

## The Conceptual Content and Main Structural Components of Language Competence

**Rustamova Shokhista Sharifovna**

*Samarkand state institute of foreign languages, associate professor*

**Abstract.** *The article explores the conceptual essence, theoretical foundations, and structural composition of language competence as one of the central categories in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and language pedagogy. The study emphasizes the role of innate linguistic universals and the learner's ability to internalize grammatical rules through interaction within the linguistic environment. The author identifies and analyzes the main structural components of language competence — linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic — highlighting their interdependence and functional roles in the process of effective communication. Special attention is paid to the motivational and cognitive aspects that ensure the learner's capacity to produce and interpret language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts. The paper concludes that language competence is a multidimensional, dynamic phenomenon that integrates knowledge, skills, and personal attributes necessary for successful linguistic activity and cross-cultural communication.*

**Key words:** *language competence, linguistic competence, communicative competence, conceptual content, structural components, language system, phonetic, lexical and grammatical knowledge, speech skills, sociolinguistic approach, pragmatic factors, communication effectiveness, structure of language competence, language acquisition process, linguistic potential.*

Language competence is the individual's ability to use language not only grammatically correctly, but also appropriately in terms of meaning and context. In other words, it is a person's skill in using linguistic means effectively in the process of communication. This competence is not limited to knowledge of language rules; it also includes cultural, social, psychological, and pragmatic factors. A person possessing communicative competence:

- a. can express his or her thoughts clearly;
- b. understands the interlocutor correctly;
- c. is able to speak in a language appropriate to the communication situation.

The process of forming a competent specialist involves the development of a set of key competences. As can be seen from the above-mentioned sources, the distinctive feature of a modern specialist is his or her communicative competence. A.K. Markova wrote that professional competence is an activity and communication carried out with a sufficiently high level of skill [13;195]. It is emphasized that changing conditions require changes in organizational processes and impose new demands on the interactions between members of an organization and the external groups with which they engage [19;132]. The English verb “communicate” is interpreted as “to convey through speech or writing”, and the purpose of communication is defined as “to ensure the successful transfer of sufficient information.” The adjective “communicative” means “able, inclined to communicate, or easily establishing connections [18;402].”

In psychology, communicative competence is viewed as one of the conditions of personal orientation. Communicative competence includes a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that ensure effective communication [10;86]. Researchers such as L.G. Antropova and L.V. Smirnova describe communicative competence as an integral characteristic of the individual [4;27]. E.V. Rudensky defines communicative competence as the manifestation of an individual's subjectivity in communication, based on a technological description of personality. According to the author, communicative competence is knowledge of communication norms and rules and awareness of the technology of their application.

Communicative competence consists of the ability to make a socio-psychological diagnosis of how the given communication situation is likely to develop; to plan the communication process based on the specifics of the situation; to adapt to the communication environment; and to manage communication processes socially and psychologically. Furthermore, communicatively competent behavior relies on evaluating the effectiveness of the communication act and ensuring its rationality from the point of view of the communicative goal. Thus, the most important features of communicative competence include situational specificity, goal orientation and behavioral appropriateness [15;87].

The main sources for mastering **communicative competence** are distinguished as follows:

1. the socio-normative experience of national culture;
2. knowledge of the languages of communication used by that culture;
3. interpersonal experience;
4. experience in the perception of art [15;65].

Communicative competence is connected with mutual interactions and can be identified, since it usually concerns a person's abilities and communicative readiness. Communicative competence is related to the application of this readiness in individual communication situations, and this distinction is important in teaching and implementing communicatively literate behavior.

The mere presence of a certain predisposition (ability) in a person does not necessarily imply the existence of communicatively competent behavior. To analyze **communicative competence** as a **pedagogical category**, we use the main structural blocks or positions such as the nature of the phenomenon, its purpose, content, forms of manifestation, and criteria of effectiveness [12;10-19].

As a specific category of pedagogy, the manifestation of the essence of communicative competence is the expression and reflection of relational activity carried out by certain trained individuals within the objective process of communication. Defining communicative competence as a **pedagogical phenomenon** helps determine the objective function of interpersonal relations, which ensure the individual's integration into social and professional life based on specialized education.

Communicative competence is manifested in forms of **communication and activity** (professional and communicative) and in the relationships created through them. In our opinion, in the teaching of foreign languages, **competence** refers to adherence to certain linguistic standards, the possession of practical skills, and the ability to perform linguistic activities.

