students' anxiety-reducing strategies*

To start with the prevailing negative avoidance strategies; students may resort to short, "fossilized" replies, unresponsiveness, silence, avoiding eye-contact with the

teacher, fictitious illness and skipping classes. For example, a student from Macedonia said “I use the excuse of being sick or having a sore throat, so that I don’t have to speak in class”. A student from Montenegro said he asked the teacher to excuse him from speaking in front of a class at the very beginning of the semester. The students with higher levels of speaking anxiety tried to make themselves less noticeable in class, so that the teachers did not engage them in speaking activities, by pretending to look at their notes, keeping a low profile and busying themselves with unimportant chores. One Croatian student referred to his strategy of volunteering regularly to read rather than talk in order to give the impression that he was vocally active. Many students admitted that they tended to agree with everything said in class only to avoid speaking, or they spoke so quietly that the teacher was forced to repeat the same question a few times before being able to hear them. Upon correction, they sometimes denied making mistakes, claiming that the teacher had misunderstood them, accompanying such claims with body language that might suggest hostility. Another negative strategy is to create an environment in class in which the first student to speak is embarrassed. According to the interviewees from different countries, such tendencies at times prevented good speakers from showing off their knowledge of English, which if exercised may have exacerbated the anxiety of lesser speakers.

Regarding the use of more positive strategies; a few more advanced students admitted to frequently breaking the awkward silence in class by speaking on their own initiative. To diminish any possible levels of anxiety, some of them tried to look for opportunities to practise speaking in their home countries as well as making the best use of additional speaking activities offered at school or online (e.g. using online discussion boards). Others frequently asked for help from schoolmates, relatives and others who spoke good English in an attempt to empower themselves to express themselves through extra practice. Some more anxious students realised that besides a lack of knowledge of general English and BE vocabulary, the fundamental reason that caused nervousness during speaking was the basic fear of public speaking, leading potentially to ridicule. Therefore, they tried different positive strategies to overcome their speaking anxiety, such as individual motivation and positive thinking, talking with more advanced classmates, friends or relatives, speaking in front of a mirror, recording, listening and improving their speech in English, speaking through the internet, participating in student exchange programmes, summer schools and going abroad.

#### *Teachers’ anxiety-reducing strategies*

The teachers were more aware of the problem of speaking anxiety than the students and consequently focused more on conscious strategies than the students. Most teachers did not try to assert a dominant role in the class, instead attempting to embrace each student individually as a personality, respecting his/her opinions and way of thinking, assisting them according to their existing interlanguage and the degree of their anxiety. Most teachers stated that it was crucial to create the awareness among students that they were not the only ones to experience speaking anxiety; secondly, that it was normal to make mistakes and that the teachers’ primary role was not to fix

student's mistakes in class. A Slovene teacher said that she always took great care to be able to judge, depending on the situation in class, who would be able to participate in a debate and who would not, and that nobody criticized or ridiculed less advanced students. A Serbian teacher said that she was presenting affective strategies for controlling emotions and managing discomfort when communicating with others. Most teachers avoided situations in which the students would be surprised or caught unprepared; they tended to provoke more proficient students to engage in the discussions. The students did not approve of this strategy as it seemed to increase their anxiety. Most teachers claimed that they asked easier questions of students who were more anxious. Realizing that insisting on the students speaking at all times may critically increase their speaking anxiety, a great number of teachers took care that the students did not speak until they felt ready. A Slovenian teacher reported teaching students how to lessen the burden of having to speak constantly simply by using the phrase "And you?" – an easy way to return a "communication ball" to an interlocutor. A Bosnian teacher reported that she allowed the students to make short notes before speaking. A Croatian teacher said that at the end of each lecture she announced the activities for the next week, so that students could come prepared. As a special technique for decreasing speaking anxiety, Serbian students related that they asked the teacher to show them a mock exam and to present the criteria for oral assessment. Some teachers prepared video clips based on speaking anxiety topics and discussed the problem in class. Most teachers also reported that they were organizing additional lectures, workshops, consultations and presentations with a view to practising speaking in English. A Slovene teacher explained that she was encouraging students to praise each other: "Our brains are not subconsciously aware of who is praising them, so I teach the students to praise each other, for example, to pat each other on the backs." Quite a few teachers recommended that the students should take pleasure in discovering aspects of the English culture embedded in the new language (songs, newspapers, magazines, customs and various aspects of daily life). The teachers also related that they were assisting the students with a variety of advice on how to reduce speaking anxiety by undertaking activities requiring the use of English, for instance choosing a hobby that would be conducive to learning BE, or frequenting instructive web sites.

