



INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE
COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Annotation: *The article discusses the challenges and approaches to assessing communicative competence in foreign language education. Communicative competence, being a multidimensional phenomenon, includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components, as well as paralinguistic skills. The paper overviews key theoretical models by Canale and Swain, Pillar, Verhoeven and others, and highlights the relevance of an integrated, context-based approach to language testing. Various indicators and criteria for evaluating communicative competence are presented, including those used in Cambridge Assessment exams. The article emphasizes the importance of assessing all language skills- speaking, listening, reading, and writing-through realistic, communicative tasks such as role plays, interviews, and integrated exercises. Recommendations are given for foreign language teachers to develop and apply effective assessment tools tailored to specific educational contexts.*

Keywords: *Communicative competence, foreign language teaching, language assessment, integrated testing, paralinguistic skills, communicative approach, evaluation criteria, language proficiency, role-play, real-life communication.*

Assessment is an integral part of the education process. Nowadays communicative approach is prevailing and recognized as the most suitable way to acquire a foreign language, and communicative competence is the main purpose of most foreign language courses. In this regard, the questions arise: how to evaluate at what level students possess communicative competence and how to monitor dynamics of forming communicative competence among students in the process of teaching them a foreign language.

The problem of testing communicative competence has been studied by Kitao, M. Canale, M. Swain, G. W. Pillar, L. Verhoeven, S.J. Savignon, J. J. Torres-Gordillo, F. Guzman-Simon, E. Passov, Y. Bim and others [1-6].

All researchers claim, that objective evaluation of communication ability is a challenging complex task. The purpose of communicative language testing is to measure how the testees are able to use language in real life situations, to interact meaningfully, as distinct from discrete-point testing, where linguistic skills are tested separately. The former requires an integrated approach.



The majority of the authors note a multidimensional nature of communicative competence. Michael Canale and Merrill Swain introduce a model of communicative competence, which consists of three components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic [2, p.1-3], that reflect aspects of human communication. The first one encompasses linguistic categories, and the others incorporate a combination of both linguistic and paralinguistic categories. This complex model demonstrates that successful communication requires not only knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary, but also ability to use them appropriately in a given social context, which includes linguistic skills as well as paralinguistic. Paralinguistic skills are ability to express meaning through intonation, rhythm, gesture, facial expressions, posture, etc. They are not directly related to the language, but they are an integral part of real communication and influence achieving the communicative goal. Granville W. Pillar applies four paralinguistic categories: proxemics, kinesics, prosodic and confidence [3, p.33].

Granville W. Pillar uses the modification of Canale and Swain's model, adding the fourth component - discourse competence, and replacing grammatical component with a broader analogue - linguistic, which includes a set of linguistic categories: accuracy, appropriacy, comprehension, fluency, intelligibility and range [3, p.33, 38-39].

Another set of criteria, worth to be considered, is the one used by Cambridge educators. Cambridge Assessment is an organization at the University of Cambridge, which conducts research on teaching and testing English, and provides a range of exams to test the English language. Cambridge exams are multidimensional, multi-aspect and communicative. Educators from Cambridge Assessment use the set of the five criteria: content, communication, achievement, organization, and language [7].

Although criteria are different, they reflect the same facets of communicative competence (ability to express meanings, achieve communicative goals taking into account the conditions of a real social situation, produce coherent texts both written and oral; knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary and ability to use them in appropriate way depending on the context) as the models, suggested by Canale, Swain and Pillar.

The similar structure is proposed by Verhoeven and Vermeer in their multidimensional, interdependent framework for describing communicative competence. It includes five components of communicative competence: linguistic competence, discourse fluency, sociolinguistic competence, illocutionary force, and strategic competence; the last consists of two parts: planning and execution [3, p.31; 4, p.126].

Spanish scientists Torres-Gordillo, Guzman-Simon and Garcia-Ortiz claim that the structure of communicative competence used in assessment depends on national and regional educational legislation [6, p.2].

Since communicative competence is complex, multidimensional phenomenon, criteria for its evaluation vary depending on external circumstances; therefore, official standards for students' qualifications and skills also must be taken into account.

