Task-based Language Teaching: Reducing Anxiety, and Improving Online Spoken Interaction

Lester Fennell Pereddo Hidalgo, Lcdo.

Guide: Dr. Margo Guilott

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SO-25-Nº 416-2016. Cohort 2017 – 2019. Guayaquil, April 13th, 2020.

Abstract

This research study analyzed to what extent the "weak" version of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) supplemented by sound instructional practice strategies could reduce anxiety and improve online spoken interaction among learners who were in a CEFR B2 EFL course. At the end of this study, the researcher evaluated the extent to which this innovation had a significant impact on learners' perspectives. The length of this innovation was five weeks, and it involved twenty-nine students who took this course as a requirement to obtain their tertiary degree in Guayaquil- Ecuador. Quantitative results showed that the intervention had a large effect both on the students' anxiety reduction, Cohen's d = 2.96, and online spoken interaction, Cohen's d = 2.40. Regarding learners' perspectives, quantitative results demonstrated learners felt comfortable in the classroom; they learned how to improve their pronunciation and they considered it was significant to learn L2 through real-life tasks using technology. Finally, this study was conducted in an EFL class, which could be especially suitable for those educators who teach in the Ecuadorian Public System.

Keywords: weak TBLT, online spoken interaction, anxiety, WhatsApp.

Resumen

Este estudio de investigación analizó en qué medida TBLT (enseñanza de idiomas basada en tareas, por sus siglas en inglés) en su versión “débil” complementada con prácticas de apoyo podría reducir la ansiedad y mejorar la interacción oral en línea de los alumnos que asistieron a un curso de Inglés como segundo idioma (EFL, por sus siglas en inglés) del nivel B2 MCER (Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las lenguas). Al final de este estudio, el investigador evaluó si el grado de impacto fue significativo en las perspectivas de los alumnos. La duración de esta innovación fue de cinco semanas, e involucró a veintinueve estudiantes que tomaron este curso como requisito para obtener su título de tercer nivel en Guayaquil-Ecuador. Los resultados cuantitativos mostraron que la intervención tuvo un efecto de "alta magnitud" tanto en la reducción de la ansiedad de los estudiantes, Cohen d = 2.96 como en la interacción oral en línea, Cohen d = 2.40. En cuanto a las perspectivas de los alumnos, los resultados cuantitativos demostraron que los alumnos se sentían cómodos en el aula; aprendieron a mejorar su pronunciación; consideraron que era importante aprender L2 a través de tareas de la vida real y la tecnología. Finalmente, este estudio se realizó en una clase de EFL, que podría ser especialmente adecuado para aquellos educadores que enseñan en el público ecuatoriano.

Palabras Claves: Versión débil TBLT, interacción oral, ansiedad, WhatsApp

Task-based Language Teaching: Reducing Anxiety, and Improving Online Spoken Interaction

Undoubtedly, English has become the modern Lingua Franca. This language is now the means of communication among people whose native language is not English (Mackenzie, 2014). People are learning English as a foreign language in around 100 countries. There is a compelling need in our global society to offer access and strengthen communication through a worldwide spoken language: English (Crystal, 2003). Despite the importance of English, Latin America has suffered a reduction in English skills since 2017 (Cronquist & Fiszbei, 2017; Education First, 2019). Ecuador is no exception; in fact, Ecuador has not been able to improve its competence in this foreign language. According to the Education First proficiency index (2019), Ecuador ranked 81st among 100 countries and 19th among 19 Latin American countries.

Ecuadorians are deficient in all four English Skills (Education First, 2019). The British Council (2015) interviewed 502 Ecuadorian English learners about their speaking skills, whose speaking level ranged from basic to advanced. Findings showed that those interviewed reported much lower confidence in speaking when compared to reading and writing. Most surveyed learners attributed this to not using English frequently enough (46%), not having been studying English for very long (18%). Also, they ascribed their weak speaking skills to their friends, or family not speaking English (10%), which limits opportunities to practice, and more than one in ten (12%) felt that it was because speaking was harder than reading or writing. Fewer Ecuadorians attributed their weak speaking skills to the curriculum (8%) or their teachers (6%).

Theoretically, after finishing high school, Ecuadorian learners should be able to communicate at the B1.2 speaking proficiency level according to the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). In reality, most Ecuadorian university learners are not at a CEFR B1.2 level when they start college.

University students are adults who have points of view, set objectives, and advanced cognitive styles. Learners who enrolled in this CEFR B2 course were exposed to demanding language structures, such as passive voice, reported speech, and advanced use of conditionals. After doing a placement test, most learners of this group reached CEFR A1 and CEFR A2 levels while they were expected to produce a CEFR B2 level. The latter generated an evident imbalance between learners' real English expertise and what they were supposed to produce throughout this EFL course and their university years (Guano, Allauca, & Salazar, 2018).

The imbalance explained above undermines the learner's confidence, which, likewise, triggers anxiety. These feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, and nervousness may cause a potentially adverse effect on communication among L2 learners: Foreign Language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015; Tsui, 1996). This specific anxiety reaction (Foreign Language Anxiety) does not only affects Ecuadorian learners but also those who come from all over the world (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Horwitz et al. (1986) also claimed that learners suffering from speaking anxiety tend to "skip classes, over study, or seek refuge in the last row in an effort to avoid the humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak" (p. 130).

Paradoxically, despite the challenges in speaking (pitch, stress, and intonation) plus the fact that a minimal number of learners will achieve native-like oral skills by the end of their formal English training at high school (Erdogan & Wei, 2019; Reed, & Levis , 2019), Ecuadorian students want to achieve acceptable English skills (British Council, 2015).

Ecuadorians, as it happens to learners around the world, tend to evaluate the quality of an English course based on their improvements in their speaking proficiency (Richards, 2008).

Speaking English in Ecuador contributes to progress, better living standards, and well-being: a means to get promotions or better career opportunities (Chávez-Zambrano, Saltos-Vivas, & Saltos-Dueñas, 2017). Thus, educators at all levels must be open to innovative methodologies. Innovative teachers base their instructional and classroom practices based on the specific students' learning needs (Easley, 2012). Effective teachers cannot narrow themselves to teaching orthodoxy; they should move on being productive not just within the material of the delineated program, but likewise in how they present their classes (Farrell, 2015).

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the most popular and long-lasting Second Language Acquisition (SLA) approaches (Branden, 2006). Even though Krashen (1982) was not directly referring to TBLT, he claimed that successful language acquisition takes place when low anxiety levels are present in the classroom. Some studies confirm that TBLT tasks, when applied correctly, reduced anxiety (Boonkit, 2010; Wang, 2017).

There are two main versions of TBLT "strong" and "weak" (Howatt, 1984). "Strong" TBLT assumes that learners should acquire L2 language through communicative tasks that strictly focus on meaning: L2 knowledge appears naturally during the learning process (Krashen, 1982). On the other hand, the "weak" version of TLBT focuses on linguistic forms that progressively integrate into real communication: L2 knowledge starts from the non-communicative practice of language, which leads to meaningful, real communicative tasks (Nunan, 2013).

González-Lloret and Ortega (2014) claimed that a well-theorized TBLT approach seems particularly applicable for expanding the potentiality of technology within language learning. Thus, smartphones, unlike more conventional technologies such as tape recorders, which were popular decades ago, offer distinctive characteristics that support and complement TBLT; learning on the go, such as the sense of portability, connectivity, personalization, ubiquity, and multimedia (McQuiggan, Kosturko, McQuiggan, & Sabourin, 2015). Given the digital native's natural -sometimes obvious- propensity for both internet-connected devices and innovative technologies (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014), teachers and students should benefit from these existing and emerging technologies as a means to turn the orthodox classroom into a real-world-like environment.

In the same line of thought, Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017) examined the benefits of using the application called WhatsApp through learners' smartphones to improve oral skills in second-language learners among learners taking a B1 English course at a Spanish University. A "WhatsApp" group was created, where 40 of these learners took part in an everyday spoken interaction for six months where writing was forbidden as a way to force them to speak. After the course concluded, learners achieved noteworthy advancements in terms of oral proficiency and negotiation.

