SPEAKING ANXIETY OF FOREIGN LEARNERS OF TURKISH IN TARGET CONTEXT

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Abstract

While there are many studies on speaking anxiety in English, speaking anxiety in Turkish learned in target context remains under-examined. This qualitative study was intended to investigate the sources of speaking anxiety for foreign learners of Turkish as a second language and their coping strategies with these challenges. The data collected through semi-structured observations and open-ended questions from ten foreign learners of Turkish. The results of the content analysis revealed that the participants favored the target context for their speaking development because of the available chances for exposure to and practice in the target language. However, the participants also referred to some challenges increasing their speaking anxiety such as the fear of making mistakes, being negatively evaluated, immediate questions, self-comparison with others and self-evaluation. They also counted such anxiety-creating, context-specific factors as the fear of communicating with native speakers, having native-speaker teachers, accent of the local people, cultural differences between themselves and other interlocutors. They also reported coping strategies like considering mistakes as natural and beneficial, regarding the existence of native speakers and friends from other countries contributory for language development and cultural enrichment, having self-preparation and doing individual listening or watching activities. In the light of these results, some practical suggestions were provided.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, Turkish as a second language, foreign learners of Turkish, language education

1. Introduction

Since language is the basic tool for communication, it is essential to develop speaking skill in language learning process. However, successful development of speaking skill in language learning can be under the influence of different factors, one of which is the notion of anxiety. As an affective variable, anxiety can be defined as a "state of apprehension, a vague fear" (Scovel, 1978, p. 134). Regarding the autonomic nature of variable, Spielberger (1983) describes anxiety as the "subjective feeling of tension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 15). Specifically focusing on the anxiety felt in language learning process, MacIntry and Gardner (1994) maintain that anxiety can be "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language context including speaking" (p. 284).

There are mainly three types of anxiety influencing the language learning process. One is trait anxiety which is related with the personality of the learner and can be observed in different situations as it is connected to personality characteristics (Brown, 1994; Philips, 1992). Another type is state anxiety which is about the reactions to certain conditions (Young, 1991). The last type is situation-specific anxiety, which is, like state anxiety, created by specific events and situations (Wang, 1998). MacIntry and Gardner (1991) utter that language learning can be an example of situation-specific anxiety.

As the pioneers examining the factors affecting foreign language anxiety in detail and develop the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) define language anxiety as a set of self-perceptions and behaviors connected with the specific act of language learning and propose three anxiety-related dynamics; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Communication apprehension refers to the uneasiness experienced while interacting with people. Fear of negative evaluation is the nervousness coming along with the case of being evaluated by other people. The last component, test anxiety, is about the fear of failure while performing. Brown (1994) also proposes a distinction between facilitating and debilitating anxiety. While the former type becomes a source of motivation for learner encouraging success, the latter causes negative feelings leading to failure.

Many studies centering on the notion of anxiety in language education reached the common conclusion that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill in the process (Effiong, 2016; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz, 2001; Humphries, 2011; Liu, 2009; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014; Young, 1990). A majority of these studies have been conducted in foreign language learning context in which the target language was English. In addition, these studies mostly centered on the examination of the sources of speaking anxiety and relatively fewer studies focused on the coping strategies of learners with the challenges (Akkakoson, 2016b; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Wei, 2013). Therefore, there is scarcity of research focusing on speaking anxiety experienced by foreign learners learning Turkish in second language learning context. Holding this research perspective, this study aims to examine the sources of speaking anxiety experienced by foreign learners of Turkish and their coping strategies with the anxiety-provoking factors in second language learning context.

1.1. Literature Review

Anxiety experienced in speaking skill has been a topic of continuous investigation in the field of language learning. Studies on speaking anxiety have been conducted either in foreign language learning contexts or second language learning contexts. This section is intended to present existing research first in foreign language learning context and then in second language learning context. One of the early examinations belongs to Young (1990). To examine the sources of speaking anxiety, the researcher developed a questionnaire related with foreign language speaking anxiety and conducted the questionnaire with 135 university students and 109 high school learners. The results showed that the challenge was not speaking in the foreign language but mainly speaking in front of class and teachers. With an aim to investigate sources of speaking anxiety for college-level students, Kitano (2001) asked 212 students learning Japanese in America to answer the items in the scale prepared by Horwitz, et al. (1986) and complete a self-rating can-do scale. The results revealed that participants' self-perceptions affected their anxiety level. Students with low self-perceived ability in speaking skill experienced more anxiety compared to those participants with higher self-perceived speaking ability. The researcher also noted that fear of negative evaluation also caused high levels of speaking anxiety. With a purpose to identify the correlation between foreign language anxiety and unwillingness to communicate, Liu and Jackson (2008) asked 547 first-year Japanese learners of English to complete a survey. The results pointed at the positive relationship between unwillingness and foreign language anxiety and indicated that many learners, though not experiencing problems in interpersonal dialogues, did not want to talk in English in the classroom and they head the fear of negative evaluation.