Regarding the concept of "**competence**," initially, "student competences" were regarded as simple practical skills formed through the automatization of knowledge [14;20]. Later, competences became units of educational curricula. Thus, **communicative competence** is an **evaluative category** that characterizes the learner's personality as a subject of communicative activity within a system of social relations. The analysis of the definitions and characteristics of competence makes it possible to identify communicative competence as a **qualitative indicator of communication effectiveness**. The **communicative competence of students** is a complex personal trait characterized by the degree of their involvement in communicative activity and determining the quality of this activity. Due to its complexity, communicative competence can be represented as a structure consisting of three analytically distinct yet generally similar **components**, which may be called **substructures**. Each

component includes a system of knowledge, skills and personal qualities that play a key role both in performing and in developing communicative and competent behavior.

It is emphasized that, on the one hand, communicative competence manifests itself in specific situations; on the other hand, it is connected with the learner's personality and therefore possesses the property of **situational dependence**. If we analyze communicative competence as a certain complex, it becomes possible to resolve the contradiction between constancy and situational dependency: it consists of the application of particular abilities (general, situation-independent personal traits) and the implementation of communicative readiness (knowledge and skills) acquired in relation to specific situations.

From the above definitions of professional and educational competences, it follows that any competence can be determined only **relatively**, i.e., in relation to the external requirements placed upon a person and the individual's potential. Based on the above, we can conclude that communicative competence is always a **context- and person-dependent concept**.

After a detailed analysis of literary sources devoted to **communicative competence**, we became convinced of the necessity to theoretically examine the **correlational concept of "competence"** from the point of view of communication.

The term **"language competence"** was introduced by **N. Chomsky** in the study of problems of generative grammar. However, according to Chomsky, this concept had already appeared in the works of **W. von Humboldt** and other linguists.

According to N. Chomsky, **language competence** is based on the existence of fundamental innate linguistic categories (universals) and the child's ability to "construct grammar" — that is, to formulate rules describing the sentences received in the linguistic environment. Based on this principle, N. Chomsky, in his later reflections, stated that a **competent speaker/listener** must [1;76]:

1. be able to form and understand an infinite number of sentences constructed according to the grammatical models of the language;
2. be able to make judgments about utterances, that is, to recognize similarities and differences in the meanings of two expressions.

The content of **language competence** embodies the acquisition of these categories and units, understanding of the language and its functions, and comprehension of the regularities and rules governing linguistic operation. The **motivational-value component** is determined by a set of personal qualities such as ability, orientation, politeness, the need for communication, communicative inclination, self-respect, empathy, reflection, courtesy, and others. From the previously mentioned definitions of **professional and educational competence**, it follows that any competence can only be defined **relatively** — that is, in relation to the demands placed upon a person by the external environment and the individual's own potential.

In the same way, **communicative competence** depends on the compromise between the **requirements of society** that includes the individual and the **personal needs** of that individual. This means that communicative competence is always a **context- and person-dependent concept**. **Language competence** represents the potential of an individual's linguistic knowledge — a set of rules for constructing and analyzing sentences, for analyzing and classifying linguistic units that enable the use of the language system for communicative purposes.

The content of language competence consists in mastering categories and units, understanding the language and its functions, and comprehending the regularities and rules of linguistic activity (as noted by V.A. Zvegintsev, I.A. Zimnyaya, N. Chomsky, L.V. Shcherba, L.A. Yakobivits and others).

Based on the above considerations, **E.D. Bozhovich** defines **linguistic competence** as a **psychological system** that includes two main components:

1. information about speech experience accumulated in the process of communication and activity;
2. knowledge about the language acquired through specially organized educational processes [6;96].

The term “**communicative competence**” is generally used to refer to the **practical use of the language system** — the ability to use a limited number of linguistic means according to their functional regularities to create utterances ranging from the simplest expressions of emotion to the transmission of complex intellectual information [5;101]. **Communicative competence** is viewed as the ability to establish and maintain necessary contacts with other people. Communicative competence includes a set of specific knowledge and skills that ensure the **effective progress of the communication process** [9;34-49].

