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Е.А. Karabutova,
I.B. Akinshina*,
Yu.A. Prokopenko

**Forming and developing students' communicative competence:
from reading to speaking**

Belgorod State National Research University,
14, Studencheskaya Str., Belgorod, 308007, Russia
Akinshina @bsu.edu.ru*

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Abstract. The article highlights the problem of students' foreign language communicative competence formation in the process of reading and speaking skills development. The authors point out that through reading activities students acquire language knowledge and develop speaking skills in both fluency and accuracy. Thus, the goal of the research is to define the effective ways of students' foreign language communicative competence formation by means of reading and speaking activities within the university English course. The article focuses on the concept of communicative competence and the ways to form it. The authors view this concept as a term referring not only to the language structural features, but also to its contextual, pragmatic and social characteristics. Reading and speaking skills are defined as central aspects for language communicative competence development. The authors consider basic teaching techniques and principles to involve students into foreign language communication. Reading and speaking activities are considered to be a powerful and effective resource to improve students' communicative skills.

Keywords: communicative competence; reading skills; speaking skills; vocabulary knowledge, university English course

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Карабутова Е.А.,
Акиншина И.Б.*,
Прокопенко Ю.А.

**Формирование и развитие иноязычной коммуникативной
компетенции студентов: от чтения к устной речи**

Белгородский государственный национальный
исследовательский университет
ул. Студенческая, 14, г. Белгород, 308007, Россия
Akinshina @bsu.edu.ru*

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Аннотация. Формирование иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции студентов посредством развития навыков чтения и говорения является актуальной проблемой. С точки зрения авторов беглость и грамотность иноязычной устной речи студентов формируются благодаря языковым знаниям, приобретенным в процессе чтения. В системе вузовской подготовки курс «Иностранный язык» направлен на формирование и развитие коммуникативной иноязычной компетенции студентов. Таким образом, цель исследования – определить и описать наиболее эффективные способы формирования иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции студентов путем развития навыков чтения и говорения в рамках вузовского курса «Иностранный язык». В работе анализируется понятие «коммуникативная компетенция», способы ее формирования. Авторы рассматривают данный термин не только в рамках структурных особенностей языка, но и его контекстуальных, прагматических и социальных характеристик. Грамотная и свободная устная речь, формируемая посредством развития навыков чтения, определяется как ключевое звено для дальнейшего овладения иностранным языком. Рассмотрены основные принципы и выделены наиболее эффективные приемы по обучению студентов говорению путем развития навыков чтения. Предложены конкретные практические рекомендации по организации учебного занятия по дисциплине «Иностранный язык» с целью эффективного развития навыков чтения и устной речи обучающихся, а также деятельности преподавателя во время учебной дискуссии среди студентов. Грамотное использование специальных приемов для развития навыков чтения и говорения в учебном процессе является мощным и эффективным ресурсом формирования и развития иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции студентов.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная компетенция; навыки чтения; навыки говорения (устной речи); словарный запас знаний, университетский курс английского языка.

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Introduction. Learning a foreign language within the university English course students are able to interact with each other, negotiating meanings, discussing problems, arguing their points of view, etc. It is important to master the target language in accuracy and fluency. In modern world fluency makes English communication more successful. The types of teaching/learning activities imply the new roles for teachers and learners in the classroom.

Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities which provide students with tasks to negotiate meanings, to correct misunderstanding, and give them an opportunity to communicate according to the principles of communication strategies, avoiding communi-

cation breakdowns. Students' accuracy practice focuses on creating correct examples of language use. Doing accuracy-oriented activities a teacher tends to raise students' awareness of form and forms, to draw their attention to the peculiarities of the use of new vocabulary items and specific grammatical constructs, the ways English words are pronounced. It's natural to involve students in modeling their own lexical and grammatical units. As a result, "the more students have opportunities to activate the various elements of language they have stored in their brains, the more automatic their use of these elements become" (Harmer, 2007). Thus, a communicative approach to language teach-

ing/learning encourages students to improve their speaking skills.

Reading and speaking are valuable aspects of language learning /teaching process. Evidently, reading and speaking skills provide communication.

Thus, the aim of the research is to find out the effective ways of students' foreign language communicative competence formation through reading and speaking activities within the university English course.

Main Part. Communicative competence is a term that alludes to tacit students' knowledge of language and ability to understand and use the language effectively for communicative purposes.

