

A Case Study of the “Able to Speak but Afraid to Speak” Phenomenon Among Advanced Indonesian Learners of Chinese

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study explores the phenomenon of being “able to speak but afraid to speak” among advanced Indonesian learners of Chinese. A qualitative research approach was adopted. Two Indonesian learners who had obtained HSK Level 5 or above and had studied in China were selected as research participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings generated four major themes. First, advanced learners generally experienced the phenomenon of being able to speak Chinese but lacking the confidence to speak in formal communicative situations. Second, fear of negative evaluation was identified as an important psychological factor contributing to speaking anxiety. Third, learners’ personal growth experiences, learning backgrounds, and individual characteristics jointly influenced the formation of speaking anxiety. Fourth, continuous language practice helped improve speaking confidence, but could not completely eliminate speaking anxiety in formal communicative contexts. The study concludes that speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners is not merely caused by insufficient language proficiency, but results from the interaction of language competence, personal experiences, psychological factors, and communicative contexts. Therefore, international Chinese language education should pay greater attention to learners’ emotional needs by creating supportive, low-anxiety classroom environments and providing more authentic opportunities for oral communication, so as to help learners gradually develop the confidence to speak Chinese.

INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of the rapid development of international Chinese education, more and more overseas learners are achieving a high level of Chinese proficiency through long-term, systematic study. Among them, some learners have already obtained

HSK Level 5 or above certificates and have experience studying or living in China, enabling them to proficiently complete daily communication, classroom learning, and cross-cultural communication activities. However, in actual teaching, there is a phenomenon that deserves further attention from researchers and teachers: many advanced Chinese learners, despite having good language skills, are still unwilling or afraid to actively use Chinese for communication. When teachers invite them to speak, participate in class discussions, or communicate with native Chinese speakers, they often show obvious nervousness, hesitation, or even avoidance. This phenomenon of “being able to speak” but “afraid to speak” indicates that improving language ability does not necessarily mean effective communication skills; learners' emotional factors in real communicative situations remain important variables affecting language output.

As a foreign language, Chinese is gaining global influence and learning demand. In 2024, 85 countries have included Chinese in their national education systems, with over 200 million international Chinese learners and speakers; By the same year, the cumulative number of candidates taking the HSK had reached 7.93 million, reflecting the continuously expanding demand for learning Chinese as a foreign language (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024a, 2024b). In Indonesia, as exchanges between China and Indonesia deepen in economic, educational, and cultural fields, the importance of learning Chinese is becoming increasingly prominent.

As the group of Chinese learners expands, learners with higher proficiency in Chinese are gradually becoming a group worth paying attention to. According to HSK proficiency descriptions, HSK Level 5 learners have mastered about 2,500 vocabulary words and possess strong Chinese comprehension and expression skills (Chinese Testing International, 2009). This differs from the main language difficulties faced by beginner learners. For example, Azizah (2025) found in a study of 69 lower-grade Chinese learners at Indonesian universities that their main difficulties were concentrated in phonetics, grammar, and the memory and writing of Chinese characters. The study also points out that some learners lack confidence in spoken Chinese communication due to concerns about pronunciation or intonation errors (Azizah, 2025). However, for learners with HSK Level 5 and above who already possess advanced language knowledge and skills, the problem may no longer simply stem from a lack of language knowledge, but may further involve psychological and willingness factors in actual communication.

Therefore, even if learners already have relatively sufficient language skills, they may still hesitate or even avoid using Chinese for oral communication due to fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, or concerns about negative evaluations. In other words, “can speak but dare not speak” reflects the potential gap between linguistic competence and willingness to communicate. This phenomenon constitutes a research paradox worth noting: learners already possess a certain level of Chinese communicative ability in language knowledge and skills, but may not be willing to apply this ability in

real communicative situations. Therefore, exploring why advanced Chinese learners “can speak but dare not speak” helps to further understand the psychological and communicative barriers that may exist in the process of transforming language ability into actual communicative behavior.

In second language acquisition research, anxiety has always been considered an important emotional factor affecting language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) first proposed the concept of “Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety” (FLCA), considering it a psychological phenomenon specific to foreign language learning contexts, mainly including three dimensions: communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of negative evaluations. Among them, speaking anxiety reflects the tension and unease learners experience when communicating in the target language; Exam anxiety reflects learners' worries when facing language tests; Fear of negative evaluations manifests as learners worrying about negative evaluations from teachers or others. Subsequently, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) further pointed out that anxiety not only affects learners' classroom performance, but also runs through the entire process of information input, processing, and language output in second language learning, thereby affecting learners' willingness to communicate and their language output performance.

In recent years, anxiety in learning Chinese has gradually become an important research topic in the field of international Chinese education. Studies have shown that learning anxiety affects learners' participation in class, motivation, and language output, and is also influenced by factors such as learning background, classroom environment, and self-evaluation. However, a review of existing research shows that most research subjects are still focused on intermediate learners or ordinary Chinese learners, with relatively insufficient attention paid to speaking anxiety among advanced learners who have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates. At the same time, previous studies mostly use quantitative methods such as questionnaires, lacking in-depth exploration of learners' psychological experiences and the formation of speaking anxiety in real communicative situations.

