



Psychological Problems of Indonesian Students in Speaking German

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Abstract. Speaking skills are often a major problem for German learners in Indonesia because it is the most complex language skill. The purpose of this study is to find out the psychological problems experienced by German students in speaking. The data of this research are psychological problems in speaking German among the students majoring in German Literature at the State University of Malang. They were 4th semester students and had taken the Conversation course. An open questionnaire was used for data collection which resulted in qualitative data elaborated descriptively. The results of this study indicate that the problems of the students include lack of confidence, low self-esteem, afraid of making mistakes, nervousness, and panic attacks.

Keywords: DaF · German · Speaking · Language Problems

1 Introduction

A person is said to master a foreign language, when he/she can communicate actively using it. This shows that speaking is a skill that needs a major attention. Wolf [1] observes that on average we use 90% of spoken language and 10% of written language. According to [2], speaking has a very important role in language learning, because it constitutes the key to the success or failure of a language learner. Therefore, it is not surprising that speaking skills are the most important, crucial, and even the main goal of language skills [3–6].

Speaking skills have a high level of difficulty and complexity. To achieve them, learners are required to learn many components, such as vocabulary, grammar, phonology, semantics and others related to linguistics [3]. Speaking is a result of the combination between several cognitive and psychological aspects. To achieve the success in speaking, learners need to have sufficient language knowledge, and a good psychological (mental) condition [7]. Therefore, the skills are considered to be the most complex and major skills [3–5]. In addition, it is often considered as the most difficult language skill because learners have to go through a complicated process to be able to speak correctly and clearly for others [7, 8].

Foreign language learners in Indonesia are required to be able to communicate in the corresponding foreign language appropriately and correctly. They must produce words in right pronunciation constructed in a correct grammar in a relatively shorter time than

other productive skills. Therefore, they often encounter problems in speaking. Such a case was identified among the students in German Department, State University of Malang.

As the problems in speaking are lots in foreign language learning, several studies have addressed this issue. Dalem [9] highlights the speaking difficulties faced by English students at Al Margeb University. They believed that the most urgent issues the students had in speaking were fear of making mistakes, shame, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation. These mental aspects have prevented them for doing consistent practices, which in turn keeping them away from the skills they are leaning. Nakhlah [10] explored similar problems of English students at Al Quds Open University. The results showed that the difficulties in their speaking were due to several reasons like fear of being wrong, shame, anxiety, and lack of confidence. These have convinced that the negative psychological condition has contributed adversely to the students' learning development.

In Indonesian context, another similar study proved such problems in speaking. Fitriani et al. [11] claimed psychological problems were the most dominant faced by third-semester students of the English Education Study Program, FKIP Tanjungpura University, Pontianak. Other main problems were environmental problems. Similarly, in China, Shen & Chiu [12] found that the biggest factors in speaking English for EFL students were (a) psychological problems (e.g. nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence), followed by linguistic problems (e.g. insufficient vocabulary), and environmental problems (e.g. lack of learning context for English conversation). Again, these findings emphasizes the major contribution of the learners' mentality in their learning process of speaking skills.

The researches above all focus on the problems experienced by learners in speaking English as a foreign language they were studying. This recent research also explores similar issues but in a different foreign language, German. Compared to English, speaking skills in German were reported to be more difficult [13]. Hence, the results of the study may be different, considering the level of difficulty and the learner's perception on a different foreign language [13].

A previous research on speaking difficulties in German has been carried out by Ardiyani & Rofi'ah [14]. The results of this study indicate that the main problem with speaking German students in Indonesia is the linguistic aspect, namely the lack of grammatical skills, difficulty in pronunciation, and lack of vocabulary. This study also concentrates on German speaking skills, but it highlights on the psychological problems of the learners. The results of this study can be used as empirical data regarding problems in German language skills related to the psychological aspects of learners.

