Speaking Anxiety in the Interlanguage of Kurdish University Students of English: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract— **The aim of this study was to investigate the level of speaking anxiety in the interlanguage of Kurdish EFL students at the University of Human Development (UHD), to find out which component of the participants' interlanguage (phonology, grammar and meaning) contributes more to speaking anxiety, to assess the effect of gender and level of study on the participants' speaking anxiety, and to examine the correlation between the three components of the participants' interlanguage as far as speaking anxiety is concerned. The study utilized a quantitative method represented by a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 18 items responded to by 106 Kurdish university EFL students from three semesters at UHD. The statistical analyses of the collected data revealed that the participants had a low to moderate level of speaking anxiety, meaning was the most contributing component of the participants' interlanguage to speaking anxiety, gender and level of study exhibited no significant impact on speaking anxiety and there was a strong positive correlation between the three components of the participants' interlanguage (phonology, grammar, meaning) as far as speaking anxiety is concerned.**

Index Terms— **Speaking anxiety, foreign language anxiety, Kurdish EFL students, Interlanguage.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the internal affective factors which has a robust role in foreign language acquisition and learning. Researchers who conducted studies on language anxiety (Campbell and Ortiz, 1991; Horwitz and Young, 1991) have shown that over half of the students in language classes have high anxiety. Thus, EFL students who feel anxious, according to Krashen (1982), will have trouble processing relevant linguistic information, which will lead to lower levels of language proficiency. Moreover, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) have suggested that many students have anxieties in their language acquisition at some time. They have also claimed that anxious students are afraid of being perceived as less skilled than their classmates when they have to speak a foreign language in public. Similarly, studies by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), and Young (1986) have demonstrated that language learning anxiety negatively affects several aspects of learners' linguistic proficiency. In addition, EFL students' language success has been shown to be impacted by their level of language anxiety in research by Awan, Azher, Anwar and Naz (2010); Mahmoodzadeh (2012); Azizifar, Faryadian and Gowhary (2014). For example, Awan et al. found that 149 EFL students at the University of Sargodha had language anxiety that adversely affected their performance. On the other hand, Mahmoodzadeh found that Iranian students studying English at an English-language institution were not able to reduce their EFL speaking anxiety with knowledge of FL. The role of anxiety is especially effective in foreign language speaking. Many foreign language learners feel anxious as their teacher asks them to speak in the class. Speaking has been shown to be the main anxiety-inducing factor in EFL context, according to Öztürk, and Gürbüz (2013).

Foreign language anxiety has different triggers. It can be caused by macro-skills such as the learning context, the fear of judgement by others, the fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986); or by micro-skills, such as the phonology, grammar and meaning of the foreign language (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). This study is concerned with the latter type of foreign language anxiety causes, namely the system of the foreign language itself. The aim of the study is to investigate the level of speaking anxiety in the interlanguage of Kurdish EFL students of English at the University of Human Development (UHD), to find out which component of the participants' interlanguage (phonology, grammar and meaning) contributes more to speaking anxiety, to assess the effect of gender and level of study (the semester in which the students are) on the participants' speaking anxiety, and to examine the correlation between the three components of the participants' interlanguage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Foreign Language Anxiety and its Types

The influence of anxiety on foreign language learning has been studied since the 1970s (Scovel, 1978). However, a

general theory of foreign language anxiety was first introduced by Horwitz in the 1980s (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz and Young, 1991; Horwitz, 1995, 2000, 2001). Since then, anxiety is considered one of the key factors affecting foreign language learning, (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Horwitz, 2001). Although Dörnyei (2005) emphasized that foreign language anxiety is still not well defined and is frequently confused with other fears or phobias, several researchers put forward definitions for the term. For example, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 28). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also defined it as "the feeling of tension and apprehension" experienced by learners in second language skills. Language anxiety, as an affective factor in language learning, was, according to Doğan (2016, p.56), often characterized by "feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry", all of which are thought to impair one's ability to learn a foreign language.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three types of anxiety related to second and foreign language learners' performance. The first type of anxiety is described as a fear or shyness toward interpersonal communication, dubbed "Communication Apprehension". Individuals who are typically reluctant to speak in groups are more likely to experience this fear, as they have little control over the communicative situation in a language class, where their performance is also monitored. "Test Anxiety" is the second type of anxiety. Students who are highly motivated to succeed, in particular, may suffer from this type of anxiety at a higher level. Due to their lofty goals, such students frequently regard anything less than a perfect test performance as a failure. Thus, oral tests may elicit anxiety about both the test and oral communication at the same time. The third anxiety type is defined as "Fear of Negative Evaluation", which manifests itself not only during test-taking situations but also in any social situation, such as during a job interview or while speaking in a foreign language class.

