Learners' anxiety in audiographic conferences: a discursive psychology approach to emotion talk

BEATRIZ DE LOS ARCOS, JAMES A. COLEMAN AND
REGINE HAMPEL

*Department of Languages, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, Stuart Hall
Building, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK*
(email: {b.delosarcos,j.a.coleman,r.hampel}@open.ac.uk)

Abstract

Success and failure in language learning are partly determined by the learners' ability to regulate their emotions. Negative feelings are more likely to frustrate progress, while positive ones make the task of learning a second language (L2) a more effective experience. To date no significant body of research has been carried out into the role of anxiety in the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). The present study adopts discursive psychology (DP) as its methodological approach to examine anxiety not as a psychological state, but as a social construct in the context of an audiographic conferencing tool. After interviewing a sample of learners of Spanish at the Open University (OU), our findings reveal a strong connection between emotion and learner beliefs.

Keywords: Distance language learning, anxiety, audiographic conferencing

1 Introduction

Within second language acquisition (SLA) emotion, or affect, has been directly related to effective language learning. Researchers focus on strategies to foster positive feelings such as motivation and self-esteem in language learners, and seek to halt the negative effects of anxiety and stress, recognising their potential to curtail progress (Arnold, 1999). However, no significant body of research yet exists on the role of anxiety, or emotions more generally, in the field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and particularly in relation to synchronous audiographic conferencing.

The present study was carried out in the context of an Open University language course. In 2002, OU language students were introduced to Lyceum, the OU's synchronous audiographic conferencing system. The aim was to give them the opportunity to practise their oral skills with their tutor and other learners without having to travel long distances to their tutorial venues (Hampel, 2003). Training on the new software was provided for tutors (including the lead author), and stressed the importance of familiarisation with the tool and its features, to maximise student confidence and minimise anxiety in this new learning space.

This study explores the nature of anxiety in language learners using an audiographic conferencing application for oral interaction, investigating whether anxiety is triggered by speaking the target language, and/or by possible peer or tutor judgements, and to what extent the characteristics of the online setting influence learners' anxiety. Emotion research in educational contexts typically follows either a naturalist or a constructionist approach. The present study takes a purely constructionist approach, adopting discursive psychology, which sees emotions as social constructs and not psychological states, to examine what counts as language anxiety, and how it is managed, in the specific context of audiographic conferencing.

2 State of Knowledge

2.1 Affect in SLA

Affective states in SLA have been researched within the framework of individual learner differences. Combined with learner beliefs and general factors such as age, language aptitude, personality and motivation they have been found to predict success in L2 learning (Ellis, 1994). Anxiety, one of the most thoroughly studied aspects (Scovel, 1978; Krashen, 1985; Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Gardner *et al.*, 1997), is defined as a composite of communicative apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Language anxiety is typically *debilitative* but sometimes *facilitative*.

Beliefs are " 'mental constructions of experience' that are held to be true and that guide behaviour" (White, 1999: 443). Although subject to change, their influence is such that they "can enable or seriously disable language learning" (Hurd, 2005). Learners have an enormously varied set of beliefs about how a language is best learnt (Horwitz, 1987; Wenden, 1987). Among these are beliefs about the feelings that facilitate or inhibit learning.

2.2 Emotions and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of the affective domain in SLA, in the field of CMC few texts devote space to explicit discussion of emotions. On the subject of written CMC, early studies allude to its potential for lessening anxiety, encouraging learners' collaborative spirit and increasing their motivation (Beauvois, 1992; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Sanchez, 1996). Roed (2003) investigated the behaviour of language learners communicating in a chat room and also observed that this kind of environment helps to reduce language anxiety. The benefits of written CMC, she notes, rest on its functioning as scaffolding: "gradually giving anxious students more confidence to embark on conversation in the target language" (Roed, 2003: 170).