Indonesia, as one of the most populous countries in Southeast Asia, has a relatively broad group of Chinese learners. Its Chinese language education covers multiple levels, including primary and secondary education, higher education, as well as vocational and social education, thus having a certain degree of learner representation. At the same time, Indonesian learners have a relatively unique linguistic and socio-cultural background. As learners whose main language is Indonesian, they not only need to deal with differences in intonation, characters, and grammar during their learning process, but also build confidence in spoken Chinese communication in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Therefore, Indonesian learners can provide representative research contexts for examining the relationship between language ability, psychological factors, and actual communicative behavior. Focusing on Indonesian Chinese learners, especially

those with advanced Chinese proficiency, this not only helps to further understand the oral communication barriers faced by non-native speakers during advanced Chinese learning stages, but also enriches research on Chinese as a second language for learners from different language backgrounds, and provides a reference for enhancing learners' practical communication willingness and oral skills in Indonesian Chinese teaching.

Qualitative research emphasizes that researchers enter real contexts, using interviews, observation, and other methods to understand the experiential world of research objects and their process of constructing meaning. Chen Xiangming (2000) pointed out that qualitative research is conducted in natural contexts, using the researcher themselves as a research tool, collecting various data methods, to conduct holistic exploration of research phenomena, and to form an explanatory understanding through interaction with the research object. Regarding "why do people already have a relatively high level of Chinese proficiency but still dare not speak Chinese?" This issue cannot fully reveal the complex reasons behind this issue relying solely on quantitative data, whereas qualitative research can more deeply present learners' real learning experiences, emotional experiences, and language usage processes. Therefore, this study focuses on Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates, using semi-structured interviews to collect data and explore the specific manifestations, causes, and coping strategies of their speaking anxiety, aiming to enrich research on advanced Chinese learners' speaking anxiety in the field of international Chinese education and provide references for Chinese speaking teaching practice. This study aims to explore from the learner's own perspective the reasons why Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who hold HSK Level 5 or above "can speak" but "dare not speak," in order to further reveal the formation process and influencing factors of their speaking anxiety.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

Foreign Language Course Anxiety Theory

Foreign language classroom anxiety is one of the important theories in the field of second language acquisition. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) first proposed the concept of foreign language classroom anxiety, considering it a special type of anxiety occurring in foreign language learning contexts. Unlike general psychological anxiety, it mainly arises from learners' feelings of tension, worry, and lack of confidence during the use of the target language. Horwitz and others further pointed out that foreign language classroom anxiety mainly includes three dimensions: communication anxiety, exam anxiety, and fear of negative evaluations. Among them, speaking anxiety refers to the tension and unease learners experience when communicating in the target language; Exam anxiety manifests as learners' worries about classroom performance or language test results; Fear of negative evaluation manifests as learners fearing negative evaluations from teachers, peers, or native speakers due to language errors.

Building on this, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) further pointed out that anxiety affects three stages of second language learning: information input, information processing, and language output. When learners remain in a state of high anxiety for a long time, it not only affects their classroom performance but also lowers their willingness to express themselves and their confidence in communication. Therefore, even if learners have mastered a certain level of language knowledge, anxiety may still hinder their language output, leading to the phenomenon of “knowing how to say it but not daring to say it.”

Several complementary perspectives can further explain the phenomenon of being “able to speak but afraid to speak.” Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can influence learners’ ability to make use of their existing linguistic resources, meaning that adequate language knowledge does not necessarily result in active language use when psychological barriers remain high. From the perspective of individual differences, Ellis (1994) emphasizes that second language development is influenced by learners’ individual characteristics and learning experiences. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because the two participants demonstrated similar speaking anxiety but developed it through different pathways, including previous experiences, social comparison, personality, self-expectations, and academic identity. In addition, Oxford (1990) highlights the role of language learning strategies, including affective and social strategies, through which learners can manage emotions and anxiety and develop their language abilities through interaction with others. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that speaking anxiety among advanced learners should not be understood solely as a consequence of insufficient linguistic proficiency, but rather as a phenomenon shaped by the interaction of affective factors, individual experiences, and learners’ strategies for managing language learning and communication. These complementary perspectives therefore provide a broader theoretical basis for interpreting the “able to speak but afraid to speak” phenomenon identified in this study.

These theories provide an important theoretical basis for studying speaking anxiety in second language learning and also offer a theoretical basis for explaining the phenomenon of advanced Chinese learners “able to speak but afraid to speak.” Therefore, the foreign language classroom anxiety theory can provide an important theoretical basis for understanding the speaking anxiety of second language learners and lay the theoretical foundation for subsequent research on speaking anxiety among Chinese language learners.