B. Levels of Foreign Language Anxiety

The major aim of studies on language anxiety was to examine the levels of anxiety experienced by the language learners involved in those studies. A good number of these studies reported a moderate level of language learning anxiety suffered by their participants. For example, according to Liu (2006), students had moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, particularly when responding to their professors or being called upon to speak English in class. A study of 54 Algerian EFL university students' oral performance anxiety which was conducted by Melouah (2013) found that students had a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Anxiety and English speaking were also examined by Azizifar et al. (2014) who studied 80 Iranian EFL learners. Utilizing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al., (1986), they concluded that students have moderate levels of speaking anxiety. Similarly, Saudi EFL

students bear medium level of language learning anxiety (Javid 2014). Another study by Al-Khasawneh (2016) revealed a moderate level of anxiety reported by 97 Saudi English-majored students. According to Çağatay (2015), nearly two-thirds of the students (69.4%) exhibited a moderate level of foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), while 15.6% of the students showed a low level of FLSA. Toubot, Seng and Abdullah (2018) examined the degree of speaking anxiety among 300 fourth-year EFL students from three Libyan institutions. Students in this research reported moderate to high levels of anxiety of public speaking in English as a foreign language. The findings of a study by Bensalem (2018) revealed that 261 Arab EFL students experienced an average level of anxiety. Malaysian undergraduate learners have generally a moderate level of English language speaking anxiety (Miskam and Saidalvi, 2019). Cayli (2020) investigated the levels of foreign language anxiety and motivation of 34 Intensive English Program students, and found out that the participants had moderate level of anxiety.

However, some studies claimed that their participants had high levels of FL anxiety. Ezzi (2012), for instance, examined the effect of gender, educational level, age and residence on the level of anxiety of Yemeni EFL learners of the English Department in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University. The results indicated that Yemeni EFL learners represented by the population of this study bear high level of anxiety. Taiwanese university students, also, tend to have a high level of English speaking anxiety (Tien, 2018). According to Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019), 202 Afghani students of English reported a rather high level of speaking anxiety. On the other hand, the statistical results of a study by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) revealed that the students at the program generally experience a low level of EFL speaking anxiety.

C. Foreign Language Anxiety and Gender

A number of studies attempted to examine the impact of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety and has shown that there was inconsistency concerning the effect of the gender of the participants on their speaking anxiety. Ezzi (2012) reported that Yemeni EFL female learners exhibited higher level of anxiety than male learners did. A study by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) examined the relationship between gender and foreign language speaking anxiety and students' motivation. There were 225 female participants, and 158 male participants, in their study, with 19 of them also being interviewed. This study showed that gender has a significant impact on students' feelings of anxiety and motivation and that speaking anxiety was shown to be greater in female students than in male students. It has also been reported that female EFL learners from Al-Quds Open University suffered from higher level of anxiety as compared to their male counterparts in EFL classrooms (Qaddomi 2013). Another study by Çağatay (2015) was to determine if students who are enrolled in an English preparatory program felt anxious about speaking foreign languages (FLSA). Her goal was to see if FLSA levels change between male and female students. Çağatay used a 5-point