In the 1990s internet-based audio conferencing systems expanded the possibilities of interaction beyond written communication. Allowing for synchronous voice transmission over the internet, these tools present language learners with the opportunity to work on their aural and oral skills (Hassan *et al.*, 2005). Research in the area of audio conferencing has been growing steadily ever since (Kötter *et al.*, 1999; Hampel & Baber, 2003; Hampel, 2003; Felix, 2004; Hampel & Hauck, 2004;

Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Hampel *et al.*, 2005; Hassan *et al.*, 2005; Hauck & Hurd, 2005; Hauck & Hampel, 2005; Rosell-Aguilar, 2005; de los Arcos & Arnedillo Sánchez, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Hampel, 2006; Rosell-Aguilar, 2006a; Rosell-Aguilar, 2006b). In most studies emotion is not a central concern. However, Hampel (2003; 2006) indicates that in an environment which fosters anonymity – in the more negative sense of being isolated from others – interacting orally in a foreign language without visual and verbal cues can cause anxiety and lower motivation. According to Hampel and Stickler (2005), the lack of body language can influence classroom management and learner anxiety, causing tutors to work harder than in face-to-face settings to create a sense of community, trust and student comfort. Hampel and Hauck (2004) add that the design of warming-up activities for audiographic sessions is crucial to help students get to know each other in settings where peer contact is limited to the anonymity of a voice and a disembodied name. Yet even when suffering from technostress (Hampel, 2006), students learning a language with an audiographic conferencing system report affective as well as cognitive gains (Hauck & Hampel, 2005). Hampel and Baber (2003) enumerate results similar to those of written CMC: students who tend to be shy seem to be willing to take more risks without being afraid of making fools of themselves. This argument is sustained in Rosell-Aguilar (2005) and de los Arcos and Arnedillo Sánchez (2006): these small-scale projects suggest that audiographic environments are not considered a cold medium by their users, but an environment capable of carrying considerable humour (de los Arcos & Arnedillo Sánchez, 2006) and where students feel shielded by the computer screen and are not embarrassed when making mistakes (Rosell-Aguilar, 2005). Three particular studies explore the effects of anxiety in language learning in audiographic environments. Felix (2004) seeks to stimulate systematic research in the area of anxiety and oral performance in voiced applications by asking whether the anonymity of online applications might make students feel less anxious when speaking a foreign language in public. Since students find written asynchronous computer-assisted classroom discussions "less threatening and inhibiting than oral interactions" (Felix, 2004: 285), and since synchronous chat applications contribute to the development of oral skills, she speculates about the advantages of audio CMC, citing three applications which incorporate voice communication over the Internet: an asynchronous voiced bulletin board (*Wimba*), a voiced chat (*Traveler*) and *Lyceum*, the OU's audiographic resource. Felix acknowledges the absence of rigorous research, but observes that students using *Wimba* feel at ease and confident to carry out oral tasks. *Traveler* requires the students to use an *avatar*, an icon that represents them in the virtual world, which allows them to hide behind a telepresence and to take more risks.

Lyceum takes central stage in Hampel *et al.* (2005). Students of German at Monash University and the Open University worked collaboratively on the topic of *Identities in Contemporary Germany* over a period of 12 weeks in which they had regular online meetings in Lyceum. Through questionnaires, participants indicated their awareness of the affective variables of successful language learning, further prompting the authors to look at anxiety. The task design tried to make constructive use of the anonymity of the environment – in Lyceum students see the name of their peers and hear their voices but do not know what the others look like – to give

learners "more freedom to make mistakes thus contributing to reducing learner inhibition and language anxiety" (Hampel *et al*., 2005: 11). Yet, paradoxically, both students and tutors felt anxious at times, regardless of their proficiency in the language, due to the loss of embodiment which the system carries. Thus, Hampel and her colleagues conclude "the loss of embodiment may be experienced as both liberating and restricting" and "performance anxiety appears to depend not simply on linguistic proficiency or ICT-literacy but rather on psycho-social factors and the learning context" (Hampel *et al*., 2005: 26).

Hauck and Hurd (2005) "explore the interrelationship between affective learner variables, in particular language anxiety, and learner self-knowledge and management in face-to-face as well as virtual environments". They report on two studies, the first of which concerned distance education students of French at the OU. The students answered questionnaires administered at different times during their academic year in relation to anxiety, motivation and beliefs. The authors specifically asked about the elements of the language learning process that distance learners associate with anxiety, and the strategies they use to control this emotion. The results informed the second study which concludes that self-management skills can contribute to reducing language anxiety in face-to-face and virtual learning environments (VLEs). However, it should be noted that Hauck and Hurd's initial project involved the face-to-face rather than the online version of the course, and small participant numbers.