Research on Speaking anxiety among Chinese Language Learners

In recent years, under the context of international Chinese education, oral language ability has been regarded as an important indicator for measuring learners’ comprehensive language proficiency, making speaking anxiety a research hotspot. The

anxiety issue in learning Chinese as a second language has gradually attracted widespread attention in the field of international Chinese language education. Lan Xinya (2025) systematically reviewed related studies from 2008 to 2022 and found that anxiety, learning motivation, and learning strategies are important themes in current research on Chinese as a second language. Among these, learning anxiety not only affects learners' learning outcomes but is also closely related to learning motivation, learning strategies, and classroom teaching environment. In recent years, research has gradually expanded from measuring anxiety levels to include anxiety formation mechanisms and teaching interventions.

Existing research mainly focuses on three aspects: the manifestations of speaking anxiety, influencing factors, and teaching interventions. In terms of speaking anxiety, learners are prone to nervousness, avoidance of expression, and lack of confidence during classroom speaking, public presentations, and communication with native speakers. Regarding influencing factors, teacher support, classroom interaction, learning environment, language proficiency, and learner self-evaluation all influence the level of speaking anxiety. Luo Xuan and Chen Hongyao (2025) found that teacher friendliness, classroom interaction, and positive feedback can effectively enhance learners' classroom pleasure and reduce anxiety levels. The case study by Li Qi and Shi Jinsheng (2025) further shows that reasonable classroom task design, evaluation feedback, and teacher support can effectively alleviate international students' anxiety about learning Chinese, improving classroom participation and learning confidence.

Overall, existing research has systematically revealed the manifestations, influencing factors, and intervention strategies of speaking anxiety among Chinese learners, providing important references for international Chinese education and teaching practice. However, current research mainly focuses on beginner and intermediate learners, international students in China, and primary and secondary school learners, with relatively insufficient attention to speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners who have already obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates. In particular, further in-depth research is needed to address the psychological experiences and formation process of advanced learners who “can speak” but “dare not speak” in real communicative situations.

Research on Speaking anxiety among Advanced Chinese Learners in Indonesia

Currently, research on speaking anxiety among advanced Indonesian Chinese learners is relatively limited, with existing studies mainly focusing on anxiety levels and influencing factors among different learning groups. Compared with Western countries, empirical research on speaking anxiety among advanced Indonesian Chinese learners still needs further enrichment. Wu Aixuan (2017) conducted a study on 150 Chinese and non-Chinese students at San Marino High School in Indonesia, using a questionnaire survey method to compare the levels of Chinese learning anxiety and its influencing

factors among the two groups. The study found that both Chinese and non-Chinese students experience a certain degree of anxiety during the learning process of Chinese. Among them, Chinese students have higher levels of anxiety in speaking and reading than non-Chinese students, and the reasons are closely related to factors such as identity, family expectations, self-evaluation, and learning pressure.

In addition to Chinese learning anxiety, Zhang Jinqiao, Bao Weiling, and Wu Limei (2021) examined speaking anxiety among Indonesian Chinese youth from the perspective of language learning. The study found that respondents had varying degrees of anxiety in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and classroom learning, with relatively high anxiety in listening, reading, and writing, and relatively low anxiety in speaking. At the same time, factors such as root-related awareness, cultural background, and personal identity also affect learners' levels of speaking anxiety.

Overall, existing research on anxiety among advanced Indonesian Chinese learners mainly uses quantitative methods such as questionnaires, with most subjects being middle school students or inheritance language learners, focusing on anxiety levels and influencing factors. Research on advanced Chinese learners at HSK level 5 and above is relatively lacking, and there is still a lack of in-depth exploration of their speaking anxiety experiences and formation processes of “being able to speak but afraid to speak” in real communication situations. Therefore, this study intends to adopt a qualitative research approach, focusing on advanced learners of Indonesian Chinese to further enrich related research findings.

In summary, research on foreign language learning anxiety and Chinese learning anxiety both domestically and internationally has yielded substantial results, providing an important theoretical foundation for this study. However, existing research still mainly focuses on intermediate learners or general Chinese learners, with less attention paid to Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who hold HSK Level 5 or above certificates; In terms of research methods, quantitative studies such as questionnaires are mostly used, lacking in-depth analysis of learners' psychological experiences and anxiety formation processes in real communicative situations. Therefore, this study adopts a semi-structured interview approach, focusing on Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who have obtained HSK Level 5 or above as research subjects, exploring the speaking anxiety phenomenon of “being able to speak” but “afraid to speak” from the learner's own perspective. This aims to enrich research on speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners in the field of international Chinese education and provide references for international Chinese language teaching in oral education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts qualitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews as the main data collection method, conducting in-depth interviews with Indonesian

advanced Chinese learners who have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates to explore the specific manifestations, causes, and coping strategies of their speaking anxiety.

Qualitative research emphasizes understanding the experiential world of the research object and its process of meaning-building within real-life contexts. Chen Xiangming (2000) pointed out that qualitative research uses the researcher themselves as the main research tool, collecting data through interviews, observation, and textual analysis, combined with the sociocultural background of the research subject, to comprehensively understand and explain the research phenomenon. Compared to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses more on the subjects' real experiences, emotional experiences, and the meaning behind their behaviors, making them especially suitable for exploring complex educational phenomena and learners' psychological processes.