The term "competence" was introduced by Chomsky (1965) together with the term "performance" while competence was associated with grammatical knowledge and language aspects, performance involved actual use of language.

One of the early attempts to clarify communicative competence was made by Hymes (1972). Communicative competence, according to Hymes, deals with the actual language, language in use and touches the following four aspects:

- "whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible,
- whether (and to what degree) something is feasible,
- whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate,
- whether (and to what degree) something is done" (Hymes, 1972).

One more definition of communicative competence was proposed by Canale and Swain as "knowledge of language and its use in actual and meaningful communication circumstances" (Canale, Swain, 1980). They considered communicative competence as "the knowledge of learners to master linguistic and structural properties, to comprehend utterances in different social contexts, to be skillful to achieve cohesion and to use verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies to overcome communication breakdowns". The researchers admit that the primary goal of a communicative-oriented

language teaching is to provide learners with opportunities to get information, to practice language use through actions and to get experienced in communication (Canale, Swain, 1980).

In the view of Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell "a communicative competence model has one more component – actional competence which refers to the learner's ability to understand and convey communicative intention" (Celce-Murcia, M., Dörnyei, Z., Thurrell, S., 1995).

According to Richards (2006), communicative competence deals with the following aspects of language knowledge:

- "Knowledge of the language use for a range of different purposes and functions;
- Knowledge of the various ways to use language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing the styles of speech (formal and informal) and the use of language for written or spoken communication appropriately);
- Knowledge of the different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations) and the ways to produce and understand them;
- Knowledge of the means to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)" (Richards, J., 2006).

The mentioned theories help us understand communicative competence as a broad term concerning not only the structural features of language, but also its social, pragmatic and contextual characteristics. In this regard, it seems to be very useful to consider its four constructs:

- "*Grammatical competence* in view of Chomsky's theory refers to the ability of speakers in using the different functioning rules of the system of the language and includes knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology" (Chomsky, N. 1965);
- "*Sociolinguistic competence* refers to the ability of learners in producing appropriate utterances in a particular social context or

“speech event” proposed by Hymes and referring to activities or their aspects (according to the communicative situation) governed directly by rules of language use” (Hymes, D., 1967);

– *Discourse competence* refers to the speakers’ ability to determine the discourse topics and to use the different kinds of discourse.

– *Strategic competence* refers to “the speakers’ knowledge to maintain the flow of communication trying to be understood, and to understand others. It’s important for an individual to be able to use such “communicative strategies”, as paraphrase, circumlocution, literal translation, lexical approximation, expressions, mimics, gestures, to get their message across and to compensate for a limited or imperfect knowledge of rules or the interference of such factors as fatigue, distraction or inattention” (Selin). “It is called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (Canale, Swain, 1980: 30).

In this regard, reduction (avoidance) and achievement strategies should be emphasized. Reduction strategy can affect the content of our communicative purpose: we are all familiar with the essential strategy of avoiding a topic we do not feel confident to talk about. As for the second one, it becomes much more interesting when it is based on the learner’s actual interlanguage communication. It means when a learner tries to use his/her present knowledge and skills and stretch them, so to say, to their limits. As Mariani Luciano admits: “It is this active use of one’s limited resources that I think we should be particularly concerned with” (Luciano, 1994). Strategic competence is the ability to cope with unexpected problems, when no ready-made solutions are available.

Thus, as a result of discussions, a communicative competence should be defined mainly as the latter capacity of an individual to use the language for meaningful communication.

Communicative competence is viewed as mastery of functions needed for communication across a wide range of situations. According to the functions being taught in Present-Practice-

Produce lesson cycle vocabulary and grammar are generally chosen. To speak spontaneously students need to use a number of common lexical phrases specific for the certain language functions performance.

The English teaching course, “as a target language in the University training system of future specialists, aims to provide students with the opportunity to acquire communicative competence. Undoubtly, careful investigation in the lesson planning stage allows teachers making the learners’ experience enjoyable and trouble-free” (Prokopenko, Karabutova, 2018).