To sum up, learner differences such as anxiety are an important area of research in SLA, since they explain why some individuals succeed and others fail in learning a language, but have previously attracted little attention within CALL. The anonymity offered by written and spoken CMC – if understood in terms of not revealing personal information involuntarily since learners cannot see one another other and they can use a different online persona to represent themselves – can be considered a liberating asset: learners feel less inhibited, free to take risks and unafraid of making mistakes, and anxiety is reduced. Understood as loss of embodiment, as communicating in a void without eye contact and paralinguistic features, the anonymity of the setting potentially generates more anxiety. The present study hypothesised that learners using a synchronous audiographic conferencing application in the context of L2 learning would experience anxiety first and foremost because they had to speak the target language; that a certain degree of apprehension would originate in their knowledge that, although not seen, they could be heard and thus evaluated by tutor and peers; and that the tool itself would have a strong positive or negative impact on the students' anxiety and willingness to take risks.

3 Constructionist models of emotion in education

"Emotion is a complex human package different from action and from thought but related to both" (Stearns, 1995: 37). For Stearns, emotions are both physical reactions and cognitive exercises, a judgement of the acceptability of our emotional expression in a social setting. Scholars in the study of emotions divide between naturalists, for whom emotions are innate, uniform and biologically grounded, and constructionists, who argue that emotions are culture-specific, thus determined by

context and function (Stearns, 1995). The constructionists' approach is based on three assertions: firstly, that emotional life is less instinctual than the naturalist view asserts, as it responds to cognitive appraisal; secondly, that different societies have different emotions, not always replicable in other cultures; thirdly, that emotions, and our reactions to them, change over time.

In the field of SLA, researchers who associate language anxiety with performing in public in the specific context of the language classroom seem to be adopting a constructionist stance. Although others (e.g. Arnold, 1999: 8) see emotions as semi-permanent individual psychological traits, in the present study we consider language anxiety primarily as a social construct.

4 Discursive psychology

The term discursive psychology (henceforth DP) dates back to the 1980s (Edwards & Potter, 1992) but has recently incorporated ethnomethodological principles and conversation analysis into its theoretical core. DP sees language more as a medium of social action (Edwards, 1997) and a socially shared code (Wetherell *et al.*, 2001) than an abstract grammatical system. It draws on the conversational analysis (CA) approach of Sacks, Schlegloff and Jefferson, which defines discourse not as the transmission of thoughts between the minds of speaker and hearer but as joint creation of meaning between speakers continuously interpreting the previous turn and making that interpretation manifest in their own turn (Antaki, 2002). Emotions, attitudes, memories and thoughts are no longer cognitive representations but discourse practices, observable in the way participants in interaction make them relevant in their talk (Edwards, 1997). Talk is constructive in that it presents just one plausible version of events, and action-oriented in that it adopts a non-neutral viewpoint (e.g. countering, complaining, praising, justifying) (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). While DP prefers natural to experimental interactional data, it is also acceptable to treat interviews as natural data, provided the researcher has no preconceived agenda.

5 Method

Interviews were conducted with seven volunteers who, in the context of a Spanish course at the OU, were participating in regular online rather than face-to-face tutorials. Lyceum allows for many-to-many synchronous voice communication over the Internet, and features different graphic modules that can be manipulated by all participants in the conference; it also has a text-chat, a recording facility and the option to create an indefinite number of sub-conferences for pair or small group work (for a more detailed description see Hampel & Baber, 2003). Five participants were beginners, the other two post-beginners. Subjects were advised of broad topics before consenting to participate. Interviews were deliberately unstructured to allow flexibility for follow-up questions as in conversations, and conducted in English either in Lyceum or via telephone, in keeping with the students' wishes. They were electronically recorded with the subjects' permission and transcribed for analysis following Jefferson's system (see Appendix).

6 Analysis

No preconceived categories were adopted for transcript analysis. While the majority of feelings reported in students' accounts belong in the basic family of *fear* – anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, qualm (Goleman, 2005) – our principal concern is the study of reported emotions as part of how talk performs social actions. Edwards (1997) explains that there is a set of oppositions and contrasts which point to a range of things that emotion discourse can do in constructing events and managing their accountability. We begin to unfold these in the analysis of Extract 1, taken from the interview with student A. Here he answers the question '*How do you feel attending tutorials in Lyceum?*'.