It is worth mentioning that the above study (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017) consisted of learners who were in a B1 CEFR level and that the research took place in an extended period (six months); they limited their research to speaking interaction improvements. That is, Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez presented WhatsApp alone as a tool that could improve students' speaking skills. Subsequently, the researcher, seeking to add to the body of

knowledge, applied the weak version of TBLT as a research variable. Also, he applied sound instructional practices such as engaging tasks, small group work, self-assessment, and timely feedback to this group of learners whose CEFR skills mostly ranged from A1 to A2, respectively. Likewise, the researcher favored a classroom where learners felt emotionally and physically safe so that anxiety diminished and spoken interaction improved during this EFL course.

Literature has confirmed that technology-mediated tasks are likely to reduce learners' anxiety and increase motivation (Ziegler, 2016). These new technologies minimize morbid fear of failure, distress, and humiliation occurring in the classroom; they can also raise students' motivation to take risks (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014). For this reason, this study included a freeware called WhatsApp, the most used app in Ecuador (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2018) as a tool that complements weak TBLT.

As for the private college where this research took place, learners took an English mandatory placement test used by the educational institution to assess their actual language level. After grading the placement test, the results showed that 13 learners were CEFR A1, 14 are CEFR A2, two were B1 and B2, respectively **(**see Appendix A**).**

All these learners were enrolled in a CEFR B2 EFL (English as a second language) course. Consequently, there was a gap between what they are expected to produce and what they could actually produce in English. Speaking was the weakest skill, which based on the researcher's experience, is quite common among university students who come from the Ecuadorian public educational system.

Based on this context, it appears to be relevant to research on how to support these 29 learners to diminish their anxiety level and subsequently improve their speaking skills. This study aimed at introducing the weak version of TBLT, which included all the instructional practices explained in the previous paragraphs, plus the use of an application called WhatsApp as a tool that complemented this approach. Thus, the three proposed research questions were:

1) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice reduce speaking anxiety?

2) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice improve online spoken interaction?

3) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by available technology (WhatsApp) impact learners' perspectives at the end of this research?

Literature Review

Describing and Assessing Speaking

Speaking is the oral system of interacting with other people. Speaking means human, authentic communication: people wishing to interact based on their specific needs and objectives of the ongoing conversation (Luoma, 2004). Not only does speaking pose a hardship for learners to achieve, but also, it is the most challenging language skill to evaluate (Luoma, 2004). The latter does not mean that assessing speaking is an unattainable task to achieve (Luoma, 2004). There are many options to generate grading scales or tests to assess speaking; one of those is the CEFR descriptors, such as the "Qualitative Features of Spoken Language" given by the Council of Europe (2018), used in Ecuador and worldwide.

Luoma (2004) substantiated two claims. First, standardized scaling descriptors cannot serve for every assessment. Second, he argued that measuring instruments -in this study, a rubric- should be developed on the demands of the ongoing research. It is worth pointing out that even though rubrics and scales are the best means at hand; they are just approximation tools to carry out language proficiency assessment: They are not able to comprehensively capture all dimensions and categories involved in language production (Baker, 2011). Consequently, the researcher adapted the measuring tools to the specific needs of this study.

Speaking L2: Adulthood and Fear of Speaking (Language Anxiety)

Learning to speak a second language (L2) as an adult markedly contrasts with the native language acquisition (L1). L2 is difficult, variable, and usually an unsuccessful goal to accomplish. On the other hand, L1 develops in an effortless, continuous, and successful-simple process, which speeds up the understanding of the target language from the moment children are born. There is no pressure on children to produce acceptable oral skills immediately; in fact, parents encourage them to continue speaking even though their oral production is still deficient (Moyer, 2004; Zsiga, 2013).

Literature has shown that most adults speak L2 with a strong accent if acquiring the language occurred after adolescence. Plus it takes between 180 to 260 hours to get learners from an elementary A2 CEFR to an intermediate B2 CEFR (Knight, 2018); however, children who start a second language acquisition before puberty have little or no foreign accent in the L2 (Krashen, Scarcella, & Long, 1982). Brown (2007) confirmed the latter; the prospect of an individual learning a second language with no accent after adolescence is virtually nonexistent.

Consequently, this research focused on functionality rather than looking for a close-to-native accent among learners under this study.

Adults tend to feel embarrassed, discouraged, and even panic when they realize their oral skills are not adequate to meet their expectations (Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Meza, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Krashen, 1982; Moyer, 2004; Zsiga, 2013). The latter culminates in an adult who is not able to communicate ideas as he/she expects, this provokes anxiety, one of the dominant SLA setbacks (Nakata, 2006). Consequently, anxiety causes learners to "freeze" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). Nunan (2013) went to extremes when he claimed that adults who experience acute stress or anxiety are not learning as expected.

Despite the above, there are researchers who believe that anxiety has a positive effect on L2 acquisition, as it makes learners improve oral skills (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). The latter has been debunked by research (Robinson, 2007; Sheen, 2008) whose results demonstrated that significant anxiety affects L2 oral production. Thus, most reviews on anxiety have determined that emotional tension, nervousness, and growing apprehension -called Language Anxiety- have proven to be an obstacle in the SLA process (Horwitz et al., 1986; Maclntyre & Gardner, 1994; Robinson, 2007; Sheen, 2008).

Online Spoken Interaction

According to the Council of Europe (2018), spoken interaction is the beginning of language, as it provides interaction, collaboration and transactional language. This spoken interaction also occurs through online telecommunications (Knight & Barbera, 2018): the interlocutor uses telephones, internet-based audios, and video communication. Even though this kind of online spoken interaction uses predictable topics, such as arrival times, routine messages

both for personal and professional purposes, the length of exchange ranges from short to extended conversations (Council of Europe, 2018). Finally, this interaction is always mediated through a machine, in this case, cellphones, which significantly differ from face-to-face interaction, as it is a multi-modal phenomenon that emphasizes how interlocutors handle both serious issues and social exchanges (Council of Europe, 2018).

Task-based Language Teaching: Strong and Weak Versions

Meaningful tasks are those learners perceive as authentic and applicable in the real-world (Abdelhafez & Abdallah, 2015; Ellis, 2003). Richards and Rodgers (2001) explained that task-based language teaching (TBLT) meets these specifications: meaningful tasks and language that resemble real life. The rationale behind the TBLT approach is to offer task-oriented activities within the classroom that facilitate communication while learners accomplish assigned tasks (Nunan, 2004). There are also claims that TBLT improves vocabulary, fosters better pronunciation, and fluency (Ellis, Skehan, Li, Shintani, & Lambert, 2019). These tasks provide better opportunities for learners to develop competence in the target language in realistic, every-day activities rather than learning a language only through grammatical construction (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). That is, TBLT aims to provide functional tasks that transfer knowledge and abilities to serve learners' real-world academic, vocational training, occupational, or social survival needs. In other words, TBLT is a generative approach to learning (Long, 2015).

The above does not mean TBLT is the panacea of English teaching. In fact, Ellis (2018), one of the leading advocates of TBLT, pointed out that TBLT has undergone both active support and substantial criticism from educators and researchers. According to Ellis, this criticism

wrongly assumes TBLT is a method, rather than a general approach to teaching languages. He added that "focused" tasks provide opportunities for practicing fixed linguistics items, that is, TBLT is an interdependent teaching tool that fits into Present-Practice-Production (PPP) method, which functions as an "add-on" to an otherwise standardized syllabus (Ellis, 2018, p. 103).

As explained above, TBLT is an approach in which the learning process is based on the completion of meaningful tasks. TBLT has two opposing sides: On the one hand, there are those who are for the "strong" TBLT approach, which insists that focusing on forms is pointless as the communication provided by the task engagement itself would be enough to achieve L2 acquisition (Krashen, 1982). And on the other hand, there are others who are for the "weak" TBLT approach, which claims that a systematic focus on language systems is indispensable for language acquisition (Nunan, 2013).

TBLT: Authenticity and Real Life Situations

Effective teachers have to find the link between two "colliding worlds" one encountered in the classroom, and the other that transcends the school facilities by bringing the pedagogical world into the experiential world (real world), which is the central issue of authenticity (Abdelhafez & Abdallah, 2015; Nunan, 2013). Task authenticity refers to the use of spoken and written material brought to the classroom; and whose original purpose was to promote communication, not language teaching (Nunan, 2013). Therefore, the correct balance between authentic and simulated material improves learners' opportunities for learning. One useful indicator to decide the authenticity of a good task is when it concentrates on real authentic language as spoken today (Abdelhafez & Abdallah, 2015).