The question this study focuses on is: "Why do Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who have already obtained HSK Level 5 or above still experience the phenomenon of 'being able to speak' but 'afraid to speak'?" 。 This issue not only involves the development of learners' language abilities but is also closely related to learning experiences, self-awareness, classroom environment, and authentic communication experiences. Relying solely on questionnaire surveys is difficult to deeply reveal the causes of their formation. Therefore, this study adopts qualitative research methods, aiming to gain in-depth understanding of learners' genuine thoughts and learning experiences through interviews, analyze the causes of their speaking anxiety from their own perspective, and further explore the interrelationships among different factors.

Research Subject

This study selected research subjects using purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is a commonly used sampling method in qualitative research. Its characteristic is to select research subjects that provide rich information based on the research objectives, rather than pursuing representativeness in sample size (Chen Xiangming, 2000).

This study selected two advanced Indonesian Chinese learners as research subjects. To ensure that the research subjects fit the theme of this study, respondents must meet the following conditions: (1) Indonesian Chinese language learners; (2) Have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificate; (3) Have studied in China for one year or more; (4) Currently have experience using Chinese for study, work, or communication; (5) When using Chinese for authentic communication, there are still varying degrees of tension, anxiety, or reluctance to express themselves.

The selection of these two respondents was mainly because their learning backgrounds and language experiences align with the research objectives of this study

and can comprehensively reflect the real experiences of speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners. Chen Xiangming (2000) pointed out that qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of research phenomena, focusing more on the richness of data and the value of information provided by research objects rather than the number of samples. Therefore, this study uses two interviewees as case studies, conducting in-depth interviews to understand their learning experiences, specific manifestations of speaking anxiety, and the causes of their formation, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of advanced Indonesian Chinese learners who “can speak” but “dare not speak.”

To protect the interviewee's personal privacy, the paper uses “Interviewee A” and “Interviewee B” instead of real names. All interview materials are used solely for this study and do not involve any personal identification information.

Data Collection

This study mainly uses semi-structured interviews to collect research data. Semi-structured interviews combine openness and guidance. Researchers conduct interviews based on pre-designed outlines and conduct appropriate follow-up questions based on respondents' responses to obtain richer and more authentic information.

The interview mainly covered five aspects: (1) the interviewee's background in learning Chinese; (2) Authentic experiences of speaking in Chinese; (3) The specific context and causes of speaking anxiety; (4) The impact of speaking anxiety on study, work, and daily communication; (5) Respondents' responses and suggestions.

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and compiled into transcripts as research materials. To protect interviewee privacy, the paper uses “Respondent A” and “Respondent B” instead of the real names of the respondents; all data is used solely for this study's analysis.

Data Analysis

This study uses the topic analysis method to analyze the interview data. The topic analysis method emphasizes identifying, organizing, and generalizing themes of common significance from a large amount of qualitative data, thereby revealing the laws and characteristics behind research phenomena.

During the specific analysis, the interview recordings were first organized into text, and the interview texts were repeatedly read to familiarize themselves with the materials; Second, preliminary coding of content related to the research questions; Subsequently, codes with similar significance are categorized and integrated to form preliminary themes; Finally, the study further analyzes and explains each topic, and, combined with

relevant theories and existing research, discusses the manifestations, causes, and coping strategies of spoken speaking anxiety among advanced Indonesian Chinese learners. Through the above analysis process, the study ultimately summarized four themes, which will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 4 combined with the interview content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Advanced Chinese Learners Commonly Experience the Phenomenon Of “Knowing How to Speak” But “Not Daring to Speak.”

Through semi-structured interviews with two advanced Indonesian Chinese learners, it was found that although both have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates and have experience studying and living in China, enabling them to handle basic communication in study, work, and daily life, they still commonly “speak well” in formal communication situations such as classroom speeches, formal presentations, and interactions with unfamiliar Chinese people. The phenomenon of “not daring to speak.” This indicates that advanced learners already possess certain proficiency in Chinese, but improving language skills does not mean they can output language naturally and confidently.

Interviewee A candidly admitted at the start of the interview:

“对！非常同意。因为不常说中文，所以一开口就会觉得很僵硬，而且一直在想自己说得对不对，尤其还要注意声调。”

“That's right! I strongly agree. Because they rarely speak Chinese, they feel stiff as soon as they start speaking, constantly wondering if they're saying it correctly, especially paying attention to their tone.”

Later, when asked why she was reluctant to speak up, she further said:

“其实我知道我要表达什么，可是我会一直想，这样说对吗？这个词是不是更合适？如果说错了怎么办？”

“Actually, I know what I'm trying to express, but I keep wondering, is this really the right way to say it? Isn't this word more appropriate? What if you say something wrong?”

In addition, she mentioned:

“有时候别人其实没有觉得我说得不好，但是我自己会一直觉得还可以说得更好，所以就越来越不敢说。”

“Sometimes others don't actually think I speak well, but I always feel I could say better, so I become less and less willing to speak.”

