The Dissonance between Teachers' and Students' Views on Speaking Anxiety in Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes

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Abstract

The study identifies the perceptions of the reasons for speaking anxiety in foreign languages for specific purposes (FLSP) by Slovenian students and their teachers. A survey was carried out with 335 students and 24 teachers of FLSP from Slovenian higher education institutions. The results show discrepancies between students' and teachers' perspectives regarding the reasons for FLSP speaking anxiety. The students emphasized a lack of the knowledge of the carrier content in FLSP, whereas the teachers stated as reasons oral tests, failure to speak fluently and a worry about being looked down on for making mistakes in real and carrier contents.

Keywords: *foreign languages for specific purposes, speaking anxiety, carrier content, real content, reasons*

Introduction

Foreign language anxiety has been one of the key issues addressed by many language teachers since the mid-1980s, as well as one discussed by many scholars (e.g., Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Horowitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Yan Xiu & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1990), who found that foreign language anxiety is an important factor affecting students' speaking abilities. Horwitz et al. (1986), as pioneers and key scholars in foreign language anxiety research, have provided

the following definition: "FLA is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning which arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). They emphasised that foreign language anxiety is related to communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension, also known as "stage fright", is defined as the anxiety that arises on the need to talk in front of others. Several studies have confirmed that it is the most intimidating aspect of foreign language learning, since a competent speaker must synthesize a variety of skills and knowledge to perform a given speech act (Horwitz et al., 1986; Yan Xiu & Horwitz, 2008; Young, 1990). Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) claim that "people who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in a foreign language class, where they have little control of the communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored."

Students and teachers have different perspectives regarding the speaking anxiety in English, as confirmed by He (2013) in his study comparing teachers' and students' perspectives on general English speaking anxiety. On the basis of comprehensive data from 332 participants (302 students and 30 teachers) at two universities in China, He (2013) identified 13 major reasons for Chinese students' English speaking anxiety. "Speaking on an unfamiliar topic", "fear of being tested orally in English" and "having little time to think before speaking in English" are very prominent reasons for English speaking anxiety strongly emphasized by both students and teachers. At the same time, significant differences emerged from the comparison of the perceptions of students and teachers. One of the major differences was associated with the views about a "lack of English vocabulary" as a reason for students' English speaking anxiety. The differing views about the reasons for speaking anxiety in an FL between students and teachers call for attempts at mutual understanding and communication so that all concerned can be better informed of all viewpoints.

Studies on foreign language speaking anxiety have been carried out on foreign language for general purposes (e.g., Boyce, Alber-Morgan & Riley, 2007; He, 2013; Subaşı, 2010; Zhang & Zhong, 2012) and have neglected FLSP. The common thread of all conceptualizations of FLSP has been the central role of learners' needs or reasons for learning an FLSP. A foreign language for general purposes is also less specific and purpose driven than an FLSP (Widdowson, 1984, p. 1). In-depth interviews with students and teachers of business English in the Balkans carried out by Čepón (2016) demonstrated that two key reasons for students' speaking anxiety in business English are: students' lack of real content of business English

instruction and a lack of the carrier content. Thus, the learning of FLSP can launch different anxieties in comparison with the learning of a foreign language for general purposes. We also assumed that the reasons for speaking anxiety in an FLSP would be different from those encountered by a target group of students of general foreign languages (He, 2013; Zhang & Zhong, 2012). Given the paucity of FLSP empirical research into speaking anxiety, it is of great significance to make such an attempt. Specifically, the research questions this article endeavoured to address are:

RQ1: What kind of perspectives on the reasons for speaking anxiety do FLSP students and their teachers have?

RQ2: Are there any differences between FLSP students' and their teachers' perspectives on the reasons for speaking anxiety in an FLSP?

Research Methodology

Research General Background

The study design was a questionnaire survey aiming to identify the perceptions of FLSP teachers and students regarding the reasons for Slovenian students' speaking anxiety in FLSP.