Extract 1

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1        A:      Uhm:: hh I f-feel a little bit (.) apprehensive a little bit anxious
2                just before a tutorial hh (1.0) for various reasons (.) hh
3                m-maybe that no one's going to be there or maybe the system w-won't
4                work properly or something like that (0.8) but once the tutorial gets
5→               going=>I mean I'm talking about your tutorials now< on-on-once the
6                tutorial gets go↑ing then (1.1) you know (0.5) you soon forget all=well I
7                forget forget my ne::rves and then just concentrate on what we're
8                ↑doing (0.9) >and at the ↑end of it< (0.6) I feel if we if if we've learnt
9                something or if we've done something good then you get a sense (.) of
10               satisfaction a sense of relief (1.2) and you go and have a drink and relax
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Student A reports he initially feels nervous and apprehensive (line 1) but downgrades his emotion – he is *a little bit* nervous and *a little bit* apprehensive (emphasis added). Counteracting any version of his apprehension as unfounded, he rationalises it in lines 3 and 4 – it is possible that the system will fail, or that he is the only student attending the tutorial, in which case there is an actual reason for him to feel nervous. He does not say that he is calm until something goes wrong but that his nerves appear beforehand in expectation that something will go wrong. This prior cognitive assessment of the situation indicates his nervousness is cognitively grounded. In line 7 the feeling is given a temporary state: A does not have a nervous disposition; his nerves disappear "soon", they are controllable and only last until the beginning of the tutorial, eventually replaced by a sense of satisfaction and relief (line 10). Note the contrast: whereas apprehension is cognitively grounded, satisfaction and relief are cognitively consequential – if he learns something or does something good (lines 8 and 9), he feels satisfied and relieved. He publicly displays these by having a drink and relaxing (line 10), thus allowing the feeling to shift from private state to external behaviour. Considering A's nerves will not reappear presumably until the next tutorial, both satisfaction and relief posit a more permanent quality.

As the conversation proceeds, the interviewer's question is here prompted by the rhetorical business of line 5 in Extract 1 (>I mean I'm talking about your tutorials now<).

Extract 2

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11       I:      hh hh and why=do you feel any different then if it is a French
12               tutorial
13       A:      We:::ll ↑yes (0.9) its::: it depends on the students I mean I know
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14   you're recording this °I'm trying (.) I mustn't mention names° but you
15   know (0.5) there's (1.4) hhh it's <u>not</u> (.) the <u>tutor</u> is wonderful the
16   tutor is wonderful she does a <u>marvellous</u> job but there's only been
17   (1.0) wha- three or four people turning up for the ↓tutorials and (1.3)
18→   hhh >one of them can hardly speak any French at all and she never
19→   <u>says</u> anything< so it must be very very frustrating for the <u>tutor</u> to get
20→   her to <u>talk</u>

The interviewer interprets line 5 as student A suggesting the existence of another version of events concerning the way he feels when attending online tutorials, a version which differs from what he just narrated. She makes that obvious in her question in lines 11 and 12 – "do you <u>feel</u> any <u>different</u> then if it is a <u>French</u> tutorial". Notice that A initiates his reply in line 13 with a stretched *we:::ll* followed by a pause of nearly a second, another elongated sound and a hesitation in a lower tone (°I mustn't mention names°); he then pauses again for nearly two seconds before properly acknowledging the question. Preliminary pauses in CA generally mark a dispreferred response, which on this occasion would break the normative assumption that a request for clarification is followed by some sort of explanation. In our sample, the interviewer does not concede that somehow A finds little comfort in answering her question; instead of jumping her turn in interaction, she waits for A's. Before he actually begins a new account in line 15, the interviewer already has confirmation of her previous inference, that indeed another situation exists, where A's emotions are not only different, but other than satisfactory.

A's alternative version ends in frustration (line 19), intensified by the repetition of the adverb –*very very* frustrating (emphasis added). Interestingly, it is not A's frustration he refers to, but the tutor's. The feeling, albeit rationalised in lines 18 and 19, is also cognitively consequential and event-driven – it is one of the students not speaking which he assumes must cause the tutor to become frustrated. Identities are constructed in talk. The way participants in a scene are categorised has huge implications for the way they are understood: A casts himself and the people he is talking about in one of two social roles, either the role of 'student' or the role of 'tutor'. Within a context such as language learning, each member is bound by the behaviour, rights and obligations of their role (Antaki, 2002): students learn, tutors teach. A makes relevant the connection with 'talk' in lines 18–20: it is the tutor's job to get students to speak the language, and the student's to speak. The tutor successfully accomplishes her role (the <u>tutor</u> is wonderful the tutor is wonderful she does a <u>marvellous</u> job), while the student does not fulfil hers: she does not speak (>one of them can hardly speak any French at all and she never <u>says</u> anything<) thus triggering the tutor's frustration in line 19.