The majority of the teachers stressed that they focused on the fluency and not on accuracy, striving to encourage the students to express themselves freely without thinking about making mistakes or feeling anxious. The teachers claimed that they were careful not to cause additional anxiety while correcting mistakes; therefore they almost without exception used proactive and retroactive FoF. According to the interviews, they preferred a retroactive technique of using implicit, unobtrusive paraphrases of the students' sentences, called auditory recasting, to direct correction. As a Bosnian teacher put it, she was afraid that the feedback itself could cause "the blockage", and one Croatian teacher was "adjusting questions and reporting mistakes depending on the individual." Quite a few teachers said they were "recording mistakes and presenting them in front of the whole class" and a Slovene teacher was "analysing

mistakes only as a group practice and not as individual mistakes and always complimenting the students at the same time”.

Very few teachers used the negative strategy of ignoring the physical manifestations of fear, such as trembling hands and a shaky voice. A teacher from Bosnia and Herzegovina said that he was “pretending that students are not nervous, because this helps me to wait for them to speak and it also helps them to surmount their fear of speaking.” Most of the other teachers stated exactly the opposite, that they adopted the positive strategy of trying to identify the students with English language speaking anxiety to help them in various empathic ways.

To reduce English language speaking anxiety, teachers attempted to change students’ incorrect beliefs by motivating them in various ways and raising their self-esteem. For instance, a lot of students believe that speaking anxiety is a problem specific to them. Therefore teachers often decided to assure them that the problem is quite common. For instance, they informed the students that even native speakers felt speaking anxiety and have to practice their speech; above all, teachers have been doing their best to convey that students can conquer anxiety in various ways, even simply by thinking of a different word when stuck trying to recall a precise one. The belief that you only have to study in order to get good grades is very common among the students; therefore, teachers were trying to convince them to learn English for themselves by presenting them with the benefits of knowing BE (from a Croatian teacher). A Montenegrin teacher reported that she was trying to persuade her students that it was not necessary to speak with immaculate English pronunciation in order to be able to successfully communicate in BE. The students seemed to believe that they can give the impression of excellence only if their English pronunciation is perfect. Many teachers said that they were trying to enhance their students’ self-confidence by telling them that they actually spoke better than they thought and that they should make more effort to speak even if they make mistakes.

The highest levels of consonance between teachers’ and students’ points of view were reached on the topic of using the following classroom practices, techniques, materials and topics to diminish speaking anxiety. Firstly, both teachers and students are fond of starting a class in an atmosphere relaxed through the telling of jokes and “idly chatting”. Overall, they emphasized the importance of creating a relaxed atmosphere in class to establish trust. Both related that one of the key classroom strategies to reduce speaking anxiety was dealing with topics apart from economics, such as themes concerning the current state of affairs in the country, the city, the possibilities of employment for young economists, pop culture, etc. According to a Slovenian teacher, “The intrinsic transactional nature of BE is quite stressful. BE students are restricted in their ability to express themselves in English and therefore they feel frustrated. Therefore, it is necessary to enable students to also speak about non-economics topics, anything familiar to them to boost their confidence.” Additionally, the use of materials such as crossword puzzles, songs, guesswork, etc., was mentioned by both as potentially having speaking-anxiety decreasing qualities. One of the more relax-

ing techniques that was mentioned was role-playing phone conversations with backs turned to each other. Finally, both students and teachers asserted that having enough time to prepare to speak was an essential strategy for lowering anxiety, as well as not insisting that all students are included each time.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Unlike previous studies, this study revealed that the students interviewed used primarily negative and elaborated strategies to reduce English language speaking anxiety. Most often they refused to respond or else they produced quite brief answers, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Quite anxious students tended to agree with everything said in class and were embarrassed to volunteer to speak out first in English. Some even skipped the lectures. The survey showed that all the interviewed teachers, irrespective of the countries of origin, were aware of the problem of speaking anxiety. They employed various techniques to assist the students in different ways and primarily tried to customize their activities to the affective needs of the learners (Young, 1991). However, their primary concern was the creation of as many ways as possible of giving them an appetite to learn English. The interviewed teachers used strategies that had been identified by other studies (Young, 1991; Tsui, 1996; von Word, 2003; Tsiplakides and Keramida, 2009); among others, providing a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom where language errors are considered natural in the process of language learning, implementing group and project work and focusing on fluency rather than accuracy. One of the strategies was to employ proactive and retroactive FoF as an anxiety-reducing technique. Additionally, they tended to avoid overcorrection and as part of retroactive FoF, and instead of direct correction, they used implicit unobtrusive exchanges in the form of immediate contingent auditory recasting (Doughty, 2003). Another strategy was promoting conversations about familiar, non-economic topics, as well as allowing sufficient time for answering and waiting for the students to speak until they had exhibited an eagerness to do so (Krashen, 1982).

