**"*Malu*" - Shyness and Shyness
Behaviour in the English Language Classroom:
Who, What, Where, When, How and Why.**

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Introduction

It is said that success in language learning is influenced by many factors - the teachers themselves, the methodology used, the resources available, and the amount of exposure to the target language. However, I feel that the paramount factor influencing success in language learning (which is often disregarded while all the above are taken into account) is the language learners themselves - their psychological make-up; in short, the selves that they bring into the language classroom. As an English as a Second Language (ESL hereafter) teacher in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM hereafter), I have experienced the frustration of ESL learners of all levels keeping silent in the language classroom. These ESL learners seldom volunteer to answer questions, seldom give their opinions and seldom initiate communication. When called on, these learners hesitate, give very short answers, or do not answer at all. In most cases, these learners shun eye contact, preferring to stare at the floor, ceiling or out the window. It can be concluded that their silence is due to several possible reasons:

1. they don't know the answer or answers to questions asked.
2. they lack the necessary language to communicate effectively in the English language and thus find it difficult to say what they cannot yet say at all.
3. they feel insecure about their level of English and prefer to say little or nothing at all for fear that their mistakes would make their classmates or teacher laugh at or look down on them.
4. they find it difficult to quickly switch from their mother tongue, or another language that they can communicate effectively in, to the English language.
5. they are following the appropriate and highly acceptable cultural behaviour of showing respect.

However, when learners are asked what factors contribute to their silence in the classroom, they are apt to attribute their silence to "shyness" or the Bahasa Melayu equivalent "malu". When questioned further about what they mean by "malu" or "shy", they usually find it difficult to define the phenomenon and often try by relating their feelings to it such as "takut", "nervous", "afraid"; give a Bahasa Melayu equivalent term such as "segan"; or even give an answer to the unasked question, "Why are you shy?" (instead of directly defining the phenomenon) such as, "I don't want my friends

to laugh at me". The problem with shyness is that it seems to defy definition and the idea of shyness itself appears to be somewhat loosely used in ordinary conversations so much so that we can find varied meanings and varied connotations tied to these meanings (usually in the negative sense) for the phenomenon. Perhaps this is why shyness conjures up different ideas for many people such that many of our shy but bright learners have been mentally categorized as "unmotivated", "lazy", "aloof" and "indifferent" throughout their schooling lives. How my learners act in the classroom and what they say about why they act as such has led me to conclude in accordance with Zimbardo (1977) that shyness is a wide-spread, universal phenomenon that is in its negative aspects more like a social epidemic than a private psychological problem. It may be concluded that like my ESL learners, many individuals in our society are too shy to realize that they can, afraid that they can't or afraid to be laughed at.

Because the concept of shyness or "malu" is highly prevalent in our society - in academic, professional, as well as interpersonal spheres and because it is ambiguous and complex, the immediate aim of this paper is to provide possible definitions of shyness collected from my readings so as to denote it in its several presenting forms and to attempt at the same time to denote its relationship to behaviour noting that there is a connection between shyness and anxiety without implying that they are synonymous. The causes of shyness will also be discussed.

What is shyness and shyness behaviour?

Although negative consequences of shyness are pronounced, the phenomenon of shyness and shyness behaviour has not attracted much serious scientific attention that it deserves especially in the Malaysian situation. However, researchers (Pilkonis, 1977; Zimbardo, Pilkonis and Norwood, 1974) have successfully reported the prevalence of shyness through their scientific studies. Zimbardo et. al. (1974) studied subjects from Japan, Taiwan, Hawaii, Israel, Mexico, India and North America and found that across all populations studied, 40% of the people considered themselves to be "presently shy" while over 80% reported that they had been "dispositionally shy" at some point in their lives. Ong (1987) surveyed teachers from urban as well as rural schools in Malaysia and found out that 46% of the teachers in the urban schools surveyed felt that their English ESL learners were shy to use the English language and 69% of the teachers in the rural schools surveyed felt the same about their ESL learners. Kagan and other psychologists (The Malay Mail, 15 March 1991:37) believe that:

> the seeds of extreme shyness and caution are already sown at birth and probably lie within the genes. Scientists believe that by observing how youngsters act and how their bodies work, they can pick out the ones who are predisposed - though not absolutely destined - to become shy and timid teenagers and adults.

Amatu (1981) has attempted giving us a comprehensive definition of shyness and shyness behaviour. According to him, shyness and shyness behaviour can be denoted: (i) as overt bits of behaviour; (ii) as an intervening variable; (iii) as an experiential state; (iv) in global forms; and (v) in specific forms.

Shyness as overt bits of behaviour

Shyness is analysable as "shy behaviour" (shyness as overt bits of behaviour). This implies that shyness in performance situations shows overt signs that are observable by others which the person

labeled as shy may or may not be aware of during an on-going activity. Such overt behavioural indices include excessive or too little body movement - body sways, avoidance of eye contact, fidgeting, blushing, perspiration, nervousness and tension. The shy person (introvert) is believed to be a quiet, retiring person, introspective, seldom behaves in an aggressive manner but is pessimistic. The non-shy person (extrovert) is described as sociable, craves excitement, is carefree, optimistic and aggressive.

