

Developing a Meta-Communicative Competence of Pre-Service Foreign Language Teachers

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Abstract: In the era of globalization and internationalization, it is irrefutably evident that the command of foreign languages – English is at the forefront of education agendas across the world. In the Kazakhstani context, a cultural project "Trinity of languages" suggested by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan set a challenging task before the Language teacher training institutions that are responsible for training future language teachers. The ultimate goal of Foreign Language Teaching training in the Kazakhstani context is to develop fundamental knowledge, skills and competencies that are required for English language trainees in their future professional life. In this regard, meta-communicative competency is very essential for foreign language teachers working in the content-based classrooms. The level of pre-service teacher's competency development defines their capability to form learners' foreign language communicative competence that enables them to use the target language to speak about the content or specific information. This paper, based on an ongoing research, discusses the conceptual framework of the term 'meta-communicative competence' and its components; it also discusses competency-based approach as a theoretical framework of the development of meta-communicative competence of trainees.

Keywords: *communicative competence; meta-communicative competency; competency-based approach, language teacher training; pre-service English teachers/trainees*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the significance of the English language in the context of Kazakhstan is widely discussed in every field of science, in particular, in the education system. This issue at present time attracts attention not only of our home scholars but also many researchers across the globe in the area of education. The English language has been a subject of paramount importance in Kazakhstan due to its role as the language of successful integration into the world economy and science. That is why the President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, put forward the cultural project "The Trinity of languages: Kazakh, Russian, English". The implementation of this project is a part of the state internal policy and it is considered as a condition for the strengthening of social coherence and evidence of the country international competitiveness. On top of this, the "State Program of Development and Functioning of Languages of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020" highlights the provision of favorable conditions for the development of language diversity. Within the multilingual policy dissemination, Kazakhstan strives to apply multilingual education as a strong tool for achieving a degree of linguistic proficiency in three languages among the population. This expects 95% of Kazakhstan's citizens must speak the state language, Kazakh, whereas 90% of population must speak Russian and 20% English by 2020 [1]. In an attempt to accomplish the objectives of multilingual education emphasized in the State Programs of Education Development and other Educational Standards of the Republic of

Kazakhstan, there have been significant positive changes in the sphere of education. These include the development of trilingual education based on "Roadmap of trilingual education for the period 2015-2020". This program is intended to update the content of secondary education by introducing pilot programs on teaching in three languages as well as integrating language and content at secondary schools. Therefore, the modernization of the education system of Kazakhstan has challenged not only the content of secondary education, but also higher education institutions that provide language (predominantly English) teachers' training. Thus, the content and structure of English Language teacher-training programs are increasingly being discussed across the country both at the ministry and university level as they maintain a key function in the education of highly-qualified specialists in multilingual education. Furthermore, academics have also noted "...the national education system will never be able to meet today's requirements, if we lack modern teachers [2] with specific professional competencies". Therefore, within the framework of above mentioned language policy this paper will focus on foreign language (English) teacher education in the Kazakhstani context.

II. A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

At the contemporary job market a university graduate's competitiveness is defined by its ability to operate new technologies, ability for continuous self-education and self-development and being adaptive to various working conditions [3]. The ultimate goal of Foreign Language Teacher Education in the Kazakhstani practice is to develop fundamental knowledge, skills and competencies that are required for English language trainees in their future professional life.

The main idea of a competency-based approach is that education has to provide not only knowledge, but to develop future specialist's ability and readiness to resolve the problems arising in their social and professional life [4]. Today, the vast majority of education systems place competencies at the heart of curricula [5]. Regarding this, in this paper we will discuss the meta-communicative competence of pre-service language teachers as the competence that will ensure their readiness in different working conditions. At the same time, it will meet the requirements of learning and teaching of a foreign language in the Kazakhstani context.

The analysis of numerous works devoted to the competence-based approach stated its relevance because: (1) the employers' needs and demands are taken into account; (2) the learning outcomes of education is determined through competencies; (3) the content of education is structured on the modular system, taking into account the interdisciplinary approach and the principle of integration; (4) assessment of students' achievements is based on a predetermined quality standards [6,7,8,9].

Thus, the competence-based approach involves a systematic

change in the content and structure of foreign language teacher education. Furthermore, it provides a unified system for goal setting, selection and content design of educational materials and educational technology in teacher training.

Communicative competence and its components

In this section, we will be focusing on communicative competence and its composition components as a ground for the development of a meta-communicative competence.

In the literature the concept 'communicative competence' is discussed together with the concepts such as "linguistic competence", "speech competence" "verbal-communicative competence", "verbal-cognitive competence", and "meta-communicative competence"[10]. Although meta-communicative competence is not widely discussed in international research related to teacher development education, it is a concept, that is significantly discussed in the field of foreign language education by Kazakhstani scholars as well as researchers from former soviet countries[11,12]. Therefore, in our research we are attempting to develop a more comprehensive and complex definition of this term broadening its scope of interpretation and abilities it encompasses.

In order to present a comprehensive definition and components of the term 'meta-communicative competence', below we analyzed modern approaches to the definition of communicative competence.

The components of communicative competence causes controversy in the pedagogical literature. There is no unequivocal opinion about them, or about the approaches for the selection.

