

Speaking Anxiety, Listening Instruction, and Silence: Data-Based Attempts to Reconceptualise Oral Communication Pedagogy

Among the four language skills, speaking and listening are widely acknowledged as the skills most immediately required in real-world communication. They are also the most difficult to assess reliably, the most resource-intensive to teach systematically, and for many learners, the most emotionally fraught. A student who reads and writes competently may still freeze at the prospect of speaking in front of peers or strain to parse a fast-flowing authentic conversation. Anxiety is the heart of this challenge. Language anxiety and speaking anxiety have attracted sustained scholarly attention since Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's foundational work in the late 1980s, yet the classroom implications remain far from resolved.

Listening has received comparatively less systematic treatment, despite evidence on learners' beliefs and their own listening ability shaping both their strategy use and their willingness to engage with listening texts. The articles collected in this issue of the journal address both the strands of this challenge, the instructional and the affective.

The first article on speaking anxiety is a qualitative study that makes a timely and contextually grounded contribution by situating speaking anxiety within India's NCF 2023 policy framework, a setting conspicuously absent from the existing literature. The study's finding is that CBL does not simply eliminate evaluative anxiety but redistributes it - peer judgment replaces teacher correction as the primary social threat. This is a nuanced and theoretically significant observation.

The next article is a survey-based study in an EFL context that offers comprehensiveness, rarely achieved in language anxiety research: it examines all four skills simultaneously within the same population, comparing Thai and Chinese learners across nationality, gender, and proficiency. The finding that writing generates the highest anxiety, above speaking, challenges the field's traditional emphasis on oral anxiety and deserves wider attention. Another article extends the issue's concern with affective factors into the career domain, examining stigma, anxiety, and self-perception of first-year engineering students. It navigates English as gatekeeper rather than merely a subject. Its five-theme structure, notably the "aspiration-anxiety paradox," in which English is simultaneously feared and desperately wanted as career capital, is a significant conceptual contribution in the issue.

The article on listening shifts discusses whether mental modelling, asking learners to draw rather than write or speak their understanding of a listening text, can serve as both a pedagogical strategy and an assessment tool for socio-economically disadvantaged ESL learners. Its real contribution is conceptual rather than empirical. It makes a compelling case that under-resourced classrooms need alternative, non-verbal channels for demonstrating comprehension.

The article on silence examined how undergraduates at a university interpret silence and participation across face-to-face and digital classrooms. It is methodologically the most self-aware paper in the set. Even so, the argument for treating participation as multimodal, and the concrete classroom strategies it proposes, are among the more directly actionable contributions in this issue.

Happy reading!

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