

*I command thee thou shalt speak*



# Dealing with silence and language anxiety in the L2 classroom

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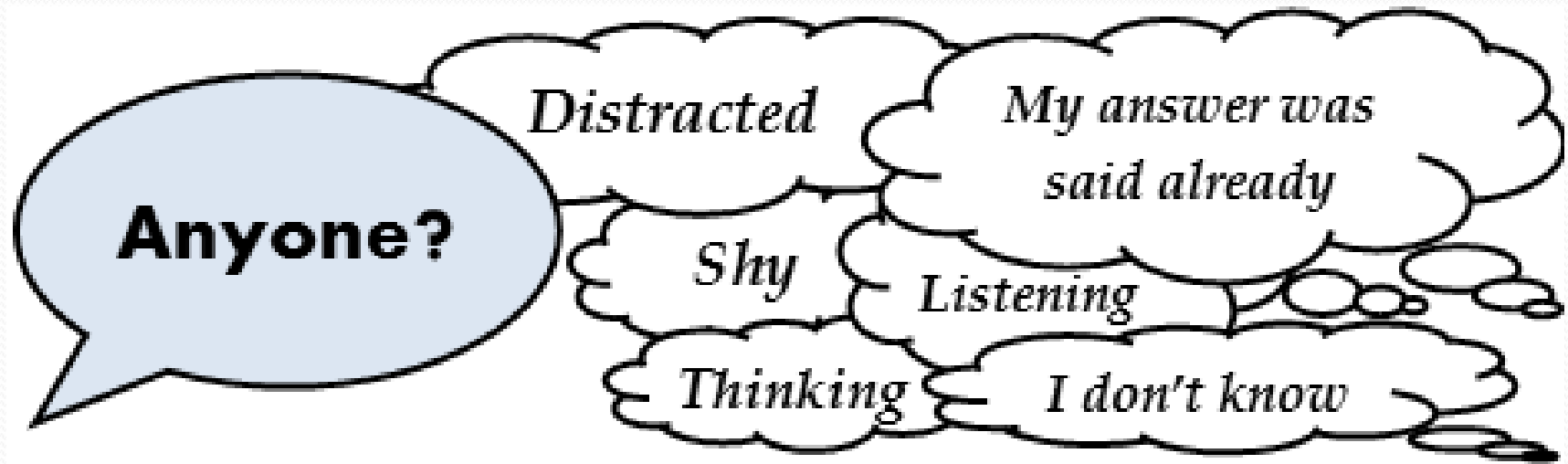
# Expectation




# Reality



# Initial perceptions



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- What is it that makes them anxious about participating in class?
  - What strategies can we adopt to minimise the effects of language anxiety in the classroom?

# Language anxiety

- It refers to the feeling of apprehension, tension and even fear in situations in which students are asked to use the L2 (Dewaele, 2007)
- Linked to individual self-perceptions (e.g. Onwuegbuzie et al. 1999), cultural and contextual factors (Steinberg and Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre et al. 1997; Bao 2015; see Gknou et al. 2017 for a recent overview).

# Some sources of language anxiety

**Worry about being  
judged by others  
(peers and teachers).**

Young, 1991; MacIntyre et al. 1997;  
Onwuegbuzie et al. 1999; Gknou et al.  
2017.

**Counterproductive  
beliefs about  
language learning**  
(Young, 1991, Horwitz, 1988)

**Sources of  
anxieties**

# Working on us: reducing power imbalances

- Renegotiating our own identity in the classroom
- Incorporating more group activities (e.g. correction in pairs and then in plenum; addressing students in groups and not individually)



# Hearing from them: the potential of reflective journals

- Ideal spaces where students can **reflect** on their classroom behaviours and also **give feedback** to the teacher
- Issues
  - Not anonymous
  - Usually presented at the end of the subject.
- Our suggestion
  - Preservation of anonymity
  - Presentation at regular times (ideally from Week 3).

# Maximising the potential of language-related activities



language-related activities



Relaxation and anxiety-reducing activities (Wolpe, 1958, Gregersen, & MacIntyre, 2013): the whole class is explicitly asked to reflect on their language-anxiety



Counterproductive: → double pressure “Now they’re asking me to talk about why I don’t want to talk”



# Syllabus

Twofold objective:

- Didactic: reinforcing a language structure
- Reflective: students speculating on their language-anxiety triggers + food for thoughts for teachers

## In practice

- Italian language, but possibly adaptable to other languages
- Different group activities for Beginners, Intermediate, Advanced students, followed by final de-briefing

# Examples

**Intermediate:** conditional. Imagine you need to give suggestions to a friend who is in these situations:

- Your friend doesn't want to speak in class in front of others.
  - You could talk to the teacher
  - I would ask for advice to other students
- Your friend is upset because the teacher corrected him.
  - I would ask the teacher to give feedback privately and not in front of the class
  - Everyone makes mistakes, so you shouldn't care about the corrections
- [Students add other situations]



**Thank you for your attention!**

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