

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Rationale for the Study**

Second language anxiety has been identified as an anxiety specific to learning a second or foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). More than half of all foreign language learners have experienced some kinds of anxiety in their learning (Worde, 1998). In Thailand, with the development of tourism, English became the most popular and important foreign language. It is taught in almost every school and university. In the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) or Foreign Language (FL), the acquisition of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking is considered important. However, English speaking is the most required skill among the learners of English as a second language (ESL) and those of English as a foreign language (EFL), as demonstrated below.

According to the report of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, North Bangkok (2007), most of the 161 EFL learners in the four-year bachelor program wanted to improve their oral English skills, and speaking was their highest requirement, as listed in the following order: speaking (50.93%), listening (34.16%), reading (9.93 %), and writing (4.96%). In the 2-3 year bachelor program, the 147 EFL students wanted to improve their oral English skills, and speaking was their highest requirement as well, as listed in the following order: speaking (49.65%), listening (31.29%), reading (13.32%), and writing (2.72%). Students preferred to improve speaking, listening, reading and writing respectively.

This preference also applied to the lecturers according to the data gained from an investigation in 2001 for a course on the Advanced Study of Education and Training (Songsiri, 2001, p. 2). The data of 'Preliminary Data of Technical Teachers' Learning Requirements in English' shows that the lecturers wanted to improve their English skills, as listed in the following order: speaking (41.0%), listening (29.1%), reading (16.6%), and writing (12.56). According to these data, speaking was the skill that lecturers wanted to improve most.

In the Thai context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), lecturers regularly meet the problems of why the majority of undergraduate students are unable to speak English well, even when communicating with their peers and instructors in the classroom. "During informal talks to undergraduate technical students from several classes in 2004, I discovered that most of them had problems with speaking English" (Songsiri, 2007).

Speaking English is one of the most important skills for students and it can help them find a job in the future. According to Hadley and Sheingold (1993), oral English proficiency can serve as an additional advantage for people seeking employment in business, industrial, governmental, and educational sectors. In other words, speaking English well might boost their chances of getting employed. Unfortunately, Amornthip (2006) reported that Thai students generally do not have English proficiency high enough to perform well in speaking English. Over several years of self-experiences, the researcher has also found that students would like to speak, but they felt anxious in speaking. As a result, they (Tanveer, 2005) think that English speaking is very difficult, especially in the class, and they become bored with learning EFL speaking.

In the EFL class, learners not only have to learn but also need to perform. An EFL speaking class mainly focuses on performance rather than learning the subject matter. In relation to performance, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) believe that performing in a language class can be more stressful than performing in other subjects because it may challenge a person's self-concept as a competent communicator which will lead to uncommunicativeness, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic. This phenomenon is very common in the EFL speaking class, and it also attracts a number of researchers' attention.

Accordingly, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was constructed by Howitz et al. (1986). This instrument has been used by many researchers in their ESL class anxiety studies. For example, Kleinmann, H. H. (1977) found that her Spanish and Arabic ESL learners' oral performance was positively related to anxiety while American university learners of Spanish reported oral presentations, role plays, and charades as their most anxiety-provoking language activities (Koch and Terrell, 1991); however, students claimed 'the stressful,

competitive nature of oral public performance' as the major source of anxiety in their ESL classrooms (Bailey, K.M 1983). Moreover, students also cited speaking in a foreign language caused the greatest anxiety (Price, 1991). In addition, Samimy and Tabuse (1992) reported that speaking anxiety was one of the most important factors in determining the oral performance of Japanese students in American University.

EFL learners often express a feeling of stress, nervousness, or anxiety when learning to speak English and even claim to have a "mental block" (Horwitz, 1986) against ESL speaking. They wonder why English speaking can be so difficult, and their compulsive efforts do not lead them to their intended performance. This anxiety exists among ESL learners of different levels. Horwitz and Young (1991, p. 14) - two well-known researchers in the area of 'language anxiety' - stated, "We have been truly surprised at the number of students who experience anxiety and distress in their language classes." Similarly, Campbell, and Ortiz (1991, p. 159) found language anxiety among university students to be 'alarming' and estimated that up to one half of all language students experience high levels of language anxiety. Hence, the questions of what factors contribute to the EFL speaking anxieties are of interest among many researchers.

