

探究英語非母語的學生在雙人搭檔口語考試活動裡的焦慮現象

**EFL Students' Anxieties towards Paired-Oral Testing**

by

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## **EFL Students' Anxieties towards Paired-Oral Testing**

### **ABSTRACT**

The use of pair work has been commonly implemented in the EFL classroom. Most prior studies concluded that pair work was an effective strategy in EFL teaching. However, there is deficit in researching the problems that students may encounter within an oral paired test setting. Anxiety is often a negative attribute to EFL learners' speaking abilities as their test taking abilities may deter them from doing their best performance on their oral tests. To better understand how anxiety is situated as an affected factor in EFL learners' pair-work activities, this longitudinal study explored the causes and the types of anxiety which may occur during paired oral testing. The study observed English-majored EFL college freshmen's anxieties towards paired-oral testing in an EFL Freshman English classroom at a Taiwanese University. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's language anxiety model was employed for the analysis of data. This study took a qualitative approach as well as, the data will be analyzed qualitatively. This one-semester-long observational study's data was collected by classroom observations and conducting semi-structured interviews on the participants. The study (1) uncovers the kinds of anxieties that can be found on the participants in pair-work English oral tests, (2) the possible affective factors of the found anxieties in a paired English oral test setting, (3) the possible pedagogical implications for language teachers who plan to include paired oral tests in the assessment.

*Keywords:* Anxiety, Pair work, Oral tests, Test design.

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## 摘要

雙人搭檔的學習活動常被廣泛應用在英語非母語的英語教學中。大部分研究認同此活動是有效的語言教學法。然而當此活動被應用在口語考試,是否會對學生的學習造成問題,卻鮮少被討論。焦慮對學生的口語能力而言是種負面表徵,因為學習者的應試能力會阻礙其口語考試的表現。為了瞭解焦慮如何影響學生的雙人搭檔活動進行,本研究透過長期觀察來探究在以此型態為主的口語考試裡,學生出現焦慮的原因及焦慮類別。本研究以 Horwitz、Horwitz、及 Cope 的語言學習焦慮模式為理論架構,分析六名就讀於台灣某大學英文系的大一學生,其在大一英文課裡,面對雙人搭檔口語考試所產生的焦慮行為。基於本研究的質性本質,資料分析也是採取質性分析。在為期一學期的資料蒐集下,本研究共進行了二十六次的課堂觀察及二十四次的半結構式訪談。本研究旨在(1)發掘個案在此種活動裡所產生的焦慮類別及其影響因素(2)提供有意將雙人搭檔考試列入評量的教師們教學啟示。結果顯示個案們不只出現「考試焦慮」更會在考試前出現「準備考試焦慮」。本研究因此建議教師在學習評量的設計上要更注意雙人搭檔的口試評量對學生所帶來的影響,因為此種活動足以改變學生的語言焦慮程度。

關鍵詞：焦慮、雙人搭檔、口語考試、評量設計

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

The reason I chose to investigate anxiety towards paired oral testing is because often I myself as a student tend to experience anxiety working with one or more partners in the classroom. Pair work is often beneficial in many ways increases communication, interactions and idea inspirations within student interactions in the language classroom. However, what is often overlooked and under investigated are the negative impacts of pair work. Pair work is often more complex than both a teacher and a student can anticipate in the foreign language classroom due to many external factors influencing the individual's experience of pair work. In addition to pair work, anxiety or specifically foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been observed in the foreign language classroom. Anxiety is namely an interference to language learning in the classroom (Horwitz, 2010).

Due to my own experience of anxiety within pair work, I was fortunate enough to be able to find and successfully locate a freshman English course in Taiwan which the professor utilized pair work both during their in-class English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and in oral testing. Therefore, by using qualitative measures, I began to record and measure the possible triggers of anxiety Foreign Language students faced during a paired oral test setting. By interviewing the Freshman English Majored students, I was one step closer in understanding how they perceived pair work in the paired oral testing setting.

## **Statement of Problems**

The use of pair work has been commonly implemented in the EFL classroom. Most prior studies also concluded the effectiveness of using pair work activities in EFL teaching (Nichols, 1994; Mishra & Oliver, 1998). However, within the field of paired work, students' anxieties in paired oral testing were rarely addressed. In the paired oral test setting, students may experience varied anxieties, which are negative attributes to EFL learners' speaking abilities. This is because their test taking abilities may deter them from giving the best performance. Similarly, although there are numerous studies on anxieties and the factors causing foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2010; Gregersen, & Horwitz, 2002; Liu, 2006 a, Liu, 2006 b; Onwuegbuzie, 1999), most of which were investigations about individual anxieties in the EFL classroom. There has been a lack of investigation of anxieties within a paired oral test setting.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative study seeks for existing and new emergent anxieties experienced by Freshman English majored students within a paired English oral test. This includes observing possible affective factors that also that contribute to the anxiety levels of the participants during the paired oral test.

## **Research Questions**

Three research questions are raised to guide this study:

(1) What anxieties can be found on the research participants in a paired English oral test setting?



