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Assessing Students' Strategic Competence in Speaking English

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Globalization processes like developing international relations and mutual dependence among countries are nowadays continually intensifying the need of communicative interaction on the planetary level, as well as increasing demands for the complexity level of such communication. This defines one of the primary tasks of modern English language teaching methodology – teaching students not merely to speak English „fluently", but strategically competently. Students' **strategic competence in speaking** can be interpreted as their ability to maximize the effective usage of all available language means to realize one's personal aim and the overall purpose of communication process with consideration of all its pragmatic factors. From a viewpoint of achieving interlocutors' purposes strategic competence comprises a range of strategies and tactics that include, but are not limited to informative, evaluative, emotional-expressive, persuasive, conventional, metacognitive, compensatory and didactic ones. Quality teaching of communicative strategies to the university students demands valid assessment tools. Hence, **the importance of** accurate evaluation of strategic competence in speaking is paramount and arises from the two main reasons: firstly, the demand for developing multiplex strategically successful communicative skills of future specialists – to prove they are not only equal with the native speakers in the level of operating the language, but also highly competitive communicators in general; secondly, strategy-based instruction has its own specificity related to the manifestation of strategic competence in monologic, dialogic and polylogic types of speech. **The aim** of this article is to suggest appropriate criteria for testing strategic competence in speaking and tools best for monitoring students' performance.

Criteria for assessing strategic competence in speaking English is based on considering the following:
– the content of strategic competence;
– peculiarities of speech forms;
– Curriculum for English Language Development in Universities and Institutes (criteria used in Spoken English Examination by Trinity College, London).

There can be recognized four main constituents which frame the general **content of strategic competence**. Every strategy is an actual representation of a particular component of the multi-faceted strategic ability.

A **cognitive** constituent exhibits how strategies are realized in the thinking processes: evoking one's motives and communicative intentions to speak, prediction of interlocutor's communicative reaction and speech production, prognostication of the whole of communicative process, keeping in mind and tracking one's personal aim throughout interaction. A cognitive constituent demonstrates communicative function of thinking which is activated via a chain of mechanisms:

– orientation and evaluation of one's own verbal and non-verbal behavior, feedback and situation as a system of interlocutors interrelations;
– goal-seeking that is manifested in the concentration on the main communicative task;
– prognostication of interlocutor's reaction, content of their and one's own utterances;
– choice of facts, thoughts and semantic blocks;
– combination of facts, thoughts and ideas;
– construction of the content part of the utterance and concentration on it;
– self-regulation that is responsible for the tactics in utterance production [Пассов 1991].

A **communicative** constituent represents a correlation of strategies with the main types of communicative activities: speaking, listening, writing and reading. The usage of each strategy presumes realization of a particular communicative purpose and is conditional on various factors, such as communicative context of a situation, communicative intentions of a speaker, communicative experience and communicative statuses of interlocutors. All these factors influence the choice of strategies and define ways of their realization.

A **purpose** constituent is responsible for an aim-oriented communication. Without goal-seeking a strategy wouldn't be brought to life and the conversation would be devoid of meaning.

It is necessary to make a statement that a **didactic** (**educational**) element of students' strategic competence signifies the process of learning communicative strategies according to their individual learning styles in the context of their university studies.

Strategic competency in speaking is demonstrated in diverse ways and is dominant by various types of strategies depending on **the form of speech**. Whether it's a monologue, a dialogue or a polylogue – students manifest their strategic ability differently. Thus the peculiarities of these speech forms must be taken into account [Андронік 2009]. A few valuable features of a **monologue** are: topic or idea defining composition; structural completeness; specific language means of linking sentences; logical structure; little dependence on extralinguistic situation; partial or total preparedness. Primary characteristics of a **dialogue** are: high activity of interlocutors; utterance production motivated by a topic,

a problem or collocutor's utterance; tendency for spontaneity; broad usage of clichés and etiquette formulas; possible change of topics. Distinctive peculiarities of a **polylogue** include: high activity of communicators; spontaneity; structural complexity conditioned by participants' „inserted" monologues; broad usage of clichés and etiquette formulas; concentration on one particular topic; complexity of turn-taking process; a speaker not necessarily reacts to the previous speaker's words; logical connection of each speaker's utterances with the general context of a conversation; tendency for unpreparedness; possibility of shorter duration of speakers' utterances due to greater number of conversation participants.