Extract 3 shows an identical pattern. Although not reproduced here, in her turn the interviewer explains what she does as a tutor to try and encourage participation from all students attending a tutorial, and worries that by concentrating on a less talkative person, she may be wasting everybody else's time. A's reply is shown in Extract 3.

Extract 3

21   A: Well it's::: (1.3) it's up to the students I s'ppose to try their best.
22   I remember the <u>first</u> ever tutorial I had on Lyceum that was with the
23   (0.5) the German level 3 (0.6) and I got a <u>real</u> shock (.) with <u>that</u>

24	because they were ↑all (.) well they were ↓all (.) I mean there were
25	three of them (1.0) and hh two of them were Germans (.) from
26	Germany (0.5) hhh so you know absolutely fluent and >the other one
27	had lived in Germany for ten years< (0.6) .hh and so
28 →	they were rattling away in completely fluent German y'know and I was
29 →	wondering "wha wha (1.3) what is this course↑for"=y'know they can
30 →	speak the ↑language so it's obviously not for learning a language so I
31	felt I felt hhh (0.5) I felt at sea there (0.8) but (0.9) y'know I tr-tried
32	my best (.) and tried tried to make myself understood and (0.4)
33	although °I was nervous for the first two or three tutorials° (1.0) hhhh
34	but then I tried to (.) I think I got a bit more confidence and
35	I spoke a bit more (1.3) it's up to the (0.7) ↑obviously a good tutor
36	makes a difference (0.7) but she can't make someone speak who
37	doesn't want to

'Talking' continues to be the pertinent action: we see once again how emotion emerges from the transgression of the role of 'student', yet on this occasion it is not the fact that they do not speak, as in extract 2, but their speaking fluently and effortlessly (line 28). A feels "a real shock" (line 23) and "at sea" (line 31) because he finds himself in a completely unexpected situation. The expectation is that you do a language course to learn a language; these people are not real students, "they can speak the ↑language" (lines 29 and 30). Student A has been denied a basic right of students', that of learning to speak, and that is what leaves him shocked, lost and even nervous (line 33). These feelings are temporary (°I was nervous for the first two or three tutorials°) as order is re-established and the expected behaviour of a student enacted: A tries his best (line 31), builds up his confidence (line 34) and manages to speak more (line 35). His negative feelings cease to exist coinciding with his execution of the role of 'student'. The last two lines of Extract 3 acknowledge once more the role of 'tutor' as someone who must make students speak. When A moves from the indeterminate *a tutor* (↑obviously a good tutor makes a difference) to the personal pronoun *she* in "she can't make someone speak who doesn't want to" (lines 36 and 37), we are reminded of the frustration of the tutor in the previous extract: just as A cannot accomplish his role when he cannot speak, the tutor will find a student who does not want to speak an obstacle in the realization of hers.

Next, student A is asked whether he can remember any incident in Lyceum that may have set off in him a particular kind of emotion, be it negative or positive.

Extract 4

38	**A**:	Well hhh (0.6) I mean (0.3) °this is being recorded again° yes there was
39		an incident when (0.8) I was I was doi::ng (0.7) a tutorial (0.9) and the
40		.hh the Spanish and the tutor=I mean this is I think the first or second
41		lesson or something (0.7) and the tutor gave me:: (1.4) °th-this lo::ng
42		passage to re::ad (1.5) and I tried to read it as best I could >but
43 →		obviously I made mistakes<° and then at the end of it she said "well
44		that's not bad let's↑everybody↑everybody give him a cheer girls" (1.7)
45		.hh and I thought that was::: (0.4) ↓unnecessary (0.5) °and I did feel
46		angry then. I would never do that when I was teaching° (1.4) hhh so
47		that's one of the reasons I wanted to (.) I wanted to change ↑tutors