- (2) What are the possible affective factors of the found anxieties in a paired English oral test setting?
- (3) What pedagogical implications gained out of the study shed light on future research?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Anxiety:** According to (Spielberger, 1983), anxiety refers to the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

**Foreign Language Anxiety:** According to Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986), foreign language learners may experience three related performance anxieties, including (1) communication apprehension, (2) fear of negative evaluation, and (3) test anxiety. More specifically, communication apprehension is a fear of communicating with people such as speaking in dyads and groups (oral communication anxiety), speaking publicly or having receiver anxiety (p.127). Fear of negative evaluation is an apprehension about others' evaluation (p.127). Test anxiety is a performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure (p. 127). In this study, the participants' three performance anxieties in paired oral testing activities were observed.

**Pair work:** In this study, pair work refers to two participants actively working together for a classroom-based academic activity.

**Paired oral test:** In this study, paired oral test refers to two participants' part-taking in an oral test together.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study observed how college-level EFL learners' anxieties emerge and are situated in paired oral tests. In studying the case of anxiety, there is a gap in identifying the anxieties faced when pair work is involved. Therefore, this study takes closer examination towards anxieties that may take place when pair work and testing are involved.

Additionally, this study hopes to uncover existing and new anxieties taking place during paired oral testing. By doing so, this study has the potential to give pedagogical insight to language teachers in their test designing and assessment making process.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Foreign Language Anxiety

Within the past decades, different compositions of foreign language anxiety have been identified. (Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope, 1986; Macintyre & Gardner, 1989; Young, 1990; Woodrow, 2006). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) found that anxiety has profound effects on many aspects of foreign language learning. They also defined three performance anxieties related to foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Communication Apprehension, defined as the fear of communicating with people, includes speaking in dyads and groups (i.e., oral communication anxiety), speaking publicly, or having receiver anxiety (p.127). The fear of negative evaluation is an apprehension about others' evaluation (p.127). As for the test anxiety, it is a type of performance anxiety in which a student fears failing. (p. 128).

In addition, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope proposed an instrument to measure foreign language anxiety, called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). In addition to the components of foreign language anxiety, Macintyre & Gardner (1989) factor analyzed 11 scales of anxiety and concluded two types of anxiety, general and communicative anxiety. Macintyre & Gardner (1989) stated foreign language anxiety is separate from general anxiety and rather is considered a general communicative anxiety. Macintyre & Gardner (1989) mostly clarified conflicting results of past studies on foreign language anxiety.

Aida (1994), one of many who adopted Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Construct of Foreign Language Anxiety, found that even though speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were important components of foreign language anxiety, test anxiety was not. Instead, it was a general anxiety problem.

In addition to foreign language anxiety, Young (1990) investigated students' perspective on speaking and anxiety. Young utilized Horwitz's three performance anxieties revealed communication apprehension was not solely defined as fear of speaking in a foreign language rather other causes of apprehension was speaking in front of others. Young thus characterized students' fear of speaking as follows: communication apprehension, self-esteem, and social anxiety (p. 520). Furthermore, Young stated that fear of negative evaluation was not exclusive to peers but also to their instructors. Results in Young's (1990) study concluded the stem of language anxiety is related to self-esteem, social anxiety and communication apprehension due to the anxiety of speaking in front of the class. For foreign language learners, in-class speaking is one of the most cited concerns of students with anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Woodrow (2006) describes the relationship between second language speaking anxiety and speaking performance. The second language speaking anxiety scale (SLSAS) was developed in result of Woodrow's study. The scale validated by confirmatory factor analysis and found second language speaking anxiety is a predictor of oral achievement. Although the use of a scale was utilized, anxiety was also investigated through interviews. Interviewing revealed that the most frequent source of anxiety was speaking to native speakers.

Mak (2011) modified the FLCAS in order to investigate factors of in class speaking anxiety among Chinese ESL learners. By factor analysis, five factors were identified: speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation; uncomfortableness when speaking with native speakers; negative attitudes towards the English classroom; negative self-evaluation; and fear of failing the class consequences of personal failure.

Atasheneh & Izadi (2012) also utilized a modified and translated version of the FLCAS and found a moderate but significant negative correlation between FLCAS and listening comprehension. The goal of the study was to investigate the three components of foreign language anxiety but utilizing listening comprehension tests to find the relationship of listening test results and foreign language anxiety. As a conclusion their study was able to reduce listening comprehension test anxiety by treatment sessions.

### **Test Anxiety**

Test anxiety is often regarded as a general anxiety problem in that it may considerably affect students' level of achievement, performance, proficiency, and language skills. Its affected factors are multifaceted. Language proficiency, environmental and situational factors, time limit, gender, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, test techniques, exam format and instructions are significantly correlated with level of test anxiety among language learners (Adyin, 2009).

Burgucu & Engin (2011) surveyed test anxiety levels of EFL Turkish university students regarding their gender, age, educational background and their year of education by using the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) developed by Sarason (1978). Findings revealed Turkish students appear to have high levels of anxiety taking general tests rather than

English tests. Furthermore, females had slightly higher test anxieties, but revealed both genders were worried about tests. Participants with more educational background and of higher age were less anxious. Birjandi & Alemi (2010) investigated the relationship between test anxiety and test performance in Iranian EFL learners. No significant negative relationship was found between test anxiety and test performance. Results determined that the test taking anxiety questionnaire by Sarason (1975) was not a proper measure in case of a linear relationship between test anxiety and test performance.

