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# The Nature, Structure and Content of Foreign Language Communicative Competence Among Students at Pedagogical Universities

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**Abstract:** This article examines the nature, structure and content of foreign language communicative competence among students at pedagogical universities. The study aims to provide a theoretical substantiation of its principal components and to identify the pedagogical conditions required for its effective development during professional training. Foreign language communicative competence is defined as an integrative personal and professional quality that enables effective intercultural interaction in a foreign language. Five interrelated components are identified: motivational and value-based, cognitive, communicative and activity-oriented, sociocultural, and reflective. The analysis substantiates the need for a comprehensive approach to competence development that takes account of contemporary requirements for professional and intercultural communication. The findings may inform the design of educational programmes, teaching materials and foreign-language teaching technologies.

**Keywords:** Foreign language communicative competence; communicative competence; pedagigical university students; professional training; foreign language; intercultural communication; competence structure; competence content; pedagogical conditions; communicative skills.

**Introduction:** Changes in the aims of contemporary higher education have made it necessary to clarify the nature and content of the outcomes expected from professional training. Whereas, in the traditional educational paradigm, learning outcomes were assessed primarily in terms of the amount of knowledge acquired, the competence based paradigm places greater emphasis on learners' ability to apply knowledge and methods of action independently in educational, social and professional contexts. Accordingly, foreign language training at pedagogical universities should do more than develop students' command of the English language system: it should also prepare them to use English in interpersonal, intercultural, academic and professional pedagogical interactions.

A theoretical account of the phenomenon under investigation requires, first, clarification of the relationship between the concepts of "competence" and "competency" (or "competence as an individual quality"). The scholarly literature does not use these categories uniformly, some studies treat them as synonymous, whereas others distinguish between them according to their content and functions. This terminological variation reflects both differences among national research traditions and the multidimensional nature of the competence-based approach.

In English language scholarship, the term competence may refer either to an ability defined by an established standard or to a person's demonstrated readiness to act. In Russian language academic discourse, its translation has given rise to two related concepts, commonly rendered as "competence" and "competency". Distinguishing between them makes it possible to describe more precisely the relationship

between the requirements of an educational programme and the individual outcome of a student's training.

A. V. Khutorskoy regards the competence-based approach as a methodological foundation for educational design in which learning aims and outcomes are expressed in terms of learners' ability to apply knowledge and methods of action to meaningful tasks [63; 172]. Within this framework, competence denotes an established requirement for educational preparation, whereas competency characterises the extent to which a particular individual has mastered and can enact that requirement.

O. A. Ulyanina defines competency as an integrated, systemic personal formation that brings together cognitive, operational, motivational, and value-related characteristics [68; 43]. It therefore cannot be reduced to a sum of knowledge and skills. Rather, it also encompasses practical experience in applying them, an individual's attitude towards the activity, the ability to select appropriate courses of action independently, and the capacity to evaluate the outcome.

On the basis of this analysis, the present study defines competence as a normatively specified set of interrelated knowledge, skills, modes of action and requirements that determine the content of student preparation in a particular field. Competency, by contrast, is understood as an integrated personal quality that reflects an individual's readiness and actual ability to apply relevant knowledge, skills, experience and values when addressing practical tasks. This distinction clarifies their relationship: competence specifies what a student is expected to master, while competency indicates how consciously, independently and effectively the student applies what has been learned. In foreign language education, communicative competence thus represents the prescribed content of learning, whereas foreign language communicative competency is the personal and professional outcome of mastering that content.

**Theoretical Foundations Of Communicative Competence**

The theoretical origins of communicative competence are associated with Dell Hymes, who extended the concept of linguistic knowledge by emphasising the ability to use language appropriately in socially situated contexts. This idea was subsequently developed in the model proposed by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, which included grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence; discourse competence was incorporated in later formulations. Although these works belong to the classical period in the development of the field, they remain relevant to the identification of the structural components of communicative competence.

In contemporary research, communicative competence is interpreted more broadly. Sandra Savignon emphasises its dynamic, contextual and interpersonal character: competence becomes evident in actual interaction and depends on the communicative purpose, social situation, characteristics of the participants and strategies they employ [40; 42]. It should therefore not be regarded as a fixed quality acquired once and for all; rather, it develops and changes as individuals gain further communicative experience.

