

A COMMUNICATIVE-CULTURAL APPROACH TO DEVELOPING SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN PEDAGOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Boboqulova Shahnoza Baxridinovna

Doctoral Student at Bukhara State University

Abstract

Sociolinguistic competence, the ability to produce and interpret language appropriately in a given social context, is widely recognized as a core component of communicative competence, yet it is often treated as a secondary goal in the preparation of future English language teachers. This article proposes a communicative-cultural approach to developing sociolinguistic competence among pre-service English teachers in pedagogical higher education institutions. It reviews the theoretical foundations of the construct, outlines the principles of the approach, describes a staged instructional model with representative activities and assessment procedures, and discusses implementation considerations in the multilingual context of Uzbekistan. The article argues that sociolinguistic competence should be developed not as a set of isolated politeness formulas but as an integrated capacity grounded in cultural awareness, reflective practice, and authentic interaction.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic competence, communicative-cultural approach, pre-service teacher education, intercultural communication, English language teaching, pragmatics.

Introduction

Future English teachers are expected to be more than proficient users of grammar and vocabulary. They serve as language models, cultural mediators, and designers of learning experiences in which students learn to communicate with real people in real situations. A teacher who produces grammatically accurate but socially inappropriate language, for example by using overly direct requests in formal contexts or by misreading registers, transmits these patterns to learners. Sociolinguistic competence is therefore both a learning outcome for pre-service teachers and a professional resource that they will need to teach their own students.

Despite its importance, sociolinguistic competence is frequently under-addressed in teacher education curricula. Courses tend to concentrate on language systems (phonetics, grammar, lexicology) and on methodology, while the social rules of language use are left to incidental exposure. In contexts where English is learned mainly in the classroom, such exposure is limited. This creates a gap between linguistic proficiency and the ability to use English appropriately across social situations.

This article addresses that gap by proposing a communicative-cultural approach. The approach combines the communicative principle (learning through meaningful, goal-oriented interaction) with the cultural principle (understanding language use as embedded in the values, norms, and identities of speech communities). The article asks: what theoretical basis supports this approach, what instructional principles follow from it, and how can it be organized in practice within pedagogical universities?

The concept originates in Hymes's (1972) argument that knowing a language involves more than knowing its grammatical rules: speakers must also know what is feasible, appropriate, and actually done in a given situation. Canale and Swain (1980) subsequently proposed a model of communicative competence that included grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic components, and discourse competence was added in later elaborations of the model. Bachman (1990) reorganized these components within a model of communicative language ability, placing sociolinguistic knowledge (sensitivity to dialect, register, naturalness, and cultural references) within pragmatic competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and its Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) continue to treat sociolinguistic appropriateness as an essential part of the communicative language competences, covering the use of politeness conventions, register differences, and the markers of social relations. For teacher education, the framework is useful because it provides descriptors that can be adapted to define target levels of sociolinguistic proficiency.

Language use cannot be separated from culture. Kramsch (1993) argued that language learning is inherently cultural, and that learners need to develop a "sphere of interculturality" in which they reflect on both their own and the target culture. Byram (1997) extended this line by proposing a model of intercultural communicative

competence that includes knowledge, attitudes of curiosity and openness, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. For pre-service teachers, these components matter doubly: they need them as users of English and as teachers who will guide learners in intercultural encounters. Together, these perspectives suggest that sociolinguistic competence in future teachers should be understood as a three-part capacity: (a) *knowledge* of sociolinguistic norms and the variation within them; (b) *skills* of selecting and adapting language according to participants, purpose, and setting; and (c) *attitudes and awareness*, including sensitivity to difference and the ability to reflect critically on one's own cultural assumptions.

The proposed approach rests on five principles.

1. Language-in-context. Forms are taught together with the social conditions that make them appropriate. A request, for instance, is practised across situations that vary in social distance, power, and degree of imposition.

2. Authentic interaction. Learners engage with real or realistic communication, using authentic texts, recordings, and interactions with speakers of English.

3. Cultural comparison and reflection. Learners compare English conventions with those of Uzbek, Russian, and other languages familiar to them, making implicit norms explicit and discussing them critically.