Research Sample

A total of 359 participants from all four Slovenian universities (335 students and 24 teachers) took part in the survey in the winter and spring of 2016. The FLSP teachers and students were selected as participants because they are the most deeply involved in the daily teaching and learning of FLSP and thus most closely related to the issues addressed in this research. FLSP teachers at Slovenian faculties were sent an invitation to participate in the research and to invite their students to take part in it in the form of an e-survey.

The study included 224 female and 111 male students, aged between 18 and 24, in the first or second year at various faculties, who on enrolment had to fulfil the B1/B2 English language requirements. They had all studied general foreign languages (English, French, Italian, German, Russian and Spanish) in primary and secondary schools. Now, at the faculty, the carrier content of their FLSP study involved different disciplines, such as economics, business, and management (N= 62, 15 male, 47 female), tourism (N= 52, 14 male, 38 female), maritime studies (N= 51, 30 male, 21 female), political studies (N= 34, 11 male, 23 female), sociology (N= 31, 10 male, 21 female), communication studies and journalism (N= 26, 8 male, 18 female), law (N= 22, 7 male, 15 female), medicine (N= 19, 7 male, 12

female), logistics (N= 14, 4 male, 10 female), transport (N= 12, 3 male, 9 female), pedagogy and anthropology (N= 12, 2 male, 10 female). The inclusion of FLSP teachers and students was considered necessary to ensure independent, possibly differing perspectives on the same issue of speaking anxiety. Among the FLSP teachers, 22 were female and 2 male, aged from 30 to 60, with 7 to 30 years of teaching experience, who have all been awarded the habilitation degree required for FLSP teachers at the tertiary level in Slovenia.

Instrument and Procedures

For the purpose of this study, we adopted a 5-point Likert scale, The Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (He, 2013) for FLSP. To adapt a 13-item questionnaire (He, 2013) to the specifics and complexity of FLSP speaking, four new items were added, based on Čepon's (2016) findings on important reasons for students' speaking anxiety in business English: "A lack of knowledge of my academic discipline prevents me from speaking an FLSP" (item 4), "I get anxious when I have to discuss my academic discipline in general, because I have not mastered it yet" (item 10), "I get anxious when I have to react unprepared to a group interaction on topics from my academic discipline" (item 16) and "I feel nervous or get anxious when I have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of my academic discipline" (item 17). The final version of the questionnaire contained 17 structured items. To ensure the best comprehensibility, the FLSP anxiety scale was translated into the Slovene language. Reliability was 0.91.

In order to enable the teachers to judge their students' anxiety levels and feelings as independent stakeholders, a teacher version of the questionnaire was provided. The two versions are almost the same except for some wording, since teaching and learning are the two aspects of the research questions. For example, the item "I feel nervous or get anxious when I have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of my academic discipline" was reworded for the teachers as "Students feel nervous or get anxious when they have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of their academic discipline."

The last part of the questionnaire focused on demographics, including age, gender, and faculty.

Data Analysis

After the main questionnaire data were collected, the response frequencies and the means of all the items were tabulated. Rank-orders of the means for both

the student and teacher groups were obtained to examine the importance of the reasons to each group. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also conducted to find specific differences in the emphasis on the reasons between the student and teacher groups. The multivariate analysis of variance is one of the most common multivariate statistical procedures in the social science literature. MANOVA is a member of the General Linear Model family of statistical procedures that are often used to quantify the strength between variables (Zientek & Thompson, 2009). MANOVA, specifically, is an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that has two or more dependent variables (Fish, 1988). This method was used to compare the two groups (students and teachers) in terms of their means on each of the 17 items.