The concept 'communicative competence' was initially introduced by Hymes as a reaction to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence, which focused only on knowledge of grammar rules and the ability to form sentences correctly [13,14]. Hymes maintained that knowledge of grammar rules provides the ability to use the language in the process of communication. This term, however, was appropriated and reworked [15,16] within the field of foreign language teaching and new approaches or dimensions (sociolinguistic, socio-cultural, social, etc.) were added to the original idea. However, foreign language education shouldn't be involved simply with training in communication skills, but it should contribute to learners' general education like personal and social development of learners as an individual [16,17,18]. Consequently, he presented a framework for a comprehensive foreign language objectives including aspects of foreign language teaching and learning, such as learners' social ability, the promotion of autonomy or social responsibility.

Van Ek's definitions of the six competences have been summarised by Byram as follows [19]:

1. Linguistic competence: the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances, which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language.
2. Sociolinguistic competence: awareness of how the choice of linguistic forms is determined by such conditions as establishment, relationships, etc.
3. Discourse competence: the ability to use appropriate strategies to construct and interpret texts.
4. Strategic competence: these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, assigning for clarification applied to find

ways of 'getting our meanings across'.

5. Socio-cultural competence: a certain degree of familiarity with the socio-cultural context.
6. Social competence: the desire and willingness to interact with others, the ability to cope with the social situation.

In the book 'Communicative competence: theory and classroom practice', S. Savignon describes four components that make up the content of communicative competence; these are: (1) grammatical competence, i.e. the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic and phonological features of the language and manipulate them at the level of words and sentences; (2) sociolinguistic competence, or social rules for using a language: understanding the roles of the participants in communication, the information they exchange, and the functions of their interaction; (3) the competence of the utterance, which is associated with the ability to perceive or produce not a separate sentence, but super-phrasal unity; (4) the competence of speech strategy, used to compensate for imperfect knowledge of the rules [20].

In identifying the components of communicative competence it also important to stress the pragmatic and linguistic competences to be able to convey a communicative content within a social context[21].

However, none of the above considered models of competencies can be used without taking into account the structure of the education system of Kazakhstan. A mechanical transfer of any of the European models will entail serious structural changes in the educational system as a whole and in the system of secondary education as well. The introduction of international standards for foreign language education, will also require the development of a modified model of international education that does not break the foundations of the national system.

For the Kazakhstani context, intercultural communicative competence is very important. Hence, a profound analysis of the components of intercultural communicative competence is also discussed by one of the Kazakhstani scholars in foreign language education N.D.Kulibaeva in her work 'Innovative model of formation the international standard levels of language skills in the international types of schools'. In her analysis of the Common European Framework she emphasizes the two main competencies for the assessment of proficiency in a foreign language: (1) general competencies which include empirical and academic knowledge; existential competence which demonstrate individual characteristics as well as abilities and personal qualities; (2) communicative language competency with a three-component structure such as linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic [22].

Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, N.D.Kulibaeva developed the component composition of intercultural communicative competence as the following: (1) linguistic, (2) discourse, (3) strategic and (4) sociocultural sub-competence [22].

In contrast to the views and the arguments forwarded in many research related to competencies in foreign language education, S.S.Kunanbayeva considers the 'intercultural-communicative competency' as an independent competency and not a mere component of the 'MFL communicative competency'. She notes that the components of the communicative competency which have been introduced into the aforementioned approaches can be considered as

independent sub-competencies since each of them is of more importance in putting the intercultural-communicative content and functions into practice. S.S.Kunanbayeva defines the structure of the 'intercultural communicative competency as the following sub-competencies [23]:

- the linguoculturological
- the social and socio-culturological
- the conceptual
- the cognitive
- the personality-centred
- the communicative sub-competency.

The above-mentioned sub-competencies are believed to be formed on the cognitive principle.

The described components of intercultural communicative competence is a learning system that forms an intercultural communicative level of proficiency in a foreign language, that would be sufficient to ensure the functioning of a social and professional role of a person in the context of international interaction.

III. METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of this research were: 1) to analyse previously conducted studies on modern approaches in defining the components of communicative competence which have served as a ground for a development of meta-communicative competence; 2) to develop a comprehensive definition of the term 'meta-communicative competence' and define its component composition. Theoretical research method was used to analyse the publications on the research area.

IV. DISCUSSION

An analysis of the literature review on the components of communicative competence and their development has shown that there is no unanimously accepted definition of the term "meta-communicative competence", but at the same time, the concept of "meta-communicative competence" is a unifying competence and includes all types of competencies that determine the pragmatic aspect of any subject field.

After this analysis and for the purpose of our research we have defined meta-communicative competence as a multicomponent phenomenon, which consists of the following components:

- (1) Cognitive component: acquisition of certain systemic knowledge and knowledge of the terminological apparatus of the subject area of a certain sphere;
- (2) Pragmatic component: the ability to perform professionally-oriented speech acts of foreign language to establish a successful professional communication;
- (3) Reflexive component: willingness to monitor both their own speech and students' speech as well as to analysis them;
- (4) Didactic component: possession of certain abilities to transfer the knowledge with adequate linguistic means depending on the learning situation in the educational process.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the above stated assumptions regarding the components of the meta-communicative competence that a foreign language teacher should have, we can formulate the

following definition of the main concept of our research.

Meta-communicative competence of foreign language teacher bears an integral quality of the subject of their professional and pedagogical activity. This characterizes their ability and readiness to use a foreign language for a successful implementation of educational and cognitive activity in the subject area, as well as the ability to effectively organize content-language integrated learning in high schools.

Following this, I will be conducting my experimental research with a group of trainees. The effect of opting for both the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach in the research will give me possibility to find out the development level of trainee's meta of meta-communicative competence.

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