What is interesting in Extract 4 is that A recalls an episode that made him angry. His anger is not irrational but an integral part of rational accountability; not dispositional but event-driven, in other words, justified and reactive. First he sets the scene in lines 39–41: he is attending a Spanish tutorial, at the beginning of the course, and he is asked by the tutor to read a passage. The narrative is rhetorical; "in constructing a version of events, anyone risks having their version discounted on the grounds of stake and self interest" (Horton-Salway, 2001: 155). A addresses such a possibility in his account, as he knows that the interviewer is also a tutor and hence may read his story in a different light: in lines 41 and 42 the passage is long and not short (if it were short, it would also be easier to read), the vowel sounds are physically stretched too (°th-this lo::ng passage to re::ad) as if to reflect the length of the text; in line 42 he says he tried his best and counteracts any claims that he could not be bothered or that in the face of difficulty he gave up too soon. Despite all his efforts and best disposition, he *obviously* made mistakes (line 43); we intentionally highlight the adverb for attention as it normalises the action: it is to be expected that anyone learning a language will make mistakes, especially having just started the course. Next, in lines 43 and 44, using direct speech, A copies the tutor's remark as he completes the task assigned to him ("well that's not bad let's↑every-body↑everybody give him a cheer girls"): by repeating the tutor's exact words, he is lodging with the interviewer a request to judge by herself the appropriateness of such comment. After a long pause of nearly two seconds and a shorter one, A deems the observation unnecessary and feels angry (lines 45 and 46). He has interpreted the tutor's gendered words as probably condescending, in such a way that his anger is then morally justified. Socially, A has acted according to his role of 'student', he has made mistakes, but the tutor transgresses hers ("I would never do that when I was teaching"): what is expected of tutors is to correct mistakes, to encourage students to see mistakes as an integral part of the process of learning a language, not to demean, albeit involuntarily. In consequence, A displays his anger in a dramatic and very public manner by asking to be removed from this tutor's group (line 47), eventually coming to join the interviewer's.

We can only speculate that a similar incident in a face-to-face classroom would have yielded different results; the tutor could have easily guessed the student's discomfort in reading the passage and withheld her phrase, whereas a smile on her face could have transformed the perceived criticism into praise in the student's eyes. In an audiographic conferencing system like Lyceum, the only visual information that participants share about one another is a list of names on the side of the computer screen. A's anger does not receive recognition from anyone present in the conference simply because they do not see it. Privately, each of them may have interpreted the situation quite diversely. When A exteriorises his feeling and decides to quit his tutorial group, the reaction may appear to other tutees (assuming they know of it) as extreme. Then, how significant is the social appreciation of emotion in Lyceum? We further unravel the question in the analysis of Extract 5, where the interviewer asks another student whether she feels embarrassed speaking a foreign language online.

Extract 5

1	**B**:	Personally I thi:nk (0.6) hh hh >you're not gonna believe it but< (.)
2		I don't like to (0.6) stand up and talk in front of people >I really
3		don't< but on Lyceum I don't mind it=I mean (0.4) °it's easier° (0.4)

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4              if I'm asked to give a presentation >or something< at work I always
5→             just go bright re:d and cringe >you know< I really really worry (0.5)
6              but in this situation (0.4) I don't fee:l that because I don't
7              (0.5) probably don't have (0.8) the eyes on me=>you know what I
8              mean<? (…) That's the whole ↑thing you know (0.5) people (.) their
9              eyes on you and you (0.4) >I mean< (0.6) I could sit here >you know<
10             .hh and do a presentation and ehm: (.) do something wrong and (0.5)
11             I might go re:d but nob(h)ody can s(h)ee so they ca(h)n't la(h)ugh hh hh
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The interviewer's question introduces Lyceum as the relevant context for the production of spoken language. In a pattern which we have found in several other interviews, B establishes a contrast between speaking in public and speaking on Lyceum (lines 2 and 3); more explicitly, she talks about giving a presentation at work, a situation which she finds considerably distressing (I really really worry) and which causes her to blush and cringe (line 5). On the contrary, in Lyceum, identified by the words *in this situation* (line 6) and *here* (line 9) as this conversation took place online, she does not experience such a physical reaction and offers an explanation for it in line 7 (I don't have (0.8) the eyes on me). Her emphasis is on people looking at her, her fear is of being judged by others, of doing something wrong and being laughed at, but all this public exposure has to come through the eyes; in Lyceum one can not see or be seen, thus you might still make a mistake and go red, but the incident is denied its existence by the very fact that nobody is looking: embarrassment needs to exist in the public domain. If in Extract 4 we speculated that A's anger might not have survived had it been socially recognised, it is clear that B sees her embarrassment as a comic episode (line 11) precisely because that kind of publicity is not there. As a language learner, B relates to the notion that speaking on Lyceum is different from speaking in any other situation; the emotions that she experiences as a user when talking on Lyceum are linked to her understanding of the system as a particular context with its own rules of interaction. Extract 6 advances the argument.