There is a plethora of "specifications or requirements" to recognize an authentic task. Willis and Willis (2007) simplified it to three levels of tasks that replicate the real world, that is to say, classroom authentic tasks, which from the researcher's viewpoint give an easy way of figuring out the authenticity of a task in the classroom:

- Level one: (Meaning). The task offers learners the opportunity to create meanings that are practical in authentic life, for instance, applying vocabulary about topics of general interest.
- Level two: (Discourse). The task produces a level of discourse that simulates/reflects everyday life, for example, agreeing, disagreeing on given opinions, guessing at meaning.
- Third level: (Communicative) The task is similar to the language used in situations that typically take place in the actual world: communicative activities which reflect the language used outside the classroom (e.g., telling stories).

Finally, Nunan (2013) has claimed that nothing can be more authentic than adding technology to the TBLT realm; for him, technology has become an integral part of all aspects of the life of the worldwide population. In other words, technology pursues authenticity. Likewise, Amory (2018) posited that authentic technology-mediated tasks enrich learning and teaching by applying innovative approaches.

TBLT: Engaging Tasks

TBLT promotes tasks that are close to learners' reality and worldview; this enhances the task authenticity in the classroom. It fosters engagement among learners. For instance, Wiggins (1993) noticed the relevance of engaging students with tasks similar to those encountered in real-life interactions through authentic simulations, that is, those situations adults face daily.

Likewise, Richards and Rodgers (2001) validated Wiggins' argument: Providing or facilitating comprehensible input is not enough; learners need to negotiate meanings, so they engage in natural and meaningful communication. Finally, Schlechty (2011) claimed very pragmatically that learners who are involved in engaging tasks develop fundamental skills to survive in the 21st century.

Small Group Work (Pair Work)

Ellis (2006) informed that pair and group work are common in task-based learning; for him, it is easier for students to collaborate with other classmates, without the pressure of the teacher being present. This results in behavior where risk-taking prevails, which is requisite in the TBLT realm. In reality, group work is a common option when teaching English as a second language. Rixon (2013) considered pair work a subset of group work; he added that pair work class management functions better if compared to group work. Rixon also clarified that neither pair nor group work guarantees successful interaction if the design of tasks is not correct or if genuine interaction does not happen. Likewise, Ellis (2003) confirmed the latter; he highlighted the importance of the interaction and having students engaged effectively with the task so they can support each other.

Self-assessment

While implementing a task-based syllabus among 340 first-year Japanese students, Beglar and Hunt (2000) acknowledged self-assessment as a tool that creates a learning environment where learners could engage in periodic evaluation cycles. Thus, learners kept track of what they had learned throughout the task performance resulting in the first step towards learners' understanding of their weaknesses in L2. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) explained that it

was through self-assessment that teachers could apply a thorough insight into precise students' perspectives on the tasks, criteria, and standards leading to self-assessment. Self-assessment works as a default process where learners connect new knowledge, understandings, and skills with what they have already stored and used. Finally, as explained above, self-assessment also might work as a powerful learners' log that facilitates information and feedback (Bookhart, 2017; Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

Safe Supportive Learning Environment

Ellis (2003) posited that TBLT encourages a safe learning environment to engage leaners through meaning-centered activity. Kubanyiova (2018) defined a safe speaking environment as a space that treats people as a resource that need protection and care. She also explained that a safe speaking environment independently of its linguistic feature or meaning should be in the service of students' conversational accomplishments. This non-threatening, safe learning, language-rich environment results in learners constantly using L2 during class (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001). Therefore, when learning occurs in a safe supportive environment by default learners succeed, they feel freer to ask questions, they share opinions and feelings more openly.

Timely Feedback

Weaver (2006) carried out a study on the effect of feedback in the classroom: students highly value timely feedback. Wiggins (2016) claimed that the faster the learner gets feedback, the better. He claimed that teachers should not wait for hours or days to find out if their learners were attentive or not. In most cases, the sooner teachers give feedback, the better. For Wiggins, a great problem that faces education is untimely feedback. Wiggins regretted that most of the essential feedback on key skills often comes days, weeks, or even months after the performance.

Finally, Wiggins encouraged educators to work overtime so that students get timely feedback and opportunities to use it while still fresh in their minds.

Use of Mobile Phones as a Tool for Educational Purposes

According to Statista Research Department (2018b), there will be 2.7 billion smartphone users worldwide by 2019. Ecuador is no exception to this phenomenon. El Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (2016) provided the following information: over three million Ecuadorians have a smartphone. Thus, in developing countries, such as Ecuador, students have more mobile phones than computers. Learners around the world, those who are at school at this precise moment—the future workforce—use mobile phones to interact every day. Accordingly, the technology behind mobiles (as a complementary learning tool technology) is remodeling both homework and the way of researching at schools (Bingham, 2015).

WhatsApp as a Supplementary Learning Tool

Some research has been carried out into WhatsApp as a tool to enhance speaking skills among L2 learners. For instance, Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017) created a WhatsApp group where 40 of their students interacted through text, voice, images, and video-sharing daily for six months. The measurement tools and the final oral exam proved that dialogues had increased substantially. It is, then, relevant to use WhatsApp, the most downloaded app in Ecuador (Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2018) as a means to improve the effectiveness of weak TBLT among 29 students taking the mandatory English courses before finishing their tertiary education.

Assessing Anxiety

Research by Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001) claimed that even though SLA has experienced substantial advances in teaching methods and techniques, speaking apprehension and tension are remarkable among university students. While conducting the above research, Casado and Dereshiwsky found out learners under their study still felt anxious even though they were already in the second semester of their undergraduate degree. Second language learning produces what psychologists report as a specific anxiety reaction: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA).

This type of anxiety results from negative experiences associated with L2 (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is worth mentioning that most studies performed in the SLA field proved anxiety as a hindrance to the proper learning process of a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Clément, 2016). Aimed at measuring the level of anxiety among learners, Horwitz et al. (1986) applied a 33-item scale called the foreign classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS), which measured the level of anxiety experienced by 75 university students. The Foreign Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has three factors: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. There are other adapted versions of FLCAS, such as the one introduced by MacIntyre (1992), which is shorter and simpler to implement without risking validity and reliability levels of gathered data.

Technology-mediated TBLT: The Next Step Forward

TBLT has been used for decades in the second language acquisition (SLA) action field. Most TBLT literature has mainly focused on face-to-face (FTF) communication in the classrooms; this has changed in recent years where there has been an increasing interest in

technology-mediated TBLT (Ellis et al., 2019). TBLT has been applied to some extent in Ecuador, but TBLT combined with phones using WhatsApp (as a complementary tool), or similar application is still scarce or nonexistent.

The potential synergy between TBLT and technology as a complementary tool, that is, Technology-mediated TBLT has not always been recognized as workable in most available literature in past decades where face-to-face communication was the dominant focus of TBLT research (Ellis et al., 2019). Despite the latter, there were exceptions, such as Pellettieri (1999), who carried out a research work that measured the impact of task-based synchronous network-based communication (SNC) on a group of L2 students from the University of California. Learners' negotiation of meaning considerably improved at the end of the course. This group of learners described how technology (SNC) allowed them to communicate in the target language. Not only were they able to communicate in the L2, but they also enjoyed the activities throughout the course, which resulted in significant anxiety reduction and increased motivation among them.

This last decade has marked a veer towards TBLT as the methodological framework of new technologies. Nothing can be more real than the fact that there are 4.2 billion people worldwide actively using the internet (October 2018) who have access to global forms of technology-mediated communication (Thomas & Reinders, 2010; Statista, 2018a).

Another advantage is that TBLT can be adopted without technology when this is not available. TBLT has also prompted criticism; detractors tend to claim that this approach centers too much on the fluency and not the precision of language (Ellis, 2017). This observation constitutes a misinterpretation of the concept of a TBLT task: TBLT provides corrective

feedback, during the post-task performance, which includes direct teaching of the language of those items the learners needed to improve or reinforce (Ellis, 2017).

Research Questions

Based on the introduction and the extensive literature, the present research answered the following questions:

1) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice reduce speaking anxiety?

2) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice improve online spoken interaction?

3) To what extent did weak TBLT supported by available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice impact learners' perspectives at the end of this research?

Therefore, for the first two questions data were analyzed quantitatively in the pre and post tasks, to answer the third question, data were analyzed with the use of personal interviews. These interviews were transformed from qualitative to quantitative results.