Likert scale to deliver an 18-item questionnaire to 62 female and 85 male students. According to the results of this study, female students were more anxious than their male counterparts. The level of anxiety among females appeared to be higher than the level of anxiety among males, according to Doğan (2016). A study by Karatas, Alci, Bademcioglu and Ergin (2016) examined university students' anxiety of public speaking in a foreign language using a variety of factors. The aim was to find out whether students' levels of anxiety are affected by gender and language competency, preparatory training and the types of high schools where the students have graduated. The results of the study have shown that female students were more anxious than male students were. The analysis of data collected from 175 Iranian EFL learners showed that the level of females' anxiety was significantly higher than that of males in speaking activities (Mohtasham and Farnia (2017). Taiwanese female students had more speaking anxiety than male students did, according to Tien (2018). Similarly, female participants in Bensalem's (2018) study suffered more from anxiety than their male counterparts. On the other hand, the results of certain research showed that male students are more anxious than their female counterparts (Campbell and Shaw, 1994; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan, 2002).

A group of researchers such as Çubukçu (2008), Kiliç (2018), and Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019) have reported that gender has no significant effect on speaking anxiety. Other investigations also came to the same conclusion (Aida, 1994; Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham, 2008; Kao and Craigie, 2010).

D. Foreign Language Anxiety and Level of Study

Again, there is inconsistency concerning the relationship between the level of study of EFL students and their speaking anxiety. Many studies have demonstrated that there is no significant relationship between these two variables. The results of a study by Qaddomi (2013) showed that there is not any statistically significant differences in the level of the participants' speaking anxiety due to their level of study. In addition, Çağatay (2015) wanted to see if the students' proficiency level affected their FLSA levels. The analysis demonstrated no significant variation in FLSA based on the proficiency level of the students after breaking them into four groups. Another study by Karatas et al. (2016) claimed that there was no effect of language competency on the students' level of speaking anxiety. The finding that level of study had no significant effect on speaking anxiety was replicated by Al-Khasawneh (2016), Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019), and Cayli (2020).

However, there were differences between lower and upper intermediate levels of study in their speaking anxiety (Marwan, 2007). Similarly, there was negative correlation between level of study and speaking anxiety in Tien's (2018) study of Taiwanese EFL students. In other words, the study showed that "learners who have more years of English learning experience are less apprehensive about speaking in English" (p. 29).

E. Triggers of FL Speaking Anxiety

Students in speaking courses may suffer from language anxiety for several causes. Many linguistic, psychological, and cultural variables combine to cause foreign language speaking anxiety. Researchers have shown that communication apprehension is a key cause of anxiety in EFL classrooms (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; Liu and Jackson, 2008; Arnaiz and Guillén, 2012; Al-Saraj, 2014). Tests were considered another source of anxiety by Koch and Terrell (1991), and Ohata (2005). In addition, fear of being judged by both the teacher and one's classmates is a key trigger of FL anxiety (Horwitz, 1986; Aida, 1994; Lu and Liu, 2011).

Several factors, such as learner and teacher perceptions of language learning, teacher-learner relationships, and classroom management, have been shown to contribute to classroom anxiety, according to Young (1991). The participants in Marwan's (2007) study ascribed their FL anxiety to three factors, namely "lack of preparation, lack of confidence and fear of failing the class" (p 43).

Ohata (2005) studied language anxiety among five Japanese ESL students in their second year of college and found that language anxiety was caused by participants' fear of being negatively evaluated and their lack of self-confidence. Semi-structured interviews with 20 EFL learners led Tanveer (2007) to conclude that speaking anxiety was induced by language acquisition difficulties. According to research by Liu and Jackson (2008), the fear of being judged, self-assessment, and unfavorable attitudes about the English classroom led to 547 Chinese ESL students' speaking anxiety. Another study by Subaşı (2010) found that 55 Turkish university students were anxious about speaking English and that their anxiety in speaking English stemmed from their fear of negative evaluation and their perception of their English speaking ability. Findings from qualitative interviews conducted by Riasati (2011) demonstrated that three Iranian EFL adult learners were anxious because of the negative evaluations of teachers and classmates, the type of the classroom activities and lack of preparation. Bangladeshi EFL university students were asked by Sharif and Ferdous (2012) to look into sources of their listening comprehension anxiety. The results of this study revealed that materials and process (such as nature of speech, level of difficulty, lack of processing time, etc.) were the main source of Bangladeshi EFL students (95%). Other sources of their anxiety were the learning environment (47%) and the personal and interpersonal attributes of the teachers and learners (39%).