From the above interview, it is clear that respondent A already possesses a certain level of language expression ability. What she truly worries about is not how to express herself, but that she constantly checks whether her language is accurate during

the process. This ongoing self-monitoring shifted her attention to “not being wrong” rather than “completing communication,” which increased psychological pressure and reduced the fluency and initiative of her expression.

In contrast, although respondent B has long used Chinese for learning and teaching, she also said she still feels nervous in formal settings. She said:

“平时跟朋友聊天其实没有什么问题，但是如果老师突然叫我回答问题，我还是会很紧张。”

“Normally, chatting with friends isn't a problem, but if the teacher suddenly asks me to answer questions, I still get very nervous.”

When talking about the class report, she said:

“虽然我每次都会提前准备，可是一站到前面，我还是会紧张。有时候连声音都会发抖。”

“Although I always prepare in advance, once I stand at the front, I still get nervous. Sometimes even his voice trembles.”

Additionally, she added:

“我觉得不是因为不会说，而是因为太想说好了，所以反而会给自己很大的压力。”

“I think it's not because I can't say it, but because I want to say it well, which actually puts a lot of pressure on myself.”

Unlike respondent A, respondent B was able to communicate more naturally in daily life, but still easily felt anxious in classroom presentations, teacher questions, and formal discussions. This indicates that the speaking anxiety of advanced Chinese learners is clearly situational. When the communication environment is relatively relaxed, she can successfully express herself; But when the exchange partner becomes a teacher or a formal setting, anxiety increases significantly.

Based on the interviews with both interviewees, it can be seen that both have reached a high level of Chinese proficiency and are able to communicate in both study and work. However, both interviewees believe that what truly troubles them is not “not being able to speak,” but “not daring to speak.” Although the specific reasons for their anxiety differ, ultimately, they all manifest as a lack of confidence in expressing themselves in formal communication situations, which in turn affects their language output.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) pointed out that speaking anxiety is an important component of anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Even if learners already have good language skills, when immediate language output is needed, tension and psychological pressure may still affect their expressive performance. Lan Xinya (2025)

also pointed out that learning anxiety not only affects learners' participation in class, but also reduces their willingness to communicate and their language output abilities. The results of this study further indicate that for advanced learners of Chinese, as language skills improve, speaking anxiety does not naturally disappear but more often manifests as concerns about expression and psychological pressure in formal communication situations.

In summary, although the two respondents have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates and have good Chinese proficiency, they still commonly “know how to speak” but “dare not speak.” This phenomenon indicates that speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners does not automatically disappear with improved language proficiency, but is more influenced by communicative situations and psychological factors. This finding also provides a basis for further analysis of the causes of speaking anxiety in the next section.

Fear Of Negative Evaluations Is a Major Source of Speaking Anxiety Among Advanced Chinese Learners

Analysis of the interview data revealed that although both respondents already have a high level of Chinese proficiency, they are very concerned about others' evaluations of their language abilities during actual communication. When they think their expression may be wrong, or worry about not meeting the expectations of teachers, classmates, or others, they often feel obvious nervousness and actively reduce their spoken expressions. This indicates that fear of negative evaluations has become an important psychological factor affecting speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners.

Interviewee A said when asked why she is afraid to speak Chinese:

“我最担心的不是别人听不懂，而是别人觉得我的中文不好。”

“What worries me most isn't that others don't understand, but that they think my Chinese isn't good.”

She then further explained:

“如果别人一直看着我，我就会一直想自己是不是说错了，发音是不是不标准。有时候一句话还没说完，我就在想下一句要怎么说。”

“If others keep staring at me, I keep wondering if I said it wrong, if my pronunciation isn't standard. Sometimes, before I finish a sentence, I'm already thinking about how to say the next.”

In addition, she added:

“其实很多时候别人没有笑我，也没有纠正我，但是我自己会一直觉得还可以说得更好，所以就越来越不敢说。”

“Actually, many times people don't laugh at me or correct me, but I always feel I can speak better, so I become less and less willing to speak.” “

From respondent A's response, it is clear that she always pays attention to how others evaluate her language performance during communication and continuously self-checks. This excessive focus on language correctness makes her more prone to anxiety during formal communication. Further analysis of the interview content revealed that respondent A has long been influenced by her upbringing and social comparisons, making her more concerned about others' evaluations than typical learners. This mindset has gradually extended to Chinese learning and oral expression.

Respondent B expressed another concern. She stated:

“如果老师突然让我回答问题，我一定会紧张，因为我怕回答得不好。”

“If the teacher suddenly asked me to answer questions, I would definitely get nervous because I was afraid, I wouldn't answer well.” “

When talking about the class report, she said:

“我每次都会准备很久，可是真正站到前面的时候，我还是会一直担心自己说得不够好。”

“I always prepare for a long time, but when I actually stand at the front, I still worry that I haven't spoken well enough.” “

She also added:

“因为我是学国际中文教育的，又一直教中文，所以别人可能会觉得我的中文应该很好。我也会给自己很大的压力，希望不要让别人失望。”

“Because I studied international Chinese education and have always taught Chinese, others might think my Chinese should be very good. I also put a lot of pressure on myself, hoping not to disappoint others.” “

From Interviewee B's interview, it can be seen that her anxiety does not stem from insufficient language skills, but more from high self-expectations and psychological pressure brought on by her professional status. She hopes her expression will meet the expectations of teachers and classmates, so she constantly raises her standards in formal communication, which actually lowers her confidence when expressing herself.

