



TEACHER EVALUATIVE DISCOURSE AND SPEAKING ANXIETY IN
ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP): ADVANCED
PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATING PROFESSIONAL
FACE-THREAT AMONG PHILOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES

Jumaniyazova Feruza Rustam qizi

An English teacher of Mamun university

The department of roman-germanic philology

feruzajumaniyazova757@gmail.com

Mutallapova Elena Ruslanovna

The department of roman-germanic philology

An English teacher of Mamun university

elenamutallapova586@gmail.com

Abstract: *Speaking anxiety continues to represent a major affective barrier in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms, particularly among philology undergraduates whose academic success and professional identity are closely tied to language performance. While previous research has identified teacher evaluative discourse as a significant contributing factor to this anxiety, there remains a need for pedagogically grounded frameworks that translate theory into actionable classroom practices. This study provides an in-depth pedagogical analysis of how evaluative discourse can be systematically reshaped to reduce speaking anxiety and mitigate professional face-threat.*

Adopting a classroom-based intervention approach, the study integrates affective pedagogy, communicative language teaching, and reflective practice into a cohesive instructional model. A set of structured strategies—including delayed feedback, dialogic evaluation, scaffolded peer review, self-assessment, and discourse reframing—was implemented over a twelve-week period with philology undergraduates enrolled in ESP courses. Data from questionnaires, observations, and



student reflections indicate significant improvements in learner confidence, participation, and perception of feedback.

The findings suggest that speaking anxiety is not merely an individual psychological trait but a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by classroom discourse patterns. By transforming evaluative discourse from a judgmental to a collaborative process, teachers can foster a learning environment that supports both linguistic development and professional identity formation. The study concludes with a comprehensive pedagogical framework and practical recommendations for ESP educators.

1. Introduction

The increasing emphasis on communicative competence in higher education has placed speaking skills at the forefront of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. For philology undergraduates, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently in English is not only an academic requirement but also a professional necessity. Despite this, many students experience persistent speaking anxiety, which inhibits their performance and limits their engagement in classroom activities.

Traditionally, this issue has been approached from a learner-centered perspective, focusing on individual traits such as personality, motivation, or linguistic competence. However, recent pedagogical research has shifted attention toward the interactional environment of the classroom, highlighting the role of teacher discourse in shaping student experiences. Among the various forms of teacher talk, evaluative discourse is particularly influential, as it directly addresses student performance and competence.

In ESP contexts, the impact of evaluative discourse is amplified due to the professional orientation of learning tasks. Students are not merely practicing language; they are simulating real-world roles such as educators, translators, or researchers. As a result, feedback on their speaking performance is often interpreted as a reflection of their future professional abilities. This gives rise to what can be described as professional face-threat, where negative evaluation undermines not only academic confidence but also professional self-concept.



This paper argues that addressing speaking anxiety in ESP requires a shift from traditional corrective practices toward face-sensitive pedagogical strategies. It seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and implementing such strategies in the classroom.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study adopts a pedagogical intervention design grounded in principles of action research. This approach allows for the simultaneous implementation and evaluation of teaching strategies within a real classroom context. The cyclical nature of action research—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—enables continuous refinement of pedagogical practices.

2.2 Participants and Educational Context

Participants included:

50 philology undergraduate students

English proficiency levels: intermediate to upper-intermediate

Enrolled in ESP courses focusing on:

Academic discourse

Professional communication

Oral presentation skills

The instructional context emphasized interactive learning, including discussions, role-plays, and presentations.

2.3 Pedagogical Intervention Framework

The intervention was structured around five core components:

Temporal Adjustment of Feedback (Delayed Evaluation)

Discursive Reframing of Feedback Language

Collaborative Feedback Mechanisms (Peer Review)

Learner Autonomy (Self-Assessment)

Dialogic Interaction (Co-Constructed Evaluation)

Each component was systematically integrated into lesson planning and delivery.



2.4 Data Collection

Multiple instruments were used to ensure depth and reliability:

Pre/post anxiety assessment surveys

Classroom observation protocols

Student reflective journals (weekly entries)

Focus group interviews

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data: descriptive and comparative analysis

Qualitative data: thematic coding focusing on:

Emotional responses

Participation patterns

Perceptions of feedback

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Transformation of Classroom Atmosphere

One of the most notable outcomes was a shift in classroom climate. Initially characterized by hesitation and limited participation, the classroom gradually evolved into a more interactive and supportive environment. Students became more willing to take risks in speaking, suggesting a reduction in fear of negative evaluation.

This transformation underscores the idea that anxiety is not fixed but context-dependent, shaped by interactional norms and expectations.

3.2 Reframing Evaluation: From Judgment to Dialogue

A key pedagogical shift involved redefining evaluation as a dialogic process rather than a unidirectional judgment. Instead of simply correcting errors, teachers engaged students in discussions about their language use.

For example:

Traditional: “This is incorrect. Use past tense.”

Dialogic: “Can you think of a tense that better fits this context?”

This approach encouraged critical thinking and reduced the hierarchical gap between teacher and student.



3.3 Layered Feedback and Emotional Buffering

The introduction of layered feedback (positive → corrective → encouraging) proved highly effective. This structure acted as an emotional buffer, allowing students to process criticism without feeling discouraged.

Students reported that:

Positive comments increased motivation

Constructive suggestions felt more manageable

Encouragement reduced fear of future mistakes

3.4 Peer Feedback as a Social Equalizer

Peer feedback played a crucial role in reducing anxiety by distributing evaluative authority. Unlike teacher feedback, which carries institutional weight, peer comments were perceived as less threatening and more relatable.

However, effectiveness depended on proper scaffolding:

Clear criteria

Training in constructive language

Monitoring by the teacher

When implemented correctly, peer feedback fostered a sense of community and shared responsibility.

3.5 Self-Assessment and Metacognitive Development

Self-assessment encouraged students to reflect on their performance, promoting metacognitive awareness. This shifted the focus from external judgment to internal evaluation.

Students began to:

Identify their own strengths and weaknesses

Set personal learning goals

Develop greater independence

This autonomy contributed to reduced anxiety, as students felt more in control of their learning.

3.6 Managing Professional Face-Threat



The study confirms that professional face-threat is a central factor in ESP speaking anxiety. Pedagogical strategies that preserve student dignity and emphasize growth over perfection were particularly effective.

Key practices included:

Avoiding public criticism

Using inclusive language (“we” instead of “you”)

Highlighting progress rather than failure

These strategies helped students reinterpret mistakes as part of professional development rather than as indicators of incompetence.

3.7 Challenges in Implementation

Despite overall success, several challenges emerged:

Time constraints: dialogic feedback requires more class time

Teacher adaptation: shifting from authoritative to facilitative roles

Student expectations: some learners initially preferred direct correction

These challenges suggest that pedagogical change must be gradual and supported by institutional frameworks.

4. Conclusion

This expanded study demonstrates that pedagogical strategies centered on evaluative discourse can significantly reduce speaking anxiety in ESP classrooms. By adopting face-sensitive approaches, teachers can transform evaluation from a source of stress into a tool for empowerment.

The findings reinforce the importance of viewing language learning as a social and emotional process, not merely a cognitive one. For philology undergraduates, whose professional identity is closely tied to language competence, this perspective is particularly critical.

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