Studies about the factors contributing to the EFL speaking anxiety have been done as demonstrated below. Horwitz et al. (1986) were the first to examine foreign language anxiety using their Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Pappamihiel (2002), Casado and Dereshiwsky (2004) pointed out the possible factors contributing to EFL learners' anxiety, such as communication apprehension (e.g., difficulty in understanding the teacher's instruction), negative evaluation (e.g., fear of correction and fear of making mistakes), and a general feeling of anxiety (e.g., fear of failing the class). Voviana Zulkifli (2008) also found three factors contributing in an ESL class in Indonesia, which are anxiety from tests, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of communication. Barley M. (2011) analyzed five categories of factors contributing to Chinese learners' ESL speaking anxiety. These are 1) speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, 2) uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers, 3) negative attitudes towards the English class, 4) negative self-evaluation, and 5) fear of failing the class/ consequences of personal failure.

Since systematic studies of the factors contributing to the speaking-in-class anxiety of English majors in the Humanities Faculty at Naresuan University Phitsanulok, Thailand do not exist in the databases, an investigation of this is worth being explored so that the data can be available for policy-makers and EFL lecturers to devise ways of mitigating anxiety while improving students' oral proficiency in the class. Those factors above are all based on FLCAS, a quantitative questionnaire. Because interviews can "provide us with valuable information about language classes ..." (Block, 1997, p. 348), the other typical factors hidden in general Thai students were explored through the semi-structured interviews, in order to provide qualitative information regarding how students put their English words together to describe their anxiety and to find other factors different from those reported in the FLCAS questionnaire.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to speaking-in-class anxiety of English majors in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University. In order to reach the goal of the study, two research questions were raised as follows.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent did the five categories of factors from FLCAS contribute to the speaking-in-class anxiety of English majors in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University?
2. Were there any other factors contributing to speaking-in-class anxiety of English majors in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University? If yes, what were they?

### **Significance of the Study**

When EFL instructors understand some of the factors of English speaking-in-class anxiety, they are better able to plan collaborative activities, guide participation, and scaffold knowledge in a non-threatening environment to improve academic performance in the classroom (Folse, 2006). Understanding the factors of speaking-in-

class anxiety may help both ESL lecturers and students to create a low-anxiety classroom. The study primarily was of use to students at Naresuan University, as a resource towards understanding why speaking-in-class can be difficult, and in what ways the instructors might have more references to improve on methods of speaking instruction.

### **Definition of Terms**

Language anxiety: according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), is the feeling of tension and apprehension experienced by learners in the foreign language classroom. More specifically, Horwitz et al. (1986) maintains that language anxiety is “a distinctive, complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p.128).

ESL- English as a Second Language: ESL refers to English language learning and teaching in countries where English is the main and / or official language, and the student's own native language (first language) is not English.

EFL - English as a Foreign Language: EFL is used to describe English language learning and teaching in countries where English is not an official or first language.

FLCAS- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: A scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It is considered as an efficient instrument to measure the ESL learning and speaking anxiety in the classroom.

Factors are anything that contributes causally to a result. In this study, factors refer the elements contributing to EFL language anxiety.

### **Scope of the Study**

#### **1. Scope of the content**

This study was aimed at investigating the factors contributing to in-class-speaking anxiety of English majors in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University.

#### **2. Subjects**

The subjects of this study consisted of fifty-six third year English major students in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University.

**Duration of the study**

The study was conducted during the fifteenth week of the first semester of the academic year 2011 in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University.

**1. Independent variables**

The fifty-six third year English major students studying English Conversation and Discussion in the Humanities Faculty, Naresuan University.

**2. Dependent variables**

The dependent variables of this study were the factors contributing to speaking-in-class anxiety.