Shyness as an intervening variable

The definition of shyness as an intervening variable implies that shyness is expressed in a feeling of "shyness" where a pattern of behaviour may result from such a feeling. Thus, a person may feel shy without it being apparent to others. A person may put on a mask of non-shyness when in fact he is shy. An air of confidence on the other hand, may be a screen for, or mask of, lack of confidence. The "outgoing" or "happy-go-lucky" person may in fact have difficulty (e.g. he/she may feel nervous/shy) while interacting with people. Therefore, the patterns of behaviour that may result in a person feeling reluctant to participate in a potential or actual self-revealing or self-disclosing performance situation are characteristic of shyness behaviour. Having to perform in novel situations where others may be evaluating them is a prime source of the anxiety shy people experience such that they typically have negative, self-critical thoughts about themselves, and often describe their shyness as a personal problem of serious proportions. Why? According to Zimbardo (1977b:48) "more people and situations have this effect on shy people." Furthermore, shy and non-shy people draw different inferences from the same set of evidence so that when asked, "Whom do you blame? Yourself or the situation?" the shy person is more likely to say that he is wrong and that he is at fault. The non-shy person would look outside himself to find who or what is the cause, and responds by doing something about it. The shy person finds fault in himself, not in the situation and therefore, arranges much of his life around avoiding situations where he might be singled out and forced to take individual action. This behaviour pattern may later become so intensified that it may be characterized by social isolation, withdrawal, loneliness and self-loathing.

Shyness as an experiential state

The definition that shyness is an experiential state indicates that the behaviour labeled shy is an enduring and temporary state within an individual. Therefore, in accordance to Amatu (1981:37):

> shyness is essentially a state observable only by introspection of inner states in which the individual reports experiencing, for example, a certain disorganization resulting in an inability to collect his thoughts, drying up before an audience, sensations of butterflies in the stomach, dry mouth, muscular tremors and sweating in a performance situation.

Here, shyness is a possible reaction to being aware that one is the object of regard by others. This may lead to a habitual pre-occupation in shy persons with themselves, a situation that Ishiyama (1984:105) believes as "stemming from over-indulging the normal feedback process of self-monitoring and social evaluation."

Habitual preoccupation in shy persons with themselves may be characterized also as self-specializing where they tend to feel that their problems are unique, that no one else has the same difficulty as they

do. Being less perceptive of others' shyness, and being hypersensitive to their own, the shy may prematurely attribute the cause of shyness to their personalities or appearances ("I'm too fat to socialize", "I'm stupid", etc.), and consequently lower their social self-confidence. This definition then lends itself to study through self-reports (eg. self-questionnaire) by the labeled shy person and of being detectable by psychophysiological (term used in Amatu, 1981) monitoring.

Shyness as a global behaviour

Shyness can also be denoted as a global behaviour where its behaviour is a cross-section of social and performance situations. This definition assumes however that shy persons tend to or do avoid social and interpersonal situations with fear of negative evaluation. It seems logical then that if situations cannot be avoided, the shy person will resign or endure the situation even though it is unpleasant. Zimbardo (1977b) feels that shyness may be better understood in a social context where it is a socially learned "people phobia" brought about as a product of our cultural values (collectivism, submissiveness, individualism, individual achievement, etc.) that makes shy learners socially anxious, publically self-conscious, and poor to monitor their social behaviour than non-shy learners or that makes shy learners less sociable, less self-confident, more passive and more helpless than their non-shy classmates. Shy people, he is convinced, are more conforming and less sympathetic to someone with a problem than others are and they are likely to think of themselves as less attractive, less intelligent, and less sensual than their non-shy agemates. Zimbardo (1977b: 49) believes that:

> shyness is a product of social and cultural values that place undue emphasis on the individual ego and on success through individual effort and that make love and acceptance contingent upon meeting high performance standards (the individual's).

He further concludes that parental attitudes which promote critical self-evaluation and societal values that instill fear of intimacy or cooperation further perpetuate shyness. In this context, it is easy to conclude that shyness diminishes the quality of human life by making people fear what is unstructured, spontaneous, novel or intimate. In terms of educational implications, it can be concluded that shyness results in both poor performance on assignments and increased feelings of helplessness.

Shyness in specific forms

This final definition is a working definition used in many on-going studies of shyness and shyness behaviour. According to Amatu (1981) shyness is an observable (by others), reportable (by person concerned), and measurable (by, for example, psychophysiological monitoring) disposition to act or respond to situations in a certain way (situation-specific). Shyness also requires performance (task or activity) in context (social or interpersonal) which shyness behaviour can be judged. Because shyness is a response, it is assumed that the behaviour pattern labeled "shy" is considered to be consistent across similar stimulus situations and cannot be understood in a vacuum or in abstraction. Shyness in this definition may be in relation to an unknown which may arouse discomfort, an element of conflict because of the novelty of uncertainty, nervousness or fear of negative evaluation. Thus, the shy person becomes self-conscious, self-distrustful, uneasy and hesitant. In verbal performance situations, Amatu (1981:34) states that:

shyness may manifest itself in hesitation, short durations of speech, few syllables and non-fluent speech, or "garrulousness" characterized by flamboyance, boastfulness, long durations of talk, large verbal output, with the speech largely non-fluent being accompanied by minimal eye contact, excessive fidgeting, and feelings of nervousness.