Teachers therefore need to find creative ways to reinforce their students' existing effective coping behaviours and eliminate those that are maladaptive. Teachers should continue to provide support to anxious students and strive for deeper insights into students' ways of coping with speaking anxiety. An environment conducive to minimizing speaking anxiety and a focus on developing the necessary skills for coping with speaking anxiety is absolutely crucial. The study indicates that negative coping strategies could be transformed into effective anxiety-coping strategies (Kao and Craigie, 2013).

Although the study has provided valuable insight into anxiety-coping strategies, there are limitations. Because the sample was restricted to 35 teachers and 90 students of business English, the results cannot be generalized to include all students and teachers of business English in Slovenia and the Balkans. Other methods of data

collection may be employed with a view to generalizing the results to a larger sample, for example, to other neighbouring countries in the European Union. To verify the interviewees' self-reported information, direct observation of classroom practices could be used in further research.

Dr. Slavica Čepon

### **Strategije za zmanjšanje anksioznosti pri govoru v angleškem jeziku na Balkanu**

*Anksioznost je pomemben dejavnik, ki vpliva na učenje tujega jezika. Učenci in učitelji uporabljajo različne strategije, s katerimi jo skušajo zmanjšati. Obstoječe študije parcialno obravnavajo strategije, predvsem ali s stališča učencev ali učiteljev jezika ločeno, zato želi raziskava predstaviti tako strategije učiteljev kot učencev ter zapolniti raziskovalno vrzel. Obenem raziskave nakazujejo, da je anksioznost najbolj prisotna pri govoru v tujem jeziku, zato se raziskava osredotoča na le govorno anksioznost (Price, 1990; Young, 1990; Horwitz idr., 1991; Öztürk and Gürbüz, 2014). Cilj je bil ugotoviti, katere strategije za zmanjševanje govorne anksioznosti v angleškem jeziku uporabljajo študenti in učitelji poslovne angleščine (PA) na visokošolskih ustanovah v Sloveniji, Hrvaški, Bosni in Hercegovini, Srbiji, Črni gori in Makedoniji.*

*Pregled obstoječih raziskav kaže, da učenci in učitelji uporabljajo strategije za zmanjšanje anksioznosti pri govoru v tujem jeziku na različnih ravneh. Strategije za zmanjšanje anksioznosti na osebni in medosebni ravni izhajajo iz predpostavke, da učitelj prepozna anksioznost pri učencih, jim pomaga verbalizirati in sprejeti anksioznost kot neracionalno prepričanje (Young, 1991). Ključno je preprečiti, da bi se učenci zaradi strahu izogibali pouku, kar je po ugotovitvah Pappamihiela (2002) najpogostejša negativna strategija učencev. Strategije na tem področju vključujejo tudi organizacijo dodatnih oblik dela za študente z visoko stopnjo anksioznosti (Young, 1991). Za zmanjšanje anksioznosti, ki temelji na učenčevih prepričanjih, Horwitz (v Young, 1991) svetuje pogovor o napačnih prepričanjih učencev, ki jih mora učitelj spremeniti z novimi informacijami. Strategije, ki temeljijo na prepričanjih učiteljev, izhajajo iz spoznanja, da učitelj ni več dominantna oseba v razredu ter da so napake pri govorjenju v procesu učenja jezika normalne (ibid.). Strategije, ki temeljijo na praksah v razredu, so usmerjene v ustvarjanje sproščenega vzdušja v razredu. Študenti poročajo o manjši anksioznosti, ko učitelji obravnavajo "manj poslovne" teme iz vsakdanjega življenja. Bistveno za zmanjšanje anksioznosti je tudi ustvarjanje podpore v razredni skupnosti (von Würde, 2003) ter uporaba skupinskega in projektne delo (Tsiplakides in Keramida, 2009). Ker nobena obstoječa raziskava o strategijah za zmanjšanje anksioznosti pri govoru v tujem jeziku ne vključuje učencev in učiteljev poslovne angleščine, smo si zastavili naslednje raziskovalno vprašanje: Katere strategije učitelji in učenci poslovne angleščine na Balkanu uporabljajo za zmanjševanje anksioznosti pri govoru v angleškem jeziku?*

Da bi odgovorili na raziskovalno vprašanje, smo izvedli poglobljene intervjuje z 90 študenti ekonomije iz Slovenije, Hrvaške, Bosne in Hercegovine, Srbije, Črne gore in Makedonije. V raziskavo je bilo vključenih tudi 35 učiteljev, ki v teh državah učijo intervjuvane študente poslovno angleščino.