Extract 6

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1       C:     .hhh I was thinking of the first time I used Lyceum and I felt very
2              ne:rvous
3       I:     uhm:
4       C:     .hh e:h (0.4) it was a kind of a nervous excitement if you like
5       I:     yeah
6       C:     and (I even) thou:ght (0.5) and thinking of (0.5) that today I even
7              thought there was perhaps a bit mm (0.3) almost as much [pressure
8       I:     [yeah
9       C:     as if I was seeing the people .hh face to face .hh because (0.8) for me
10             I thought about it today (.) >the way I felt< (.) it was almost
11             like=I don't kno:w who was listening so (.) I felt even more pressure
12             rather than (0.4) having (.) eh:: seeing faces looking at you .hh, so
13             ((distortion)) in fact I think (0.3) because it's (.) Lyceum I felt that (.)
14             there's almost like a (0.6) hurried way of doing things because (.) you
15             feel compelled to respond .hh and because people aren't seeing your
16             facial or body language (0.4) whereas you're working yourself up to
17             answer you feel eh: like you have to hurry your answer
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As we can read in lines 1 and 2, student C recalls how he was *very nervous* at his first tutorial. Immediately, however, he reformulates this feeling into *a kind of nervous*

excitement (line 4), a term that lacks the gravity of the previous one. In his account of why he felt this way, it is obvious once again the significant action is 'speaking': he also differentiates between speaking face-to-face and speaking on Lyceum and understands it is the latter's absence of visual contact that sets apart both scenarios. C talks first about being aware of *as much pressure* (line 7) then *even more pressure* (line 11) when speaking online, anxiety that comes from answering a question when you cannot be seen. B and several other interviewees interpreted the conventions operating in the context as meaning that not having others' eyes on you allowed you to make mistakes without feeling embarrassed; C's interpretation, by contrast, is that you have to respond quickly, since nobody can see you preparing for it (lines 16 and 17). Here is where his nervous excitement is generated. What we want to take away from this is the notion that there is an attentiveness on the part of the users as to what the system entails which ties in with their knowledge of what it implies to be a language learner. Emotion, then, plays a role in their accounts of what Lyceum is and what learning a language means. In fact, our interviewees, even those on the ab initio course, showed a surprisingly high level of awareness with regard to the responsibilities of a language learner. The interviews included many comments like those in Extracts 7 and 8.

Extract 7

1	**D**:	I don't feel <u>embarrassed</u> because (0.6) even if I make mistakes I <u>know</u>
2		that (.) <u>eventually</u> I correct them=and I <u>find</u> myself >you know< eh:
3		(0.4) when I <u>make</u> a mistake I <u>realise</u> I've made a mistake °with the
4		masculine and the feminine= the adjectives (.) that type of thing° so (.)
5		whereas before (.) I didn't <u>bother</u> about anything like that (0.6) and little
6		by little I got ↑better

Extract 8

1	**E**:	↑no not ↓really (.) ehm: I mean I think the only way to <u>learn</u> is when
2		you get it <u>wrong</u> (0.5) ehm if you get it <u>right</u> <u>all</u> the time you're never
3		gonna lea(h)rn any↓thing so (.) no I don't feel embarrassed

As a language learner, you speak, you try your best, you make mistakes, you correct them, you practise, you are one in a group of equals, you learn. The fulfilment of this role as understood by students does not create feelings of anxiety, it actually diminishes them. Negative emotion seems to stem from not executing these responsibilities freely: earlier we had the opportunity to analyze A's anger as he understood that his tutor had not fulfilled her duties appropriately; and his shock as he concluded that those students who already spoke fluent German were not fit to be called language learners. In Extracts 9 and 10, B is frustrated at her mispronouncing, and F's nerves come from not having prepared for his tutorial – two more examples of how the transgression of the role of 'student' results in negative feelings.

Extract 9

1	**B**:	I would get quite frustrated maybe about (0.5) the pronunciation .hh
2		when I <u>kno:w</u> (.) the way it <u>should</u> be said (0.6) and >still say it the
3		wrong way <u>any</u>way<=that would (.) that would (0.9) frustrate me

Extract 10

```
1    F:    ehh:: I usually feel fine=I'm looking forward to tutorials except
2          if I haven't got through the preparation document=haven't had ti:me or
3          just haven't got around (0.4) .hh y'know haven't had time to do it
4          beforehand (.) and then just rushing through it then I feel a bit nervous
5          (0.3) but if I actually:: (0.6) got through it (0.3) ehh: beforehand and
6          read over it then I'm fine
```