Zimbardo (1977a: 69) states that shyness can be devastating because:

it can make it difficult for a person to make friends; it can prevent a person from speaking up for his rights and from expressing opinions; it can encourage self-consciousness; it can interfere with clear thinking and effective communication, and serious shyness can be accompanied by feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness.

What causes shyness and shyness behaviour? Experts and professionals have not come to an agreement on what causes shyness and shyness behaviour. According to Biemer (1983:55):

psychoanalysts believe that shyness is a reaction to unfulfilled primal wishes of the id; personality-trait specialists feel that certain people are born with the predisposition to social anxiety; developmental psychologists view that intense and frequent social anxiety among young children has its roots in early parent-child relationships; and behaviourists believe that shyness is best explained as learned habits of responding with anxiety and impaired performance to social situations. These habits are learned through one's own negative personal experiences in interacting with others or through vicarious experiences, i.e., through observation of what is perceived to be aversive in the interpersonal experiences of others.

Conclusion

The information gathered in my readings of the phenomenon of shyness and shyness behaviour, the observations of how my ESL learners act in the classroom and the acknowledgement of what they say about why they act as such in the ESL classroom point to the fact that shyness is a biopsychosocial phenomenon, one that can be taken together as a personal, private and often painful experience, as well as a reflection of social influence and cultural programming (more so the case in Malaysia) rather than wholly of individual inadequacy. It has been suggested that a clear conception of the opposite of shyness, for example, "confidence", "self-assuredness", and "assertiveness" would help one to understand shyness itself more as it provides a base of sorts for comparing, contrasting, perceiving, judging or evaluating its presence or absence in any person under certain situations. I have not personally found this suggestion useful. Shyness manifests itself in observable, reportable, and objectively measurable forms from a wide range of affective-evaluative states under specific stimulus situations and has both positive and negative connotations. Kitiyama, a psychologist at the University of Oregon, in Goleman's "Individualism at Odds with Eastern Culture" (The New Sunday Times, 20 January 1991:11) asserts that "people in different cultures have very different premises about what defines a person, with different consequences for how they think, feel and act." For instance, in our Malaysian society, shyness in its positive connotation may show that one is discreet, introspective, respectful, and non-threatening instead of aggressive and obnoxious. Shyness behaviour is substantially situationally presented, existing in all persons to some degree and may be genetically determined. Kagan (The Malay Mail, 15 March 1991:37) reports that "the inborn tendency does not mean babies will unfailingly grow up to be withdrawn. Many learn to cope with their condition and even overcome it." Contrary to popular belief, women are no more shy than men

and therefore, shyness may be experienced by persons of any age, sex and profession (Low, 1991; Tan, 1988; Ishiyama, 1984; Kupfer, Detre and Koral, 1974; Zimbardo et.al., 1974; Philips and Metzger, 1973).

Because shyness is comprehensive in its situational specificity, anyone may cross into either direction - shy or non-shy - depending on the situation, context, or the characteristics of the medium or stimuli. Sources of variables that maintain shyness and shyness behaviour include socio-cultural factors (submissiveness, self-effacement, competitiveness, social control, socialization, rewards and punishments for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, etc) and the connotations shyness has in a given culture. Amatu (1981:39-40) states that:

> shyness has a multiplicity of causes theoretically comprehensible within an amalgam of psychological

theorizing. These range from attributions to genetics (personality-trait theorists), non-acquisition of effective social skills (learning theorists), conscious manifestation of unconscious, repressed conflicts (psychoanalytic theory), social programming (child psychological and sociological theory), and the effect of labeling (socio psychological theory). The multiplicity of variables implicated in the causation of shyness are reducible to two central factors -perceptions of performance situations as a threat to the self (real-imagined, current-future) and a fear of negative evaluation.

After defining shyness in terms of specific properties which differentiate it from other similar concepts, denoting the relationship of shyness to behaviour, briefly stating ways for quantifying shyness, and briefly explaining what causes shyness and shyness behaviour, it is hoped that this paper has shed some light on the difficult to define concepts of shyness and shyness behaviour for the interest of not only those familiar with the disruptions shyness and shyness behaviour can cause in the academic spheres (especially in the language learning situation) but also for the interest of those in the professional and interpersonal spheres. What is more important is the reassurance that shyness is modifiable either spontaneously or through intervention and that shyness can be "unlearned" by shy individuals through a combination of different techniques and approaches used in shyness intervention.

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