For detailed testing communicative competence, based on criteria, it is effective to use sets of indicators; for example, suggested by Granville W. Pillar [3, pp.37-40].

Each indicator describes a particular attribute of communicative performance. At the same time it is not discrete-point; indicators are not reduced to separate grammar rules or



vocabulary elements, but represent properties of communication, both linguistic as well as paralinguistic. Granville W. Pillar in his paper presents three sets of indicators for scoring; each of them contains about twenty indicators. In the process of testing each indicator is scored with grade from 1 to 5 depending on the student's performance; then all are summed up and the total score is calculated, which describes the level of students' communicative competence. The table below shows, as examples, some indicators from Pillar's set and categories, which indicators characterize. Sets of indicators are also used for assessment by Cambridge examiners [7].

One indicator may correspond to one or more categories, linguistic or paralinguistic. Teachers may use their own indicator sets; these sets must be full, comprehensive and wide.

Table 1. Examples of indicators for evaluation

Indicator	Category
Gives response to questions asked	Range
Speaks in complete sentences	Fluency
Responds with little hesitation	Fluency
Gives appropriate response	Appropriacy
Pronounces words completely	Accuracy
Flow of speech is rhythmic and continuous	Prosodics
Displays effective use of facial expression	Kinetics

Human language communication takes oral and written forms, that is why it is needed to test abilities to work with both forms. Communication is successful only if perception and transmission of information are completed. Therefore, all skills: receptive - reading and listening, as well as productive - writing and speaking, must be tested. Here it should be noted, that in terms of communicative testing, the best way of assessing these skills is an integrated approach, when they all are involved, for example, a role-play, which, in addition to speaking, includes tasks of reading handouts and writing notes or minutes of the meeting.

Granville W. Pillar notes in his work [3, p.27], that there are two main testing approaches: indirect or discrete-point, and direct or integrative. The latter approach is preferable for communicative competence testing since it provides comprehensive multidimensional analysis and evaluates a set of skills and the ability to use them in combination.

Since the assessment of students' communicative competence must make an effort to test a language in a way that reflects its usage in real situations, communicative tests should be context-specific [1, p.2].

In the communicative method the situation is a unit of the learning process, that is why tasks must aim to involve students in the process of communication and create conditions, which are as close to a real communication situation as possible.



The following tasks may be used for testing communication skills: note taking, completion of an information gap, summarizing, letter writing, role play, and others. Interviews, incorporating descriptions of pictures, monologues, questions and answers, etc., as well as role plays are effective for assessment of communicative competence, but they must be used in combination to provide a comprehensive evaluation of a range of skills. One example of such integrated sets of tests is exams from Cambridge Assessment [7].

When organizing a role-play, a teacher's aim is to eliminate the artificiality of the situation and to achieve an environment close to the real one. This can be obtained by a detailed description of the roles and little teacher intervention during the game, unless the teacher is playing a role in the game. In the latter case, participation is permissible, but only within the framework of the teacher's role. This kind of role-play is allowed only on the initial stage of language learning. When testing through an interview, the presence of two examiners is preferable, one of whom is talking with students, and the other is only assessing without participating in communication. The same is true for the role-play with the teacher's participation.

It is desirable to include in tests work with two types of media: video and audio to test listening comprehension skills both with visual support and without, as well as work with written texts.

In conclusion, communicative competence is multidimensional, complex by nature, and, consequently, can be evaluated only with a set of criteria. The above considered criteria and tests are recommended to be used for assessing students' communicative competence. Multidimensional and integral approach to communicative language testing makes it possible to comprehensively evaluate students' ability to use a foreign language for communication. To sum up, tasks must represent interaction in a real situation and, to do so, describe context in details. Using sets of criteria and indicators allows educators to assess learners' communicative competence more objectively and in a wide scope. As recommendations for teachers, it is necessary to be aware of different criteria systems both already proven and recently suggested by researchers, choose the most suitable for their particular educational program or combine criteria themselves and introduce their own criteria, basing on their experience and students' needs. Besides, it is important to educate students of the pedagogical university on complex integrated assessment of communicative competence, so they can use these methods and guidelines of communicative testing in their future teaching work.

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