To develop students’ communicative competence a teacher should engage them actively in the communication act providing them with the most appropriate activities and tasks relevant to students’ needs. To achieve communication goals in the classroom a teacher should give students communicative opportunities to practice and learn in the frame of such techniques as information gaps, gap fillers, matching, sequencing, categorizing, dialogues, discussions and debates, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and jigsaw. It is natural to organize communication according to the functions the learner should be able to carry out in English, such as introducing a problem, offering and accepting solutions, explaining their visions of treating the problem, expressing advantages and disadvantages, and giving arguments.

Encouraging students to interact in social activities a teacher should focus learners on the context and the roles they can perform, and to formal or/and informal language.

Reading and Reading techniques.

Reading is considered to be the main factor in language learning, in particular, in language acquisition, and “effective for incidental vocabulary acquisition” (Lehmann, 2007).

Supporting this idea, Nation considers reading to be “a major source of vocabulary growth” (Nation, 1996: 7).

While reading students find words “used memorably with force and point, they are able to understand sentences and structures of a written text and then use them in communication” (Bright, McGregor, 1970: 53). Advocat-

ing this point of view Hedge stresses that “through reading learners advance their ability of guessing the meanings of unknown words and phrases from clues in the context”. (Hedge, 1985: 77). Evidently reading allows students “combining information from a contextual resource and their own background knowledge to build meaning, i.e. to comprehend a written message” (Nunan, 2003: 68).

In other words, through reading students acquire vocabulary and structural knowledge, formal discourse structure knowledge, content/world background knowledge, metacognitive knowledge and develop automatic recognition skills, synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies and skills monitoring (Grabe, 1991: 379) that naturally influence learners’ speaking achievements.

It’s important to mention, reading is considered to be purposeful; students are encouraged either to read for enjoyment, or they need to search for information, or to complete a task, etc. Reading with a purpose has a specific goal to classroom activity. In the classroom it’s possible to engage students into reading a text from a specific point of view, depending on what information the text might be focused on. Students can be given reasons to read that approximate their purposes in a variety of real-world situations. Learners can be asked either to look through movie listings and reviews to decide whether it’s worth seeing a particular movie, or to read ads for apartments in order to find one that fits a particular set of requirements, or to respond to a written message/invitation. The main idea is “to arrange activities that allow students getting something done via the language, to read a text for doing something with the information” (Long, Crookes, 1992). It is important to suggest task-based activities to involve performance of reading in conjunction with other skills: listening, speaking, or writing. Thus, students can be divided into small groups and given a number of texts, such as brochures, timetables, or maps, then they can be offered radio traffic reports or weather forecasts for listening in order to carry out the larger task of deciding which method of transportation might be used on a trip as the

best one. Doing such activity, each student subgroup deals with one specific aspect of information, and students of all subgroups are pushed to come up with the best plan for the voyage through communication.

In the light of purposeful reading students are taught to use different techniques:

– Skimming – an effective technique in the process of identifying the main ideas of material to read too quickly (even three to four times faster than normal reading) is used to find out whether the information is of reader’s interest.

Skimming depends on students’ learning styles and teaching/learning goals. Students can be asked to read the first and last paragraphs focusing on headings, concentrating on summaries as they move down the page or screen trying to find dates, names, and places, etc. It is possible for them to look through the title, subtitles, subheading, and illustrations or/and review tables, graphs, and charts. Actually, this technique works well to seek specific information rather than in case learners are interested in reading for comprehension.

Scanning – a technique, which helps learners answer the particular question/s looking for specific words and phrases or ideas in the e-dictionary or telephone book. If a document seems to be required a learner has a chance to go back to a scanned one and skim it.

When scanning it’s useful to look for the author’s use of organizers such as letters or the words, numbers, and steps. Words can be bold faced, italics, or in a different font size, style, or color. Sometimes in the margin the author puts key ideas.

– SQ4R technique (Survey, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite, and Review) is flexible and can be applied to a whole range of reading purposes helping readers to get detailed information.

– Critical reading is a technique especially used in case of writing an article critique or a literature review. It presents questions asking about the reading to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the reading’s argument.

Interestingly, critical reading enrolls students into considering the following components:

- the background of reading material;
- its purpose and overall conclusion (claim);
- the evidence used in the material for reading;
- the logical connections between the claim and the evidence;
- the reading material's balance or its limitations;
- how the reading material relates to other sources and research;
- whether the reading material is based on research, and how this research was conducted.