Research Results

The FLSP anxiety scale items (cf., Table 1) show that for the students the most important reasons for FLSP speaking anxiety is insufficient knowledge of the topic (item 9) and of the academic discipline (item 10). This suggests that for the students a key reason for FLSP speaking anxiety is a lack of the specialist carrier content. According to them, among the top reasons for FLSP speaking anxiety are also the necessity to speak unprepared (item 16) and the performance of complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of the carrier content related to their academic discipline (item 17). Four reasons received a 3.8 mean score: speaking an FLSP (item 7), speaking to others in an FLSP (item 8), oral test (item 12) and too little time to prepare for speaking (item 13). Giving important information orally got a 3.7 mean score. Five reasons received a 3.6 mean score: presumption of poor pronunciation and intonation (item 1), worry about not getting a decent job in future without speaking an FLSP well (item 2), not knowing enough FLSP vocabulary (item 3), a lack of the knowledge of the academic discipline (item 4) and pressure from a peer group (item 15). At the end of the list there are three reasons with a 3.5 mean score, which deal with foreign language proficiency (items 5, 14, 11).

Table 2 shows that the top seven reasons for speaking anxiety observed by FLSP teachers were: oral test (item 12), students cannot speak FLSP fluently (item 14), pressure from a peer group (item 14), giving important information orally, speaking to others in an FLSP (item 8), being unfamiliar with the topic (item 9), and performance of complex professional speaking activities (item 17). In the middle of the list there are the following reasons: too little time (item 13) and

Table 1. Frequencies and means for FLSP anxiety scale items for the students' perception of the reasons for FLSP speaking anxiety (N= 335)

Items	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Means
9. I am nervous if I have to speak an FLSP when I am not familiar with the topic.	4.0	10.0	17.7	40.1	28.8	4.0
10. I get anxious when I have to discuss my academic discipline in general because I have not mastered it yet.	6.1	12.0	16.8	39.2	26.4	4.0
16. I get anxious when I have to react unprepared to group interaction on topics from my academic discipline	12.4	20.2	21.9	33.6	12.7	3.9
17. I feel nervous or get anxious when I have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of my academic discipline.	7.9	14.4	17.7	39.5	21.0	3.9
7. I would not be so anxious just to learn to read and write in an FLSP rather than having to speak as well.	11.7	15.6	17.2	32.0	24.0	3.8
8. I do not mind thinking aloud in an FLSP, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to speak to others in it.	10.8	17.1	19.2	32.6	20.7	3.8
12. I feel nervous when having to be tested orally in an FLSP.	13.5	18.6	22.2	25.5	20.7	3.8
13. I get worried when I have little time to think about what I have to talk about in an FLSP.	10.5	13.5	20.7	37.1	18.6	3.8
6. I feel more nervous when having to give important information orally in an FLSP.	12.9	20.4	17.1	30.0	20.1	3.8
1. I feel embarrassed to speak an FLSP, because I think my pronunciation and intonation are poor.	15.6	23.4	22.2	24.6	14.7	3.6
2. I am often worried that if I cannot speak an FLSP well I will not get a decent job in the future.	13.3	27.4	19.8	30.1	10.2	3.6
3. I feel that not knowing enough vocabulary is the biggest problem preventing me from speaking an FLSP easily.	12.3	21.4	21.6	32.7	12.6	3.6
4. A lack of knowledge of my academic discipline prevents me from speaking an FLSP.	7.8	29.0	33.4	24.2	5.7	3.6
15. Others will look down on me if I make mistakes speaking an FLSP.	16.7	22.7	19.4	26.9	14.3	3.6
5. I become anxious when I get stuck on one or two words when speaking an FLSP.	17.6	21.5	20.0	27.5	13.4	3.5
14. I get anxious when I find I cannot speak in an FLSP fluently.	11.3	17.6	20.6	29.6	20.9	3.5
11. When speaking an FLSP, I often know all the words I need, but still fail to express myself easily due to anxiety.	16.1	26.3	20.6	24.8	12.2	3.5

Notes: SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; N: neither disagree nor agree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

Table 2. Teachers' response frequencies and means of the speaking anxiety scale items for FLSP (N= 24)