A study on speaking anxiety in Chinese context was offered by Tianjian (2010) who examined the relationship between speaking anxiety and the variables of trait anxiety, gender and proficiency. The results revealed that though there was not a significant correlation

between speaking anxiety and gender, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between proficiency and speaking anxiety. In addition, the researcher also attracted attention to the connection between personality traits and speaking anxiety. Another study in Chinese context was conducted by Mak (2011) who investigated the factors affecting speaking anxiety. The results of the FLCAS showed that fear of negative evaluation, uneasiness while speaking with native speakers, fear of failure, negative self-evaluation and speaking in front of the class without being prepared were among the factors creating anxiety. He (2013) carried out research on the factors causing speaking anxiety for Chinese learners of English. Conducting questionnaires with students and interviews with teachers, the researcher concluded that fear of being orally assessed, worries about fluency, pronunciation and intonation, fear of using the target language with other people, talking about unfamiliar topics and having time limitation in talking were the main factors causing anxiety while speaking.

Focusing on gender differences in speaking anxiety, Sadeghi, Mohammadi and Sedaghatgoftar (2013) worked with 38 male and 38 female Iranian learners of English. The results of the FLCAS revealed that female learners were more anxious than their male counterparts and fear of making mistakes, preparedness, linguistic difficulties, instructor-learner relationships, socio-cultural factors and self-perception were among the factors influencing the participants' speaking anxiety. Hamad (2013) aimed to examine the factors causing speaking anxiety in relation with students, instructors, curriculum, teaching methods and learning environment. The results obtained from a questionnaire and interviews with instructors indicated that the participants experienced anxiety in public speaking, that the curriculum and instructors did not encourage speaking much and that foreign context did not promote speaking development. Akkakoson (2016a) centered attention on the speaking anxiety experienced by Thai learners of English. The results of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview forms with 282 university-level Thai learners showed that limited vocabulary knowledge, self-confidence, attitudes towards the target language and background in the target language were the factors influencing the anxiety levels of the participants. Another research in Thai setting was presented by Wilang and Singhasiri (2017). The researchers developed a scale to examine the anxiety in English as a lingua franca. The answers of 240 Thai graduate EFL learners pointed at interlocutor-related difficulties and language-processing difficulties. The results also revealed that apprehension about interlocutors decreased the comprehensibility and intelligibility of interactions and thus increased anxiety.

Speaking anxiety in foreign language learning context has also attracted attention in Turkish context. In her doctoral dissertation, Aydın (2001) aimed to examine the sources of anxiety for EFL learners in Turkish context in speaking and writing skills. Thirty-six intermediate level learners completed the FLCAS and their anxiety levels were determined. These participants were also asked to keep diaries and one third of them were interviewed. The results showed that there were mainly three sources of anxiety for the participants: learner-related factors such as negative self-assessment, self-comparison with others and high expectations; teacher-related factors like teachers' attitude and teaching-related factors such as making presentations and speaking in front of the class. In an MA thesis, Balemir (2009) also investigated the factor influencing foreign language speaking anxiety as well as the relationship between speaking anxiety and proficiency level. The data were collected from 234 participants through a questionnaire and interviews. The researcher found out that proficiency level did not have major effect on speaking anxiety. Teaching and testing practices, individual reasons, fear of negative evaluation and some linguistic difficulties were among the sources of speaking anxiety for the participants. In his MA thesis, Öztürk (2009) examined the influential factors in foreign language speaking anxiety. The study included

383 prep class students. All the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and 19 participated in interviews. The results indicated that immediate questions, pronunciation, fear of making mistake and negative evaluation were among the causes of speaking anxiety.

Working with preparatory class EFL learners, Koçak (2010) conducted open-ended questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that lack of vocabulary, grammar and syntax knowledge, fear of failure, lack of chances for practice and fear of speaking in front of others were among the key causes of speaking anxiety. With a purpose to find out the anxiety-creating factors for 12 first year ELT Department students, Yalçın and İnceçay (2014) carried out a mixed-methods research. The results indicated that familiarity/unfamiliarity with the topic on which to speak, time limitation, preparedness and feeling of success/failure were the dynamics affecting the participants' speaking anxiety. Holding a perspective to assess the effectiveness of using paralinguistic features to decrease speaking anxiety, Uştuk and Aydın (2016) conducted an experimental study with 40 advanced-level ELF learners. After providing instruction with paralinguistic features to the experimental group, the researchers noted that instruction in paralinguistic features decreased the participants' speaking anxiety by reducing their communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation while increasing their test anxiety.

The second category of studies, which are not many in number, centered on speaking anxiety in second language context. Developing a scale for second language speaking anxiety, Woodrow (2006) aimed to examine the relationship between second language oral performance and anxiety levels. 275 advanced level English for academic purposes learners participated in the study. The results pointed at the negative relationship between speaking performance and anxiety levels. The researcher reported oral presentations, role-plays, group discussions and answering teachers' questions as in-class anxiety sources and having interaction with native speakers, talking with more than one native speaker and answering their questions as the out-of-class anxiety sources. The study also indicated that positive thinking, compensation, relaxation techniques and effort to develop language skills as ways to cope with speaking anxiety. To investigate the non-native learners' coping ways with speaking anxiety second language learning context, Terui (2012) conducted iterative interviews with six international students studying in a multilingual and multicultural context. The results showed that protecting self-esteem, keeping conversations flowing and open, benefitting from other clues and taking advantage of status were the tactics to deal with speaking anxiety. Centering on the issue of second language speaking anxiety from the perspective of immigrants, de Blakeley, Ford and Casey (2017) investigated the second language speaking experiences of 90 immigrants. The researchers maintained that the social context, self-perceived language proficiency, extroversion and age were the central causes of speaking anxiety in second language. The researchers also attracted attention to the observation that learners experiencing speaking anxiety may avoid interactions with native speakers or wish to remain silent as a way to cope with stress while speaking.