Each of these components affects how “strong” the argument is, i.e., how convincing it is. All the mentioned components are necessary to develop students’ speaking skills. According to Williams (1984, 13), “reading provides learners with further practice in the language they have learnt to reuse it in other skills such as speaking and writing” (Williams, 1984). Only involving learners in speaking/writing communication can be “the chance to develop their communicative competence” (Savignon, 2007).

Arranging students’ reading activities, it’s important to follow the principles offered by Jeremy Harmer, the author of the highly acclaimed “The Practice of English Language Teaching”. They include:

“*Principle 1: Encourage students to read as often and as much as it’s possible*”: the more students read, the better. A teacher should encourage learners to read extensively as well as intensively.

“*Principle 2: Students need to be engaged in the text they are reading*”: that means teachers should try to help learners get as much pleasure as possible in the process of reading both extensively and intensively. The aim is to make them be *involved* in the topic of a reading text and the activities they are asked to do.

“*Principle 3: Encourage students to respond to the content of a text (and explore their feelings about it), not just concentrate on its construction*”: teachers should give students a chance to respond to the text message. It is especially important to allow them expressing

their feelings about the main idea and the language while reading extensively.

“*Principle 4: Prediction is a major factor in reading*”: the task of a teacher is to give learners some kind of a hint to make them predict what the text is about.

If it is extensive reading learners choose reading for pleasure and a teacher should encourage students to look at covers getting a chance to predict a genre of a story and its main idea.

“*Principle 5: Match the task to the topic when using intensive reading texts*”: a teacher should arrange such activities as before and after reading questions and purposeful study exploitation, etc. Otherwise, boring and inappropriate activities can undermine the most useful and interesting text or, on the contrary, captivating, imaginative and challenging activities make the most common passage really exciting.

“*Principle 6: Exploit reading texts*”: that means to integrate the reading text into interesting lessons, using the topic for further speaking activities “to provoke useful feedback” (Harmer, 2007).

Thus, doing reading activities students form language knowledge and develop speaking skills in both fluency and accuracy. According to Brumfit, such activities “push students to discover new linguistic forms and to activate their linguistic knowledge through foreign language communication” (Brumfit, 1984).

Speaking and speaking techniques.

Reading allows students using their vocabulary knowledge to complete tasks. The activities should be designed to foster students’ better speaking through “talking classrooms”, rather than to focus them on specific language constructions” (Thornby, 2009: 36).

Let’s consider some classroom activities that facilitate learners’ speaking practice.

Information-gap activities: require students to speak and to practice collaborative work, communicating to their mates to acquire the missing information. Having learned the information from their group mates they need to fill the “gap” and complete the task or activity.

Jigsaw reading is one of the favorite activities among students and teachers. It allows arranging an interaction between students. The group should be divided into two subgroups taking different stories depicting two different tiny links to read. They need to exchange the information. To understand the story better students can ask questions. Another modern type of this activity is to make students look through one story split into two parts. Then it's possible to arrange a discussion focusing on things the students have difficulties with. Thus, jigsaw activity helps involve students into the process of communication.

Storytelling is an effective technique that allows students exercising their imagination, exposing students to the target language. It is an essential tool to convey messages to students of different interests. Learners are able to share a remarkable variety of personal experiences, values and ways of understanding. The language they learn in the classroom is the tool they use to shape their thoughts and feelings. It is more than a way of exchanging information and extending ideas, it is their means of reaching out and communicating to other people. Storytelling can link not only between the world of classroom and home but also between the classroom and beyond. Such technique provides a common thread that can help students identify themselves with the characters and try to interpret the narrative.

Undoubtedly, the best stories are those that are very close to learner's personality and his/her life experience. It can be about his/her close friend, family member or, of course, him/herself. Asking a student about his car or describe the best or the worst day in his/her recent life a teacher gives a learner a chance to be more creative in speaking. Very often, such kind of activities happens spontaneously as students can come up with a certain topic in the classroom environment. However, it takes time to think about a story they would like to say to the audience.

"Favourite objects" is another activity providing students with a chance to tell their personal stories. A teacher should push students to speak about their favourite objects (things

like phones, books, talismans, pieces of jewelry, photos, etc.) and ask each other different questions about an episode of life or a story they are associated with.

Balloon debate is a technique allowing students to think of any celebrity (Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare, Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc.) they would like to be or any job (educator, interpreter, physician, etc.) they would like to do. A teacher asks students to give reasons to survive in the basket of a balloon losing air. It's important to give more arguments to stay in the balloon's basket.