Luo (2014) studied on college Chinese language learners and its associated factors to foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). Luo revealed that perceived difficulty of learning a foreign language, and self-perceived achievement is also a significant predictor of speaking anxiety. Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) attempted to link between language anxiety and perfectionism. They looked at anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance and found that the discussion of procedures that have been used to overcome perfectionism may also be helpful to anxious foreign language learners.

### **Pair Work in Language Learning Context**

Prior studies revolving around pair work have concluded its positive effect on students' language learning (Nichols, 1994; Mishra, & Oliver, 1998). Dyadic interaction (e.g., pair work) is often a recommended activity in the foreign language classroom (Nichols, 1994). Nichols (1994) hoped to reveal that pair work would be unpopular in the classroom however discontent from students' reactions towards pair work wasn't towards pair work activities but due to the fact to having a partner that is unsuitable. Taylor &

Wigglesworth (2009) pointed out that pair work in a learning context gave more opportunities for students to use receptive and productive language skills, including providing and obtaining feedback from the other students. In the EFL classrooms, more and more teachers have been incorporating pair work into testing. Taylor & Wigglesworth (2009) also concluded that pair-work allowed an ideal forum to obtain data of paired interactions. In particular, they found that students were able to demonstrate their interactive skills in a paired testing format if compared with the traditional one-on-one oral proficiency interview format. On the other hand, Mcdonough, K. (2004) took perceptions from students and instructors and the effectiveness of pair work as well as group work activities in the second language classroom. It was determined that productions of target forms were improved for the students, but they perceived the activities were not useful in learning a language. Cordeiro (2017) investigated the relevancy of pair work in the English classroom and the paired activities which would help develop speaking skills of the students. By administering questionnaires, majority of the students responded they favored pair work and tend to use more L2 than L1. Corderio emphasizes and advises that when students are given explanations of the purpose of the paired activities, students tend to become more motivated.

### **Pair Work and Testing**

Many aspects of paired work testing have been probed, this includes observing the differences between paired testing and one-to-one testing (Brooks, 2009; Egyud & Glover, 2001) to the observations of paired interactions (Galaczi,2008; Ducasse & Brown, 2009)

and even the evaluation of the students' oral proficiency within a paired setting Davis (2009).

Brooks (2009) did a research comparing 8 pairs of test takers whom took both took the paired format and the individual format in a test of oral proficiency. Brooks used both quantitative methods and qualitative measurements to determine co-constructed performance in paired oral testing. Results measured by quantitative methods revealed test takers showed higher scores in pairs than when they individually interacted with an examiner. Qualitative measurement of students' speaking performance was different, in terms that the two test formats were more marked than what the scores represented. The study concluded paired testing promotes more interactions, negotiation of meaning, consideration of the interlocutor and more complex output.

Egyud & Glover (2001) stated paired testing were preferred over the one-to-one testing method. With prior experience with working with both paired and individual formats of testing they concluded pair work is favored by the student, paired testing can give students a better opportunity to produce their best, and as well as produce better English rather than in a one-to-one testing setting. Another point they made was that pair work and testing would support good teaching by providing a more realistic teaching pattern. Often in utilizing pair work and testing in the language learning, paired interactions are often observed.

Galaczi (2008) had observed three peer to peer interaction characteristics termed as collaborative, parallel and asymmetrical. Galaczi (2008) is one of which focused on the analysis the patterns of interactions within a paired speaking test format. Results of their study revealed L2 learners have both higher and lower levels conversational management



abilities, higher level skills relate to collaborative dyadic interaction and lower-level skill refer to parallel dyadic interactions. As noted, asymmetric interactions appeared in the study however an additional, “blend” was discovered as a combination between the concepts of “mutuality” and “equality.”

Davis (2009) focused on the test-takers oral proficiency in a paired oral assessment setting. The study probed into the effect of the interlocutor’s speaking proficiency level and how this would affect their partner’s corresponding speaking performance. Results showed the proficiency level of the interlocutor had not much effect on Rasch analysis ability measures, except more words were produced by the test taker when partnered with a higher-level test taker. In fact, Davis’s (2009) study supports Galazi’s (2008) study as most pairs that were examined produced collaborative interactions. Asymmetric interactions were found when examiner was partnered with a lower-level partner.

Ducasse & Brown (2009) was concerned about the increase use of paired assessment and understands the claim of using such techniques to increase interactional skills during assessment. Despite the benefits of using interactional testing methods, they find it is important to investigate the effectiveness of the raters and the rating criteria used for the output and outcomes of paired interactions. By testing 17 beginner dyads learning Spanish as their second language, raters found three interactional parameters called: non-verbal interpersonal communication, interactive listening and interactional management. The findings in their study were stated to be features that belong to the construct of paired interactions, however suggests a scale may be developed to measure interactions and interactional proficiency using qualitative and quantitative methods.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODS**

### **Research Context**

All Freshman students in the Taiwanese University were required to take the midterm oral test. In the case of this Freshman English class, the instructor requested the students to pick their own partners for the paired oral test. The test setup included giving each student 7 topics that required them to have an Introduction, Pre-closing and a closing statement. It was also noted for the students to use both grammar structures and vocabularies taught in the previous lessons for the dialogue. The students were to arrive before class and pick one random topic the day of the test. Next, they were given 5 minutes before the paired oral test in order to prepare for their oral tests. During the testing time, the teacher sat adjacent to the paired students which faced the teacher during the paired oral testing. Each student was required to finish their dialogue within a 3-minute time limit or be subjected to point deduction.