There are also some other studies examining the anxiety coping strategies of language learners as well as the sources anxiety for them. Examining the overall language anxiety experienced by Japanese learners of English and their coping strategies with the challenges, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) reported that the participants adopted five categories of coping strategies: positive thinking, relaxation, peer seeking, resignation and preparation. Sharing a similar perspective with Kondo and Ying-Ling, Kao and Craigie (2013) aimed to study the coping strategies adopted by 120 Taiwanese learners of English at tertiary level. They obtained similar results with the ones in Kondo and Ying-Ling's research, pointing at positive thinking and resignation as strategies used by the participants to cope with language learning anxiety. Working with 25 Chinese learners of English, Wei (2013) also referred to

such similar coping strategies with classroom anxiety as preparation, seeking for help, relaxation, positive thinking and resignation. Yoshida (2013) focused on the speaking anxiety experiences and the coping ways of three learners of Japanese at an Australian university. The researcher collected data through participant diaries, interviews and observations. The results showed that the participants considered making mistakes and maintaining accuracy as the main challenges increasing their speaking anxiety. They explained that they encouraged themselves to understand the importance of participation. They also noted that they began to learn from their mistakes instead of feeling anxious. Akkakoson (2016b) also aimed to examine the sources of speaking anxiety and the coping strategies of 88 EFL learners. The results obtained from the interviews showed that the participants' lack of self-confidence, their limited language background and lack of motivation were the factors increasing the learners' speaking anxiety. The participants stated that they were adopting affective, social, cognitive, meta-cognitive strategies in order to deal with the anxiety sources.

The perusal of literature indicates that speaking anxiety has been a widely-investigated topic in foreign language education, especially English as a foreign language. However, there is still a need for further studies on speaking anxiety in second language learning in different languages. Therefore, with an aim to contribute to research on second language speaking anxiety from a different perspective, this study is intended to examine sources of speaking anxiety experienced by foreign learners of Turkish in the process of learning Turkish as a second language in Turkish context.

2. Method

This study adopted qualitative research design in order to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) concerning speaking anxiety in learning Turkish as a second language. The main aim is to identify the sources of speaking anxiety exemplified through the lived-experiences of the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

2.1. Participants and Setting

This research was conducted at ATATÖMER (Teaching Turkish Center) at 2016-2017 academic year. ATATÖMER offers one-year-long Turkish language preparatory education to learners coming from different countries to follow their undergraduate or graduate studies in Turkey. The preparatory education lasts for 32 weeks, 960 hours. The Center provides learners with extra-curricular activities besides the curricular ones at school. Therefore, in such a context, the foreign students can be exposed to the target language and have the chance to practice it in its natural setting.

The participants in this study were 10 foreign students receiving Turkish education at ATATÖMER. They were coming from Georgia (one), Bashkortostan (one), Mongolia (one), Kazakhstan (two), Afghanistan (two), Kyrgyzstan (one), Iran (one) and Tajikistan (one). These students stated that they had stated learning Turkish in their countries before coming to Turkey. They were at A2 level of proficiency in Turkish when they started their target language education at ATATÖMER. The participants were at C1 level of proficiency at the end of their preparatory education. So, this learner profile had the experience to compare cases of learning the language in foreign context and target context.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data in this study were collected through two instruments. One of the instruments was classroom-observations. The researcher conducted six observations in speaking classes over a period of six months (one for each month). The researcher, based on previous studies, prepared a semi-structured guide to take notes during observations. During the observations,

the items in the guide as well as extra cases that were observed were noted for further evaluation.

The other instrument was open-ended questions. These questions were formed by the researcher in the light of literature and observation notes. The questions were in Turkish. After forming the questions, the researcher consulted two field experts (experts in teaching Turkish) for the understandability and validity of the questions presented below:

1. How can you compare your speaking anxiety during your foreign language education in your home country with your second language education in the target context (at ATATÖMER)?

2. Can you compare your speaking anxiety in the initial phases of preparatory class education with that at present?

3. How did learning Turkish in the second language learning context affect your speaking anxiety?

4. What factors affected your speaking anxiety level in and out of school context?

5. How did you overcome your speaking anxiety?

2.3. Data Analysis

In order to conduct a detailed analysis, the researcher adopted content analysis. Each data set was analyzed separately. First, the observation notes were analyzed to identify the recurring items. As there were six observation notes, the researcher compared the items in the notes. Then, the answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed. The answers of each participant were first analyzed individually and then a compare-contrast process was followed to make a cross analysis among the participants' answers. After each data set was separately analyzes, the researcher conducted a cross analysis again between the data sets. All these steps were followed to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the analysis.

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained through open-ended questions and classroom observation notes. The sources of anxiety experienced by the foreign learners of Turkish in second language learning context and their coping strategies with the challenges are displayed under five sub-sections according to the open-ended questions.

1. How can you compare your speaking anxiety during your foreign language education in your home country with your second language education in the target context (at ATATÖMER)?