The study of 54 Algerian EFL university students' oral performance anxiety by Melouah (2013) concluded that one of the sources of speaking anxiety was their inability to communicate effectively in the target language. Furthermore, 8 EFL international postgraduate students studying in a Malaysian university reported feeling anxious because they were afraid of getting a low grade and worried about communicating with their professors, according to Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) observations and interviews.

Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel (2013) conducted an interview with 30 Turkish university students on the possible causes of language anxiety in speaking classes. The students in this study provided a variety of sources of their anxiety including: linguistic difficulties (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation), cognitive challenges (fear of failure in front of others, fear of exams, fear of failure in communication, lack of self-esteem, fear of making mistakes), lack of information in the L1, competitiveness, and the teacher's role.

A multitude of extrinsic variables, such as lack of instructor support, an insensitive attitude, and a shortage of personal attention, can contribute to learners' language anxiety (Day and Gu, 2013; Siyli and Kafes, 2015). According to Ellis (2015), students who are struggling with their language skills (grammar, pronunciation, and lexis), are more likely to experience significant levels of anxiety. Classroom activities that are less engaging, lacking in teamwork, inadequate instructor teaching style, demanding classroom climate, time issues, and improper instructional subject might cause students to get anxious (Zia and Norrihan, 2015). Furthermore, Toubot et al. (2018) concluded that the fear of unfavorable assessment and communication apprehension had the greatest scores as sources of FL anxiety, followed by poor self-confidence.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

The present study was set to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of speaking anxiety experienced by Kurdish university students of English based on their interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning)?
2. Which of the participants' interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning) contributes more to speaking anxiety?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female participants as far as speaking anxiety is concerned?
4. Is there any effect of level of study on the speaking anxiety of the participants?
5. Is there any correlation between the participants' interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning) as triggers of speaking anxiety?

B. Participants

A total of 106 university students at the Department of English, University of Human Development participated in this study. The participants belonged to semesters 3 (23 students), 6 (40 students) and 8 (43 students). The questionnaire was shared by email with all the students of these three semesters who were about 340 students but only 106 students volunteered to participate in the study. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 22 years. In terms of gender, there were 75 male students and 31 female students. The mother tongue of all the participants was Kurdish language.

C. Data Collection

The data collection in this study was based on a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire which was adapted from Mahmoodzadeh (2012). The questionnaire was a modified version of the FLCAS developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986) and it consisted of eighteen items divided as follows: 6 items (1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16) were about interlanguage phonology, 6 items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17) were about interlanguage grammar, and 6 items (3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18) were about meaning in interlanguage. The responses of the participants to the questionnaire items were collected in an excel file by using google forms. The questionnaire was responded to by 106 EFL university students and the value for Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was α = .91, as table 1 shows.

Table (1)

The Reliability Test of the Participants' Responses to the Questionnaire Items

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.910	18

D. Data Analysis

To find answers to the research questions, the researcher performed both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics analyses using jamovi app (version 2.3; Fox and Weisberg, 2020; R Core Team, 2021; The jamovi project, 2022). The responses of the participants were compared on the basis of different variables, namely the three systems of foreign language (phonology, grammar, meaning), gender and level of study (the semesters the participants belong to). Responses to the items which were stated negatively in the questionnaire were reversed before being computed in order to ensure that a high score indicates high anxiety.

IV. RESULTS

The descriptive statistics of the data collected from the participants revealed that Kurdish EFL students at UHD have an overall moderate level of anxiety (M = 60.03) when speaking English. However, there is variation among the participants in their level of speaking anxiety. The descriptive statistics in Table 2 shows that 53.77 % of the participants experienced moderate level of anxiety (M = 62.23), 37.74% had a low level of anxiety (M = 41.65) and only 8.49% had a high level of anxiety (M = 76.22).