Innovation

Based on the backwards design, this section outlines the eigh main steps carried out during this innovation, which aimed at implementing a version of weak TBLT, so that this group of 29 learners diminished their anxiety levels and improved their online spoken interaction when they speak in English (L2).

This EFL course lasted five weeks from Monday to Friday (170-minute class periods with a 10-minute break). To be approved by the college director, this intervention had to be

included in the institutional syllabus. Despite time limitations, there were seven intervention tasks: two the first week, one the second, third, and fourth week; and two events in the fifth week. The extent of every classroom intervention was 50 to 55 minutes each, around 6.5 hours. This entire innovation process likewise included the grading and preparation of class materials, which took 40 hours, totaling around 46.5 hours. The researcher also used field notes to organize activities and other important components of the innovation. They provided day-to-day information such as duration of tasks, feedback on expertise progress, or topics that needed precise reinforcement (see Appendix I).

The researcher, with a teaching background of 18 years, applied the "weak" approach of TBLT, given the fact that the institutional program included grammar in context; the "weak" approach of TBLT was more feasible as it was indispensable to teach grammatical structures needed to perform the proposed tasks (Nunan, 2013). Above all, this group of learners needed grammar to pass this EFL B2 course. A "strong" form of this approach would try to bypass all grammar instruction because language is learned by just using it (Howatt, 1984).

Not only does this innovation present the standard weak version of TBLT but also supported by sound instructional practice, but one where tasks were more engaging and familiar to learners' reality -Applying for a job, Booking airline tickets, ordering takeout food, etc.- (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). Also, while doing weak TBLT tasks, learners felt challenged, supported to take risks, and make mistakes, so they would learn from them and feel motivated to speak in the L2 (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Ellis, 2003). In a weak TBLT version, task performance is still of core importance, but learners' performance were preceded

and followed by some teacher-led moments. That is, the teacher modeled the task: he explained the description of the settings (asking for food, or booking a hotel room), he role-played with learners, he provided vocabulary and grammar guidelines, he monitored fluency and pronunciation in a structured fashion, based on an institutional syllabus. In contrast with strong TBLT, the task itself is the ultimate and unique condition to achieve successful second language acquisition (Nunan 2004). Finally, available technology complemented weak TBLT tasks (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Ziegler, 2016), to implement the innovation effectively, the researcher applied the following process:

- **Step one**: Establishing real learners' proficiency level. Therefore, on the first day, the researcher gave an institutional placement test to this group of learners to determine their CEFR level (See Appendix A).
- **Step two:** On the first day of class, the researcher administered a MacIntyre's (1992) adapted version of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, from now on referred to as adapted FLCAS, to measure the incidence of Foreign Language Anxiety among learners enrolled in this EFL course (see Appendix B).
- **Step three:** For the pre-test, on the second day, to measure online spoken interaction skills through WhatsApp (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017), the researcher introduced a weak version of TBLT, which provided learners the language needed to practice target structures. Before performing the task, the instructor modeled what learners had to do during each weak TBLT task.

Learners picked up their cell phones, recorded messages where they pretended they got a phone call from a recruiter to set up a face-to-face job interview. Before recording the conversation, they said their names before starting to talk so that the researcher could identify the specific learner later on for grading purposed (see Appendix E). Recruiter and applicant set a time for the job interview; they provided/received direction on how to get to the interview place. The recruiter described the offered position, and the applicant confirmed or discarded interest in the offered position (see Appendix C).

- **Step four:** Facilitating the challenge of speaking L2 without the fear of making mistakes (Kubanyiova, 2018), learners switched roles during the task and worked with a different partner when switching occurred (Ellis, 2006). During the task performance, the researcher provided immediate feedback to those learners who needed extra help.
- **Step five:** Even though it is not part of the variables included in this study, the researcher taught learners to self-correct their spoken skills by listening to their own audio files through WhatsApp. The foregoing occurred once learners completed their tasks, through their self-assessment rubric, and based on the teacher's feedback (see Appendix D) (Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Bookhart, 2017).
- **Step six:** For the post-test, to measure online spoken interaction through WhatsApp (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017), which took place the day before the final exam, the researcher modeled the weak TBLT task to the class and verified that the seating arrangement was functional for this task. Afterward, one group of learners played the role of executives who needed to fly to another city in Ecuador; the other group played the role of the customer service representative of a travel agency. Learners exchanged

information about arrival/departure times, prices, discounts, hotel preference, and check-in/check-out times.

To avoid bias by performing the task with the same partner, the researcher drew lots, so that learners could work with a different person. Students used WhatsApp as a supplementary tool to record their conversation in audio files. Learners changed roles and repeated the task. Learners said their names before starting to talk so the researcher could identify the specific learner. Finally, learners worked on the process previously detailed. (See Appendix F).

- **Step seven:** The last day of class, the researcher administered the adapted version of the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale to measure the incidence of Foreign Language Anxiety among learners after the completion of this EFL course (see Appendix B).
- **Step eight:** Based on the comparison of pre and post online spoken interaction tasks **(**see Appendix C and F**),** the researcher could confirm that the transfer goal had been successful (see Appendix H). The in-depth interview also showed the positive perspective learners had about this research.

Methodology

Design

This action research is a systematic process conducted by and for those who take up an active role to improve the learning quality of English as a Second Language (Sagor, 2017). That is, after close observation, teachers or individuals who take part in the educational settings spot situations that can be improved. They design systematic procedures and gather relevant information in an attempt to improve teaching and learning quality among their students (Sagor,

2017). Thus, the researcher identified common problems among learners: anxiety causing poor speaking skills in L2, and he aimed at finding a solution. He applied and customized strategies for the learners' specific context and needs. Even though the teacher carried out the study, he remained objective so that the reliability of yielded results would not be affected.

Participants and Sample

The study took place over five weeks in a private college (Tecnológico) located in the north of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The private college serves as an outsourcer of EFL courses to a public university also located in Guayaquil. This study group was made up of 29 participants whose ages ranged from 20 to 40 years old. They must complete five EFL courses as a mandatory prerequisite before obtaining their tertiary education degree. For their fourth EFL course, learners enrolled in the private college. Thus, this course, which is the base of the study, was the first EFL course they took in the private college.

During the first day of class, at the private college premises, learners took an English institutional placement test to determine their actual language level. After administering the tests, 27 students (92.17%) were CEFR A1 and A2 CEFR, whereas only two (7.83%) were B1 and B2, respectively. The reasons students with that low proficiency level had passed previous courses remain unknown.

Variables

<u>Independent variable:</u>

1. The weak version of TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice.

<u>Dependent variables:</u>

1. Anxiety as defined in the Adapted Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
2. Online spoken interaction as defined in the adapted rubric
3. Learners' perspectives based on the in-depth interview

Instruments

Pre-Post adapted foreign language classroom anxiety scale.

To answer the first question: *To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice reduce speaking anxiety?* The researcher applied MacIntyre's 1992 adapted form of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to this group of learners (see Appendix B). MacIntyre elected items 2, 9, 13, 16, 18, 20, 23, and 27 from the original 33-item scale implemented by Horwitz et. al., (1986). It is important to remark that "Cronbach reliability of the short form of the FCLAS is similar to that of the full scale" (MacIntyre, 1992, p. 184). Also, this instrument has been used in other studies that measured anxiety among learners (Dewaele, MacIntyre, Boudreau, & Dewaele, 2016). Therefore, applying this adapted eight-item scale secures the validity of results.

Learners took the adapted FLCAS scale. The said Likert Scale provided the following options: 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 2 (disagree), 1 (strongly disagree). The researcher compared the pre and post-scale quantitative results measured on the first and the last day of class, respectively. The results determined that learners' anxiety had diminished by the time this innovation had concluded.

Liu and Jackson (2008) developed a practical guideline for interpreting responses produced in foreign language anxiety scales. This scale has eight items with values ranging from one to five assigned to the five descriptors of each item, respectively. Therefore, the FLCAS

results ranged from 8 to 40. Subtract 8 from 40 which equals 32, which is the statistical range, the difference between the lowest and highest values. For the purposes of having a better scope of the anxiety level, this scale was constructed with five class intervals, the subsets into which the data is grouped "the choice of the number of class intervals must represent a judgment based upon a consideration of how the data will be utilized" (Taylor, 2005, p. 176). The statistical class width, the difference between the upper or lower class limits, was eight. Thus, results higher than 32 mean high anxiety, the score between 32 and 28 medium-high anxiety, scores between 27 and 24 medium anxiety, scores between 23 and 20 low anxiety, scores between 19 and 16 represent almost non-existent anxiety.