Since all the participants in this study had started learning Turkish in their home countries, they could make comparisons between foreign and second language learning contexts regarding their levels of speaking anxiety. In their comparisons, they referred mainly to two contextual differences between two learning settings. The first contextual difference was the lack of native speakers and teachers in their language education in their home countries. Nine out of ten participants noted that not having native teachers to teach the target language and native speakers to practice the language was as a serious limitation in the process of learning Turkish in their home countries, as expressed by a participant as follows:

"Taking Turkish education at ATATÖMER is more advantageous because we have native teachers at the Center and native speakers out of the school. We can hear and observe how they use the language in communication. In my home country, I could learn the language only in the classroom but here I can learn the language everywhere because it is used everywhere." (participant from Afghanistan)

The limited chances for exposure to and practice in the target language in the foreign context also affected the speaking anxiety of the participants. All of them considered the lack of chances as a drawback increasing their anxiety during speaking because they could not have familiarity with the target language in spoken format. Reflecting this perspective, a participant stated that because she could not have chances to see how the target language should be used in different contexts, she experienced higher levels of speaking anxiety in speaking acts in her own country:

> "The act of speaking in my country was actually a more anxiety-creating experience for me. We were learning Turkish there (in Georgia) but we were not exposed to the target usages in authentic communication. As there were not native speakers of Turkish around, we also could not have much real practice of the language. Therefore, this situation increased my anxiety level in speaking because I was afraid of making mistakes while producing the language. I believe learning Turkish here (at ATATÖMER) is more advantageous and helpful." (participant from Georgia)

The observation notes also revealed that the participants considered having native teachers and speakers always around as a chance for their speaking development, which helped them decrease their speaking anxiety. I observed that while communicating with native teachers in the class or native speakers during the breaks, the participants were trying to learn new things from them as regards the appropriate usages of the language.

2. Can you compare your speaking anxiety in the initial phases of preparatory class education with that at present?

When asked to evaluate their second language learning experiences at ATATÖMER, all the participants maintained that they felt observable improvement in their language skills, speaking skill in particular, and this improvement helped them decrease their speaking anxiety. They explained that in the initial stages, especially in the first few weeks, when they were experiencing the adaptation process to the target environment, they felt high anxiety levels in speaking in the target language. The main reasons for their speaking anxiety were the fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by the native speakers of the language. One of the participants stated that, in the first few weeks, she was feeling so anxious while communicating with her teachers or native speakers that she was making more mistakes than she normally did in her home country:

> "When I came here first, I was really anxious speaking with my teachers at ATATÖMER or with the native speakers around. I experienced the fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed or being understood wrongly. Now, I can better realize how that situation increased my anxiety while speaking." (participant from Kazakhstan)

All the participants, fortunately, reported the chance for positive in their levels of speaking anxiety in time. The more they were exposed to the target language and practiced it in its natural setting, the more self-confident they became and the less anxiety they experienced in using the spoken form of the target language. They expressed their pleasure of their increased levels of confidence and decreased levels of anxiety while providing answers to this question. A participant stated that she was a bit shy at the beginning but she overcame it later and could benefit from the chances for development in the target context:

> "After getting used to the new learning environment, I could better adapt myself to the language learning process and I could benefit from the available chances in the target setting to improve my language skills. In time, I got over my shyness and became

more willing to engage myself in interaction with the native speakers of the language." (participant from Tajikistan)

As I conducted six observations over a period of six months, I could observe the change in the participants. In my first observation, I saw that all the participants were introverted and they were less willing to participate in speaking activities. They were only providing answers when the lecturer asked them some questions. However, in my following observations, I realized the change for positive in the level of self-confidence of the participants. I inferred that spending time in the target community and getting used to the new environment helped them overcome their shyness and unwillingness in speaking. Especially, in the last three observations, I saw the increase in their motivation and the decrease in their speaking anxiety. My observation notes also highlighted the decrease in the speaking anxiety of the participants.

3. How did learning Turkish in the second language learning context affect your speaking anxiety?

Taking the effect of learning context on their speaking anxiety, all the participants maintained that the second language learning environment had positive influence on their language learning motivation and provided them with an encouraging atmosphere to develop their language skills, especially speaking. The participants noted that though there were still some challenges for them affecting their speaking anxiety levels in initial stages, learning Turkish in the second language context is advantageous, as expressed by a participant:

> "Learning Turkish in Turkey is a more encouraging experience than learning it in my home country. Being in constant contact with the native speakers of the target language is an advantage for us to improve especially our speaking skill. Therefore, even if there are some factors still creating speaking anxiety, learning the language here is more helpful for us." (participant from Mongolia)

4. What factors affected your speaking anxiety level in and out of school context?

The answers of the participants to this question centered around nine factors affecting their speaking anxiety levels in and out of classroom environment. Two of the factors that all the participants pointed at were the fear of making mistakes while speaking with native speakers. The participants explained that they were afraid of making mistakes in communicative situations with native speakers and being wrongly understood by them. Though perceiving interaction with native speakers as an advantage, the participants experienced the pressure of making mistakes because the native speakers were the experts of the language. Referring to this factor as a problem increasing her speaking anxiety, a participant offered the below comment:

> "Talking with native speakers is a great chance for us to develop our speaking skill. However, I felt nervous, especially in the initial phases, while talking with native speakers because it was their language and they had a full command of it. This fact inevitably increased my speaking anxiety because I was afraid of making mistakes while interacting with them." (participant from Bashkortostan)

Fear of negative evaluation was another issue influencing the participants' speaking anxiety. As the participants were still in the process of expanding their language knowledge, they were making mistakes while producing the target language. Seven out of ten participants stated that these mistakes naturally increased their speaking anxiety because of the fear of being negatively evaluated based on their incorrect or inappropriate usages of the target language by their native-speaker lecturers and by the native speakers outside the classroom. Accordingly, a participant stated:

