

**LINGUISTIC SELF-CONFIDENCE:
A PERCEPTION OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SETTING**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is to examine the perception of Pakistani university students' linguistic self-confidence in English as a foreign language across variety of conversational contexts i.e. public encounters, small meetings, large meetings and group discussions. The examination of Linguistic Self-Confidence (LSC) under aforementioned conversational contexts was limited to three types of interlocutors such as friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Linguistic self-confidence can generally be viewed as one of the great sources of encouragement for L2 learners to communicate in English (Clark, 1989:237). The research participants (N=100) of the study were from the Department of English, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Pakistan who were studying English for last couple of years in the department. For the analysis of the data, Statistical-analysis Package for Social Science (SPSS 22) was used analyzed data obtained through questionnaire. Also, Pearson correlation was run to examine the relationship of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' linguistic self-confidence with three aforementioned audiences. The findings of the study suggested that significant number of informants were linguistically competent to communicate in English. It was also found that there was no statistically significant relationship between the students' LSC with friends and acquaintances as well as with friends and strangers. But there did appear to be a correlation of the students' LSC with strangers and acquaintances. Based on the results, suggestions were recommended for future studies along with limitations.

Keywords: Linguistic Self-confidence, Foreign Language Setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For years teachers have been observed saying that confidence is an aid to effective communication. They may be right in their assessment when they witness how some students are eager to communicate in L2 and others seem to avoid it due to a lack of confidence. This could be a general assessment among the teaching

community because they observe the day to day reality, particularly in the classroom, where some students excel at L2 communication and many other students underperform or may not be able to achieve their desired results. There are multiple factors affecting students' performance in L2 communication. Self-confidence is probably one of the major factors playing a very defining role in overall performance of learners. Clark (1989:237) states that "confidence allows a student to develop a desire to communicate". This suggests that confidence could be an effective tool for communication in L2. Learners certainly seem to be more willing to communicate if their L2 confidence is higher. DeVito (1986, cited in Clark, 1989:237) argued that "self-confidence supposedly enhances one's ability to achieve goals through communication as well as the capacity to provide mutual satisfaction for interpersonal interactions". Onwueguzie *et.al.*, (2000) stated that students who have a higher level of self-confidence were likely to be interacting more with the members of an L2 community, providing them with further exposure to maximize their confidence level.

There are two immediate variables which seem to play a major role when it comes to defining linguistic self-confidence, namely the L2 learners' perception of second language competence and their level of anxiety. Clément (1980) defined self-confidence by relating two of the cognitive variables, perceived self-competence and language anxiety. He further argued that these variables could predict the language achievement of the L2 learners. Besides these variables, there could be many other factors which may affect one's Willingness To Communicate (WTC) in English. Time, past experience and motivation can be seen as important factors improving one's WTC in English. There are a host of L2 studies which have interpreted that perceived competence is predominately based on the actual competence of the learners. The relationship between perceived competence and actual competence, in the opinion of L2 researchers seems to suggest that "evaluating self-perception of competence is an efficient mechanism for putting students at appropriate levels, saving both the time and the expense of formal testing" (MacIntyre *et.al.*, 1997:266).

It was also highlighted by McCroskey and Richmond (1991) that L2 learners are, in general, cognitively aware of their perceived L2 competence rather than their actual competence. This awareness,

which is based on the L2 perceived competence, largely affects the decision of L2 learners whether to initiate communication in the L2 or not (McCroskey and Richmond, 1991). This distinction between the perceived and actual competence in L2 seems reasonable because students often tend to rely on their previous or current language ability enabling them to determine whether or not they are willing to communicate in English.

Furthermore, it has also been viewed that the frequency and pleasantness of contact with members of a second language community could also be an aid in the development of self-confidence (Clément, 1980). Some of the researchers believe that self-confidence is closely interlinked with frequency and quality of L2 use, achievement, and motivation (Noels, Pon, Clément, 1996; Clément, 1980; Clément, Gardner, Smythe, 1980). A study was conducted by Clément *et.al.*, (1980) in Canada in which the participants were Francophone students. On the basis of their findings, they argued that one's self-confidence develops through contacting and communicating with L2 groups. There seems to be a reasonable justification to this argument because communication with members or groups of an L2 community enhances the self-confidence of L2 learners in different contexts with a variety of audiences. This point is further cemented by another study conducted by Noels et al (1996) with Chinese students in Canada. Their findings suggested that self-confidence in English encourages learners to mingle with Canadians and use English frequently. It should be noted at this point that it may not only be linguistic self-confidence which could help L2 learners mingle with native speakers; there may be a number other factors such as the overall attitude of the community you are speaking to, feeling comfortable when one wishes to engage into conversation, the identity and culture you belong to and so on.

RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

From the review of the literature, it could be argued that linguistic self-confidence, to greater extent, may exert potential influence on the L2 learners' achievements in the target language. Considering the number of the number of speakers English as a second/foreign language, there appears to be substantial need to investigate linguistic self-confidence with different groups of learners under different cultures and contexts. In country like Pakistan, it is

often seen that L2 learners not only have least access to modern day facilities of learning English, but also exposure to use L2 has been almost non-existent. Resultantly, it is likely that students seem to be quite nervous and less competent to communicate in English which collectively affect their overall performance negatively. To be more specific, this kind of situation seems to be on the rise in the rural areas of the country where students have hardly have access to internet. Warsi (2004) states although English enjoys a prominent role in Pakistan, despite that learners after studying in Schools and colleges for about 6 to 8 years still find it difficult to communicate in English with relative ease.

Besides that this research study would be great contribution in the existing literature to fill the methodological gap in particular to Pakistani context, because very limited amount of studies seem to have conducted to investigate Pakistani EFL students' linguistic self-confidence. This empirical research is an attempt to raise issues of linguistic self-confidence faced by Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan. Thus, following research questions were developed to examine the perception of Pakistani university students' linguistic self-confidence in foreign language setting:

- Q1. What is the perception of linguistic self-confidence of Pakistani university students in EFL setting?
- Q2. What is perception of the Pakistani university students' linguistic self-confidence with friends, acquaintances and strangers?

METHODOLOGY

Research site and Participants: The research site for present study was Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur. Although Khairpur is one of the oldest cities of the country, however, the research activities, and very specifically, empirical research in the realm of English language learning or teaching has rarely been centre of nucleus or surfaced in this city either in the past or even in the recent history. Therefore, it was one of the major reasons to surface the issues L2 learners face in one of the less developed cities of country because it would further broaden our understanding regarding issues concerned to L2 in areas which are far less developed both commercially and educationally. It was also noticed that students from this university had very rare chances of both learning English as

a foreign language and exposure to use it specifically for communication purposes. The most interesting aspect of conducting research in this university was that students were from far and wide areas of the city and most of them were from those villages where the concept of English language learning is still considered to be significantly next to impossible. This negligence has generated considerably greater enthusiasm among the L2 students to learn English. Therefore, the students of the Department of English very eagerly and wittingly showed their interest to participate in this research study because they assumed that this empirical inquiry concerning the problems they often faced while initiating communication in English would suggest them some of the ways to tackle them. The N=100 learners of English eventually provided their full consent to participate in this study and those informants were from under graduate and postgraduate classes of the Department of English, Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur. The age range of the participants of the study was between 18 to 22 years. It should also be highlighted here that most of the informants, if not all of them, belonged to villages and suburb areas of the city due to which communication both in the spoken and written forms was considerably low.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Perceived Communication Competence: Linguistic self-confidence is another important facet of communication which is to be tested by choosing twelve items (Cronbach's alpha = .95) used by Yashima (2002) and MacIntyre & Charos (1996). These items are to be used to examine the extent to which the respondents feel linguistically confident in communicating in English. The participants of the current study would self-evaluate their English competence by opting for a number ranging from 0% (entirely incompetent) to 100% (entirely competent). The recipients of information, on this scale, are similar to the context of WTC scale.

RESULTS

As could be seen in table 1, students felt that they were, to a degree, competent enough to speak in English (M=57.69). As was the case with WTC, students felt more competent with friends instead of acquaintances and strangers. They were more competent in talking to

a group of friends in English and talking to a friend whilst standing in a line, whereas their competence level significantly decreased when it came to interact in English with acquaintances and strangers in large meetings. It showed that students seemed to have felt relatively competent conversing in English with the people they knew or with whom they have just any relationship, i.e. friends and acquaintances. Talking in large meetings seemed to have caused a great deal of problem for students. It was the only context where students felt less competent in front of friends, strangers and acquaintances.