Various scales aiming at assessment of speaking English as a foreign language proved their recognition throughout English-speaking countries and worldwide; they also comprise descriptors and criteria for evaluating speaking competency particularly on strategic level. According to the criteria used in Spoken English Examination by Trinity College in London students' oral language production can be evaluated on strategic level on the basis of the following:

1) descriptor of fulfillment incudes such measures as control of the organization of the content of utterances during communication, communicative goal achievement, aim-oriented conversation;

2) descriptor of readiness signifies the connection and interdependence of utterance production from listening comprehension and therefore on strategic level incorporates understanding main content, confident and appropriate cues in the context of conversation, understanding conclusions and changes in style, support off language fluency, taking initiative;

3) pronunciation descriptor on strategic level describes correlation of stresses and intonation with the context of conversation and their understandability;

4) descriptor of usage includes correspondence of language usage to the context of communicative situation, to the function or functional role of a speaker, and to the communicative intention of a speaker [*Curriculum…* 2001].

Having modern descriptors and assessment criteria analyzed in detail the principal peculiarities of strategic competence measure in speaking can be outlined:

– adequateness of a communicative situation;

– compliance of strategies with communicative purposes;

– compliance of communicative skills with communicative aims on a tactical level;

– adequate regulation of communicative interaction;

– taking into account the previous utterance production of an interlocutor and predicting their next one;

– effective realization of strategies by means of the most correct formulation of the utterance on the tactical level: appropriate grammatical, lexical and stylistic accomplishment.

Based on all above mentioned it is proposed to adopt the author's scheme of assessing students' strategic competence in speaking English presented in the table.

Table 1

Criteria of Strategic Competence Development in Speaking

Criterion	Indicators	
Cognitive	- Ability to interpret oral speech utterances correctly - Ability to understand interlocutor's reaction - Ability to provide quick communicative reaction - Decision-making ability - Ability to construct images of action results - Ability to predict - Ability to program meaning - Ability to make deep critical analysis and synthesis - Ability to evaluate and control one's actions and communicative situation in general	
Communicative	- free usage of broad repertoire of lexico-grammatical structures, linking phrases and clichés (according to different types of monologue, dialogue and polylogue) - adequate pausing, articulatory and intonation framing of speech - compliance with conventional norms of greeting and parting - relative continuity of speech - relative completion of utterances - addressing the audience - ability to clearly express one's own position/idea/etc. - ability to provide logical and persuasive arguments - adequateness of language tone and style of communication - ability to present/discuss information on difficult topics linguistically and semantically smoothly - ability to quickly repair communicative bias or difficulties which are caused by specificity of a particular speech form	
	in monologue	*in dialogue/ polylogue*
	- compliance with the public speaking rules - ability to hold attention of listeners during a sufficient amount of time	- smoothness and exactness in turn-taking - quick and adequate reaction for difficult /unknown /unexpected turns in communicative behaviour of interlocutors
Goal-seeking	- manifesting personal communicative intentions (tactical purposes) - combining different tactics for maximally effective manifestation of strategies - manifesting one's personal global aim (strategic purpose) - realization of common global purpose of communicative process - flexible changing of strategies	
Educational-compensatory	- ability to adequately use non-verbal strategies - ability to explain differently - ability to ask for help - operating big amounts of information for verbalizing communicative strategies - self-control and self-correction	

Diagnosing the level of strategic competence development based on the proposed criteria is estimated on the basis of the total sum of points (a three-point scale rating) for every indicator of the four criteria. Cognitive criterion is represented by 9 indicators, communicative criterion – by 13 indicators (in each form of speech), goal-seeking criterion – by 5 indicators, educational-compensatory criterion – by 5 indicators; the four criteria are represented by 32 indicators. Having students' performed the test activities their performance is graded according to a three-point scale (by each indicator): zero pints – no ability; one point – poor ability; two points – sufficient ability; three points – excellent ability. Therefore, the maximum amount of points scored equals to 96 points. Depending on the results of students' performance a low (58 points or less), intermediate (82 points or less) or high level (83 or more) of strategic competence is determined.

Literature

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Abstract

This article proposes criteria for testing university students' strategic competency in speaking. The roots of the derivation of the four criteria and their indicators is the demands for the future specialists – university students, the essence and distinctive peculiarities of strategic competence, the specificity of speaking as a skill and as an activity, the modern tendencies in evaluation processes. Hence, such criteria with the corresponding indicators for evaluation were established: cognitive, communicative, goal-seeking, educational-compensatory. Studying specific tasks for assessment and developing tools of evaluating strategic competence in writing and interaction activities open new **prospects** for further educational research.

Key words: language education, testing of competences, evaluation processes.