Table (2)

Kurdish EFL Students' Levels of Speaking Anxiety

Level of Anxiety	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Frequency	Percentage	Total Mean
Low anxiety	25	52	41.65	40	37.74	
Moderate anxiety	54	72	62.23	57	53.77	60.03
High anxiety	73	80	76.22	9	8.49	

To examine the level of speaking anxiety within each system of the participants' interlanguage, the researcher prepared a descriptive statistics table for each system individually. Table 3 indicates that the participants have a low to moderate level of speaking anxiety (M = 18.1) due to their phonology. More precisely, 44.34% of the participants (47 out of 106) scored a low level of speaking anxiety, 43.40% of the participants (46 out of 106) scored a moderate level of anxiety and only 12.26% of the participants (13 out of 106) scored a high level of anxiety.

Table (3)
Kurdish EFL Students' Levels of Speaking Anxiety Based on Phonology

Statistic	Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	High anxiety
Minimum	6	18	25
Maximum	17	24	29
Mean	13	20.9	26.5
Std deviation	2.96	2.1	1.27
Frequency	47	46	13
Percentage	44.34	43.40	12.26
Total Mean		18.1	

Based on their grammar, the participants showed a low to moderate level of speaking anxiety (M = 17.9). Again, the results of descriptive statistics analysis revealed variation among the participants in grammar-related anxiety. As shown in Table 4, 40.57% of the participants (43 out of 106) scored a low level of anxiety (M=14.21), 58.49% of the participants scored a moderate level of anxiety (M=20.4), and 0.94% of the participants (only 1 out of 106) scored a high level of anxiety (M=25).

Table (4)
Kurdish EFL Students' Levels of Speaking Anxiety Based on Grammar

Statistic	Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	High anxiety
Minimum	6	18	25
Maximum	17	24	25
Mean	14.21	20.4	25
Std deviation	2.78	1.89	0
Frequency	43	62	1
Percentage	40.57	58.49	0.94
Total Mean		17.9	

Speaking anxiety triggered by meaning was moderate (M=19.6). However, it was slightly higher than anxieties triggered by phonology (M=18.1) and grammar (M=17.9). In addition, the participants varied in the levels of anxiety ascribed to their interlanguage meaning. The descriptive statistics in Table 5 indicates that 33.96% of the participants (36 out of 106) had a low level of anxiety (M=13.8), 47.17% of the participants (50 out of 106) had a moderate level of anxiety (M=21.3), and

18.87% of the participants (20 out of 106) had a high level of anxiety (M=26.1).

Table (5)
Kurdish EFL Students' Levels of Speaking Anxiety Based on Meaning

Statistic	Low anxiety	Moderate anxiety	High anxiety
Minimum	9	18	25
Maximum	17	24	30
Mean	13.8	21.3	26.1
Std deviation	2.38	1.97	1.19
Frequency	36	50	20
Percentage	33.96	47.17	18.87
Total Mean		19.6	

The descriptive statistics in tables 3, 4 and 5 suggests that the speaking anxiety caused by meaning was higher than that caused by phonology, and the speaking anxiety caused by phonology was higher than that caused by grammar.

The results of the independent samples t-test, in Table 6, show that there was no statistically significant effect of gender, t(104) = 0.854, p =.395 on speaking anxiety, although males (M = 3.13, SD = .707) attained slightly higher scores than females did (M = 3, SD = .768).

Table (6)
Independent Samples t-test for Gender Effect on Speaking Anxiety

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Male	75	3.13	0.707	0.854	104	0.395
Female	31	3	0.768			

A one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the effect of three levels of study (three semesters) on speaking anxiety and the results of the analysis (see Table 7) demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference in speaking anxiety between semester 3, semester 6 and semester 8 (F(2, 58.5) = [1.2], p =.309).