TABLE-1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDENTS'
LINGUISTIC SELF-CONFIDENCE (LSC)

Linguistic Self-Confidence	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1-Talk in a large meeting of friends <u>in English</u>	0	100	61.04	31.008
2-Talk with a friend while standing in line <u>in English</u>	0	100	66.99	32.557
3-Present a talk to a group of friends <u>in English</u>	0	100	73.75	27.628
4-Talk in a small group of friends <u>in English</u>	0	100	69.11	30.727
5-Talk in large meeting of acquaintances <u>in English</u>	0	100	44.57	30.418
6-Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line <u>in English</u>	0	100	49.81	30.361
7-Present a talk to a group of acquaintances <u>in English</u>	0	100	51.53	29.857
8-Talk in a small group of acquaintances <u>in English</u>	0	100	52.09	30.616
9-Talk in a large meeting of strangers <u>in English</u>	0	100	51.74	30.953
10-Talk with a stranger while standing in line <u>in English</u>	0	100	57.18	30.787
11- Present a talk to a group of strangers <u>in English</u>	0	100	62.18	28.748
12-Talk in a small group of strangers <u>in English</u>	0	100	55.53	30.842
Total			57.96	8.786

As mentioned in Table-1, there was a statistically no significant correlation between the students' LSC with friends and acquaintances

as well as with friends and strangers. But there did appear to be a correlation of the students' LSC with strangers and acquaintances.

TABLE-1.1
CORRELATION IN STUDENTS' LSC BETWEEN FRIENDS,
STRANGERS AND ACQUAINTANCES

	Correlation	R	p
LSC	(friend and	0.162	0.1
LSC	(friend and stranger)	-0.021	0.83
LSC	(stranger and	0.430*	0.00

* Correlation is significant at 0.01 Level (2-tailed)

As illustrated in Figure-1, most students seemed to have a fair amount of linguistic self-confidence while communicating in English. Students were more linguistically competent in conversing with friends in English (67.7%), whilst they felt less linguistically competent in commencing communication both with acquaintances and strangers.

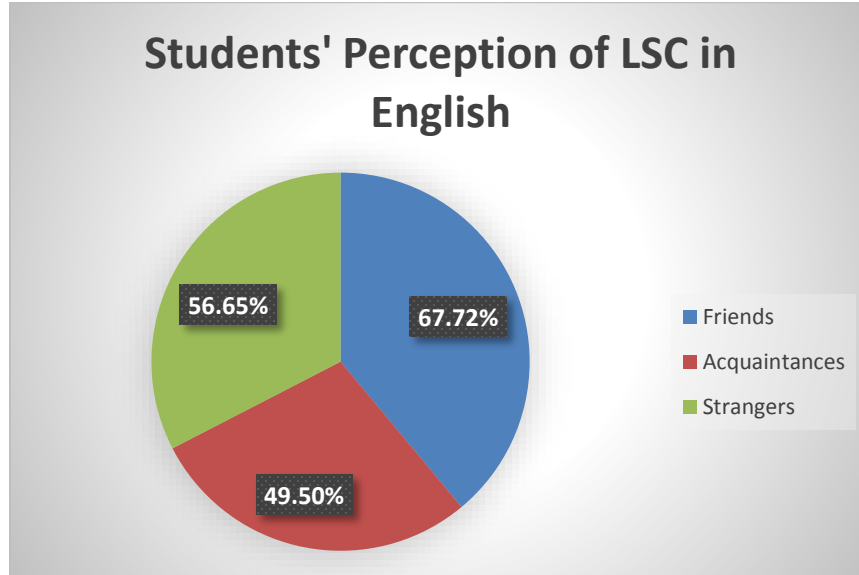


Figure-1 Students' Perception of LSC in English

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the linguistic self-confidence of Pakistani university students under variety of conversation contexts (i.e. public speaking, small meeting, large meeting and group discussions) and across variety of interlocutors like friends, acquaintances and strangers. This study was conducted among Pakistani English language learners in a setting and context where English was taught, learnt and used as a foreign language. The findings of the study indicated that students were found to be relatively competent to communicate in English. As mentioned above in table 1, students felt they were, to a degree, competent to converse in English ($M=57.69$). The most immediate reason behind being linguistically competent to speak in English seemed to be the mastery of grammatical structures and rules, remembering idiomatic expressions and a wide range of vocabulary. Students in Pakistan are under the impression that by giving time and effort to grammar, vocabulary, idioms and phrases, they could become linguistically competent. Furthermore, they seemed to be right in thinking this because an emphasis was given to grammatical rules, reading and writing, and no attention was provided to speaking and listening. This might be the reason that they felt they were, to an extent, competent at speaking in English. Students were found to be more competent when they communicated with a group of friends. The competence level of participants decreased significantly when they were asked to communicate with strangers and acquaintances in English in large meetings.