### **Participants**

The participants selected six (three pairs) English majored freshmen at a Taiwanese university in an advanced-level freshman English class. Students in this class were placed

based on their English placement scores. All of them are native Chinese speakers and learned English as a foreign language. A note is that none of them had the paired oral test experience prior to taking this class. They volunteered to participate in this study when the researcher contacted the course instructor and went to his class to recruit volunteer participants: all of them signed the consent form based on their own willingness to participate. To protect the confidentiality of their personal information, pseudonyms were created to maintain anonymity. The three pairs include: Abby and Belle; Cindy and Della; Eric and Fred.

Table 1.

Participants' Basic Information

<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Native Language(s)</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>Abby</b>	Female	Mandarin Chinese	18
<b>Belle</b>	Female	Mandarin Chinese	18
<b>Cindy</b>	Female	Mandarin Chinese	18
<b>Della</b>	Female	Mandarin Chinese	18
<b>Eric</b>	Male	Mandarin Chinese	18
<b>Fred</b>	Male	Mandarin Chinese	18

### Data Collection Procedures

To maximize the findings of the raised issues, this study employed a qualitative inquiry by means of observations and semi-structured interviews. Prior studies had largely drawn on quantitative methods, most of which placed emphasis on the identification of participants' anxiety levels with the usage of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This qualitative study examined the ways that anxiety is naturalistically situated amid the participants. The researcher had observed this class for the time span of one semester, including the time the participants' took their midterm and final exams. For both the midterm oral and final oral, the instructor of this class gave permission for the students to decide their own partners.

The sources of data include classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

**Observations.** Observations (see Appendix B) were used to better understand these six participants' pair work interactions with each other in the classroom. The observational data were used only as a reference to understand how students paired up in the foreign language classroom. The researcher dated all entries in a journal and took notes without interrupting the classroom nor did the researcher state to the classmates the purpose of their presence in the classroom. As each class began, observations included noting down, behaviors that emerged during the oral speaking paired oral activities in the classroom. This also included writing down reflective questions at the end of the class time where this aided the formation of the semi-formal questions for the students in the classroom. (See Appendix C). Observational data was also collected during their paired midterm oral test and paired final oral test.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews are conducted on participants individually solely to solicit each participants' responses about the paired oral

midterm without the influence of their partner's opinions. Each interview will last around 45 minutes. Separate 4 rounds of semi-interviews were conducted on participants individually. Questions were conducted solicited student's opinions and reactions about the midterm oral and the final oral testing as well as their perceptions of pair work. Due to the researcher's native English-speaking background, all the interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collected by the researcher had been analyzed by a qualitative approach. Inspired by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) theory on foreign language anxiety, the analysis of data was also framed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's work.

As a qualitative study, all the collected data is descriptive and was analyzed qualitatively. All observational data was recorded, and the interview data was compared and contrasted in order to develop coding categories to sort them out. Bogdan & Biklen's (2007) coding system for qualitative research was used for coding. In addition, to achieve data validity, one additional informant who was familiar with data coding and the research context was recruited to check the developed data coding schemes. The informant checked the coded data after the researcher had completed keying out the newly found anxieties and existing anxieties and confirmed if the data were consistent with the definition of foreign language anxiety.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected resulted in 26 in-class observations within a 18-week course and the class met twice a week. A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted (each student was interviewed 4 times). All 26 in-class observations (See Appendix B) were written in one notebook which includes the midterm and final paired oral test observations. The intention of the in-class observations served as supporting data for the formulation of the four sets of semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix C). Questions in Appendix C were formed from the researcher's reflection upon their note-taking after each in-class observation class or after the midterm and final oral testing observation.

Although much data was collected, results of this research became a surplus. It was soon realized that observing the anxieties that emerged in the participants within a paired oral test is more complex than what meets the eye. Nevertheless, the results in this discussion were not disappointing. Key components relating to the definition of foreign language anxiety were less supported since the results lead into a direction unexpected. By using Bogdan & Biklen's (2007) coding system, test preparation anxiety was the most significant finding in the study including its two affected factors (1) familiarity towards pair work partners in test preparation and (2) the test design. The initial assumptions of results supporting Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) notions of Communication apprehension,

or Fear of negative were minor but rather, significance was found more so in support of test anxiety and its sub-category, test preparation anxiety. It is also important to note that although 4 rounds of semi-structured interview questions were conducted found in (Appendix C), only relevant questions related to pair work and anxiety in the paired oral test setting were focused and discussed in the following section. Initially, the research was to observe anxieties both within the classroom as well as during the paired oral test. As time progressed, the direction of the research became more focused in determining the anxieties that emerged specifically during the paired midterm oral test.

### **Participants' Varied Responses to Paired Oral Testing Experience**

The semi-structured interview questions revealed participants had little or no experience both in oral testing and paired oral testing before participating in this study. When interviewing Abby, Belle, Cindy, Della, Eric and Fred. Conclusively 3 out of 6 participants had some prior experience to some sort of oral testing before participating in the paired oral tests. Only Abby, Belle and Della were the ones who did not have experience in oral tests. This reveals only half of the English majored students interviewed would have experience being orally tested before taking this Freshman English class. As compared to when participants were asked whether they had prior paired oral testing experience, 6 out of 6 students had never experienced paired oral testing before. Thus, this is important to keep in mind because the students' reactions and anxiety levels were affected by their exposure towards the paired oral midterm and final oral testing. This would indicate paired oral testing is not a common type of testing used for the EFL learners.