Items	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Means
12. Students feel nervous when having to be tested orally in an FLSP.	0.0	3.4	16.8	45.9	37.6	4.3
14. Students get anxious when they find they cannot speak in an FLSP fluently.	0.0	0.0	12.8	66.8	20.9	4.2
15. Students think others will look down on them if they make mistakes speaking an FLSP.	0.0	4.3	16.8	45.9	33.4	4.2
6. Students feel more nervous when having to give important information orally in an FLSP.	0.0	4.3	33.4	20.9	41.8	4.1
8. Students do not mind thinking aloud in an FLSP, but they feel very uncomfortable when they have to speak to others.	0.0	6.8	3.4	58.4	20.9	4.1
9. Students are nervous if they have to speak an FLSP when they are not familiar with the topic.	4.3	4.3	8.4	50.1	33.4	4.1
17. Students feel nervous or get anxious when they have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of their academic discipline.	0.0	0.0	20.9	58.4	20.9	4.1
13. Students get worried when they have little time to think about what they have to discuss in an FLSP.	0.0	0.0	20.9	66.8	12.6	4.0
10. Students get anxious when they have to discuss their academic discipline in general, because they have not mastered it yet.	4.3	8.4	4.3	62.6	20.9	4.0
16. Students get anxious when they have to react unprepared to group interaction on topics from the academic discipline.	0.0	4.3	29.3	54.3	12.6	3.9
7. Students would not be so anxious if they only had to read and write in an FLSP and not to speak as well.	4.3	8.4	20.9	45.9	20.9	3.8
1. Students feel embarrassed to speak an FLSP, because they think their pronunciation and intonation are poor.	4.3	8.4	25.1	45.9	16.8	3.7
11. When speaking an FLSP, students often know all the words they need, but still fail to express themselves easily due to anxiety.	4.3	8.4	29.3	50.1	8.4	3.6
3. Students feel that not knowing enough vocabulary is the biggest problem preventing them from speaking an FLSP easily.	0.0	8.4	33.4	54.3	4.3	3.6
5. Students become anxious when they get stuck on one or two words in speaking an FLSP.	0.0	6.7	20.1	70.1	13.4	3.4
2. Students are often worried that if they cannot speak an FLSP well, they will not get a decent job in the future.	4.3	37.6	29.3	20.9	8.4	3.0
4. Students think that a lack of knowledge of their academic discipline prevents them from speaking an FLSP.	8.4	29.3	41.8	16.8	4.3	2.9

Notes: SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; N: neither disagree nor agree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree.

a lack of the knowledge of academic discipline (item 10) with a 4.0 mean score, speaking unprepared in an FLSP (item 16) with 3.9 mean score, speaking as the most difficult skill in an FLSP (item 7) with a 3.8 mean score, presumption of poor pronunciation and intonation (item 1) with a 3.7 mean score, inability to express easily (item 11) and not knowing enough vocabulary (item 3) with a 3.6 mean score. At the end of the list, there are three reasons for speaking anxiety in an FLSP: getting stuck on one or two words (item 5) with a 3.4 mean score, a worry about not getting a decent job in the future without speaking an FLSP well (item 2) with a 3.0 mean score and a lack of the knowledge of an academic discipline (item 4) with a 2.9 mean score.

Table 3 shows that MANOVA at item level revealed significant differences on nine out of the 17 items between the students and teachers. The calculations of items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16 did not show significant differences between the students and teachers.

Table 3. Means and difference of item scores on which students and teachers showed significant differences (N= 359)

Items	Means	
	Ss/Ts	Differences
2. Students are often worried that if they cannot speak an FLSP well, they will not get a decent job in future.	3.6/3.0	.7**
4. Students think that a lack of knowledge of their academic discipline prevents them from speaking an FLSP.	3.6/2.9	.8***
6. Students feel more nervous when having to give important information orally in an FLSP.	3.7/4.1	-.5*
8. Students do not mind thinking aloud in an FLSP, but they feel very uncomfortable when they have to speak to others in it.	3.8/4.1	-.4*
12. Students feel nervous when having to be tested orally in an FLSP.	3.8/4.3	-.6**
13. Students get worried when they have little time to think about what they have to discuss in an FLSP.	3.8/4.0	-.3*
14. Students get anxious when they find they cannot speak in an FLSP fluently.	3.5/4.2	-.8**
15. Students think others will look down on them if they make mistakes in speaking an FLSP.	3.6/3.9	-.4*
17. Students feel nervous or get anxious when they have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of their academic discipline.	3.9/4.1	-.3*

Notes: ***p < .001, **p < .01; *p < .05. Ss: students; Ts: teachers. The items used in this table are from the students' version of the FLSAS. For the teachers' version, cf. Table 2.