> "I know it is natural to make mistakes while learning the target language. And, the native speakers we are interacting with know that we are still learning the language. But, I still experience the fear of being misunderstood and being negatively evaluated by them." (participant from Kyrgyzstan)

Seven participants pointed at their focus on correct pronunciation as a factor increasing their anxiety levels during speaking. Four of these participants also referred to the focus on grammatical accuracy as an aspect influencing their speaking performances, thus, their speaking anxiety. A comment combining accuracy in grammar and pronunciation can be given as an example reflecting the experiences of these participants:

> "I believe language involves both grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, it is important for me to center my attention on grammatical appropriateness and correct pronunciation while speaking in Turkish. However, I sometimes focus too much on grammar and pronunciation and I make more mistakes than I normally do and this certainly decreases my motivation and increases my anxiety." (participant from Kazakhstan)

Immediate questions posed by native speakers during interaction was also another source of speaking anxiety for half of the participants. They stated that when they receive questions to which they were expected to provide quick answers, they experienced stress and anxiety. The more their anxiety increased, the longer it took for them to think of an answer. A participant not liking immediate questions in the target language explained that such questions increased his anxiety level and negatively affected his speaking performance:

> "I don't like immediate questions in the target language because when someone asks me a question, I need some time to think about it. Immediate questions influence my fluency in speaking and increase my anxiety." (participant from Afghanistan)

The remaining two sources of speaking anxiety were the participants' comparing their speaking performances with their friends and their self-evaluation regarding their own speaking performances. These two sources were reported by seven participants in total. The participants stated that while their classmates were speaking, they were making comparison between their own performances and those of their friends'. When they saw that a friend had better speaking performance, then the participants experienced anxiety. Another challenge for these participants was the act of self-evaluation. The participants were evaluating their own practices during and after speaking performances and these evaluations sometimes resulted in increased levels of speaking anxiety. Having these experiences, a participant remarked as the following:

> "When I speak with a native speaker, I constantly evaluate my own performance and this helps me realize my mistakes. When I make a mistake, however, I become demotivated and my speaking anxiety increases. In addition, while my friends are speaking in Turkish, I pay attention to their language use. When they have better performances than I do, I inevitably make a comparison and feel anxious." (participant from Iran)

An interesting point which was regarded as a challenge by three participants increasing their speaking anxiety was the accent of some local native speakers in target context. These participants reported experiencing anxiety while communicating with speakers who had noticeable accent in their speech. Since they had difficulty in understanding these people, they hesitated to find appropriate answers to maintain the conversation, which increased their anxiety while speaking, as a participant suggested:

"I like having conversations with local people but some of them have. When I talk with them, I sometimes feel anxious because I cannot understand all the things they say. So, I have difficulty in finding the true words to reply. This increases my speaking anxiety." (participant from Bashkortostan)

Having native-speaker teachers was also perceived as a factor to increase the speaking anxiety levels by two participants. The participants explained that they had native speaker teachers for every course in the target language setting. Although this is a big advantage, these participants reported to experience anxiety while communicating with native-speaker teachers in the initial weeks of their language education. Because it was their mother tongue, the teachers knew everything about the language and if the students made a mistake, they immediately realized it. One of these participants explained that she was sometimes feeling anxious while speaking Turkish with native teachers because of this reason:

"I know that learning the language from native-speaker teachers is an advantage but I sometimes feel anxious while communicating with my teachers. It is their language; they know everything about it. So, when I say something wrong, they can identify my mistake. When I try to speak with this in my mind, I really feel anxious." (participant from Afghanistan)

The cultural differences between the native speakers and foreign learners were also a source of anxiety for four participants negatively affecting their speaking productions. These participants explained that they experienced speaking anxiety because of the stress of saying something which was not culturally appropriate in the target setting. One of these participants provided an explanation based her experience as follows:

"When I first came here, I wanted to communicate with the local people so that I could learn more about their culture. In time, I realized that there are several basic cultural differences between my culture and theirs. So, this created a source of anxiety for me while speaking because I was afraid of saying something wrong." (participant from Georgia)

The cultural differences between the students and their classmates from different countries were also a cause of speaking anxiety for three participants. The cultural differences sometimes made it difficult for the participants to understand each other while communicating. The communication breakdowns resulted in increased levels of speaking anxiety for these participants, as maintained by one of them:

"Having classmates from different countries was nice but I sometimes had difficulty in interacting with them mainly because of our cultural differences. I was becoming anxious when I could not understand what they were saying. I think this, especially in the initial phases, increased my speaking anxiety." (participant from Kazakhstan)

During my observations, I also noted all the factors indicated by the participants, except 'comparison with classmates' item. Especially in my first three observations, the shyness and sometimes anxiety of the participants to make mistakes while speaking to their native-speaker lecturers and to me attracted my attention. I noticed that while they were speaking with us, they experienced the fear to be misunderstood. This tension and anxiety reflected itself in the way these participants were hesitating what to say or how to say things. For example, when the lecturer asked a casual question to one of the participants, I heard that the participant repeated the same thing several times with hesitation. When I asked her the reason for her hesitation and anxiety during the class, she answered that she was afraid of saying something wrong and convey the wrong meaning (participant from Mongolia). In my last two

observations, on the other hand, I realized the chance for positive in the participants' motivation and self-confidence in speaking in the target language with its native speakers.