### **Pair Work Favoritism**

When all 6 participants were asked if they like working in pairs for a test, all had positive reactions towards pair work. Even though this experience is nearly every participant's first time in being exposed to pair work testing, most favored pair work rather than having a negative reaction towards it. In asking whether participants would take more paired oral tests in the future, all students agreed. Although their answers are positive towards paired oral testing, the reasoning behind the openness to take a paired oral test resulted in a reduction in work load amount in preparation (pair work), gaining information through the discussion of topics (topical), speaking practice (oral), higher opportunity to speak rather than working in a big group (oral), and feeling less pressure in preparation from help from their partners (pair work). When asked whether students would take the midterm oral again, half responded in agreement and the other half disagreed. Most in favor of taking the paired midterm oral again gave a simple answer of "yes" from Bella, Cindy and Fred. Abby, Della and Eric disagreed.

### **Test Preparation Anxiety**

The data showed that all the participants not only had traces of test anxiety, and communication apprehension during the test, but more so experiencing anxiety in preparation for the paired oral midterm test. In other words, in addition to the test anxiety, test preparation anxiety was also found on them in their paired oral test setting. Main affected factors of their test preparation anxiety in the paired oral test setting fall into two main categories: (1) familiarity towards pair work partners in test preparation and (2) the test design. Although these participants' test preparation anxiety was caused by varied



affected factors, test preparation anxiety as a barrier to the participants' oral test performance was evident.

### **Familiarity towards Pair Work Partners as an Affective Factor**

This following section presents the first affective factor of test preparation anxiety, which is the familiarity towards pair work partners in test preparation.

**Familiarity preference.** Results from the semi-structured interviews inquiring about pair work preference revealed participants in this research prefers working with familiar partners over non-familiar partners. According to the interview data, when the participants were given the chance to choose their partners for the paired oral test, only 2 out of 6 participants were open to choosing unfamiliar partners for pair work. Cindy and Della were the only two that were open to choosing an unfamiliar partner. Cindy's answer was neutral: "Actually it is difficult for Chinese people to make friends with Taiwanese so at first I just sat there and waited to become the last one. Oh Della found me." In this case Cindy didn't feel like she was familiar with any one so, she wasn't proactive in choosing her partner and let someone choose her. Della on the other hand would like choice for a partner but, doesn't regard familiarity.

Yes, because if the teacher has already picked your partner and make you have no choice. Maybe I want to change a person, maybe last time I do this with a girl and maybe next time I want to do it with a boy and you want to see what is more suitable for me. (Della)

Although Della's answer was in favor of choice in choosing her own partner, she was open in choosing different partners she had never worked before. Therefore, familiarity is not an important factor to her. The other four participants, Abby, Belle, Eric and Fred preferred having the preference of working with their own familiar partners. Take Bella for example stated: "Yes. I think picking my own partner, we can we can pick the person we know, and (they are) more understanding and we get to know her better and we will we won't get nervous on the test." This finding is in accordance with Mishra & Oliver's (1998) findings that majority of students preferred to choose their own partners for pair work.

**Decrease of test preparation anxiety.** Familiarity becomes an affective factor in decreasing test preparation anxiety since it was found that if the within a pair's adoption of test preparation strategies could come to a compromise, working with a familiar partner to some extent alleviated the test taker's anxiety level. In detail, some of the participants would stick to the same partner for gaining familiarity in pair work throughout the whole semester. Take the pair of Eric and Fred for example, Eric had chosen Fred to be his midterm oral test partner, which was also the same partner he had in the beginning of the class. Fred also stated that Eric was his first partner in class. Even though the course instructor changed the students' partners after the first week of class, Fred still chose Eric to be his partner later. He explained the reason, "About the oral exam we can choose our own partner. Eric and I are familiar with each other, so I choose him." This reveals that familiarity towards pair work is important in a paired test setting since it may allow pair work test preparation to become more lucrative in preparing for their oral test.

When the participants were asked about the reason of choosing a familiar or a non-familiar partner, three of them (i.e., Abby, Della, and Fred) mutually agreed that familiarity

in pair work was important in contributing to easy communication, discussion, and had the potential for fun rather than seriousness in working together. Other three participants (i.e., Belle, Eric and Fred) pointed that unfamiliarity generated politeness, seriousness, potential communication difficulties, personality differences, and communication apprehension. The existence of communication apprehension enforces the existence of foreign language anxiety. Eric's words well address this concern: "If your pair is someone you won't talk with, you won't talk to, or you don't understand his or her personality, maybe I will be afraid to talk about some of my thoughts." This can be explained by Baleghizadeh & Rahimi's work (2011) that students tend to work with familiar partners since familiarity can provide a sense of security and less pressure of losing face.