Comparing the two respondents, although their specific reasons for developing fear of negative evaluations differ, both ultimately affect their spoken expression. Respondent A cares more about others' direct evaluations of their language ability, while respondent B is more concerned about whether their performance matches their identity and others' expectations. Both different psychologies ultimately lead learners to reduce

their willingness to express themselves, making them more cautious in formal social situations, and even actively reducing opportunities to speak.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) argued that fear of negative evaluation is an important component of anxiety in foreign language classrooms. When learners worry about negative evaluations of their language abilities, anxiety easily arises, which further affects their language output. Research by Luo Xuan and Chen Hongyao (2025) also points out that teachers' positive feedback and a supportive classroom atmosphere can effectively reduce learner anxiety and increase classroom participation. The results further indicate that for advanced Chinese learners, as their language proficiency continues to improve, their focus gradually shifts from “whether they can speak” to “whether they speak well enough,” making the fear of negative evaluations even more pronounced.

Thus, fear of negative evaluations does not naturally diminish with improved language skills, but continues to influence advanced Chinese learners' oral expression in new forms. For learners who already have a high level of Chinese, reducing anxiety requires not only continuing to improve language skills but also building positive self-awareness and gradually increasing confidence in expressing themselves in a more supportive language environment.

Different Upbringing and Educational Backgrounds Jointly Influence the Development of Speaking Anxiety

Further analysis of the interview materials from both respondents reveals that although both show “speaking well” but “not daring to speak,” However, the process of developing speaking anxiety is not exactly the same. Respondent A was more influenced by her upbringing and past learning experiences, while Respondent B was more influenced by personal personality, self-requirements, and academic identity pressures. This indicates that the speaking anxiety of advanced Chinese learners varies significantly among individuals, and its formation is often the result of multiple factors acting together.

During the interview, interviewee A repeatedly mentioned that her upbringing had a significant influence on her current way of expressing herself. She stated:

“小时候爸爸妈妈经常拿我跟姐姐比较，所以我一直觉得自己没有姐姐那么优秀。”

“When I was little, my parents often compared me to my sister, so I always felt I wasn't as outstanding as my sister.”

She then went on to say:

“后来到了中国学习，我看到身边很多同学中文都很好，我就更不敢主动讲话了，因为我
觉得别人一定比我说得好。”

“Later, when I went to China to study, I saw many classmates around me speaking Chinese very well, so I became even more afraid to speak up because I believed others must speak better than me.”

When talking about her class speech, she added:

“有时候老师问问题，其实我知道答案，但是我还是会想很多，最后就选择不说了。”

“Sometimes when the teacher asks questions, I actually know the answer, but I still think a lot, and in the end, I choose not to answer.”

From respondent A's response, it is clear that her speaking anxiety does not only arise after learning Chinese, but is also influenced by long-term social comparisons during her upbringing. After entering China to study, the change in learning environment further amplified this mentality, making her more concerned about her language performance and gradually developing a habit of lacking confidence in expression.

In contrast, respondent B did not mention similar upbringing. She believes her anxiety stems more from her personality and her constantly rising self-demands. She stated:

“我本身就是比较内向的人，所以不只是说中文，很多时候公开讲话都会紧张。”

“I'm naturally quite introverted, so not only do I speak Chinese, but I often get nervous when speaking publicly.”

In addition, she mentioned:

“现在读博士，又一直教中文，所以别人会觉得我的中文应该很好，我自己也会这样要求自己。”

“Now that I'm pursuing a PhD and have been teaching Chinese, people think my Chinese must be good, and I hold myself to the same standards.”

When talking about the class report, she said:

“我不是不会说，而是希望自己说得很好。如果觉得准备得还不够，我就会越来越紧张。”

“It's not that I can't say it, but I hope I can speak well. If I feel I'm not prepared enough, I get more and more nervous.”

From this, it can be seen that respondent B's speaking anxiety mainly stems from high self-expectations. When learners continuously raise their standards for themselves, formal communication can easily become a psychological burden. She worried that her performance would not meet the expectations of teachers, classmates, or herself, so she was more likely to feel nervous during formal communication situations such as classroom reports and academic discussions.

Comparing the two respondents, it can be found that although both ultimately showed a tendency to express themselves proactively, the paths through which speaking anxiety developed were clearly different. Respondent A was more influenced by upbringing, social comparisons, and past learning experiences, while respondent B was more influenced by personality traits, self-requirements, and academic identity pressures. This indicates that there is no unified pattern of speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners, but rather strong individual differences.