Raziskava je pokazala, da med intervjuvanci iz različnih držav ni bilo bistvenih razlik v odgovorih. Študenti za zmanjšanje anksioznosti na osebni in medosebni ravni prevladujoče uporabljajo negativne strategije. Večina intervjuvancev je navajala, da sta ključni strategiji neodzivnost in molk. Običajni so izjemno kratki odgovori, izogibanje očesnemu stiku z učiteljem, izgovarjanje v razredu na namišljeno bolezen in odsotnost od pouka. Študenti z visoko stopnjo anksioznosti želijo biti čim bolj nevidni v razredu, zato ne izražajo svojega pravega mnenja, da jim ne bi bilo treba govoriti.

Študenti uporabljajo tudi pozitivne strategije. Ena od teh je, da boljši študenti samoiniciativno razbijajo molk ter spregovorijo prvi. Nekateri so poročali, da skušajo poiskati dodatne priložnosti za komuniciranje v angleščini v domačem okolju, obenem pa tudi izkoristiti dodatne izvenšolske priložnosti za govor v angleščini ter dodatne šolske dejavnosti, npr. konzultacije, gradiva in nasvete učitelja o zmanjševanju anksioznosti pri govorjenju.

Manjše število učiteljev uporablja negativno strategijo ignoriranja fizične manifestacije strahu pri študentih, čeprav je v literaturi splošno sprejeto (Young, 1991), da problema anksioznosti ni moč rešiti z zanikanjem ali ignoriranjem. Večina drugih učiteljev je poročala, da uporabljajo pozitivno strategijo, ko poskušajo prepoznati anksiozne študente in jim na različne načine empatično pomagati.

Za zmanjšanje anksioznosti pri govorjenju v PA skušajo učitelji v pogovoru s študenti spremeniti napačna prepričanja študentov, jih na različne načine motivirati in dvigniti samozavest. Študenti pogosto menijo, da je anksioznost samo njihova individualna težava, zato jih želijo učitelji prepričati, da je to težava številnih učencev tujega jezika. Veliko učiteljev je tudi poudarilo, da učence motivirajo z dejstvom, da se anksioznost med govorjenjem pojavlja tudi pri naravnih govorcih tujega jezika, torej v njihovem maternem jeziku, ter da je za njeno premagovanje treba dodatno iskati priložnosti za govorjenje v prostem času.

V predstavljanju strategij za zmanjševanje anksioznosti, ki temelji na prepričanjih učiteljev, je večina intervjuvanih učiteljev poudarila drugačnost svoje vloge v razredu: ne želijo več imeti dominantne vloge, študente sprejemajo kot osebnost, spoštujejo njihovo razmišljanje in pomagajo glede na obstoječe znanje PA in prisotnost anksioznosti pri govorjenju. Ključno je ustvariti spoznanje pri učencih, da ne obstaja samo en pravilni odgovor, da so napake v procesu učenja normalne in da učitelji niso v razredu zgolj zaradi popravljanja napak. Učitelji uporabljajo različne pozitivne strategije pri popravljanju napak, pri tem pa skoraj vsi govorno anksioznost zmanjšujejo z osredotočanjem na tekočnost govorjenja in ne na točnost. Študentov pri govorjenju kljub napakam ne prekinjajo. Na anksioznost vplivajo predvsem na dva načina: prvič, s selektivnim popravljanjem samo večjih napak, pri čemer študentov nikoli ne prekinjajo; in drugič, ali s proaktivnim fokusom na morebitnih jezikovnih problemih ali pa, prevladujoče, z

retroaktivnim fokusom potem, ko je napaka že storjena. Pri slednjem gre predvsem za uporabo tehnike takojšnjega, nemotečega preoblikovanja napak.

Učitelji in učenci so navajali podobne prakse v razredu za zmanjševanje anksioznosti pri govorjenju v poslovni angleščini. Vsi so poudarjali, da je pomembno ustvariti sproščeno vzdušje in dovolj časa za pripravo na govorjenje.

Ker med študenti dosledno prevladujejo negativne strategije zmanjševanja anksioznosti, morajo učitelji najti ustvarjalne načine za krepitev obstoječih pozitivnih strategij in opustitev negativnih. Učitelji naj pomagajo študentom tako, da jih seznanijo z načini zmanjšanja anksioznosti in ustvarijo okolje, v katerem se bodo njihovi študenti zavedali anksioznosti in se osredotočili na razvoj veščin za njeno premagovanje.

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