Table 3 also shows that the teacher scores were significantly higher than those of the students on seven items. Among them, four reasons (items 6, 8, 13 and 14) are related to the situation in which the students have to speak quickly and fluently to others, presenting important information in an FLSP. The teachers placed significantly more emphasis than the students on oral tests (item 15) and situations when the students have to carry out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of an academic discipline. Significantly higher mean scores on these items indicate that the teachers were more likely than the students to regard these reasons as important causes of speaking anxiety in an FLSP. The students emphasized, more than their FLSP teachers, the concern about not getting a decent job in future without speaking an FLSP well (item 2). The students also scored the reason for a lack of the knowledge of an academic discipline significantly higher.

Discussion

If we compare the findings from the research on the anxiety of speaking English for general purposes so far (e.g., He, 2013), we can conclude that there are not major differences in the perceptions regarding the reasons for speaking anxiety. He (2013) found that speaking on an unfamiliar topic was a very prominent reason for speaking anxiety in general English. This was also strongly emphasized by both the FLSP students and teachers in this study. However, in comparison with the students of foreign languages for general purposes, the academic knowledge of the carrier content is more crucial for FLSP students, where the presentation of certain language items (real content) in all foreign language skills should rely on topics from a particular discipline (carrier content) (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

The results of this study point towards the insufficient knowledge of the carrier content, both in the mother tongue and a foreign language, as the key reason for pre-experience FLSP students' speaking anxiety: the necessity to discuss the carrier content in a foreign language before having really mastered it in their mother tongue, speaking on an unfamiliar topic in a foreign language, speaking unprepared in an FLSP about topics from the academic discipline and carrying out complex professional speaking activities based on the knowledge of the academic discipline. The teachers' perspective is that being tested orally in an FLSP, not speaking FLSP fluently and social pressures from a peer group are the students' most important reasons for speaking anxiety in an FLSP. The results of MANOVA show that the most differently scored item is "Students think that a lack of the knowledge of their academic discipline prevents them from speaking FLSP".

One possible explanation for the lower levels of consonance between the FLSP teachers' and students' perceptions of the importance of the carrier content regarding speaking anxiety could lie within the postulations of FLSP instruction, which requires teachers to accentuate the real content of FLSP instruction and not the carrier content for which they would have to possess real knowledge of the specialist subject content (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Consequently, FLSP teachers are inclined to over-estimate the levels of the carrier content knowledge of FLSP students (Čepon, 2016). The apparent disregard of the FLSP teachers of the effect of inadequate carrier content on the raised levels of speaking anxiety may also arise simply from the negative strategy of ignoring the physical manifestations of that fear (2015).

Conclusions

The study showed that FLSP students and teachers hold different perspectives regarding the reasons for speaking anxiety in an FLSP. The FLSP students perceived insufficient specialist subject content knowledge as the main reason for their speaking anxiety, while the FLSP teachers' perceptions gave priority to oral tests, the students' inability to speak fluently and speaking anxiety arising from a feeling of apprehension of being looked down upon by classmates/peers for making mistakes. To conclude, insufficient knowledge of the carrier content is a decisive reason for FLSP speaking anxiety that teachers should acknowledge more extensively.

These findings are likely to provide insightful information and have implications for tertiary FLSP education. The difference in perceptions of the reasons for speaking anxiety between the FLSP students and teachers calls for further mutual understanding with a view to becoming better informed of each other's perceptions.

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