I also noted that some of the participants were focusing much on true grammar and pronunciation. For example, I one of the participants was constantly checking her own language production while speaking and was immediately correcting her grammatical mistakes. She sometimes focused so much on grammatical correction that she nearly forgot what to say (participant from Kyrgyzstan). Another participant was frequently dealing with his pronunciation mistakes. Whenever he mispronounced a word, he was instantly correcting himself. However, this constant personal interruption distracted the participant's attention and negatively affected his fluency (participant from Kazakhstan). And, to note, the focus on correct grammar and pronunciation continued to be among the items in my observations.

Immediate questions posed during interactions were also a source of anxiety for some of the participants during my initial observations. I realized, for example, that when one of these participants was asked a quick question, she became anxious and tried to gain some time by saying "ımm, well" phrases. I also noticed the quaver in her voice while speaking (participant from Tajikistan). In addition, they could not provide fluent answers. Fortunately, the hesitations and anxiety levels of these participants caused by immediate questions decreased in time.

The observations also revealed that the participants were going through processes of self-evaluation. While they were realizing their grammar or pronunciation mistakes or while having the fear of negative evaluation, the participants were evaluating their own performances at the same time. These self-evaluations were helpful for them to realize the strengths and weaknesses of the participants but increased their speaking anxiety.

5. How did you overcome your speaking anxiety?

The participants referred to some common strategies to overcome the negative effects of speaking anxiety. One of the tactics they were adopting was having been prepared for speaking classes. Seven participants stated that they were studying the subject before the class when they knew the topic of the following session. However, the participants also stated that this tactic was not always useful since what to say is based on the flow of the communication, as expressed by a participant:

> "If I know what we will discuss in the following lesson, I prepare for it in the dormitory. I plan the things I can say during the lesson and this relaxes me and decreases my anxiety. However, it doesn't always work. For example, when I talk with a native speaker outside the school environment, how can I plan what I would say?" (participant from Kyrgyzstan)

Eight participants also referred to having individual inner speech and practicing aloud as ways to overcome their speaking anxiety. When they were practicing the spoken from of the language alone silently or aloud, they felt more comfortable and ready to speak with native speakers. A participant following these strategies commented that they helped her decrease her speaking anxiety since she felt more self-confident:

> "Whenever I have some spare time, I practice the target language on my own. I try to imagine different cases for interaction and then I start talking by myself. It may sound weird but it helps a lot to increase my confidence and decrease my anxiety." (participant from Tajikistan)

Considering mistakes as natural components of language learning process was another way followed by six of the participants to overcome their speaking anxiety. Since they were

afraid of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated, these participants developed a way to protect themselves from the adverse effects of anxiety experienced during their speaking performances. They encouraged themselves to regard their mistakes not as serious problems but as a way to promote their development in the target language. With the help of this strategy, they stated that they began to overcome the fear of making mistakes, as also expressed by a participant in the below comment:

> "When I first came here, I was really afraid of making mistakes and this increased my speaking anxiety. However, in time, I began to realize that mistakes were actually not so bad; instead, when I made a mistake, I could learn something new. Then, I started to value mistakes not as a source to create speaking anxiety but as a way to develop my language ability." (participant from Georgia)

The participants who were experiencing anxiety while communicating with the native speakers of Turkish also tried to deal with this challenge by trying to remind themselves that having native speakers around was actually an advantage for them to be exposed to the authentic language usages and to practice the language with its native speakers in different contexts. One of these participants noted that remembering this fact helped them reduce their speaking anxiety:

> "When I was communicating with a native speaker, I unavoidably felt anxious because of the fear of making mistakes or being negatively evaluated. But, I believe I can cope with this anxiety source better because I am aware of the fact that being with native speakers is a great opportunity for me to develop my speaking skill. Therefore, whenever I experience speaking anxiety, I remember this fact." (participant from Mongolia)

The participants considering cultural differences as an anxiety-provoking source while speaking with native speakers and with their classmates from different cultural backgrounds reported to adopt the strategy to consider cultural differences as a source of richness for them. In order to overcome the fear of saying something culturally inappropriate, two participants having this fear stated that they changed their approach regarding cultural differences. Holding this new perspective, a participant offered the below comment:

> "In the first few weeks, I was afraid of saying something inappropriate because of the cultural differences between home country and Turkey and this situation was negatively affecting my speaking performance. However, I encouraged myself to change my attitude and began to consider the differences as cultural richness to enlarge my world knowledge instead of an anxiety source to influence my speaking performance." (participant from Bashkortostan)

Half of the participants also referred to watching movies or listening to music in the target language as a way to improve their speaking skills and to overcome their speaking anxiety. They maintained that they could identify new items to use while speaking by being exposed to the language through these sources. Listening to these sources increased their self-confidence and decreased their anxiety levels.

Since the coping strategies followed by the participants were not much observable in the classroom setting, I could not note down the ways they were adopting to overcome the sources of speaking anxiety during their class hours. However, while we were having informal talks with the participants outside the classroom environment, they referred to the above-mentioned tactics they were following to deal with speaking anxiety in speaking.