Adapted CEFR grading rubric: Online spoken interaction.

To answer the second question: *To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice improve online spoken interaction?* Based on the Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, and the Council of Europe (2018) *Companion Volume with New Descriptors*, respectively, the researcher adapted a grading rubric to measure online spoken interaction among learners of this study group (see Appendix E). Generally speaking, learners who are in A1 and A2 CEFR levels need to focus on fluency rather than language accuracy. But it is important to point out that this group of learners was enrolled in a B2 CEFR level, where accuracy is of utmost importance to pass this kind of EFL course. And above all, the researcher had to adhere to the pre-established institutional program.

Thus, a grade of 5 was equivalent to 0%-10% of errors found in online spoken interaction: DISTINCTION. A grade of 4 was equal to 20%-30% of errors found during online

spoken interaction: CREDIT (APPROVAL). A mark of 3 meant 40-50% of errors found during online spoken interaction: PASS. A grade of 2 was equal to 60%-70% of errors found during online spoken interaction: FAIL. A grade of 1 meant 80%-90% of errors found during online spoken interaction: FAIL. Learners would receive a grade of 0 if they had a null set of results in spoken production. The researcher enlisted the help of two college colleagues who graded three speaking files against the adapted CEFR rubrics, respectively, on the different stages of the research (pre and post-test); results yielded similar scores. Therefore, the inter-rater reliability, the level by which raters agree on the results, provided validity of this rating rubric.

In-depth interview.

To answer the third question: *To what extent does weak TBLT supported by available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practice at the end of this research impact learners' perspectives ?* The researcher conducted an in-depth interview on learners' perspectives on the intervention (see Appendix F)**,** to avoid bias, the researcher selected eight learners randomly (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The researcher used ATLAS.ti, which is a software commonly applied in qualitative research. Once the interviews concluded, audio files containing learners' interview verbatim were uploaded to ATLAS.ti to create themes. Therefore, data obtained from qualitative research (perspectives) was processed quantitatively (percentages). This in-depth interview consisted of the following questions:

First question: *How has what you learned in class impacted your willingness to speak in class?* This question sought to determine if what students learned throughout this EFL affected, positively or negatively, their interests in speaking L2 in classes. For this reason, interview

question one did not narrow to subject's learning topics, but likewise those new, different approaches that students learned and that had not been part of their standardized learning process before.

Second question: *How did what you learned in class impact your speaking ability?* This question aimed at finding out if what students learned improved their overall speaking ability. In other words, to determine if learners consider they could speak better than when they started this EFL course, and in what areas they had improved their oral skills.

Third question: *what was particularly significant to you?* This question dealt with learners' impressions about the study, those which they believed being distinctive, important, or helpful to improve their English skills.

Data Analysis

For question one, the IBM SPSS software provided analysis for the standard deviation, mean, and percentage of improvement among learners. For question two, the IBM SPSS provided data for population size, standard deviation, mean, and Cronbach's alpha to measure internal scale reliability, this reliability internal measurement was also applied to the first question.

Before and after the implementation, to analyze the results of this innovation, there were two paper-based data collection tools to answer questions one and two, respectively; in the first one, the researcher applied an adapted 8-item FLCAS, which is a Likert-based scale. In the second one the researcher assigned quantitative values to qualitative descriptors of the CEFR to

facilitate data input. For questions one and two to calculate Cohen's d (effect size of intervention) the researcher used the online calculator available on the Social Science Statistics page (https://www.socscistatistics.com).

Finally, for question three, the researcher used ATLAS.ti, which is a software used for qualitative research that analyzes events found in unstructured data (videos, audios, interviews, social activities). These types of data cannot be analyzed with conventional methods (Silver & Lewins, 2014). It is necessary to transform qualitative data into quantitative data (Gibbs, 2018; Sandelowski, as cited in Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Thus, after conducting eight in-depth interviews, the researcher uploaded the voice files to ATLAS.ti. The researcher asked two colleagues from another university to help with the coding. These two coders and the researcher agreed on four main themes: the safe supportive environment, pronunciation, real-life tasks, cellphones, and job opportunities/career.

Ethical Considerations

Regarding ethical parameters, the researcher reassured anonymity. The vice-rector granted permission to research within the college premises. The researcher also explained to the learners that the information found was only for academic purposes, and no disclosure of any sort would occur during and after the innovation. The researcher was also the teacher who carried out this study; this might have raised some ethical considerations. Therefore, to ensure reliability, the researcher maintained the highest standards of ethical behavior and objectivism, so that methodology would not be affected throughout the whole process of this study.

Results

The result section analyzed the statistical outcomes found in this innovation. Data showed how learners diminished their anxiety levels, as well as how they improved online spoken interaction during this 5-week EFL course. Learners' perspective towards this innovation was also positive. These results were achieved by comparing pre and post adapted FLCAS, and pre and post CEFR grading rubrics, and by interviewing about learners' perspectives on this innovation, respectively.

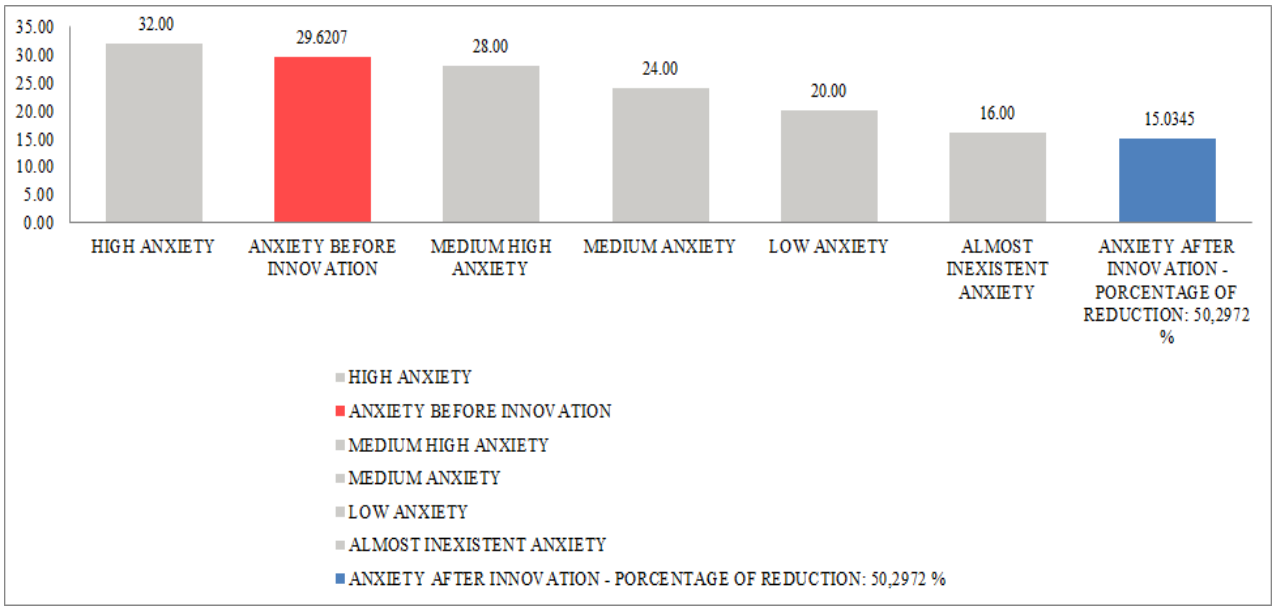
To answer question number one, *"To what extent did weak TBLT complemented by sound instructional practices reduce speaking anxiety?*

Before this innovation started, the researcher applied an adapted version of MacIntyre's FLCAS (1992) among learners (N = 29). The results yielded a mean of anxiety per question of (3.07), cumulative average anxiety of (29.62), and SD Deviation of (5.92). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these eight items scale was (0.82); the latter showed this innovation had a high internal consistency among their items.

