

## Abstract 46

### **Exploitation of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to Overcome Learner Anxiety in Speaking English as a Second Language: An Action Research in a University Context**

Anushika Kariyawasam

English Language Teaching Unit, University of Ruhuna  
*anushika.kariyawasam@gmail.com*

The present study is an action research conducted within the Sri Lankan university context to examine if learner anxiety in speaking English as a second language can effectively be combatted through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), i.e. through cognitive restructuring and behaviour modification. As CBT has been used as one of the most efficient treatments in multiple domains related to contemporary psychological counselling and psychotherapy, the current study is an equal attempt in psycholinguistics to find pragmatic solutions to language-related problems through CBT. The research participants were a purposive sample of 8 female undergraduates who were selected as of higher L2 speaking anxiety based on L2 Speaking Anxiety Scale, and 10 therapeutic sessions were conducted with them; adhering to a methodology of mixed method research for data collection and data analysis. The research procedure consisted of a pretest, which was held initially and identified diverse manifestations of learner anxiety; with empirical evidence for the dynamic interplay between negative core-beliefs/cognitive distortions and maladaptive behaviour as well as skill deficiency which were keys to generate L2 speaking anxiety among the undergraduates. Depending on the L2 learners and the learning context, significant CBT techniques were applied accordingly. The CBT techniques used were psycho-education and developing mindfulness, countering, cognitive rehearsal, exposure and breathing techniques, developing self-esteem and skills. In conclusion, the post-test results after the therapeutic intervention revealed a significant reduction of L2 speaking, insisting that L2 speaking anxiety among undergraduates could effectively be combatted through CBT. Thus, the research was a meticulous investigation of the pragmatic aspect of anxiety reducing techniques within an Asian L2 teaching-learning context, re-conceptualizing and redefining the role of ESL teachers as well as the ESL learners at the tertiary level.

**Key words:** CBT, Cognitive Distortions, Cognitive Rehearsal, Countering, Exposure, Maladaptive Behaviours, Mindfulness, Psycho-Education