To sum, the results revealed that the participants were more motivated to learn the target language in the second language learning context because of the available chances for

exposure to and practice in the target language compared with the foreign language learning context in their home countries. However, the target context also brought such general challenges for the participants as the fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, immediate questions, focus on grammar and pronunciation, comparing themselves with other students and self-evaluation as well as such context-specific challenges as fear of communicating with native speakers, having native-speaker teachers, cultural difference between the home country and host country and the accent of the local people. When asked to refer to their coping mechanisms with these challenges, the participants explained that they were encouraging themselves to consider making mistakes as natural and beneficial for linguistic development and having native speakers around as a chance for exposure and practice. They also pointed at individual preparation and practice as ways to overcome their speaking anxiety. Considering cultural differences as a source of richness instead of a source of anxiety was another way to deal with speaking anxiety for the participants.

4. Discussion

Speaking is by itself an anxiety-provoking act for a majority of language learners (Horwitz, 2001; Humphries, 2011; Liu, 2009; Stupar-Rutenfrans, Ketelaars & van Gisbergen, 2017). The complicated nature of speaking which requires learners to follow a series of multifaceted operations while paying attention to different language and culture-specific aspects makes the speaking skill a challenging one for many language learners. In addition to these challenges, speaking skill can also be influenced by some learner-related, teacher-related and context-related factors.

Specifically focusing on the causes of speaking anxiety for the foreign learners of Turkish in the second language learning context and the coping strategies of these learners, this study revealed that the context caused general challenges and context-specific challenges for the foreign learners of Turkish affecting their levels of speaking anxiety in the process of language learning. The results also pointed at some coping strategies that the participants were adopting to deal with the sources of speaking anxiety. This section aims to present some discussion on these challenges and the coping ways in the light of the relevant literature.

The sources of speaking anxiety for the participants can be discussed under two groups: general sources of anxiety and context-specific sources of anxiety. The first group presents the overall reasons why the participants experienced speaking anxiety and includes the fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, comparison with other students, self-evaluation, immediate questions and focus on grammar and pronunciation. Most of the participants in this study reported to experience the fear of making mistakes while they were using the target language for communication. This result supports previous findings since Öztürk (2009) in Turkish context, He (2013) in Chinese context and Yoshida (2013) in Japanese context pointed at the fear of making mistakes as a factor negatively influencing the speaking skills of language learners. Though sharing common results, the difference between this study and the above-mentioned ones is that while the former was conducted in a second language learning context, the latter were in foreign language learning context.

Another source of speaking anxiety for the participants in this study was the fear of negative evaluation, as also noted by the participants in other studies conducted in EFL settings (Aydın, 2001; Heng, Abdullah & Yosaf, 2012; Kitano, 2001; Ohata, 2005; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). This source can be said to be related with the fear of making mistakes. The participants in this study may have experienced the fear of making mistakes because of their fear of being negatively evaluated by native speakers. Since they did not want to be misunderstood by the interlocutors, they may have suffered from the distress of making mistakes. Fear of making mistakes can be said to trigger the fear of negative

evaluation and vice versa. The participants may have also perceived making mistakes and negative evaluation as threats to their self-images which was reported to be a factor increasing speaking anxiety by Hirsch, Mathews, Clark, Williams and Morrison (2006). Therefore, they may have associated making mistakes with negative evaluation and negative evaluation with a threat to their self-image as adult learners of Turkish.

The participants in this study also maintained that comparing their performances with those of their classmates was another source of speaking anxiety for them, which was also referred to as a challenge for the participants' speaking performances in Aydın's (2001) and Yan and Horwitz's (2008) studies. Comparing their performances with the performances of their friends can sometimes be an encouraging act for language learners as regards motivation. However, having high expectations and high demands for language performance can be challenging for learners. In addition, excessive levels of comparison with peers can be risky for them because of the possible threat to their self-confidence and motivation. If learners compare themselves too much with their friends, learners can feel demotivated by focusing on their weaknesses. In addition, learners' language progress may be negatively affected by the comparisons because they may think that they are already better than their friends and decrease the effort in language learning.

Immediate questions, which were considered as a factor to increase speaking anxiety for the participants in Öztürk's (2009) and Kana's (2015) study, also played a role on the speaking anxiety levels of the participants. Finding appropriate answers to immediate questions in the target language can be particularly challenging for language learners as there are different cognitive, personal, social and contextual processes involved when thinking of an answer. The focus on correct grammar and pronunciation also impacted the anxiety levels of the participants in the present research which renders support to the findings of the study conducted by Öztürk (2009) and He (2013) for the focus on pronunciation, and by Kunt and Tüm (2010) for the focus on grammar. As learners of Turkish, the participants in this study may have centered on the grammatical rules of the language and wanted to reflect this knowledge in their language productions for more precise and clear meanings. They may have placed emphasis on pronunciation because of their desire to sound like native speakers of the language.

The second group of anxiety sources underlines several context-specific factors influencing speaking anxiety of the participants. One of the most frequently mentioned factor was communicating with native speakers. Speaking with the native speakers of the target language was also reported as a source increasing speaking anxiety in previous EFL studies (Çağatay, 2015; He, 2013; Mak, 2011; Thompson & Lee, 2013; Woodrow, 2006). The second language learning environment in this study offered the participants limitless chances for exposure to and practice in the target language. However, as the participants were in constant and inevitable contact with the native speakers, this may have created anxiety for them. The main challenge in communicating with native speakers can be the reality that they are naturally and innately equipped with the knowledge of the language and this can naturally create uneasiness for language learners who are afraid of being negatively evaluated if they produce incorrect or inappropriate language. The on-going feature of the act of speaking which is defined as the "on-line nature of speaking" by Bozatlı (2003, p.11) can also be a dimension creating anxiety for the participants because there is limited time to understand what the native speakers said and to find an appropriate answer. Another problem may be the participants' comparing their language productions with those of native speakers. In such a case, the participants would be demotivated because they have not yet reached a complete language development. It may be due to similar reasons why some of the participants considered having native-speaker teachers as a factor increasing their speaking anxiety.