4. Variation awareness. Learners recognize that appropriateness is not uniform: it varies by region, social group, medium, and communicative situation, and English is used by speakers from many backgrounds.

5. Dual orientation. Activities develop the trainee as a language user and, simultaneously, as a future teacher who must explain, model, and assess sociolinguistic behavior.

The model comprises four stages that can be integrated into courses such as Practical English, Methodology of Teaching English, and Intercultural Communication, or offered as a dedicated elective.

Stage 1. Awareness-raising: Trainees analyze short authentic samples (service encounters, email exchanges, workplace dialogues, social media interactions) to identify how speakers choose forms in relation to relationship, setting, and purpose. Discussion questions focus on noticing: *Who is speaking to whom? What does the choice of words signal? What would sound inappropriate here?* Corpus tools such as the British National Corpus or the Corpus of Contemporary American English can be used to check frequency and typical contexts of expressions.

Stage 2. Comparative analysis: Trainees compare speech acts and politeness conventions across English and Uzbek (and Russian where relevant): forms of address, greetings and leave-taking, refusals, compliments and responses to compliments, apologies, and expressions of gratitude. The goal is not to label one set of conventions as better but to understand how cultural values shape language choices and where negative transfer may occur, such as translating honorific address forms directly or using indirect refusals that may be misread as agreement.

Stage 3. Guided practice: Practice is organized around role plays, simulations, and tasks that vary systematically along social parameters. For example, the same request ("extend a deadline") is performed with a peer, a lecturer, and a head of department, in speech and in writing. Trainees record their performances, receive peer and teacher feedback, and revise. Virtual exchange with students from other countries, where available, adds authentic interlocutors.

Stage 4. Pedagogical transfer: Trainees design and micro-teach lessons that develop sociolinguistic competence in school or university learners. They select authentic materials, formulate objectives, and prepare feedback strategies. Evaluating existing textbooks for the presence and quality of sociolinguistic content is also included, since textbook dialogues often present simplified or unnaturally formal language.

Assessment should reflect the multidimensional nature of the competence. Three types of evidence are recommended:

- **Performance tasks** (role plays, simulated interactions) rated with analytic rubrics covering appropriateness of register, speech act realization, politeness strategies, and responsiveness to the interlocutor.
- **Discourse completion and interpretation tasks** in which trainees produce or evaluate responses to scenarios, with justification.

- **Reflective portfolios** containing recordings, annotated analyses, and reflections on cross-cultural observations and on their own development.

Rubrics can be aligned with CEFR descriptors for sociolinguistic appropriateness, adapted to the target level of the program (typically B2 to C1 for graduates). Feedback should be formative, explaining why a given form is or is not appropriate rather than merely marking it incorrect.

Several contextual features deserve attention. First, most pre-service teachers learn English in a multilingual setting where Uzbek, Russian, and sometimes other languages are part of daily life, so pragmatic transfer may come from more than one source. Comparative tasks should therefore be designed with this repertoire in mind. Second, exposure to native or fluent English speakers may be limited, which makes carefully selected authentic media, corpora, and online exchange especially valuable. Third, available textbooks and curricula may emphasize linguistic form, so instructors may need to supplement them with their own materials. Fourth, class sizes and time allocations constrain the amount of interactive practice, which suggests using blended formats in which analysis tasks are completed independently and class time is reserved for performance and feedback.

Finally, the approach has implications for teacher educators themselves, who need professional development in pragmatics and intercultural pedagogy in order to deliver it effectively.

Sociolinguistic competence is an essential but often neglected part of pre-service English teachers' preparation. A communicative-cultural approach, which unites authentic interaction with cultural comparison and reflection, offers a coherent way of developing it in pedagogical higher education. The staged model proposed here, moving from awareness to comparison, practice, and pedagogical transfer, provides a framework that can be adapted to different curricula. Future research should test the model empirically through quasi-experimental studies, examining changes in trainees' sociolinguistic performance and in their ability to teach it.

References

1. Bachman, L. F. (1990). Fundamental considerations in language testing. Oxford University Press.
2. Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Multilingual Matters.

3. Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
4. Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.
6. Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Penguin.
7. Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.