



**TEACHER EVALUATIVE DISCOURSE AND SPEAKING
ANXIETY IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP): A
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MITIGATING PROFESSIONAL
FACE-THREAT AMONG PHILOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES**

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Abstract: *Teacher evaluative discourse constitutes a crucial element of classroom interaction, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts where language learning is closely tied to professional identity formation. Among philology undergraduates, speaking performance is often perceived not only as an academic task but also as a reflection of future professional competence. This study explores the theoretical relationship between teacher evaluative discourse and speaking anxiety, with a specific focus on the concept of professional face-threat. Drawing on face theory and affective perspectives in second language acquisition, the paper examines how different forms of teacher feedback may either exacerbate or alleviate students' anxiety in speaking tasks. The analysis suggests that evaluative discourse characterized by direct criticism, public correction, and authoritative tone can heighten anxiety by threatening students' professional self-image. Conversely, supportive, dialogic, and face-sensitive feedback strategies can mitigate these effects and foster a more conducive learning environment. The study highlights the need for pedagogical awareness in shaping evaluative practices that balance linguistic*



accuracy with emotional support. Implications for ESP teaching and future research directions are discussed.

1. Introduction

In contemporary language education, the role of teacher discourse extends beyond the transmission of knowledge to encompass the shaping of learners' emotional and psychological experiences. This is particularly evident in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms, where students are trained to use language within specialized academic or professional domains. For philology undergraduates, whose academic trajectory is deeply rooted in language mastery, classroom performance often carries significant implications for their developing professional identity.

One of the most salient challenges in such contexts is speaking anxiety. Defined as a form of communication apprehension associated with real or anticipated oral performance, speaking anxiety can significantly hinder students' ability to participate actively in classroom activities. While numerous factors contribute to this phenomenon, teacher evaluative discourse has emerged as a critical yet underexplored variable.

Evaluative discourse refers to the ways in which teachers provide feedback, assess performance, and express judgments about students' language use. This includes not only explicit correction but also tone, timing, and framing of feedback. In ESP settings, where communication often simulates real-world professional scenarios, evaluative discourse can carry heightened significance. Students may interpret feedback not merely as commentary on their language skills but as an assessment of their future professional competence.

The concept of "face," derived from sociolinguistic theory, provides a useful lens for understanding this dynamic. Face refers to an individual's public self-image and desire for social approval. In the classroom, face-threatening acts—such as public criticism or negative evaluation—can undermine students' confidence and increase anxiety. For philology students, such threats may extend beyond the academic domain to affect their sense of professional identity.



This paper aims to explore the theoretical relationship between teacher evaluative discourse and speaking anxiety in ESP contexts, with a focus on mitigating professional face-threat among philology undergraduates. By synthesizing insights from face theory and second language acquisition research, the study seeks to propose a framework for more effective and empathetic evaluative practices.

2. Methodology

As a theoretical study, this research adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach rather than an empirical one. The methodology is based on an extensive review and synthesis of existing literature in the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and educational psychology.

The analysis draws primarily on two theoretical frameworks:

* **Face Theory:** Originating from sociolinguistic research, this framework examines how individuals manage their public self-image in social interactions. It distinguishes between positive face (the desire to be liked and approved of) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). Teacher feedback is analyzed in terms of its potential to threaten or support these dimensions of face.

* **Affective Factors in Language Learning:** This perspective emphasizes the role of emotions, attitudes, and motivation in language acquisition. Speaking anxiety is conceptualized as a key affective variable that can influence learners' performance and engagement.

Relevant scholarly works were selected based on their focus on teacher feedback, classroom discourse, speaking anxiety, and ESP pedagogy. The literature was analyzed thematically to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps related to evaluative discourse and its impact on learners.

The study also incorporates illustrative examples of classroom interactions to demonstrate how different evaluative strategies may function as either face-threatening or face-supportive acts.



3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teacher Evaluative Discourse as a Source of Anxiety

The analysis reveals that teacher evaluative discourse can significantly influence students' emotional responses to speaking tasks. Direct and explicit correction, particularly when delivered in a public setting, often functions as a face-threatening act. For example, interrupting a student mid-speech to correct grammatical errors may disrupt not only the flow of communication but also the student's confidence.

Such practices can activate a fear of negative evaluation, a core component of speaking anxiety. Students may become overly focused on avoiding errors rather than expressing ideas, leading to reduced participation and limited language development.

3.2 Professional Face-Threat in ESP Contexts

In ESP classrooms, the stakes of speaking performance are inherently higher due to the professional orientation of the curriculum. Activities such as presentations, negotiations, and role-plays simulate real-world scenarios, making students more sensitive to evaluation.

For philology undergraduates, whose future careers may involve teaching, translation, or linguistic research, language proficiency is closely tied to professional credibility. As a result, negative feedback may be perceived as a threat not only to academic success but also to future career prospects.

This amplifies the impact of evaluative discourse, making it essential for teachers to consider the broader implications of their feedback.

3.3 Face-Sensitive Feedback Strategies

The study identifies several strategies that can mitigate face-threat and reduce speaking anxiety:

- * Indirect Correction: Reformulating students' utterances without explicitly highlighting errors allows for correction while preserving face.

- * Delayed Feedback: Providing feedback after the completion of a speaking task avoids interrupting communication and reduces immediate pressure.



* Positive Framing: Emphasizing what students did well before addressing areas for improvement helps maintain motivation and confidence.

* Dialogic Feedback: Engaging students in reflective discussions about their performance fosters a sense of collaboration rather than judgment.

These strategies align with a more student-centered approach to teaching, where evaluation is viewed as a supportive process rather than a punitive one.

3.4 Balancing Accuracy and Emotional Support

A key challenge for ESP teachers is balancing the need for linguistic accuracy with the need to maintain a supportive learning environment. While correction is essential for language development, its delivery must be carefully managed to avoid negative emotional consequences.

The findings suggest that adopting a flexible and context-sensitive approach to evaluation can help achieve this balance. Teachers should consider factors such as the complexity of the task, the proficiency level of students, and the classroom atmosphere when deciding how and when to provide feedback.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the theoretical relationship between teacher evaluative discourse and speaking anxiety in ESP contexts, with a particular focus on professional face-threat among philology undergraduates. The analysis demonstrates that evaluative discourse is not merely a pedagogical tool but a powerful social and emotional force that can shape students' learning experiences.

Face-threatening feedback practices, such as direct and public criticism, can exacerbate speaking anxiety and hinder participation. In contrast, face-sensitive strategies that emphasize support, dialogue, and respect can mitigate anxiety and promote more effective learning.

The findings underscore the importance of pedagogical awareness in the use of evaluative discourse. ESP teachers must recognize the dual role of feedback as both a linguistic and emotional intervention. By adopting more empathetic and reflective evaluative practices, educators can create a classroom environment that supports both language development and professional identity formation.



Future research could build on this theoretical framework by conducting empirical studies to examine the impact of specific feedback strategies on student anxiety and performance in ESP settings.

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