Therefore, based on the maximum anxiety level (32), the average (29.62) is very close to the high anxiety limit determined for this scale. Thus, it is correct to conclude that this group of learners corresponds to the category of medium-high anxiety level. By the end of the innovation, this medium-high anxiety reduced from (29.62) to (15.03) a reduction of 50.30% (see Figure 1). This post-intervention also showed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these eight items of (0.72). Regarding the effect size, after using the online calculator provided by the Social Science Statistics website (https://www.socscistatistics.com), of this intervention with regards to anxiety among learners, showed a strong correlation [Cohen's d = (15.0345 - 29.6207)/4.927679 = 2.960055]. A Cohen's d coefficient of (.80) or above represents a large effect size (Rubin,

2012). Consequently, the reduction of anxiety showed that it had a positive effect among learners.

Figure 1. Anxiety level Pre-Post results

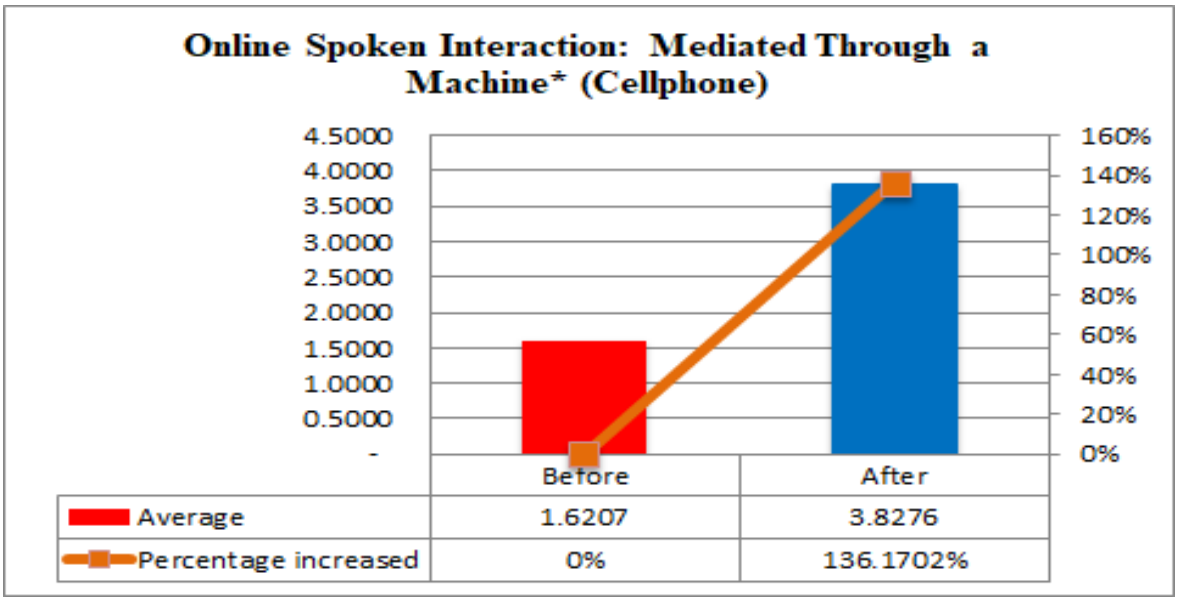


To answer question number two, *"To what extent did weak TBLT supported by the available technology (WhatsApp) and sound instructional practices improve online spoken interaction?"* Based on an adapted CEFR rubric, which ranged from 0 (minimum) to 5 (maximum), the researcher graded learners' spoken performance before the intervention: pre TBLT task (see Appendix B and E**).** The mean obtained by this group of learners before the intervention was 1.62 over 5 with a SD = .82.

The day before the final exam, the learners did the post TBLT task (see Appendix E and F**)**; the mean was 3.82 over 5 with an SD =1.00. In percentage terms, these learners improved in 136.17%. Regarding the effect size, based on the results provided by the online calculator on the Social Science Statistics webpage, [Cohen's d = (3.827595 - 1.62069)/0.915789 = 2.40]; Rubin

(2012) explained a coefficient of (.80) or above entails a large size effect. Therefore, based on the results presented above, pre and post results showed an improvement in spoken interaction (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Online spoken interaction before and after the intervention



Note. *Mediated through a machine a term from Council of Europe (2018, p. 96)

To answer question number three, *to what extent did weak TBLT supported by available technology (WhatsApp) impact learners' perspectives at the end of this research?"* The researcher administered an in-depth three-question interview with eight learners. He recorded the participants' perspectives on this course, uploaded audios, and coded files in the ATLAS.ti (see Table 1).

Interview question one, **"How has what you have learned in class impacted your willingness to speak in class?"** coding for this question established one main theme: *Supportive*

safe environment, seven out of eight learners (87.50%) felt more confident and relaxed when they spoke in the L2.

Regarding interview question two, **"How did what you learned in class impact your speaking ability?"** learners' responses fell into one main theme: *pronunciation,* they mentioned they had learned to pronounce new words and expressions that their speaking pace improved, six out of eight learners (75%) believed their spoken skills had been developed.

Finally, interview question three, **"What was particularly significant to you?"** learners' responses established two themes: *Real life*, 5 out of 8 learners (62.50%) considered exercises were practical; *Cellphones*, 5 out of 8 students (50%) believed they were less anxious using phones to interact.

Table 1

Summary of themes after coding used to reconstruct respondents verbatim

	Categories	**L1: Female 28**	**L2: Female 29**	**L3: Male 26**	**L4: Male 30**
Question one: How has what you have learned impacted your willingness to speak in class?	**Safe supportive environment**	"I felt motivated to ask more questions despite of my mistakes"	"I could make mistakes"	**"**I could interact with the teacher and my friends"	
Question two: How did what you learned in class impact your speaking ability?	**Pronunciation**	**"**I learned how to pronounce verbs ending in -ed	"I learned to pronounce new words correctly"	"I could listen to my own pronunciation; my pronunciation improved"	"I learned to say words in a better way"

Question three: What was particularly significant to you?	**Real-life tasks**	"I could book an airline ticket'	"I could order food from restaurants"		"I applied for a job

Table 1: (continued)

	Categories	L5: Male 25	L6: Male 25	L7: Male 22	L8: Male 23
	Technology		"I felt less nervous when I used the phone"	"the use of phone was something different when learning English: less pressure	
Question one: How has what you have learned impacted your willingness to speak in class?	**Safe supportive environment**	"The teacher had patience with me"	"The teacher repeated if some-thing was not clear"	"the answers didn't have to be perfect"	"The teacher encourage d to keep on trying
Question two: How did what you learned in class impact your speaking ability?	**Pronunciation**			"I could say words with the "th" sound	"My pronunciat ion is terrible. Now I think is less terrible"
Question three: What was particularly significant to you?	**Real-life tasks**		"I liked exercises were practical"		"activities were realistic"
	Technology	"phones made conversations			"my friend and I could

	less stressing”	speak in English using the phones without fear”

Discussion

Pre and post results showed that weak TBLT, when implemented properly through well-designed tasks supported by sound instructional practice (Nunan, 2004), lowered anxiety among learners (Boonkit, 2010; Ellis et al., 2019; Wang, 2017) and improved online spoken interaction (Ellis et al., 2019; Knight & Barbera, 2018). Thus, by the end of this course, over five weeks, learners’ anxiety reduced in 50, 39% (Figure 1), and their online spoken interaction improved in 136, 71% (Figure 2). Finally, learners’ perspectives were also positive as they felt their proficiency level had improved.

After comparing the pre and post FLACS results, they showed that weak TBLT reduced the level of anxiety among learners who were part of this study. (Boonkit, 2010; Wang, 2017). When weak TBLT, as well the other version, include a technology-mediated approach such as cellphones and WhatsApp: anxiety tend to diminish among learners in special when tasks are simple and achievable (Ellis et al., 2019; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Ziegler, 2016). The technology was also complemented with sound instructional strategies, among others, a safe supportive environment when learners spoke in L2 (Kubanyiova, 2018).

Regarding the improvements in the spoken interaction; even though they were quite acceptable, they did not narrow the existing gap as learners need to perform in an EFL B2 course: it typically requires 180 to 410 hours of guided learning to get students from A2 to B2

CEFR (Knight, 2018). At this point, it is worth emphasizing that this research was part of an EFL course; therefore, many other activities that were part of the official syllabus could have influenced the good results in the online spoken interaction. The latter, on the other hand, might also confirm the interdependency of TBLT that perfectly fits and improves official syllabi (Ellis, 2018).