2 Method

This study employed a qualitative approach. It was to determine the difficulties faced by Indonesian language learners in speaking German related to psychological aspects. This was conducted at the UM German Language Study Program in the *Konversation* course. The data in this study are the difficulties experienced by students in speaking, while the data source is JSJ UM students who take the *Konversation* course in the 2020/2021 academic year. There were 65 students, divided into three groups in the learning process.

The data in this study were collected through an open questionnaire instrument, making use of *Google Forms* for its composition and distribution. The data analysis was carried out by sorting the data, categorizing the psychological problems speaking German, and reducing the data to extract only the significant data. Finally, an in-depth analysis was undertaken, based on relevant theories and researches.

3 Results and Discussion

Psychological problems in foreign language learning are experienced by certain individuals due to psychological and behavioral reasons that affect their academic performance. According to previous research, psychological problems can affect speaking skills and even become a major obstacle in speaking a foreign language, e.g. English [9, 11]. This study agrees, but it is not the main factor. The German learners also experience the psychological problems. The problems identified include lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, nervousness, and panic attacks.

3.1 Lack of Confidence

Having a high confidence is important for language learners. This is a foundation for learners to show their verbal competence a foreign language. The lack of it, otherwise, will bring them into a wrong belief that they cannot be good speakers. This leaves a big problem that affects the speaking performance of learners [11]. In this study, their lack of self-confidence is seen in such answers:

1. *Kurang percaya diri dalam berbicara*
("I'm not confident to talk")
2. *Terkadang saya masih bingung apakah strukturnya benar atau salah. Yang paling utama, saya masih kurang percaya diri, Frau.*
("Sometimes I am still wondering whether the structure is right or wrong. Most of all, I'm still lack confidence, Frau.")
3. *Percaya diri yang rendah untuk berbicara.*
("I have low self-confidence to speak")

As it is identified in the previous studies, lack of self-confidence is again proved to be one of the problems among the learners to speak a foreign language [9–12]. It has been known to have a negative impact on foreign language learning. From the data, we can see that students do not have the courage to speak due to it. It means some encouragement is vital to build their confidence [9]. Encouragement plays a positive role in the success of a language learning.

3.2 Afraid of Making Mistake

When a learner is afraid of making mistakes, he will not dare to speak freely with others' presence. This situation is worse as they should speak before the class. The teachers and their friends are like the judges for them; they will easily spot any mistake

in their utterances. The mistakes can be everywhere from the grammar, pronunciation, or word choice—not to mention the rhythm and the style which are hard to escape from other languages in their memory. Such a thought really affects their speaking performance negatively. It inhibits them from doing the speak. This finding supports previous researches that fear of making mistakes is one of the major barriers to speak a foreign language. The following data prove this problem:

4. *Saya orang yang takut salah dalam hal berbicara* (I am a person who is always afraid of being wrong in speaking)
5. *Saya merasa sulit untuk secara spontan mengungkapkan apa yang ingin saya bicarakan karena saya selalu merasa “takut akan kesalahan tata bahasa”.*
“I find it difficult to express spontaneously what I want to say because I’m always afraid of making grammatical errors”.

From the data, it can be concluded that their difficulty is from their psychological state. Such a feeling will make them hesitate to speak. It means they will keep away from practicing their speaking skills. Meanwhile making mistakes is actually a step to improve their skills by the correction from others, teachers or their peers. This finding emphasizes another research of Wijayati et al. [7]. It concluded that the students are afraid making mistakes of the content and the grammar. The students can be afraid that they were being laughed or criticized. It is further stated that the fear of making mistakes is the big reason that triggers the students’ speaking anxiety [7]. Therefore, teachers need to convince the students that making mistakes is not wrong or bad. In fact from the mistakes they can learn good lessons [7, 9, 15].

3.3 Low Self-esteem

Being inferior prevents some students from speaking German. This can be seen from the data below:

6. *Gak jarang minder sama teman sekelas sendiri, ‘Saya sering merasa minder dengan teman sekelas saya’.*
(Often I feel inferior to my own classmates, “I often feel inferior to them”)
7. *... sering merasa minder ‘saya sering minder’....* (often feel inferior. ‘I often feel inferior’.)