**Increase of test preparation anxiety.** It is easily assumed, if a participant chooses a familiar partner, test preparation anxiety remains at its minimum. Interestingly, if a disagreement emerges between the pair due to different test preparation strategies, familiarity in pair work would be annulled and result in the increase of one's test preparation anxiety. Baleghizadeh & Rahimi (2011) mentioned that learners working with a familiar partner can lower conflicts and reaching conclusions easier, however this study had different findings. Some factors such as the pair's varied test preparation strategies may still cause the increase of one's anxiety levels within paired test preparation. It is like what Abby pointed: "At first I think we have to memorize some of the parts, but my partner thinks that maybe we can just go up and say whatever we want at that time."

More specifically, different test preparation strategies adopted Abby and her partner to some extent complicated their test preparation, resulting in the raise of test preparation anxiety. The pair had some disagreements on how to prepare for the oral midterm.

Consequently, the disagreements may have influenced Abby's preference for a partner for the paired midterm oral when asked whether she would be willing to work in pairs for other paired oral tests.

When you prepare for the oral midterm, you need to memorize the dialogue but maybe your partner will not want to memorize it... I think I like to do it by myself because I can do it my own way. (Abby)

Abby even concluded the benefits of working on her own: "free time, no time scheduling issues and no disagreements in test preparation." To sum up, though the effect caused by familiarity of pair work could be positive or negative, it is an important factor affecting the participants' test preparation anxiety.

### **Test Design as an Affective Factor**

In addition to heightened anxiety levels in a paired oral test setting, anxiety faced by the participants are not limited to pair work interactions alone. The second affective factor of test preparation anxiety is design of the test. Test design contributed heavily to the participants' anxiety levels when they prepared for the paired oral tests. When the participants were asked to share the insights of taking paired oral test for the first time, Abby, Cindy, Della, and Fred admitted the effect of test design as an affective factor in their test preparation. Nevertheless, "test design" that toughened their test preparation varied a lot among the participants, ranging from the number of topics (e.g., Abby & Della), the randomization of topics (e.g., Della), the difficulty of topics (e.g., Cindy & Della), the memorization of scripts (e.g., Cindy and Della), to the unfamiliarity of the test design (e.g., Della and Fred). In other words, the multifaceted form of test design to some extent

complicates the exam takers' test preparation anxiety: a teacher's design of a test, though leading to his/her students' test preparation anxiety, affects the participants differently due to the fact that not all the students experience the same problem.

**Number of topics.** Regarding the number of topics, Abby and Della considered the number of topics to be a test design issue that caused them test preparation anxiety. Abby mentioned that, "kind of a little bit too much, because you have to prepare 7 questions and you need to prepare for it and it is kind of too much. We prepare one question for about 1 hour." It was then concluded that the instructor's assignment of 7 topics for the paired oral midterm was difficult because it demanded cognitive memorization, it was time consuming to prepare since this pair spent over 1 hour per question prior to the test. In Abby's and Della's pair work, the number of test questions became an issue when tied in with the participant's lack of experience of preparing for a paired oral test. Eventually, there was a substantial the lack of experience increased of test preparation time for Abby's pair and Della's pair.

**Randomization of topics.** Similarly, the randomization of topics also became an issue when the exam takers were given a number of possible test topics in advance and yet they did not know which one would end up being their tested topic. Take Della for instance, the course instructor gave the students seven topics of the oral test beforehand and yet giving each pair only 5 minutes to prepare when the pair came to the exam room for the test. The fact that the participants did not know which topic they would be tested topic upon until five minutes before the test contributed to the increase of test preparation anxiety.

**Difficulty of the topics.** Other aspects of test design issues such as the difficulty of the topics and the memorization of scripts could also become the causes of exam takers'

test preparation anxiety. These two issues are put together into discussion as they often come into play together. They are thus affecting each other interchangeably. Cindy mentioned that both she and Della still had difficulty after receiving possible topics for the test. Cindy personally said, “One of topics is about the news, and Della and I all think it too difficult to memorize about the news.” Namely, if the difficulty of the topics is too high, the participants are more likely to have a harder time memorizing the material before the test. This, consequently, also adds to stressful process of the participants’ test preparation.

**Unfamiliarity towards the test design.** One more issue to be addressed here is the influence of unfamiliarity towards the test design on the participants’ increase of test preparation anxiety. Della and Fred both stated how their unfamiliarity with the test style could increase their test preparation anxiety. Della added as follows, “The style of the test is one of them because we have to choose our partner on our own and we have to find times to discuss what we want to talk about, and there are 7 topics.” This reinforces the fact that pair work, in combination of test design is synergistic in promoting test preparation anxiety.

Conclusively, the number of questions causes an increase in test preparation time, randomization also increases difficulty in test preparation, and difficulty of the topics causes participants to memorize topics during test preparation.

Overall, some of the findings are in line with Horwitz, & Cope’s work (1986). Besides the test anxiety identified earlier, test preparation anxiety was also found in the participants since they were not fully aware of the testing style. Therefore, some students who felt test anxiety tended to over-prepare for the paired oral test. The participants' preference of chosen partners also supports Mishra & Oliver’s (1998) finding that students prefer to have choice of partners during pair

work activities. Baleghizadeh & Rahimi's work (2011) well explains this:

familiarity provides learners with a sense of security and less pressure of losing face.

## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of the Major Findings**

In conclusion, this longitudinal study found traces of test anxiety, and communication apprehension in participants. In addition, it found test preparation anxiety - one main feature the participants experienced while working in pairs for the oral test. Main affective factors of test preparation anxiety fall into the two main categories: familiarity of pair work partners and the test design itself. The analysis of the data confirmed that majority of students preferred familiar over unfamiliar partners in a paired test oral setting mainly because it contributed to easy communication, discussion and had the potential for fun rather than seriousness in working together. Furthermore, although familiarity can be a beneficial affective factor in pair work for some participants, on the other hand there is evidence that differences in test preparation strategies may actually supersede the alleviation that familiarity may provide within a paired oral test setting.

As a sum, the second affective factor of test preparation anxiety includes the test design itself. The test design components that increases test preparation anxiety include: number of topics, randomization of topics, the difficulty of the topic, the memorization of scripts and unfamiliarity of the test design, and other possible anxiety provoking factors. The beneficial use of pair work within an evaluative setting is innovative in promoting interactions in participants; however, through more in-depth investigation with students on

a personal level, the existence for anxieties during pair work occurs not only during a test but specifically in preparation for a test.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This study suggested that instructors may want to become more aware of student's preferences towards pair work as well as issues that may occur during the utilization of pair work in a paired oral test setting. Designing a test that involves pair-work is often complex and has high potential in provoking anxiety in students not only during the test but during the preparation of it.

This study also makes several suggestions to shed light on future research. First, the influence of test preparation anxiety on EFL students' oral performance may be included in future investigations. Another suggestion is the investigation of other pair work test formats and the possible affective factors that will influence exam takers' test preparation anxiety. Future researchers can also include an in-depth analysis of individual participant's anxieties during paired oral testing by applying Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to the measurement of foreign language anxiety.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Limitations of the study include that the number of participants in the study is limited. The sample size of six English majored students only provides a snapshot of the possible affective factors of anxieties in a paired oral test setting. The results of this study was focused on an in depth study towards identifying existing and new anxieties from only six students which has the advantage of more in-depth



interpretation of the answers from the small sample size. Yet at the same time, this advantage would be a limitation since the possible potential findings sampling from a larger sample size would greatly influence the results in this study.

Secondly, since the research was completed on solely qualitative methods, the results determined are dissimilar to the results measured by quantitative measurements. Participants' responses from the semi-structured interviews could be influenced by factors such as the interviewer, depending on how the questions were asked. The presence of the researcher in the classroom observing during the class or during their test-taking period may have possible effects on the students' experience in class or anxiety in class.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consent Form

#### Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a study which will examine Students' Anxieties towards Pair-work Activities in a College-level EFL Classroom. This includes interviews and audio recordings for data research purposes that will be analyzed by the researcher. By signing this form, you agree that participating in this research is voluntarily and all research data collected and published will only be used for research purposes only. You agree all collected data maybe published and your name will remain anonymous as a participant of the research. For more information about the research contact me at [ees0463@gmail.com](mailto:ees0463@gmail.com)

**Researcher: Esther Chuang**

Consent Statement(s)

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Major:

Student Status: (Circle)

A. Freshman

B. Sophomore

C. Junior

D. Senior

E. Other \_\_\_\_\_.



(9)

class B Midterm Oral Friday 11.10.17  
10:20 10:25-10:28

- Topics
1. #7
  2. #6
  3. #2
  4. #4
  5. You bump into a friend. #1
  - 6.
  7. #3
  8. #4 #5
  - 9.
  - 10.

I can see ss' preparing their conversations outside

[redacted] i [redacted] - sits down and places their bag in front.

T' gives them the file

[redacted] asks [redacted] what jobs they want to do  
 Interpreter, translator,  
 Advantages of being a teacher.  
 Disadvantages of being a interpreter  
 Disadvantages of translator.

[redacted] - pauses, or repeats the phrases...  
 - initiates questions

[redacted] - you can talk to me to rec.  
 T' - [redacted] didn't talk as much  
 T' notes it need to be more balanced.



T' Explain's it is very good.  
see you tomorrow

[redacted]

[redacted] - Explains her high expectation for herself

[redacted] - tell her to explain . . . .

[redacted] "nignstrung."

[redacted] "Clams down"

[redacted] Both share their thoughts about sad movies.

[redacted] →

← [redacted]

both speak such, very

T' - She says see you tomorrow "Wow!"

-every fast. speech & fluent.

Wow  
really  
good  
again

Notes

## Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

### **Interview Questions #1 Oral Midterm**

1. What year and major are you?
2. Who is your partner? Are they the same (partner) as your in-class partner?
3. Before the oral exam, were you anxious in speaking English in the classroom?
4. Does a paired oral exam make you anxious? Why or why not?
5. Did you prepare for the oral test?
6. How long did you prepare with your partner?
7. What are/were the major concerns about the 3-minute oral midterm?
8. If you were anxious, which part of the test are you most nervous about?
9. Which part of the test were you not anxious about?
10. Do you like the fact that you get to pick your own partner?
11. If you didn't get to choose your partner how would you feel?
12. Why did you pick the same/different partner for the midterm?
13. Were you nervous about working with your chosen partner?
14. Would you rather do the oral midterm alone or in pairs? Why?
15. After the test, how well did you think you did?
16. Do you feel anxious about how the professor is going to score the both of you?
17. If you had the choice to get interviewed in class or in the professor's office which one do you prefer and why?
18. In which ways can the interview be improved or be less anxious?