Therefore, having native-speaker teachers can be said to trigger the participants' fear of making mistakes and fear of negative evaluation.

The accent of the local people was another context-specific factor with indirect negative influence on the participants' speaking anxiety in this study. When they could not understand what native speakers was saying to them, the participants experienced anxiety in negotiating meaning (Bozatlı, 2003) and finding a suitable answer. When the participants could not understand the meaning as listeners, they naturally experienced anxiety in speaking.

The cultural differences between the home country of the participants and the host country as well as the countries of other classmates also turned into a factor effecting some of the participants' speaking anxiety as it was also underlined by the participants in some previous research (de Blakeley, et al., 2017; Pappamihiel, 2001; Sadeghi, et al. 2013). The cultural aspects of a language designate the way native speakers use the language. Different cultures pose different usages in languages which are culturally and contextually appropriate. Having language learning experience in a different country, some of the participants naturally felt the confusion and stress to find culturally-fitting statements in the target language. Since they have already been exposed to the aspects of their own culture, these participants have been fueled with the knowledge of their own culture (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Therefore, they needed some time for adaptation to the new language and its culture during which they experienced certain levels of speaking anxiety possibly because of the fear of making mistakes and negatively evaluated.

The results of this study also pointed at some of the strategies adopted by the participants to deal with their speaking anxiety. The basic coping strategy seemed to be the change in the participants' perspectives regarding their perceptions of the challenges. Being negatively affected by different anxiety sources, the participants began to develop positive perceptions of the existing conditions and see the things from a more positive angle. Upon this change in the conceptions, Yoshida (2013) utters that students' beliefs are dynamic and based on contextual factors; so they can change over time.

One of the most commonly referred tactics to cope with speaking anxiety was to hold a perspective that mistakes are natural in the process of language development. While most of the participants were feeling anxious about making mistakes in speaking in the early stages, they began to consider mistakes as a natural part of learning the target language. As it was also observed in Yoshida's (2013) study, the participants in this study developed the perception that they could learn from their mistakes instead of feeling anxious about them. Following this strategy was helpful for them to decrease their speaking anxiety and to improve their language development.

The participants also referred to having self-practice before possible speaking events. If they knew the topic beforehand, some of the participants preferred to have preparation for their speaking practices. This strategy was also reported in Akkakoson's (2016a) study as a way to deal with speaking anxiety.

Listening to music or watching movies as an approach to reach better levels of language knowledge was also counted as a strategy to decrease speaking anxiety by some participants in this study, which was also mentioned by the participants in Akkakoson's (2016a) research.

The cultural differences between the participants and the native speakers as well as their classmates were also counted as a challenge causing speaking anxiety for some participants. Regarding this case, Peng and Woodrow (2010) maintain that culture-based beliefs can control the perceptions of learners when they are engaged in interaction with people with different cultural backgrounds. The participants feeling negative the effect of cultural

differences on their speaking performance learned to manage the anxiety by thinking that cultural differences can actually help them expand their world knowledge and raise their understanding of differences as a source of contribution to cultural richness.

5. Conclusion

Learning a new language, either in foreign or in target context, is a demanding process which is prone to the influence of different educational, personal, social and cultural factors. As a productive skill, speaking is one of the basic skills in language development which can also be affected by these factors. This qualitative study revealed that foreign learners of Turkish could benefit from the limitless chances of exposure to and practice in the target language with its native speakers for the development of their speaking skill. However, they also experienced some difficulties which influenced their anxiety levels while speaking. The sources of speaking anxiety for the participants were observed to stem from some general sources which can also be encountered in foreign language learning contexts. Besides the common challenges, there were also context-specific challenges which stemmed from the nature of the second language learning context like having continuous contact with native speakers, having native teachers, the accent of the local native speakers and the cultural differences between the participants and residents of the host country. The results also pointed at some coping strategies that the participants developed over time to deal with the negative effects of anxiety on their speaking performances. In the light of these results, the following suggestions can be provided to decrease the anxiety level experienced by the foreign learners of Turkish:

- The foremost suggestion would be the identification of the source of stress and anxiety for each learner. Teachers of Turkish can observe their learners and reach some conclusions regarding the anxiety-creating factors for them. After identifying the source/s, teachers can collaborate with their learners to deal with the anxiety experienced in the process of language learning, especially in speaking.

- In the process of language education, these learners can be encouraged to benefit from their own mistakes through comprehensive feedback. In this way, they can be encouraged to consider mistakes as natural and beneficial.

- Foreign learners of Turkish can be provided more chances to interact with students from other departments. While interacting with other students from the host country, they can feel more relaxed knowing that they are communicating with their peers who are socially and educationally equal to them.

- Foreign learners receiving preparatory class education can be offered more frequent formal or informal meetings in which they can share their experiences and cultures with their friends and local people. This process can bear fruitful results in cultural exchange. Familiarity with different cultures can help learners develop a constructive cultural understanding and positively improve their approach for interaction and thus speaking. When they better know each other and the native speakers around, they can be more relaxed while communicating with them.

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