S. White highlights the need to reconsider communicative competence in the context of foreign-language teaching for specific professional purposes. The requirements of foreign-language communication, the author argues, are shaped by the nature of professional activity, the genres of professional discourse and the tasks that specialists perform through language [85; 53]. This position is particularly significant in teacher education because teachers' communicative activity has distinctive aims, content and ethical responsibilities.

The contemporary understanding of communicative competence has also expanded to include interaction, mediation, online communication and plurilingual activity. In the Council of Europe's CEFR Companion Volume, learners are viewed as social agents who draw on their linguistic resources to understand, create and jointly construct meaning. Unlike approaches that expect language learners to reproduce the speech of an idealised native speaker, this action-oriented perspective focuses on achieving communicative outcomes effectively by drawing on the resources available to the learner.

Enrica Piccardo, Brian North and Margaret Goodier associate contemporary language competence with mediation, collaboration and plurilingual activity.

Mediation involves more than translation: it includes explaining information, making complex content accessible, establishing mutual understanding, facilitating collaborative knowledge construction and helping others participate in communication. For prospective teachers, mediation has direct professional relevance because explaining, reformulating, exemplifying and supporting understanding are central to pedagogical interaction.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives point to several defining features of foreign-language communicative competence among teacher-training university students:

• integrative character, reflected in the unity of language knowledge, speaking skills, communicative experience, motives and values;

• an activity-oriented nature, manifested in the practical use of a foreign language to achieve a specific purpose;

• context sensitivity, whereby language behaviour depends on the social, cultural, educational or professional situation;

• professional orientation, associated with using language to address pedagogical tasks;

• dynamic development, through systematic practice, reflection and feedback;

• learner agency, involving independence in setting goals and selecting content and communication strategies;

• assessability, which makes it possible to evaluate competence through defined criteria, indicators and levels.

To clarify the nature of the competence under consideration, it is also necessary to distinguish between “communication” as a broad interpersonal process and “communicative exchange” as the transmission and interpretation of messages. Communication in the broader social-psychological sense includes the establishment and development of relationships, mutual perception, emotional responses, coordination of actions and the exchange of personal meanings. Communicative exchange refers more specifically to the informational and sign-based aspects of interaction through which participants create, transmit, receive and interpret messages.

In teaching, these aspects operate inseparably. While conveying educational content, a teacher also establishes relationships with learners, creates an emotional climate, coordinates joint activity and exerts an educational influence. Consequently, command of linguistic forms alone does not guarantee readiness for professional pedagogical communication. Prospective teachers must consider the content of a message, communicative intention, audience, social and cultural context, participants’ emotional states and the intended outcome of the interaction.

Foreign language communicative competence among teacher-training university students should therefore encompass not only the ability to convey and understand information but also the social and pedagogical readiness to establish mutual understanding, organise collaboration and sustain humanistic interaction in English.

On the basis of the analysis, the following definition is proposed: foreign language communicative competence among a student at a teacher-training university is an integrated and dynamic personal-professional quality that expresses the student’s motivated readiness and ability to engage independently, appropriately and effectively in interpersonal, intercultural, academic and professional-pedagogical interaction in a foreign language. It involves the integrated use of linguistic knowledge, speech skills, sociocultural experience, discourse and communication strategies, together with reflective evaluation and adjustment of one’s own communicative behaviour.

This definition captures several dimensions. First, competence is a personal professional quality because it links individual characteristics with the demands of future teaching. Second, it involves not only ability but also a motivated willingness to engage in foreign-language interaction. Third, successful communication depends on the integrated use of linguistic, social, cultural, discursive and strategic resources. Finally, reflection is included as a mechanism for the conscious improvement of communicative practice.

**Structure and components of foreign language communicative competence**

The structure of the competence under investigation should reflect its integrative nature and the specific requirements of preparing future teachers. Drawing on

theoretical models of communicative competence, contemporary competence-based and activity-oriented educational principles, and the characteristics of pedagogical work, the study identifies five interrelated components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and professional-communicative competence.

**Linguistic component**

The linguistic component provides the language foundation for foreign-language communicative competence. It includes command of the phonological, lexical, grammatical and orthographic systems of English, as well as the ability to select and use linguistic units in accordance with communicative intentions. Its content includes:

• phonologically and intonationally appropriate speech;

• knowledge of general, academic and professional-pedagogical vocabulary;

• grammatically accurate spoken and written expression;

• understanding of the semantic, stylistic and collocational properties of linguistic units;

• the use of language to explain, argue, evaluate, request, instruct and provide feedback;

• the ability to comprehend and interpret spoken and written foreign-language discourse.

