

**COMPETENCE APPROACH TO FOREIGN LANGUAGES
TEACHING IN NON-LINGUISTIC HIGHER
EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS**

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Abstract: *An analysis of the current practice of organising foreign language education in non-linguistic universities clearly demonstrates the problems that arise when choosing the principles of the organisation of the educational process and teaching technologies, both at the organisational and content levels. Given the shortage of time, heterogeneity of groups, a wide range of specialties and a number of other factors negatively affecting the learning process of foreign languages, a teacher should solve the main task – achievement by graduates of a sufficiently high degree of foreign language training that allows them to function not only on the national labour market, but also use a foreign language as a means of realizing personal ambitions in a highly developed global professional community. The authors argue that the competence approach as one of the basic approaches in the formation of the strategic goal of foreign language education in non-linguistic universities will provide the developing format of the teaching technology aimed at shaping the level of effective knowledge of a foreign language. Since the study of a foreign language is built on an interdisciplinary integrative basis, i.e. involves the integration of knowledge from various subject disciplines, teaching foreign languages can be aimed at the integrated development of communicative, cognitive, information, socio-cultural, professional and general cultural competences of students.*

Keywords: competence approach, communicative competence, foreign language education, educational competence, professional competence.

Learning technology is known to be a set of tools, methods and techniques based on the unity of the learning objectives, the content of the didactic process and the organisational forms of training¹, so the first problem facing the method teacher is the clear definition of the ultimate goal of training in the proposed conditions.

For a long time, domestic educational models were built on the understanding of the educational process in terms of the formation of knowledge, skills and habits. However, it is quite obvious that knowledge performs only an indicative function and cannot teach behaviour in various kinds of situations of social, practical and, most importantly, professional character. Most modern specialists in the field of foreign-

¹ V.P. Bepalko, *Pedagogy and progressive learning technologies*, Publishing house of the Institute of Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education of Russian Federation, Moscow, 1994; T.I. Shamova, P.I. Tretyakov, *Pedagogical technologies: What it is and how to use them in school*, MPSU, Moscow, 1994.

language education agree that reliance only on subject-knowledge education cannot contribute to the formation of a full-fledged specialist with a project-constructive and spiritual-personal experience that can make independent serious decisions. Such an expert can be formed if the educational paradigm is built on the principles of an activity-development approach, a person-oriented educational model, culturological and professionally oriented learning². To form such a specialist, it is necessary, according to modern didactics, to go beyond the bounds of the knowledge paradigm and move on to the level of formation of various kinds of competences that are a synthesis of cognitive, object-practical and personal experiences. That is a competence approach in education, understood as “Development and evaluation of various competences through the decision of the subject of educational tasks”³. It is the creative solution of the set tasks that presupposes the development of the interactive interaction of the subjects of the educational process aimed at uniting the intellectual and skill components of education; the presence of a “standard” at the output, the integrative nature of competences.

Competence approach to education

With a competent approach, the entire system of organisational and content activities is oriented not just to the transfer of certain knowledge and the formation of certain skills, but to the formation of those characteristics or competences that will enable the learner to act in the format of an exploratory and practice-oriented paradigm, to use rational methods of mental activity, effectively and rationally solve problems in everyday life while performing social roles, in professional activities in the solution of professionally-oriented tasks, in mastering modern technical means and technologies⁴. The relationship between the data of

² V.A. Bolotov, V.V. Serikov, “Competent model: from idea to educational program”, in *Pedagogy*, 2003, vol. 10, p. 8-14; L. Bachman, *Fundamental considerations in language testing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

³ V.A. Kozyrev, N.F. Rodionova, A.P. Tryapitsina, *Competence approach in pedagogical education*, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, Saint Petersburg, 2005.

