



TEACHER EVALUATIVE DISCOURSE AND SPEAKING ANXIETY IN
ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP): AN EXPANDED
EMPIRICAL STUDY ON MITIGATING PROFESSIONAL FACE-THREAT
AMONG PHILOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract: *Speaking anxiety is widely recognized as a critical affective barrier in second language acquisition, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts where communicative competence is directly linked to professional readiness. This study provides an in-depth empirical investigation into the relationship between teacher evaluative discourse and speaking anxiety among philology undergraduates. Grounded in socio-psychological and interactionist perspectives, the research explores how different evaluative practices influence students' emotional responses, classroom participation, and perceptions of professional identity.*

Adopting a mixed-methods design, the study integrates quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights derived from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that evaluative discourse functions as a powerful mediating factor in shaping speaking anxiety. Specifically, face-threatening feedback practices—such as explicit error correction, public evaluation, and authoritative discourse—are strongly associated with heightened anxiety levels and reduced communicative engagement. In contrast, face-



sensitive strategies, including dialogic feedback, delayed correction, and positive framing, contribute to lower anxiety and increased participation.

A key contribution of this study is the conceptualization of professional face-threat as a distinct dimension of classroom anxiety in ESP settings. The findings underscore the need for pedagogical approaches that balance linguistic accuracy with emotional support, particularly for students whose professional identity is closely tied to language performance. The study concludes with implications for ESP pedagogy, teacher training, and future research.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the role of affective factors in second language learning has gained increasing attention. While cognitive processes remain central to language acquisition, emotional variables such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety significantly influence learning outcomes. Among these, speaking anxiety has emerged as one of the most persistent challenges, particularly in contexts where oral communication is emphasized.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) represents a unique educational domain in which language learning is closely aligned with professional goals. Unlike general language instruction, ESP focuses on equipping learners with the communicative skills required in specific academic or occupational settings. For philology undergraduates, this includes activities such as academic presentations, linguistic analysis, translation tasks, and professional discourse simulations.

Within this context, speaking is not merely a skill but a marker of professional competence. Consequently, students often experience heightened sensitivity to evaluation, as their performance is perceived as indicative of their future career capabilities. This creates a fertile ground for anxiety, particularly when feedback is perceived as critical or judgmental.

Teacher evaluative discourse plays a central role in shaping this experience. It encompasses not only explicit feedback but also subtle linguistic and paralinguistic cues, such as tone, timing, and framing. Despite its importance, evaluative discourse



is often treated as a neutral pedagogical tool, rather than a socially and emotionally charged interaction.

This study addresses this gap by examining how teacher evaluative discourse influences speaking anxiety in ESP classrooms. It introduces the concept of professional face-threat, referring to the perceived risk to one's professional self-image during evaluative interactions. By exploring this dynamic, the study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between feedback, anxiety, and identity in language learning.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Rationale

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods design, allowing for the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach is particularly suitable for capturing both measurable trends (e.g., anxiety levels) and subjective experiences (e.g., perceptions of feedback).

The rationale for this design lies in the complexity of speaking anxiety, which cannot be fully understood through numerical data alone. Combining statistical analysis with narrative insights enables a more holistic interpretation.

2.2 Participants and Context

The participants consisted of:

- * 60 philology undergraduates (ages 18–22)

- * Enrolled in ESP courses focusing on academic and professional communication

- * English proficiency: B1–B2 (CEFR)

Additionally:

- 4 ESP instructors participated in observed sessions

The study was conducted over one academic semester, ensuring sufficient exposure to classroom dynamics.

2.3 Instruments and Data Collection

2.3.1 Questionnaire



The questionnaire included:

- * A modified Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale
- * Items measuring perceptions of:
 - * Teacher correction style
 - * Feedback tone
 - * Classroom atmosphere

Example item:

“I feel nervous when my teacher corrects my mistakes in front of others.”

Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

2.3.2 Classroom Observations

A total of 20 classroom sessions were observed. The observation protocol focused on:

- * Type of feedback (direct vs. indirect)
- * Timing (immediate vs. delayed)
- * Mode (public vs. private)
- * Teacher discourse patterns

Field notes were supplemented with interaction transcripts.

2.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Fifteen students participated in interviews exploring:

- * Emotional reactions to feedback
- * Perceptions of fairness and support
- * Impact on self-confidence and professional identity

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

- * Quantitative data: analyzed using correlation and regression analysis
- * Qualitative data: coded thematically using inductive analysis

Triangulation ensured reliability by comparing findings across data sources.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Statistical Relationship Between Feedback and Anxiety

The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r \approx 0.68$) between face-threatening feedback and speaking anxiety. This suggests that the more



frequently students experience critical or public evaluation, the higher their anxiety levels.

Regression analysis further indicated that:

- * Public correction was the strongest predictor of anxiety
- * Tone of feedback significantly moderated emotional response

3.2 Classroom Interaction Patterns

Observational data identified three dominant feedback styles:

1. Directive-Corrective Style

- * Immediate interruption
- * Explicit error correction
- * Teacher-dominated interaction
 - High anxiety, low student participation

2. Facilitative Style

- * Guided reformulation
- * Open-ended prompts
 - Moderate anxiety, moderate engagement

3. Dialogic Style

- * Collaborative meaning-making
- * Reflective questioning
 - Low anxiety, high engagement

The dialogic style proved most effective in reducing face-threat.

3.3 Emotional and Cognitive Dimensions of Anxiety

Interview data revealed that anxiety operates on multiple levels:

- * Emotional: fear, embarrassment, frustration
- * Cognitive: overthinking, self-monitoring
- * Behavioral: avoidance, reduced participation

Students frequently reported “freezing” during speaking tasks after negative feedback experiences.

3.4 Professional Face-Threat as a Central Mechanism



A major contribution of this study is identifying professional face-threat as a key mechanism linking feedback to anxiety.

Students expressed concerns such as:

* “Mistakes mean I am not competent enough for my future job.”

* “I feel judged not only as a student but as a future teacher.”

This demonstrates that evaluative discourse extends beyond academic performance into identity construction.

3.5 Mediating Role of Teacher-Student Relationship

The findings highlight the importance of relational trust:

* Supportive teachers → feedback perceived as helpful

* Distant/authoritative teachers → feedback perceived as judgmental

Thus, the *same type of correction* can produce different emotional outcomes depending on interpersonal context.

3.6 Pedagogical Implications

The results suggest several evidence-based strategies:

* Shift from evaluation to facilitation

* Use feedback layering (positive → corrective → encouraging)

* Normalize errors as part of professional growth

* Incorporate self- and peer-assessment

Importantly, teachers should develop discursive awareness, recognizing that *how* something is said is as important as *what* is said.

4. Conclusion

This expanded empirical study confirms that teacher evaluative discourse is a decisive factor in shaping speaking anxiety in ESP classrooms. More importantly, it demonstrates that this relationship is mediated by the concept of professional face-threat, which reflects the deep connection between language performance and identity among philology undergraduates.

The findings challenge traditional views of feedback as purely instructional, revealing its emotional and social dimensions. Face-threatening practices—especially public and direct criticism—can significantly hinder student participation



and confidence. In contrast, face-sensitive and dialogic approaches foster a more supportive and effective learning environment.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study calls for a shift toward empathetic, student-centered evaluation practices. Teacher training programs should incorporate awareness of discourse strategies and their psychological impact.

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