Although indispensable, the linguistic component is not sufficient on its own to ensure effective communication. High accuracy in lexical and grammatical exercises does not necessarily enable a learner to sustain a conversation independently, produce an extended text or respond effectively to an unforeseen communicative situation. Language knowledge must therefore be developed in close connection with its communicative, social and professional functions.

**Sociolinguistic component**

The sociolinguistic component reflects a student's ability to take account of the social and cultural parameters of communication. It encompasses knowledge of speech etiquette, social roles, registers, culturally shaped ways of expressing intentions and the conventions governing interaction within different communities.

Naoko Taguchi and Carsten Roever relate pragmatic competence to the ability to understand a speaker's intentions and choose socially appropriate means of expressing them [33; 84]. The same message may be conveyed differently depending on the interlocutor's status, the degree of familiarity, the formality of the situation and cultural norms. Sociolinguistic competence therefore ensures not merely comprehensibility but also the social appropriateness of language behaviour.

M. Feng, drawing on mixed-methods research, highlights the relationship between students' linguistic and intercultural communicative competence, noting that a high level of language proficiency does not automatically ensure readiness for effective interaction in culturally diverse environments [74; 680]. Intercultural competence consequently requires targeted tasks that engage learners in analysing different values, behavioural norms, communicative expectations and ways of interpreting meaning.

S. A. Ziyaeva's study establishes the importance of authentic situations, role-based interaction and socioculturally rich content in developing students' sociolinguistic competence [21; 37]. This component should therefore be fostered not through memorising isolated facts about other countries, but through practising the selection of appropriate patterns of language behaviour.

For prospective teachers, sociolinguistic competence involves the ability to establish pedagogically appropriate contact with learners; take account of their age, social background and cultural characteristics; select formal or informal registers; express requirements, requests, disagreement, approval and criticism appropriately; demonstrate tolerance towards cultural and linguistic differences; and prevent or constructively resolve communicative misunderstandings.

**Discourse component**

The discourse component concerns the ability to understand and produce logically organised, coherent and communicatively complete texts. It includes knowledge of different discourse types and genres, command of cohesive and coherence-building devices, the ability to establish semantic links between parts of an utterance, and the capacity to align text structure with communicative purpose.

Unlike an isolated sentence, discourse occurs in a particular situation and reflects the relationships, goals, knowledge and expectations of the participants. Discourse competence therefore involves not only grammatical connections between sentences but also the meaningful organisation of an extended utterance.

In the academic and professional activities of pedagogical university students, this component is demonstrated through the ability to develop a topic logically and systematically, distinguish main from supporting information, construct arguments and formulate conclusions, use cohesive devices, understand the structure of explanations, reports, instructions, discussions and academic articles, adapt the length, content and organisation of an utterance to the task, and produce spoken, written and multimodal texts.

Developing discourse competence is particularly important in the context of digitalisation, where students are expected to create not only conventional written texts but also electronic messages, video presentations, digital projects, online publications and materials for online learning.

**Strategic component**

The strategic component enables learners to plan, carry out, monitor and adjust their communicative activity. It is reflected in their ability to define the purpose of communication, anticipate how an interaction may develop, select appropriate means of achieving an effect, sustain an exchange and overcome emerging difficulties.

This component includes strategies for planning and organising an utterance; initiating, maintaining and ending communication; compensating for limited linguistic resources; clarifying and checking understanding; self-correction and peer correction; using non-verbal and paralinguistic resources; and reflecting on the outcome of an interaction.

Compensatory strategies include paraphrasing, describing an unfamiliar word, using synonyms, giving examples, repeating information, asking clarification questions, requesting assistance and drawing on context. Strategic competence enables students to continue communicating when linguistic difficulties arise rather than abandoning the attempt to express an idea.

B. López-Medina's research highlights the importance of prospective teachers' beliefs about language learning and communication strategies. The author points to a relationship between language preparation and the conscious selection of communicative strategies [46; 200]. Such strategies should therefore become an explicit focus of instruction, practice and reflection rather than being left to develop incidentally.

**Professional communicative component**

The professional communicative component reflects the specific requirements of foreign-language communicative competence among students at teacher-training universities. Its inclusion is justified because general ability to communicate in English does not fully encompass the speech acts teachers perform when teaching, educating learners and organising collaborative activity.