Also, the results found in question two of this research were similar to those found by Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017); regarding technology (WhatsApp) improving proficiency and negotiation skills. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2019) confirmed that technology improved the effectiveness of TBLT in the classroom; this natural synergy between TBLT and technology could provide the basis for individual lessons and tasks that would not be workable otherwise. Technology facilitated, among others, multi-modal opportunities to perform complex tasks (oral, written, and visual) synchronously or asynchronously or both (Ellis et al., 2019).

This study confirmed what Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez (2017) claimed in their research in regards of the use of WhatsApp among learners: improvements in the spoken interaction through simple and free, easy to use, accessible technology. This innovation seemed to have enhanced this previous study by introducing the weak version of TBLT, supported by technology and sounding instructional practices, which resulted in less anxiety and more online spoken interaction.

Finally, question three showed that interviewed learners had a positive perspective on this intervention. They specifically mentioned they felt more relaxed when they spoke in English

(Kubanyiova, 2018). Despite their limitations, students felt the quality of their English improved and that what they learned could be transferred to their careers and studies (Nunan, 2004).

Conclusion

This study aimed at improving online spoken interaction through the reduction of foreign language anxiety among this group of learners. Working in small groups, providing a safe, supportive learning environment, timely feedback from the teacher, and real-life technology-based tasks were essential for the success of the project. Regarding results, pre and post-tests showed a large size effect in the reduction of anxiety (Rubin, 2012), which also resulted in better online spoken interaction.

Based on the information gathered in this study, it seems that traditional learning is not producing the desired results. Seeking for, or trying renewed learning approaches seems to be a must (Farrell, 2015). Learners need to perceive that what they are learning at school is also useful in the real world.

Finally, the learners' perspectives at the end of the study reported that they felt part of a supportive environment, they learned how to improve their English pronunciation, and they appreciated activities that included real tasks, the use of technology, they also considered that English opens opportunities for their personal development.

Limitations

This research had to face some limitations. First, the relatively small population size of 29 learners; second, it did not exist a control group to compare with the experimental group. Third, the bad weather conditions that affected this innovation such as heavy rain (flooding of premises); and blackouts caused learners not to attend on some occasions.

Finally, this study lasted only five weeks; also, this research was part of a very restrictive institutional program. Consequently, the number of applied interventions had to be limited to only seven throughout this EFL course.

Recommendations

This study requires further research within the TBLT realm, specifically the weak version of TBLT, which includes more varied groups of learners, such as learners from a different educational background, or perhaps to include a control group. But above all, researches like these need more extended periods of time. For instance, a full school year or at least one semester would allow future researchers to assess the workability of weak TBLT. Further studies also need to be applied in less restrictive conditions with more openness to the TBLT approach.

Also, further studies on EFL in Ecuador could provide teachers the tools aimed at helping their students to overcome this specific type of anxiety problem, which is common all over the world. Future studies in Ecuador should also include more technology when applying weak TBLT as a way to create a more relaxed learning environment so that learners would feel motivated to speak.

Finally, the researcher tailored learners' needs based on factual observation; thus, even though these results could be used as a guideline to other studies, developing customized researching tools for future groups of learners would be highly recommended.

References

Abdelhafez, H. A., & Abdallah, M. (2015). Making it ‘authentic’: Egyptian EFL student teachers' awareness and use of online authentic language materials and their learning motivation. *Journal of Research in Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Technology*, *41*(2713), 1–34. doi: 10.12816/0019923

Amory, A. (2018). Use of the collaboration-authentic learning-technology/tool mediation framework to address the theory-praxis Gap. In T. Chang, R. Huang, &. Kinshuk (Eds.), *Authentic Learning through Advances in Technologies* (pp. 70–71). Singapore, Singapore: Springer. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.ec/books?id=EMM2DwAAQBAJ&pg=PA71&dq=Technology+authentic+tasks&hl=es&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjdx7y8htDiAhXOneAKHaWNDPcQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=Technology%20authentic%20tasks&f=false

Andújar-Vaca, A., & Cruz-Martínez, M. S. (2017). Mensajería instantánea móvil: WhatsApp y su potencial para desarrollar las destrezas orales [Mobile instant messaging:

WhatsApp and its potential to develop oral skills]. *Comunicar*, 25(50), 43–52. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3916/C50-2017-04

Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism (Bilingual education & bilingualism)* (5th ed., pp. 25-38). Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Beglar, D., & Hunt, A. (2002). Implementing task-based language teaching. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching* (pp. 96–105). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bingham, T. (2015). Mastering mobile learning: Tips and techniques for success. In C. Udell & G. Woodill (Eds.), *Mastering Mobile Learning: Tips and Techniques for Success* (pp. xi–xiii). New Jersey, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Bookhart, S. M. (2017). *How to give effective feedback to your students* (2nd ed., pp. 80-81). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Boonkit, K. (2010). Enhancing the development of speaking skills for non-native speakers of English. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*(2), 1305–1309. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.191

Branden, K. (2006). Introduction: Task-based language teaching in a nutshell. In K. Branden (Ed.), *Task-Based Language Education: From Theory to Practice* (pp. 1, 3–8). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667282.002

British Council. (2015). *English in Ecuador: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors (*Report*).* Retrieved from

https://ei.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/latin-america-research/English%20in%20Ecuador.pdf

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed., pp. 63–65). New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.

Casado, M. A., & Dereshiwsky, M. I. (2001). Foreign language anxiety of university students. *College Student Journal*, *35*(4). Retrieved from https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-84017191/foreign-language-anxiety-of-university-students

Chávez-Zambrano, M. X., Saltos-Vivas, M. A., & Saltos-Dueñas, C. M. (2017). La importancia del aprendizaje y conocimiento del idioma inglés en la enseñanza superior [The importance of learning and knowledge of the English language in higher education]. *Dominio de las Ciencias*, *3*, 759–771. Retrieved from http://dominiodelasciencias.com/ojs/index.php/es/article/view/707/787

Corporación Latinobarómetro. (2018). *Informe 2018* (PDF) [Report 2018]. Retrieved from http://www.latinobarometro.org/latdocs/INFORME_2018_LATINOBAROMETRO.pdf

Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (pp. 40–41, 186–195). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf

Council of Europe. (2018, February). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment: Companion volume with new descriptors* (pp. 81–92, 96–99, 171–172). Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.

Retrieved from https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989

Cronquist, K., & Fiszbei, A. (2017). *El aprendizaje del idioma Inglés en América Latina.* [Learning English in Latin America]. Retrieved from Fundación Luminis website: https://www.fundacionluminis.org.ar/biblioteca/aprendizaje-del-ingles-america-latina

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed., pp. 5–14). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486999

Dewaele, J. M., MacIntyre, P. D., Boudreau, C., & Dewaele, L. (2016). Do girls have all the fun? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Theory and practice of second language acquisition*, *2*(1), 41-63. Retrieved from: http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/15888

Easley, I. I. J. (2012). *The audacity to teach: The impact of leadership, school reform, and the urban context on educational innovations* (pp. 94–95). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.ec/books?id=wy4GUNHr0tgC&pg=PA95&dq=teachers+and+cutting+edge+technology&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjY2aa224vfAhXOzlkKHflJAgg4ChDoAQhUMAg#v=onepage&q=teachers%20and%20cutting%20edg

Education First (2019). *Índice del Dominio del Inglés EF para Escuelas* [EF English Proficiency for Schools Index]. Retrieved from Education First website: https://www.ef.com.ec/__/~/media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v9/ef-epi-2019-spanish-latam.pdf

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching* (pp. 2–8, 113, 269). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.ec/books?id=coO0bxnBeRgC&printsec=frontcover&dq=TBL+REAL+LIFE+SITUATIONS+ENGLISH+TEACHING+WILLIS&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj01vnx6YvfAhUGy1kKHSAhD3g4ChC7BQgtMAE#v=onepage&q=real%2

Ellis, R. (2006). The methodology of task-based teaching. *Asian EFL Journal*, *8*(3), 30-31. Retrieved from https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/September_2006_EBook_editions.pdf

Ellis, R. (2017). Task-based language teaching. In S. Loewen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition* (pp. 112-123). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ellis, R. (2018). Taking the critics to task: The case for task-based teaching. *New Perspectives on the Development of Communicative and Related Competence in Foreign Language Education*, *28*, 23. doi:10.1515/9781501505034-002