Inferiority is a feeling of being minor in terms of status or quality to other people. This tends to happen among the students with a relatively low academic abilities and/or those with low confidence. They feel insecure to have a conversation because they perceive other students are superior. This negative perception provokes their anxiety in speaking, which in turn affects their speaking performance (Dalem [9]; Fitriani et al. [11]; Rumiya & Seftika [15]; Shen & Chiu [12]; Wijayati et al. [7]).

3.4 Being Nervous

Nervous is a state of worry or anxiety. This is one of the psychological problems that many foreign language learners have when they do practices (Dalem, [9]; Fitriani et al.

[11]; Rumiya & Seftika [15]; Shen & Chiu [12]; Wijayati et al. [7]). Being nervous can affect their speaking performance, as seen in the data below.

8. *Kegugupan adalah hal pertama yang terpikir oleh saya. Menurut saya sendiri, sering kali saya memulai untuk memulai sebuah percakapan dalam Bahasa Jerman, terutama jika berbicara dengan Native Speaker. Hal itu membuat saya lupa, apa yang sebenarnya ingin saya katakan dan apa yang saya sudah persiapkan di kepala saya.*

(A nervousness just comes up in my mind. In my opinion, (it happens when) I start a conversation in German, especially with a native speaker. It makes me forget what I want to say and what I have prepared in my mind.)

The data reveals that nervousness makes an obstacle in the speaking. The learners actually have ability and willingness to speak and communicate in German, but the nervousness just break them. As a result, they get lost of what to say.

It is also seen that the nervous tendency increases when the learner should talk to a native speaker. Nervousness and anxiety are two interrelated things in foreign language learning; both have a negative effect on academic achievement. This finding supports the result of another which shows that one of the causes of students' speaking anxiety is the learner's fear of strangers [7]. When learners speak German to native German speakers, learners are more nervous because they assume that the natives will easily notice the mistakes they produce in the speech. This prevents them from speaking the language fluently.

3.5 Panic Attack

Panic attack is one of the effects when a person experiences certain anxiety. It has several physical symptoms, like sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, feeling of suffocation, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, fear of losing your mind, fear of death, flushed, feeling of danger and palpitations [16]. This automatically interferes the learner's speaking performance. It can be seen in the following data:

8. *Saya sering panik ketika tiba-tiba harus menjawab pertanyaan dalam bahasa Jerman. Ketika saya panik, terkadang saya merasa blank dan bingung harus menjawab, padahal ketika saya memikirkannya dengan tenang, saya bisa menjawab pertanyaannya.*

(I am often panic when I suddenly have to answer a question in German. In such a state, sometimes I get blank and confused to answer. When I think normally, I can easily answer the question.)

The data shows that students who experience panic attacks are loss of what to say or what to answer. He actually has good language skills. Yet, due to panic attacks, he has trouble in speaking. He becomes so anxious to speak. This emphasizes that anxiety plays an important role in the speaking performance of learners. In spite of many ideas in their mind and their readiness to express them, they fail to convey perfectly as they want. This is due to the anxiety in their mind [7, 11]. Hence, this affects the speech

performance; they will be less fluent than they actually are. It means the teachers should strive to create a more positive learning atmosphere to provide comfort for them in their learning activities [9].

4 Closing

Speaking is a language skill which is more complex and difficulty than the others. That is why obstacles often arise in the process of learning it. The problems in speaking German among the students in the State University of Malang are psychological problems covering lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, nervousness, and panic attacks. All of them have a negative impact and become an obstacle in the language learning, particularly the speaking skills.

By knowing them, teachers have to convince their students that making mistakes is good for their learning. They have to understand that it is natural to make mistakes in the learning process. Thus, they will not be afraid to do so and start speaking up. Teachers must create learning situations which are comfortable, fun and not stressful. In such an atmosphere, the students will have fun and relax to attend the learning process. Finally, based on the results of this study, other researches may focus on the issues related to methods, strategies, or media to overcome the problems in speaking a foreign language, especially German language.

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