Chen Xiangming (2000) pointed out that qualitative research emphasizes understanding the meaning behind the subject's behavior based on their real life experiences, rather than simply generalizing common characteristics. Through case analysis of two respondents, this study further found that even if learners exhibit similar speaking anxiety, the causes of its formation may still differ significantly. Meanwhile, Wu Aixuan (2017) pointed out in a study of advanced Indonesian Chinese learners that learning background, self-evaluation, and learning environment all influence learners' anxiety about learning Chinese. Building on this, this study further finds that for advanced Chinese learners, factors such as upbringing, personality traits, and academic identity also continuously affect their confidence in speaking expression.

Overall, although both respondents “know how to speak,” they “dare not speak.” However, the mechanisms behind the formation of speaking anxiety are not the same. Different upbringing, learning backgrounds, and personal psychological characteristics together shape learners' ways of expression and determine their psychological responses when facing formal communication situations. This indicates that when understanding the speaking anxiety of advanced Chinese learners, attention should be paid to the learner's individual experiences, rather than relying solely on language ability. Since the causes of speaking anxiety vary, whether continuous language practice can help learners relieve anxiety is worth further discussion. Continuous language practice helps alleviate speaking anxiety, but it cannot completely eliminate anxiety.

Continuous Language Practice Helps Alleviate Speaking Anxiety, But It Cannot Completely Eliminate Anxiety

This study adopts qualitative research methods, with findings mainly based on learners' actual experiences, interview data, and the researcher's systematic analysis and interpretation of the data. Therefore, research results are not intended to simply verify each finding based on existing theories or expert opinions, but rather to further explain the phenomena presented through dialogue between research data and existing findings. In other words, existing research and related theories mainly serve as explanations and dialogues in this study, rather than as predetermined conclusions. Based on this, the following discussion will examine the consistency, differences, and possible expansion

between the findings and existing understanding, based on the presentation of the core phenomena revealed by the research materials and their deeper explanations, combined with relevant theories and existing research findings, thereby further clarifying the theoretical significance and practical value of the findings.

Through interviews, it was found that both respondents believed that continuous learning and use of Chinese can improve language skills and, to some extent, boost confidence in expressing themselves. However, they also unanimously stated that even after reaching a high level of Chinese and using it for long periods for study or work, speaking anxiety still exists to varying degrees when facing formal communication situations. This shows that for advanced Chinese learners, while ongoing language practice can help relieve anxiety, it cannot completely eliminate it.

Interviewee A spoke about her changes in recent years, saying:

“现在因为工作关系，我每天都会接触中文，比以前敢说一点了。”

“Now, because of work, I am exposed to Chinese every day and speak a bit more than before.”

She then added:

“如果是认识的人，我讲话会比较自然；但是如果突然要跟陌生中国人交流，我还是会紧张。”

“If it's someone I know, I speak more naturally; But if I suddenly had to interact with a stranger in China, I would still get nervous.”

When asked how she can be more confident, she said:

“我觉得还是要多练习，多跟中国人聊天。如果一直不用中文，就会越来越没有信心。”

“I think we still need to practice more and chat more with Chinese people. If you keep not using Chinese, you'll lose confidence more and more.”

From respondent A's answer, it is clear that consistently using Chinese has indeed enhanced her language skills and confidence in expression. However, her progress is mainly reflected in familiar, relaxed communication environments, while anxiety persists when facing strangers or formal interactions. This shows that while language practice can improve learners' proficiency in expression, building confidence still requires long-term, authentic communication experience.

Respondent B expressed a similar view. She stated:

“因为每天都要教中文，所以现在说中文已经很自然了。”

“Because I have to teach Chinese every day, speaking Chinese now feels very natural.”

She further said:

“跟学生或者朋友聊天的时候不会紧张，但是如果课堂汇报或者老师突然提问，我还是会紧张。”

“I don't get nervous when chatting with students or friends, but if there's a class report or a sudden question from the teacher, I still get nervous.”

In addition, she added:

“我觉得这种紧张不会完全消失，只是现在比以前更容易调整自己的状态。”

“I don't think this tension will completely disappear; it's just that it's easier now than before to adjust my condition.”

From the interview with Respondent B, it can be seen that her long-term experience in Chinese teaching and academic study has enabled her to use Chinese fluently in daily communication. However, when communication enters formal situations, she is still affected by evaluation pressure and self-demand. Therefore, for advanced learners, developing language skills does not mean psychological stress decreases simultaneously.

Based on the interview data from both interviewees, it can be found that continuous language practice can help learners gradually improve their oral fluency and boost confidence in expression, but it cannot completely eliminate anxiety in formal communication. As language proficiency continues to improve, learners' focus shifts from “whether they can speak” to “whether they speak accurately” and “whether their expression meets expectations.” Therefore, speaking anxiety at the advanced stage is more manifested as psychological stress. It's not a lack of language skills.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) pointed out that speaking anxiety continuously affects learners' information input, processing, and output. Even if learners already possess high language proficiency, anxiety may still affect their language performance in real communication. Research by Li Qi and Shi Jinsheng (2025) also suggests that genuine opportunities for communication, positive feedback from teachers, and a supportive classroom environment can help learners gradually build confidence in expressing themselves and reduce classroom anxiety. The results of this study are basically consistent with previous research and further demonstrate that for advanced Chinese learners, although continuous language practice can improve language performance, truly alleviating speaking anxiety still requires psychological adaptation, authentic communication experience, and a positive learning environment.