## **Interview Questions #2**

### **About the interviewee**

1. Tell me about yourself? Age? What country you are from.
2. Tell me about your English learning experience?
3. Tell me about your personality? Are you an outgoing person or less outgoing person?
4. Are you an introvert or extrovert?
5. How confident are you in speaking English? 1-10?
6. Do you like interacting or meeting new people?
7. Do you feel anxious about it?

### **Questions about pair-work activities**

8. How do you feel about the oral paired activities in the classroom so far?
9. Which pair-work activity do you like the most and why?
10. What makes that activity so great? Is it useful? What are the benefits and disadvantages?
11. Which pair-work activity do you find most useful for your English learning?
12. Which activity is most disliked? Are there still benefits or more disadvantages?
13. Which you do you find least useful?

### **Attitudes towards pair-work**

14. Who is your second assigned partner? What is their personality like?
15. For your second assigned partner, are they easier to work with than your previous partner?
16. What do you like about working with that person?
17. Do you ever face any problems working them?
18. If so, can you explain? What, when, where, how?
19. Do you worry about the gender of your partner?

### **Attitudes towards pair-work in general**

20. Are there any benefits to working with one person in class?
21. With experience in the class do you like working with one person or more than one person for the class activities?
22. When thinking of a person to work with in class who is your first pick and why?
23. What is an example of the type of person you would not like to be partnered with?
24. How does it feel working with a person are familiar with vs. a person you don't know as much in class?

## **Interview Questions #3 Oral Final**

### **Test Anxiety**

1. Do you usually tend to feel calm or anxious before a test?
2. By taking an English oral final or (midterm) does it make you more anxious than other tests from other subjects?

### **Oral Final**

3. What is your topic?
4. Who is your partner this time? Why did you pick that person?
5. When thinking about the oral final how did you feel? Were you anxious or not?
6. Was your partner anxious before the oral final?
7. How long did you prepare for the oral final?
8. Did you prepare differently than the midterm oral?
9. What were your top concerns about the oral final?
10. Which part of the test made you more anxious?
11. Which part of the test made you least anxious?

### **Midterm oral vs. Final Oral**

12. What are the differences between the midterm oral and the final oral?
13. Are there similarities?
14. Do you think you did better than the midterm oral? How so?
15. How did you feel about the outcome of the oral final compared to the oral midterm?
16. Did you find the final oral helpful?
17. Did you find the oral more useful or meaningful than the midterm oral?
18. Did the final oral improve your English speech or speaking confidence?

### **Paired final oral**

19. When working with your partner what went well?
20. What didn't go well?
21. What are the benefits to having a partner for the oral final, the disadvantages?
22. Did working with a partner help your oral speaking skills or not?

### **Performance and Test Design**

23. How did you feel about your English speaking performance on the final oral?
24. How did you feel about your English speaking performance compared to your partner?
25. In which ways can the final oral be improved?
26. What can be changed to make the test less anxious?

## **Interview Questions #4**

### **Midterm questions**

1. Were you anxious? When you first heard about the midterm oral test? Yes or no?
2. Was your partner anxious for the midterm oral?
3. When working with your partner for the oral midterm what went well?
4. What didn't go well?
5. Were you anxious? When you first heard about the final oral test? Yes or no?
6. Compare the midterm oral vs. the final oral which one made you more anxious? Midterm or Final?
7. Compare your interaction with your partner for the Midterm oral and Final oral? Which one was more or less anxious than the other one? Choose one.
8. What are the benefits to having a partner for the oral midterm?
9. What are the disadvantages of having a partner for the oral midterm?
10. Did your partner help your oral speaking skills or not? (For the oral midterm)?
11. How did you feel about your English speaking Performance on the midterm oral?
12. How did you feel about your speaking performance compared to your partner's for the midterm oral?

### **Final oral**

13. Would you rather do the final oral alone or in pairs? Why?

### **Grades**

14. Do you think the grading was ever a worry for you? (yourself)
15. Do you worry how having a partner will affect your grades?
16. For this kind of paired oral testing do you worry about how the professor is going to score the both of you?

### **Oral Paired Testing**

17. Have you done an oral test before? oral test? y/n
18. Have you done a paired-oral test before? y/n
19. Before experience this experience. Do you like working in pairs for a test? y/n
20. After the experience, (both midterm and final) would you like do more paired oral tests in the future? y/n
21. Would you like to do the midterm oral again? y/n
22. Would you like to do the final oral again? y/n

## Appendix D: Sign up Sheet for Oral Final

**Sign-up Sheet for Freshman Oral Final (Class B)  
Friday 11 / 10**

<b>Time to choose topic (in the classroom)</b>	<b>Time to do dialogue</b>	<b>Name of student pairs</b>
10:20	10:25 - 10:28	[REDACTED]
10:25	10:30 - 10:33	[REDACTED]
10:30	10:35 - 10:38	[REDACTED]
10:35	10:40 - 10:43	[REDACTED]
10:40	10:45 - 10:48	[REDACTED]
10:45	10:50 - 10:53	[REDACTED]
10:50	10:55 - 10:58	[REDACTED]
<b>Time to choose topic (in my office)</b>	<b>Time to do dialogue</b>	<b>Name of student pairs</b>
11:15	11:20 - 11:23	[REDACTED]
11:20	11:25 - 11:28	[REDACTED]