Ellis, R., Skehan, P., Li, S., Shintani, N., & Lambert, C. (2019). *Task-Based language teaching: Theory and practice* (pp. 18–20, 148–152, 316–319). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Erdogan, N., & Wei, M. (2019). Articulatory Phonetics: English Consonants. In N. Erdogan & M. Wei (Eds.), *Applied linguistics for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners* (pp. 278-279). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). *International perspectives on English language teacher education: Innovations from the field*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137440068_12

Gibbs, G. R. (2018). *Analyzing qualitative data* (2nd ed., pp. 38-55). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

González-Lloret, M., & Ortega, L. (2014). Towards technology-mediated TBLT. In M. González-Lloret & L. Ortega (Eds.), *Technology-mediated TBLT; Researching Technology and Tasks* (Vol. 6, pp. 1–6). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gregersen, T., MacIntyre, P. D., & Meza, M. D. (2014). The motion of emotion: Idiodynamic case studies of learners' foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *98*(2), 574–588. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12084

Guano, D. F., Allauca, M. E., & Salazar, V. M. (2018). Buenas prácticas docentes para profesor de Inglés en el ámbito universitario [Good Teaching Practices for English Teacher in the University Area]. *European Scientific Journal*, *14*(20), 28–29. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n20p25

Hattie, J., & Clarke, S. (2019). *Visible learning: Feedback* (pp. 78-79, 114-115). New York, NY: SAGE.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, *70*(2), 125–132. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x

Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112–126. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190501000071

Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching* (pp. 278-279). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos. (2016). *En cinco años se quintuplicaron los usuarios de teléfonos inteligentes* [In five years, smartphone users increased fivefold]. Retrieved from http://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/en-cinco-anos-se-quintuplicaron-los-usuarios-de-telefonos-inteligentes

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (5th ed., pp. 610–613). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Knight, B. (2018, October). *How long does it take to learn a language?* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2018/10/11/how-long-learn-language/

Knight, J., & Barbera, E. (2018). Navigational acts and discourse: Fostering learner agency in computer-assisted language learning. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, *16*(1), 67-76. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/academic-conferences.org/docs/ejel-volume16-issue1-article642

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition* (pp. 9–66). Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. D., Scarcella, R. C., & Long, M. H. (1982). *Child-adult differences in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Kubanyiova, M. (2018). *Creating a safe speaking environment.* Part of the Cambridge Papers in ELT series [PDF]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: https://languageresearch.cambridge.org/images/Language_Research/CambridgePapers/CambridgePapersInELT_SafeSpeaking_2018_ONLINE.pdf

Liu, M., & Jackson, J. (2008). An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *92*(1), 71-86. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x

Long, M. (2015). *Second language acquisition and task-based language teaching* (pp. 68–76). Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Luoma, S. (2004). [Preface]. Assessing speaking. In J. Alderson & L. F. Bachman (Eds.), *Series editors' preface to Assessing Speaking* (pp. ix–x, 30, 82). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, P. D. (1992). *Anxiety and language learning from a stage of processing perspective* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. Retrieved from https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/2155/

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second. *Language Learning*, *44*(2), 283–306. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x

MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Clément, R. (2016). Individual differences. In G. Hall (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching* (pp. 311–312). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

MacKenzie, I. (2014). *English as a lingua franca: Theorizing and teaching English*. London, England: Routledge. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315890081

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. M. (2016). *Second language research: Methodology and design* (2nd ed., pp. 172-173). New York, NY: Routledge.

Marzec-Stawiarska, M. (2015). Investigating foreign language speaking anxiety among advanced learners of English. In M. Pawlak & E. Waniek-Klimczak (Eds.), *Issues in Teaching, Learning, and Testing Speaking in a Second Language* (pp. 104–106). Heidelberg, DE: Springer. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-38339-7_7

McQuiggan, S., Kosturko, L., McQuiggan, J., & Sabourin, J. (2015). *Mobile learning: A handbook for developers, educators, and learners* (pp. 6, 7, 43, 49-55). Haboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Ministerio de Educación. (2016). *English Teaching Standards*. Quito, Ecuador: Ministerio de Educación. Retrieved from https://educacion.gob.ec/wpcontent/uploads/downloads/2017/02/ESTANDARES-DE-INGLES.pdf

Moyer, A. (2004). Age, accent, and experience in second language acquisition: An integrated approach to critical period inquiry. In D. Singleton (Ed.), *Second Language Acquisition* (Vol. 7, pp. 17-46). Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Nakata, Y. (2006). *Motivation and experience in foreign language learning* (pp. 84–86). Bern, CH: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-Based language teaching* (pp. 13–14, 19–23, 132). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336

Nunan, D. (2013). *Learner-centered English language education: The selected works of David Nunan* (pp. 16–185). New York, NY: Routledge.

Pellettieri, J.L. (1999). *Why-talk? Investigating the role of task-based interaction through synchronous network-based communication among classroom learners of Spanish* (Doctoral thesis, Davis, University of California) Retrieved from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/119206/.

Reed, M., & Levis, J. M. (2015). *The handbook of English pronunciation* (pp. 354-355). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Richards, J. C., Gallo, P. B., & Renandya, W. A. (2001). Exploring teachers' beliefs and the processes of change. *PAC journal*, *1*(1), 41–58. Retrieved from https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/exploring-teacher-change.pdf

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667305.022

Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice* (pp. 19-20). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Rixon, S. (2013). Group work. In M. Byram & A. Hu (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (2nd ed., pp. 289-290). New York, NY: Routledge.

Robinson, P. (2007). Task complexity, theory of mind, and intentional reasoning: Effects on L2 speech production, interaction, uptake and perceptions of task difficulty. *IRAL-International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, *45*(3), 193-213. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2007.009

Rubin, A. (2012). *Statistics for evidence-based practice and evaluation* (3rd ed., pp. 141-142). Belmont, Canada: Cengage Learning.

Sagor, R. D., & Williams, C. (2017). *The action research guidebook: A process for pursuing equity and excellence in education* (3rd ed., pp. 1-7). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwing.

Schlechty, P. C. (2011). *Engaging students: The next level of working on the work* (pp. 20–24). San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons.

Sheen, Y. (2008). Recasts, language anxiety, modified output, and L2 learning. *Language learning*, *58*(4), 835-874. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2008.00480.x

Silver, C., & Lewins, A. (2014). *Using software in qualitative research: A step-by-step Guide* (2nd ed., pp. 62-63). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Spielmann, G., & Radnofsky, M. L. (2001). Learning language under tension: New directions from a qualitative study. *The Modern Language Journal*, *85*(2), 259-278. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/0026-7902.00108

Statista Research Department. (2018a). *Global digital population as of October 2018 Report (in millions)*. Hamburg, Germany: Statista Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/

Statista Research Department. (2018b). *Report of number of mobile phone users worldwide from 2013 to 2019 (in billions).* Hamburg, Germany: Statista. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/274774/forecast-of-mobile-phone-users-worldwide/

Taylor, G. R. (2005). *Integrating quantitative and qualitative methods in research* (2nd ed., pp. 176-177). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Thomas, M., & Reinders, H. (2010). Deconstructing tasks and technology. In M. Thomas & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching with Technology* (pp. 10–13). London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Tsui, A. (1996). Reticence and anxiety in second language learning. In K. M. Baiey, N. David, & M. Swan (Eds.), *Voices from the Language Classroom: Qualitative Research in Second Language Education* (pp. 229–230). Cambridge, UK: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Wang, X. (2017). The influence of task-based language teaching approach on foreign language anxiety and achievements among vocational college students. *DEStech Transactions on Social Science, Education and Human Science* (ICAEM), 223-226. doi: 10.12783/dtssehs/icaem2017/19076

Weaver, M. R. (2006). Do students value feedback? Student perceptions of tutors' written responses. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *31*(3), 379–394. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930500353061

Wiggins, G. P. (1993). *Assessing student performance: Exploring the purpose and limits of testing* (pp. 15–28). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wiggins, G. (2016). Seven keys to effective feedback. In M. Scherer (Ed.), *On Formative Assessment: Readings from Educational Leadership (EL Essentials)* (pp. 24-35). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (14, 166–167). Alexandria, VA: Ascd.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching* (pp. 1–4, 153–167). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ziegler, N. (2016). Taking technology to task: Technology-mediated TBLT, performance, and production. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *36*, 136–163. doi:10.1017/S0267190516000039

Zsiga, E. C. (2013). *The sounds of language: An introduction to phonetics and phonology* (pp. 448–450). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.