This component includes knowledge of professional-pedagogical terminology, the ability to explain learning material clearly, the capacity to formulate objectives, questions, instructions and tasks, skills in organising discussion and group work, the ability to motivate learners through pedagogical language, the provision of constructive feedback, the use of appropriate techniques to address learners' spoken errors, the presentation of professional information in spoken, written and digital forms, readiness to participate in international educational and research-methodological projects, and adherence to the ethical standards of pedagogical communication.

L. T. Akhmedova emphasises the need to integrate linguistic, methodological and professional-speech training for future foreign-language teachers at higher education institutions in Uzbekistan [61; 96]. Professional speech is not developed by mechanically transferring general conversational competence into teaching practice; it requires the deliberate acquisition of language functions specific to pedagogical work.

C. S. Ironsi examines spoken reflection as a means of developing prospective teachers' communicative competence [72; 150]. Reflection on one's own speech enables students to assess the clarity of explanations, logical organisation, audience response, effectiveness of chosen strategies and suitability of language for a pedagogical situation.

The five components form an integrated system and

cannot be developed in isolation. For example, explaining educational material requires linguistic accuracy, discourse coherence, sociolinguistic appropriateness, strategic flexibility and professional-pedagogical purpose. Weakness in even one component may reduce the effectiveness of communicative performance as a whole.

The structure of foreign language communicative competence can be represented through the following functional relationship: linguistic accuracy → sociolinguistic appropriateness → discourse coherence → strategic effectiveness → professional-pedagogical relevance. This sequence does not imply that the components are developed linearly or independently; rather, it illustrates the functions they perform simultaneously within a single communicative act.

**Domains of foreign language communication and role flexibility**

The content of foreign-language communicative competence is determined not only by its structural components but also by the domains in which it is enacted. A synthesis of existing classifications makes it possible to identify four interrelated domains relevant to students at teacher-training universities: everyday social communication, academic communication, intercultural communication and professional pedagogical communication.

In everyday social contexts, students establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, exchange routine information, express opinions and manage informal interaction. In academic contexts, they receive and analyse scholarly information, participate in discussions, prepare reports, presentations or projects, formulate questions and substantiate their positions. Intercultural communication involves interaction with members of other linguistic and cultural communities, interpretation of culturally shaped meanings and the selection of socially appropriate language behaviour. In professional pedagogical contexts, English is used to explain learning material, formulate instructions, organise discussion, assess learning and provide feedback.

Within each domain, students perform different communicative roles. In an academic group, they may act as learners, collaborators, presenters, critics, moderators or project participants. During teaching practice, they may act as prospective teachers, activity organisers, advisers and mediators. In intercultural interaction, they act both as representatives of their own culture and as participants in intercultural dialogue. Moving from one role to another requires adjustments to content, register, strategy and speech behaviour.

Accordingly, role flexibility may be regarded as an indicator of developed foreign-language communicative competence. It is the ability to adapt language behaviour appropriately to a social or professional role while maintaining ethical standards, content accuracy and communicative effectiveness. Role flexibility should not, however, be treated as a sixth component. Instead, it should be incorporated into the sociolinguistic component as the ability to choose a register and form of interaction appropriate to a role; into the strategic component as the ability to adjust communicative behaviour; and into the professional-communicative component as readiness to perform teaching-related functions.

In addition to the structural components, the personal mechanisms underpinning their implementation must be taken into account. These include motivation, communicative engagement, empathy, tolerance, independence and reflection. They are not classified as separate components because they permeate the entire competence structure and enable potential capacity to be translated into actual communicative performance.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, foreign language communicative competence among students at teacher-training universities should be understood as an integrated, dynamic personal professional quality rather than a simple accumulation of language knowledge and skills. It combines linguistic accuracy with sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, strategic flexibility and the ability to communicate effectively in pedagogical contexts. The analysis has identified five interrelated components, such as linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and professional-communicative and four principal domains in which the competence is realised: social, academic, intercultural and professional pedagogical communication.

The evidence and theoretical perspectives reviewed

suggest that effective competence development requires purposeful integration of language learning, authentic interaction, mediation, reflection and professional practice. These principles may be used to inform educational programme design, the development of teaching materials and the selection of methods for preparing future teachers to communicate effectively in linguistically and culturally diverse environments.

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