Table (7)
One-way ANOVA for the Effect of Level of Study on Speaking Anxiety

Semester	N	Mean	SD	F	df1	df2	p
3	23	3.29	0.688				
6	40	3.05	0.77	1.2	2	58.5	0.309
8	43	3.02	0.696				

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between the three systems of the participants' interlanguage as far as speaking anxiety is concerned. The data in Table 8 show that there was a strong positive correlation between phonology and grammar, r (104) = .80, p < .001; phonology and meaning, r (104) = .74, p < .001; and grammar and meaning r (104) = .67, p < .001 respectively.

Table (8)
Correlation between the Systems of Kurdish EFL Students'
Interlanguage

	Phonology	Grammar	Meaning
Phonology			
Grammar	0.800***		
Meaning	0.736***	0.672***	

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

V. DISCUSSION

As an answer to the first research question, (*What is the level of speaking anxiety experienced by Kurdish university students of English based on their interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning?*), the findings of the present study revealed that Kurdish EFL students at UHD generally experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety. This finding is consistent with findings reported by many previous studies (Liu, 2006; Melouah, 2013; Azizifar et al., 2014; Javid, 2014; Çağatay, 2015; Al-Khasawneh, 2016; Bensalem, 2018; Miskam and Saidalvi, 2019; Cayli, 2020) that EFL students bear a moderate level of speaking anxiety. From the researcher's own experience, Kurdish students are self-confident and they have the courage to speak in public, which reduces their speaking anxiety. This might be a characteristic of Kurdish culture which encourages its people to defend their rights, which promotes self-confidence and reduce speaking anxiety. Moreover, this finding might be so because the study's questionnaire was sent to about 340 students in three semesters, but only 106 of them responded to it. The respondents might be the top students in these semesters, which might explain the lower level of speaking anxiety they had compared to other similar studies.

To address the second question (*Which of the participants' interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning) contributes more to speaking anxiety?*), descriptive statistics values were calculated and the results showed that there was slight difference in the contribution of the three components of the participants' interlanguage to speaking anxiety with meaning being the main trigger of anxiety and grammar being the least trigger. Similarly, the participants in Mahmoodzadeh's (2012) and Tien's (2018) studies suffered more FL anxiety from the meaning system of their interlanguage. However, in these two studies, phonology caused the minimum amount of FL anxiety rather than grammar, as the present study has shown. Again, there is a likelihood that all the respondents to the questionnaire items were from the top students in the three semesters participated in this study; therefore, they had little amount of anxiety in grammar and phonology, as the study showed.

A t-test was performed to provide answer to the third question (*Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female participants as far as speaking anxiety is concerned?*). The result of the t-test indicated that gender had no significant impact on UHD Kurdish EFL students' speaking anxiety. This finding is in line with many studies (Aida, 1994; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Dewaele et al., 2008; Çubukçu, 2008; Kao and Craigie, 2010; Alshahrani, 2016; Kiliç, 2018; Tahsildar and Kabiri, 2019) which examined the relationship between gender and FL anxiety and concluded that gender had no significant influence on language anxiety. By contrast, there have been a number of studies (Ezzi, 2012; Öztürk and Gürbüz, 2013; Qaddomi, 2013; Çağatay, 2015; Doğan, 2016; Karatas et al., 2016; Mohtasham and Farnia, 2017; Tien, 2018; Bensalem, 2018) which showed that female students outperform their male counterparts and some other studies (Campbell & Shaw 1994; MacIntyre et al., 2002) which revealed that male students are more anxious than their female counterparts when it comes to FL anxiety scores. It is obvious that there is inconsistency regarding the role of gender in FL anxiety.