⁴ S.V. Drozdov, N.I. Almazova, “Formation of information competence of students in the field of tourism”, in *Scientific and Technical Lists of SPbPU. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2015, vol. 2, p. 177-185; M.V. Ryzhakov, “Key competences: application possibilities”, in *Standards and Monitoring in Education*, 1999, vol. 4, p. 20-23; Z.P. Trofimova, *Technology of teaching*, Republican Institute of Higher Education, Minsk, 2003; A.V. Khutorskoy, “Key competences as a component of the personality-oriented education paradigm”, in *Public Education*, 2003, vol. 2, p. 58-61.

intellectual-cognitive competence and the intellectual development of the trainee is obvious and is based on the fact that they are generalised, applicable to different contents and in various fields of activity and are associated with a certain restructuring of an individual. Formed intellectual skills of the student mean an increase in his insight, independence, productivity, flexibility and a number of other qualities required by a specialist in any field⁵.

Supporters of the competence approach to education distinguish various competences, while for the teachers of a foreign language, not only the so-called special competences that are relevant to the specific subject matter of professional activity are important, but also the key ones that are necessary for any professional activity. It is about competences based on intellectual skills⁶.

Communicative competence in foreign-language education

Different researchers attribute different competences to the key ones. It seems to us that the communicative competence is the basic for the foreign language education, and the peculiarity of this competence is that it is also a key one. It is integrative in nature and can be used in any format, including non-linguistic activity, and special, when we are talking about foreign-language vocational-oriented communicative competence of a student at a non-linguistic higher educational establishment⁷.

The most detailed description of communicative competence belongs to L. Bachman⁸ who attributed to it the following key competences: linguistic (the possibility of making utterances in a foreign language only on the basis of acquired knowledge, understanding of language as a system); discursive (connectedness, logic, organisation of the speech); pragmatic (the ability to convey communicative content in accordance with the social context); socio-linguistic (the ability to choose

⁵ N.I. Almazova, N.I. Akopova, L.G. Zhuk, T.A. Savushkina, *The humanitarian component of the educational environment in a technical university*, Publishing house of Polytechnic University, Saint Petersburg, 2011.

⁶ M.N. Vyatyutnev, "Communicative orientation of teaching Russian in foreign schools", in *Russian Language Abroad*, 1977, vol. 6, p. 8-45; I.A. Zimnyaya, T.E. Sakharova, "Design methodology for teaching English", in *Foreign Languages at School*, 1991, vol. 3, p. 9-15.

⁷ L.P. Kistanova, *Situational-thesaurus approach to the formation of foreign communicative competence of future specialists of the tourism industry*, Sochi State University of Tourism and Resorts, Sochi, 2006.

⁸ L. Bachman, *Fundamental considerations in language testing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

language forms); strategic competence (the ability to use communication strategies to compensate for missing knowledge in conditions of realistic language communication) and speech-based (readiness to create communicative content as a result of speech activity: interaction of the problem, knowledge and research).

In Russian linguodidactics the term “communicative competence” was introduced into the scientific use by M.N. Vyatutnev. He proposed to define the communicative competence “as the choice and implementation of speech behaviour programs depending on the person's ability to navigate in one or another communication environment; the ability to classify situations depending on the topic, tasks, communicative attitudes that the students have before the conversation, and also during the conversation in the process of mutual adaptation”⁹.

In the domestic method, the definition of communicative competence, proposed by V.V. Safonova and reflected in the existing federal programs on foreign languages, which combines existing domestic and all-European attempts to define the essence of this concept as a set of linguistic (grammatical, linguistic), verbal (pragmatic, strategic, discursive) and sociocultural (sociolinguistic, linguistic-regional) components¹⁰.

Thus, in the interpretations of different researcher’s communicative competence appears as a structure, the main components of which are various types of competences (linguistic, speech, socio-cultural, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic etc.) characterising it from different points of view and providing in aggregate a general, quite complete characteristic of the concept of “communicative competence”.

Summarising the interpretations of the “communicative competence” concept by different researchers, it should be noted that, despite the different points of view regarding the qualitative and quantitative composition of the structural components of this concept, all researchers note its complexity, interconnection and interdependence.

