

Enhancing Sociolinguistic Competence for Journalism Students

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Abstract. *The formation and development of socio-cultural competence are crucial components of effective foreign language education. Sociolinguistic competence encompasses various structures, mechanisms, and strategies employed by speakers in different communicative contexts (Bayley & Regan, 2004). This article examines the key elements of sociolinguistic competence, emphasizing its relevance in higher education and the challenges associated with its acquisition. It also explores how native speakers contribute to shaping learners' social and linguistic competencies during the educational process. The study further highlights the necessity of integrating models of interaction, discourse practices, and social dialect selection into language teaching. Given the evolving landscape of language education, a synthesis of teaching methods and innovative pedagogical approaches is essential to develop socio-cultural competence effectively. The research presents an experimental study conducted in European institutions of higher education, analyzing the relationship between students' success and the activation of social competence in foreign language acquisition. The findings suggest that interactive learning methods and digital technologies play a significant role in enhancing socio-cultural competence, ultimately influencing students' professional development.*

Key words: *Socio-cultural competence, sociolinguistic competence, foreign language education, communicative competence, interactive learning, digital technologies.*

Introduction

In the field of foreign language education, the development of socio-cultural competence is a fundamental aspect that significantly impacts communication and linguistic proficiency. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social settings, involving knowledge of cultural norms, linguistic etiquette, and discourse strategies (Addison & Mountford, 2015). In modern educational settings, the integration of diverse teaching models and methodologies is essential to foster socio-cultural competence effectively. Despite its importance, research on the systematic development of socio-cultural competence remains limited. This article aims to bridge this gap by analyzing methods for improving sociolinguistic competence among students in higher education.

Sociolinguistic competence is a crucial component of communicative competence, incorporating linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural elements (Cummins, 2011; Sung, 2016). Various researchers have examined its role in foreign language acquisition, emphasizing the need for contextual learning approaches that align with real-life communication scenarios (Synorub & Medynska, 2019). Sociolinguistic competence also encompasses linguistic markers such as dialects, sociolects, and registers, which reflect social differentiation (Baratta, 2016). Studies suggest that exposure to diverse language varieties enhances learners' adaptability and fosters intercultural sensitivity (Wang, 2017).

Additionally, recent research highlights the significance of interactive and digital learning tools in sociolinguistic competence development. Innovative pedagogical methods, such as gamification,

virtual exchange programs, and AI-driven language learning platforms, contribute to the effective acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Rababah, 2020). The integration of digital communication channels, including social media, blogs, and educational platforms, has also been shown to facilitate authentic language interactions (Khaleel et al., 2018; Popovych et al., 2020).

Methodology

The methodology of this article employed a qualitative research design to examine methods for enhancing sociolinguistic competence among journalism students in higher education. The study utilized an experimental approach conducted within European higher education institutions, with students actively participating in various interactive and digital learning activities. The research focused on observing students' interactions through innovative pedagogical tools, including virtual exchanges, gamification, and AI-driven language platforms. These methods were selected to foster authentic communication scenarios reflective of real-world journalism contexts. Criteria such as linguo-cognitive knowledge, behavioral adaptability, and practical application in intercultural contexts were established to evaluate the participants' sociolinguistic competence. Additionally, non-verbal communication aspects, particularly gestures and proxemics, were assessed, recognizing their critical role in facilitating effective classroom interactions. Students' performances were analyzed qualitatively, emphasizing their ability to interpret linguistic markers, adapt culturally, and engage successfully with native speakers in professional settings. The study acknowledged challenges, notably time limitations and variable control complexities, yet confirmed the positive impact of digital and interactive methodologies in developing robust sociolinguistic skills. Overall, the chosen methodological framework underscored the essential integration of diverse teaching strategies and digital technologies in journalism education to enhance socio-cultural competencies necessary for professional and communicative success.

Results

The findings indicate a significant improvement in students' ability to navigate social and linguistic contexts effectively. The integration of interactive and digital tools facilitated greater engagement, enhancing their understanding of cultural norms and discourse strategies. The study identified three primary criteria for assessing sociolinguistic competence:

1. **Linguo-cognitive Criterion:** Knowledge of linguistic structures, cultural diversity, and motivation to acquire socio-cultural insights.
2. **Behavioral Criterion:** Ability to interpret and utilize social communication markers, adapt to cultural norms, and demonstrate intercultural sensitivity.
3. **Practical Criterion:** Application of linguistic competence in real-world scenarios, participation in international projects, and effective communication with native speakers.

In a frame of social relations, non-native speakers want their status to be considered equal and therefore they are afraid to overstep social norms. (Kasper, 1990 p.1) The author claims that politeness needs to be viewed in a complex perspective of wide range of contexts - not only social, but also discursal, cultural and historical (Kasper, 1990, p. 23). In addition to that, unmarked absence of politeness and marked opposite of rudeness point out those politeness forms and meanings mentioned by Kasper that indicate the fact that neither politeness nor rudeness can be considered independently by the virtue of the fact that they belong to a common continuum. Comprehension of the politeness conception of the target language is one of the prerequisites of successful communication. Fraser (1990, p.219-236) refuses "normative perspective" of politeness, considering this category to be influenced by factors that are closely and specifically related to context and therefore it is not reasonable to form just a compilation of guidelines. Furthermore Fraser (1990, p. 219-236) advocates this phenomenon to be perceived as an interactive concept applicable to all cultures. Another point to be taken into account is reliability of the concept and as such Fraser (1990, p. 219-236) argues that conversational maxim point of view presented by Grice's Cooperative principle is not appropriate for

the above-mentioned purpose because the maxims do not allow to assess influence in a more particular way.

Discussion

Non-verbal language plays a key role in human communication (Burgoon et al, 2021). It includes codes that teachers must master due to their relevance in communicative situations found in the classroom (Wahyuni, 2018). It refers to the gestures made with hands, arms or their face and eye contact (AparicioHerguedas et al., 2020; Celce-Murcia, 2018; Author, 2018; Prado-Aragonés, 2004). Teachers gestures pay a crucial role in educational contexts, as they may help communication and learning (Bowcher, & Zhang, 2020). These codes have also been found to be beneficial when working with children with general developmental disorders, given that they generate multimodal interaction in the transfer of knowledge (Djatkika et al., 2018). Regarding proxemics, it deals with the positioning and movements of teachers in the classroom, which in turn can either facilitate or impede communication. Both non-verbal language and proxemic aspects are determined by conventions which are dependent on the cultural reality (PradoAragonés, 2004). It is through the proximity-distance relationship where the links that determine the teacher-student level of interaction are made. More generally, the techniques and resources related to nonverbal language are crucial for an effective communication with students, as they serve to improve their attention and interest (Camus-Ferri et al., 2019)

Challenges encountered during the study included time constraints and the difficulty of isolating variables affecting sociolinguistic competence development. However, the research underscores the necessity of incorporating digital platforms and interdisciplinary approaches in foreign language education.

Conclusion

The study confirms that sociolinguistic competence is a vital element of foreign language education, influencing students' professional and communicative abilities. Future research should focus on refining methodologies, expanding experimental frameworks, and incorporating AI-driven language learning technologies. By fostering socio-cultural competence, educational institutions can equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in a globalized world.

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