Based on the above analysis, both interviewees believe that continuous use of Chinese can improve language skills and confidence, but nervousness in formal communication is still hard to completely avoid. This indicates that the speaking anxiety

of advanced Chinese learners is somewhat persistent, and its relief depends not only on language practice but also on communicative situations, psychological states, and personal experiences. This research also provides a practical basis for the later teaching recommendations for advanced Chinese learners.

CONCLUSION

Research Conclusions

This study focuses on two Indonesian advanced Chinese learners who have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates and have studied in China. Data is collected using semi-structured interviews, and the interview content is organized and analyzed using thematic analysis. Through repeated coding, classification, and analysis of the interview materials, this study ultimately formed four themes: "Advanced Chinese learners commonly experience the phenomenon of 'being able to speak' but 'afraid to speak'" Fear of negative evaluations is a major source of speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners," "Different upbringing and learning backgrounds jointly influence the formation of speaking anxiety," and "Continuous language practice helps alleviate speaking anxiety but cannot completely eliminate it." 。 Based on the research findings, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First, advanced Indonesian Chinese learners generally have the tendency to "speak" but "dare not speak." This phenomenon. Although both interviewees have obtained HSK Level 5 or above certificates and possess good Chinese proficiency, enabling them to communicate in study, work, and daily life, they still tend to feel nervous in formal social situations such as classroom speeches, formal presentations, interactions with teachers, and when facing unfamiliar Chinese people. This shows that reaching an advanced level of language proficiency does not mean learners can express themselves naturally and confidently.

Second, fear of negative evaluations is an important psychological factor affecting speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners. The study found that both respondents paid close attention to others' evaluations of their language performance. When learners worry that their expression is not accurate enough, or fear that their performance will not meet the expectations of teachers, classmates, or others, their willingness to express will significantly decrease. Therefore, for advanced learners, psychological factors have become an important factor affecting spoken expression.

Third, there are significant individual differences in speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners. The study found that although both respondents showed similar speaking anxiety, their causes were not exactly the same. Respondent A was mainly influenced by her upbringing and past learning experiences, while Respondent B was more influenced by personality traits, self-requirements, and academic identity pressures. This indicates that the speaking anxiety of advanced Chinese learners results

from the combined effects of their upbringing, learning background, and individual psychological characteristics.

Fourth, continuous language practice can improve learners' language skills and confidence in expression, but cannot completely eliminate speaking anxiety in formal communicative situations. As language practice increases, learners can communicate more naturally in daily life, but anxiety still exists to varying degrees when facing evaluative communication activities such as classroom reports and formal discussions. Therefore, the development of language ability does not go perfectly in sync with psychological adaptation; improving confidence in expression still requires long-term, authentic communication experience and positive psychological support.

Overall, this study believes that advanced Chinese learners' speaking anxiety is not simply caused by insufficient language ability, but rather the result of multiple factors such as language ability, psychological factors, upbringing, and communicative contexts. Therefore, in the process of international Chinese education, attention should not only be paid to the development of learners' language abilities, but also to their psychological needs, helping learners gradually build confidence in expressing themselves and achieve a shift from 'speaking well' to 'daring to speak.'

Teaching Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to further help Indonesian advanced Chinese learners alleviate speaking anxiety and improve their oral expression skills.

First, create a more relaxed and supportive classroom atmosphere. Teachers should encourage learners to express themselves boldly and provide positive and constructive feedback on their language mistakes, reducing the psychological pressure caused by fear of making mistakes and enabling them to practice speaking in a lower anxiety environment.

Second, opportunities for real language communication should be increased. The study found that both respondents believed that continuous use of Chinese improved their expression skills. Therefore, during teaching, more opportunities for authentic communication can be provided through classroom discussions, scenario simulations, group collaboration, and communication with native Chinese speakers, helping learners gradually build confidence in expression and improve their oral communication skills.

Finally, attention should be paid to individual differences among advanced learners. This study found that different learners develop different causes of speaking anxiety. Therefore, teachers should fully understand the learners' growth experiences, learning backgrounds, and psychological characteristics, and provide targeted guidance

and encouragement based on their actual situations, helping learners build positive self-awareness and gradually reduce speaking anxiety.

Research Shortcomings and Prospects

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on two Indonesian advanced Chinese learners and exploring their speaking anxiety through semi-structured interviews. Due to the small number of study subjects, the results mainly reflect the real learning experiences of the two respondents and do not have statistically significant general representativeness. However, qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of the real experiences and significance of the research subjects. Therefore, this study can still present the formation process and characteristics of speaking anxiety among Indonesian advanced Chinese learners in a relatively deep way.

In addition, this study mainly used semi-structured interviews to collect data, with relatively single sources. Future research can appropriately expand the scope of research subjects and combine classroom observation, learning logs, and other research methods to conduct comparative studies on the speaking anxiety of advanced Chinese learners from different countries, further enriching research findings related to speaking anxiety among advanced Chinese learners in the field of international Chinese education.

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