Considering communicative competence as knowledge about the ways of orienting in various situations and free possession of verbal and non-verbal means of communication, as the ability to act in a situation of uncertainty, as a system of internal resources necessary for constructing effective interpersonal interaction in a certain range of situations, we conclude that in the activity of a specialist communicative competence is

⁹ M.N. Vyatutnev, “Communicative orientation of teaching Russian in foreign schools”, in *Russian Language Abroad*, 1977, vol. 6, p. 8-45.

¹⁰ V.V. Safonova, *Communicative competence: modern approaches to a multilevel description for methodological purposes*, Yevroshkola, Moscow, 2004.

a professionally conditioned quality of personality, since from the ability to establish and appropriate social norms, rules and etiquette of professional contacts with other people (customers and business partners) directly depends on the success of professional work. Moreover, in our opinion, the professional communicative competence of an employee, that depends on the individual and personal properties of a person, life experience, sphere of activity, interests, inclinations, emotional sphere, world outlook, the status of the individual in the team, and also its communicative culture, which assumes a culture of interpersonal communication, speech culture, sociability, emotional stability, is a professional “metacompetence”, uniting and absorbing special activity-based, socio-cultural and individual personal competences, formed on the basis of these competences and simultaneously forming them. Hence, the important conclusion, from our point of view, for professional linguodidactics, is that, while forming a foreign language competence, one can simultaneously contribute to the process of forming key professional competences¹¹.

Non-professional, professionally oriented communicative competence includes not only linguistic competence (basic knowledge of phonetics, grammar and vocabulary) and professional competence (defined as participants' knowledge of the communication act of professional concepts, both in terms of content and expression) but also interactive competence, understood as the realisation of potential social and psychological capabilities of the individual, the language experience of the individual, taking into account such extralinguistic factors like “alien” sociocultural background, pragmatic predetermination of the act of communication, individual and collective mentality. It is the mismatch of business cultures in the process of professional interaction that can lead to an imbalance in the work of decision-making mechanisms, conflict resolution, effective communication. Therefore, the formation of intercultural competence, which is an inseparable part of communicative non-verbal competence, is an indispensable condition in modern models of foreign language education. Given the shortage of time allocated to a foreign language in a non-linguistic university, this competence must be formed on the basis of the principle of updating the cross-cultural component at all levels of presentation and processing of information, in the conditions of performing independent creative tasks, which must be

¹¹ L.P. Kistanova, *Situational-thesaurus approach to the formation of foreign communicative competence of future specialists of the tourism industry*, Sochi State University of Tourism and Resorts, Sochi, 2006.

observed both at the informational (content) level, and at the organisational level.

Thus, defining the competence approach as one of the basic approaches in the formation of the strategic goal of a foreign language higher education, we come to an understanding of the new philosophy of foreign language education in the conditions of a non-linguistic university: we form not knowledge, skills and expertise, but a person who is prepared, based on the formed competences, to implement creative solutions within the framework of real professionally significant tasks in conditions of foreign-language business communication on the basis of generalized skills and subject matter which form a specific foreign-language vocational-oriented communicative competence, as well as for continuous education on the basis of an ever-increasing motivation for constant self-educational activity and orientation towards achieving a higher level of success.

In the context of determining the ultimate goal of foreign language education in a non-linguistic university, it is reasonable to proceed from the understanding that foreign-language professionally oriented communicative competence is certainly the sought-after strategic goal, which, in turn, implies solving a number of tactical tasks aimed at search for new educational concepts, forms, methods, techniques and technologies.

Meanwhile, given the fact that learning a foreign language as a discipline that does not have its own subject of study is built on an interdisciplinary integrative basis, i.e. involves the integration of knowledge from various subject disciplines, teaching foreign languages can be aimed at the integrated development of communicative, cognitive, information, socio-cultural, professional and general cultural competences of students.