However, it was also found that students either felt competent with friends or with acquaintances, they were least competent when it came to interacting with strangers. Students seemed to stay away from strangers and were found to be unwilling and less competent to converse with them in English. Pleasantness of contact, positive evaluation, understanding, tolerance all seemed to be significant factors which could increase linguistic confidence of students. This is what the research found, that students seemed to have more confidence with friends and this may be due to the fact that friendly audience may not pose serious threat to the speakers they would be more tolerant and understanding than the unfamiliar audience in a given situation (McCroskey, 1984). This matched the findings of Cetinkaya (2005) that students felt more confident with friends

(M=61) and they were less confident when they communicated with strangers (M=40). Feeling linguistically competent with friends in English seemed to be motivated by the fact that students could have a pleasantness of contact and the satisfaction of achieving the required goal. Students might feel satisfied that they had, at least, spoken in English. Clément (1980) argued that the pleasantness of contact with the members of an L2 community could also be an aid to linguistic-self-confidence. Since Pakistani university students had no contact with the members of an L2 community, they could at least feel good and competent while communicating with friends.

There was a statistically no correlation between the students linguistic self-confidence with friends and acquaintances or when with friends and strangers. However, there was a statistically significant correlation of students' linguistic self-confidence with strangers and acquaintances.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current research has a number of limitations which will be thoroughly taken into consideration. At the beginning, the measurement tools constructed in this research comprised the self-report questionnaire. However, the data collected through questionnaire instrument is simply cross sectional view showing snapshot responses of the participants and therefore it lacks the illustrative insight. This is disadvantage of quantitative research. In order to have further illustrative insights, the qualitative data through structured interviews was also collected.

Further, the data collected from the students of the Department of English, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Pakistan, did not claim generalizations because it was context specific with the said sample. The research site which was Khairpur is one of the cities in Pakistan which is under developed with limited opportunities in education and job in comparison to the cosmopolitan cities. The economically marginalized and village background of informants could be a reason which is likely to bar any generalizations. Therefore, it may not be reasonable to generalize to all university students of Pakistan.

This research only focused the LSC of students' productive skills specifically speaking; the questionnaire instrument did not cover receptive skills such as listening and reading skills. Finally, the

questionnaire had some situations which students might not have experienced before in their real life. Therefore, replies to some of the questions in the questionnaire may be based on the understanding of the informants.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE STUDIES

The suggestions are proposed on the limitations of the current study. It is recommended that it would likely be of useful to investigate Pakistani university students' linguistic self-confidence in cosmopolitans (Mega cities) of the country where students come from rich families and where the educational institutions are equipped with the modern state of the art facilities. A questionnaire is an effective instrument for collecting a broad range of data in a short span of time. However, it is sometimes difficult to explore the research objective appropriately. Therefore, a triangulation including qualitative research instruments, including in depth-interviews or classroom observation, are suggested to further enrich and supplement the target issue.

There is dearth of research activities, in Pakistan, specifically in the discipline of the EFL. Therefore, it would likely be useful to test the factors such as students' WTC in English. These factors include:

- Gender comparisons
- Examining the relationship between linguistic self confidence in L2 and actual use of L2
- Linguistic self-confidence in L2 and L2 language learning achievement
- Comparisons between introvert and extrovert learners' linguistic self-confidence
- Studies of classroom activities in specific situation and with particular person, i.e. pair work conversation, task-based group work, and class-fronted discussion.
- Future research could attempt to explore linguistic self-confidence in English when they encounter different persons with different level of proficiency, for example, beginner vs. advanced.

CONCLUSION

The basic purpose of the undertaken research study was to investigate Pakistani university students' perception of their linguistic self-confidence with different interlocutors across variety of conversational contexts in a foreign language setting. The findings of

the study suggested that students often were competent enough to communicate in foreign language which was English and friends seemed to be pleasant audience and they felt more confident to communicate with. It might be due to the fact the friends often appear to be favorable audience and can give speaker more confidence to communicate in English. The results of the study may not claim generalization because informants of the study were from village background with limited opportunities to L2 exposure. Further research is required to investigate linguistic self-confidence of the students belonging to cosmopolitan cities of the country which could further enrich our understanding about Pakistani students' linguistic self-confidence.

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