Moral dilemmas technique promotes student creativity, teamwork, and allows learners revising/consolidating using second conditional and language of speculation. Students can be asked to react to the following situations: What would you do if you ran over a cat in a residential area of town? What would you do if you found an umbrella on an empty bus late at night? A teacher should present some possible circumstances of the incident and offers students different variants of solving the dilemma. Such activity encourages students to think critically by analyzing choices that involve conflicting values. Discussing the problem learners have to choose the appropriate solution and prove it with a number of arguments.

Ladder discussion is an actual interview technique to involve students into a pair or team work. Laddering can be used to uncover the attributes, consequences, and values. Such technique helps students to explore a question, a proposition or an area of knowledge and achieve reasoned mutual understanding while arguing. It is important for a teacher to engage students in making arguments to defend the personal position. When students are engaged in classroom discussions, they have a good possibility to develop their own ideas, to advance and clarify their knowledge and to learn thinking critically.

Pyramid discussion is another speaking activity to arrange communication in the classroom. For a group of 8 students a teacher can give a task to talk about things they enjoy doing at a birthday party. As each pair has some ideas the teacher joins two pairs making groups of

four students. Then these two groups have to plan their ideal birthday party. The teacher monitors helping them with unknown words and upgrades their language. Finally, it's possible to put two groups together, making one big group of eight students, and ask them to combine their two variants of ideas to make birthday party. The teacher must make sure that every student has a role in the presentation of the party. So, the formats of the pyramid can be as the followings: 4×2, 2×4, 1×8. Such speaking activity has some really nice benefits, especially for encouraging social interaction and cooperation.

When arranging discussions in the ELT classroom it is necessary to remember that students need to find some arguments to the ideas they have to participate in discussion.

It's really very important to teach students to lead a discussion according to the following steps:

- introduce yourself and state the purpose of the discussion;
- ask questions to stimulate the discussion;
- make sure no one dominates the discussion by inviting and encouraging contributions from all students;
- ensure only one member of the group speaks at a time;
- ensure the discussion remains relevant and doesn't drift off topic;
- summarize or rephrase a speaker's point;
- summarize the discussion.

Discussing a problem, students must communicate in a positive way to assist the speakers in accomplishing their objective. It's important for teachers to form the mentioned students' leadership skills they can use to influence other people positively and help the group achieve its purpose.

Evidently, discussion-based activities help students understand a subject or topic area more deeply, explore ideas and exchange information. Students are able to expand and clarify their knowledge, to think critically. Defending their positions with definite arguments

they have a chance to improve their language skills, to increase their confidence in speaking.

Another important issue to be covered is the role of a teacher arranging a speaking activity. While monitoring any kind of speaking activity a teacher should listen to and help students to express their thoughts if it is necessary.

Conclusion. Communicative competence formation is a key concept of language teaching within a university foreign language course. The combination of reading and speaking skills seems to be fundamental components for learners' successful communication in real-life situations. Developing stronger reading skills, a teacher contributes to students' speaking skills in both fluency and accuracy. It is necessary to realize how important the vocabulary knowledge can be as a powerful resource in facilitating speaking skills by means of the reading activities. Both the findings of research studies and the authors' personal teaching experience support the opinion that reading and speaking skills are in increasingly high relationship and the development of them undoubtedly improves students' communicative competence formation.

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About the authors:

Elena A. Karabutova, PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages and Professional Communication, Belgorod State National Research University. ORCID: 0000-0003-2014-3570.

Inna B. Akinshina, PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor of the Department of Pedagogy, Belgorod State National Research University. ORCID: 0000-0002-5256-4217.

Julia A. Prokopenko, PhD in Sociology, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages, Belgorod State National Research University. ORCID: 0000-0003-1344-3946.

Данные об авторах:

Карабутова Елена Александровна, кандидат педагогических наук, доцент кафедры иностранных языков и профессиональной коммуникации, Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет. ORCID: 0000-0003-2014-3570.

Акиншина Инна Брониславовна, кандидат педагогических наук, доцент кафедры педагогики, Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет. ORCID: 0000-0002-5256-4217.

Прокопенко Юлия Александровна, кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры иностранных языков, Белгородский государственный национальный исследовательский университет ORCID: 0000-0003-1344-3946.