The fourth question of this study, (*Is there any effect of level of study on the speaking anxiety of the participants?*), was answered by the results from a one-way ANOVA which revealed that the level of study of the participants did not show any significant effect on their speaking anxiety. This finding is consistent with the results from a number of other studies by Qaddomi (2013), Çağatay (2015), Karatas et al., (2016), Al-Khasawneh (2016), Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019), and Cayli (2020). However, Marwan (2007) and Tien (2018) claimed that the effect of the level of study on speaking anxiety is significant.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to find answer to the fifth question, (*Is there any correlation between the participants' interlanguage systems (phonology, grammar, meaning) as far as speaking anxiety is concerned?*). The results of the analysis uncovered a strong positive correlation between the three components of interlanguage (phonology, grammar, meaning) as triggers of speaking anxiety. None of the two studies by Mahmoodzadeh (2012) and Tien (2018), which are similar to the present study, has examined the correlation between phonology, grammar and meaning as causes of speaking anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the statistical tests, the study found out that speaking anxiety caused by the interlanguage system of Kurdish EFL students at UHD ranges from low to moderate levels. Moreover, the study revealed that meaning contributed to speaking anxiety more than phonology and grammar did. This finding has a pedagogical implication that teachers should be aware of the importance of the anxiety-free environment in EFL classroom as it encourages students to speak in class with comfort and priority should be given to anxiety-triggering variables, such as meaning in this study and similar studies. Gender and level of study, as the study has shown, are not effective contributors to speaking anxiety of Kurdish EFL students at UHD. This implies that teachers should look at both genders equally when it comes to reducing speaking anxiety. Similarly, teacher should work on minimizing speaking anxiety in all levels of study regardless of the number of the years the

students have spent studying English. Finally, the finding that there was strong positive correlation between the three components of interlanguage (phonology, grammar, meaning) implies that speaking anxiety induced by any one of these components will lead to anxiety in the other; therefore, it is necessary that students work on improving all the three components of their interlanguage in order to minimize their speaking anxiety as much as possible.

The present study has some limitations which need to be considered in future research. Firstly, the number of participants was not large enough and all the participants were from one private university. Therefore, further research is required to cover more universities in Kurdistan region and more participants. Secondly, the study was limited to examine the impact of variables on speaking anxiety from within the participants' interlanguage. However, there are other psychological and cultural variables which might induce speaking anxiety and these relationship of these variables with speaking anxiety need to be investigated in order to have a better understanding of this anxiety and its influence on second and foreign language learning.

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APPENDIX I

A Copy of the Study Questionnaire

Personal information:

Gender: *Male   Female*

Age: ………….……

Semester: ………….

Please read the statements carefully and give your first reaction by choosing a response to each statement: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral (Neither Agree nor Disagree) (4) Agree, or (5) Strongly Agree.

1) I never feel quite sure of myself when I am pronouncing English words in my language class.

    1   2   3   4   5

2) I am usually at ease when using grammar in my speaking in my language class.

    1   2   3   4   5

3) I get tense and confused when the teacher does not understand what I mean in English.

    1   2   3   4   5

4) I keep thinking that the other students have better English accents than I do.

    1   2   3   4   5

5) In my language class, it bothers me when I cannot speak English very much because of my grammar.

    1   2   3   4   5

6) I start to panic when I am not sure of saying something that makes sense in English.

    1   2   3   4   5

7) I never feel embarrassed when other students are hearing my English accent in my language class.

    1   2   3   4   5

8) I would be worried failing to use correct grammar in my speaking in my language class.

    1   2   3   4   5

9) I can feel my heart pounding when the teacher asks me the question; "what do you mean?"

1   2   3   4   5

10) The more I try to speak English fluently in the class, the more disappointed I get.

    1   2   3   4   5

11) I wonder why some people feel very self-conscious when teacher corrects their grammatical mistakes.

    1   2   3   4   5

12) While speaking in my language class, I feel intimidated when I translate word by word the expressions from my native language into English language.

    1   2   3   4   5

13) It bothers me when I cannot speak English with a good accent in my language class

    1   2   3   4   5

14) When I want to use correct grammar to speak English in the class, I get so nervous that I forget what to say.

    1   2   3   4   5

15) In my language class, I feel pressured when I use English sentences not heard before.

    1   2   3   4   5

16) I always feel that the other students will laugh at my accent as I speak English in class.

    1   2   3   4   5

17) It frightens me when I cannot speak English without any grammatical mistakes in the class.

    1   2   3   4   5

18) I do not feel afraid when the teacher does not understand what I mean in English.

    1   2   3   4   5