7 Conclusion

The limitations of the study with regard to data elicitation are both generic (e.g. possible bias arising from teacher-researcher as interviewer, or from introspective self-report) and specific (reliance on transcribed individual retrospective interviews rather than recordings, computer tracking, learner diaries, focus groups or some form of triangulation). Further analysis, focusing for example on teaching style, learner characteristics or task design, might well yield additional insights. Nonetheless, the study has provided a surprising amount of evidence. Using a constructionist perspective and discursive psychology as our methodological approach, the study has revealed strong connections between emotions and learner beliefs. Students enter the online L2 classroom with a ready-made set of beliefs and expectations about language learning: in their talk, they display a heightened sense of what it means to be a language student or a language tutor. The feeling that stems from not fulfilling that role is what students highlight in their accounts: their frustration is because they have not pronounced properly, their nerves because they did not have time to prepare, their anger because their tutor stepped over the line. By using emotion talk they justify to others and themselves how far they are able to fulfil their role. In a truly constructionist manner, learners use emotions to communicate and express judgement: all our informants had a very clear picture of who makes a 'good' L2 learner – a person who takes risks, who sees mistakes as a means to progress, who understands the difference between pair and group work, who recognizes the need to study regularly and practise oral skills, etc. In the review of the literature, Hauck and Hurd (2005) stated that learners' self-control and self-management help them reduce their anxiety. Our results confirm that knowing one's self is not enough; it is judging that your behaviour as a language learner coincides with what you believe is expected of a language learner which indicates the absence of anxiety.

Evidence in our study suggests that learners participate in their online tutorials, initially expecting to feel embarrassed to use the target language. They translate their experiences of the outside world into the language classroom, and fear public exposure. This corroborates our hypotheses and coincides with the concept of language anxiety described by Horwitz *et al.* (1986). However, soon comes the realisation that when speaking in an audiographic conference like Lyceum, this type of apprehension serves no purpose: students allude to the fact that since nobody can see them their feeling of embarrassment is often short-lived. Their preoccupation with speaking is still relevant, but the feeling changes because emotions, as constructionists explain, are context-specific. Speaking in the particular context of Lyceum is different from speaking in a 'real life' situation. Once students learn what they perceive the rules of the setting to entail, their anxiety is substituted by a

nervous excitement which originates in the setting itself: it is the pressure to answer a question within seconds of having been asked. We agree with Hampel *et al.* (2005) that the learning context influences learner behaviour, but we also suggest that the impact of using an audiographic tool does not produce anxiety in L2 learners who understand the setting as a separate learning context with its own conventions. In this sense, we believe it is inappropriate to talk about the potential of applications like Lyceum in scaffolding students for face-to-face conversations in the target language. Instead, we call for the autonomy of conversations in synchronous audiographic environments to be recognised as objects of study in their own right. After all, with the increasing availability of such tools, authentic online spoken interactions will increase relative to face-to-face interactions.

A data-driven constructionist approach, whose aim is not to assess whether people are truthful or not in their accounts but to describe "how people do what they do at the local level of the immediate interaction" (Wetherell *et al.*, 2001: 386) therefore seems a promising avenue for further research into both emotions and learner beliefs in language learning, meeting the challenge that scholars face in the need "to find ways of ensuring that learners' verbal reports of their beliefs reflect their actual beliefs" (Ellis, 1994: 479).

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Appendix

Transcription symbols

```
(.)                 Just noticeable pause.
(0.5)               Timed pause.
↑word ↓word         Onset of noticeable pitch rise or fall.
A: word [word
B: [word            Squared brackets aligned across adjacent lines
                    denote the start of overlapping talk.
.hh hh              In-breath (note the preceding fullstop) and out-
                    breath respectively.
wo(h)rd             (h) is a try at showing that the word has
                    ''laughter'' in it.
wor-                Sharp cut-off.
wo:rd               Speaker has stretched the preceding sound.
(words)             A guess at what might have been said if unclear.
( )                 Unclear talk.
A: word=
B: =word            The equal signs show that there is no discernible
                    pause between two speakers' turns or, if put between
                    two sounds within a single speaker's turn, that they
                    run together.
word WORD           Underlined sounds are louder, capitals louder.
°word°              Quiet
>word word<
<word word>         Inwards arrows show faster speech, outward slower.
→                   Analyst's signal of a significant line.
((sobbing))         Transcriber's go at representing something hard, or
                    impossible, to write phonetically.
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Source: http://www-staff.lboro.ac.uk/∼ssca1/sitemenu.htm