One of the main concepts of the **theory of communicative actions** is precisely **communicative competence**. In the **theory of speech communication**, communicative competence is understood as the working set of **communicative strategies** of the speaker — that is, a set of theoretically planned and implemented actions aimed at achieving a communicative goal or possessing a communicative nature during the act of communication. **E.V. Klyuyev** defines the **communicative goal** as a **strategic outcome** toward which communicative action is directed; this result can be expressed both at the verbal level and at the level of physical actions [10;43].

The **communicative perspective** is regarded as the opportunity to create conditions for achieving results in **extralinguistic reality** during the course of communicative action. In addition to the components presented above, **L. Brachman** proposed adding another component to communicative competence — **illocutionary competence**, which is the ability to correctly formulate illocutionary (speech) acts such as requesting, offering, or informing someone, in accordance with the communication situation.

The inclusion of this component further expands the structure of communicative competence by adding yet another element — **country-specific (cultural) competence**, which enhances the ability to take into account the features of the country, culture, and the history of the people whose language is being studied and with whom communication is being conducted, particularly in illocutionary communicative acts.

The definitions and theories mentioned above can be summarized through the definition of communicative competence given by **I.A. Zimnyaya**:

**communicative competence** is the ability to carry out communicative speech activities based on phonological, lexical-grammatical, sociolinguistic, and regional studies, using skills connected with **discursive, illocutionary, and strategic competences** [8;34-42].

In the internal theory and practice of foreign language teaching, the definition of communicative competence given by **V.V. Safonova** is widely used. In her interpretation, communicative competence is manifested in the unity of three components — **linguistic, speech, and socio-cultural factors** [16;25].

Research on communicative competence has revealed a number of **controversial and analytically demanding issues**, including [16;25]:

- the formation of competence in **receptive types of speech activity**;
- the justification of **minimum, intermediate, and maximum levels** of communicative competence skills, which is essential for clarifying qualitative and quantitative requirements for educational programs at different stages of learning;
- the development of **criteria for selecting communication situations** and the most effective methods for presenting them in textbooks;
- the justification of the **hierarchy of speech objectives** in terms of the difficulties encountered in realizing them through speech acts;
- the identification of the **optimal relationship between function and form** in the communicatively oriented process of language teaching;
- the examination of the **comparative effectiveness** of various methods of forming communicative competence.

The various perspectives on communicative competence, its characteristics, and structure make it possible to draw general conclusions and develop key definitions consistent with the objectives of our research. Thus, all the models of communicative competence mentioned above are based on the findings of **linguistics and linguistic pragmatics**. As a result, the outcomes of studies in **psychology** and **pedagogy** demonstrate that, alongside **linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural, discursive, strategic, and emotional competences**, all these aspects should also be reflected within **communicative competence** itself.

By the criteria for the formation of students' communicative competence, we understand the indicators (essential characteristics) that show whether a certain level or degree of communicative competence formation has been achieved, reflect a specific result of development, and indicate the transition to a new qualitative state.

There exists a certain dialectical relationship between criteria and levels, which makes it possible to develop the most optimal system of criteria [7;10-14].

The determination of criteria for forming students' communicative competence is directly related to the content of communicative competence itself: the selection of criteria allows for the establishment of interconnections among all structural components of the system under study. The criteria are defined through a number of qualitative indicators, and based on their manifestation, it is possible to evaluate the degree to which a given criterion has been formed. The criteria also reflect the dynamic nature of qualitative changes measured over time. Thus, these criteria fully represent the main principles of forming students' communicative competence, including intellectual knowledge, activity (skills), personal orientation, and ability.

When correlating the essence of communication with the communicative competence realized within it, it should be taken into account that interaction can occur according to two models: *subject-object* and *subject-subject*. The subject-object type of interaction requires reproductive knowledge, skills, and experience; whereas subject-subject relations demand productive (effective) knowledge and skills. Communicative competence reflects both the reproductive and productive mastery of both sides of the communicative process.

Secondly, communication has two interrelated levels — external and internal. In our view, the external level (also referred to as behavioral or operational-technical) is associated with practical skills, whereas the internal level is characterized by knowledge, abilities, and orientations that influence personal and semantic formation.

Therefore, we can draw the following fundamental conclusion:

Communicative competence is a complex quality of an individual, characterized by the degree of participation in speech communication and determining the quality of this activity, expressed through the unity of cognitive, operational-activity, and motivational-value components.

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