

USE OF COMMUNICATIVE METHODS TO ENHANCE PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Annotation

Graduates of engineering field require an ever-increasing range of skills to maintain relevance with nowadays global market. Communication skills are recognised as vital by academic society and business world. English for specific purposes focuses on the learner's attention on the specific terminology and communication skills required in the international professional field. The article deals with the development of communicative graduates' skills with examples given of different methods of teaching. The use of advantages and disadvantages of communicative approach are reviewed. The aim of this article is to explore the students' attitudes toward the use of various communicative methods in professional English learning / teaching process. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire. The results of the study provide general idea about how to manage teaching and learning activities for the successful implementation of the communicative approach and development of learners' communicative competence.

Key words: professional language teaching, communication skills, CLT, advantages and disadvantages of communicative approach.

Introduction

Communication skills are essential for the students of technical field who aspire to carry out their professional practice in the global arena (M. J. Riemer, 2002). The graduate of the college or university should not only be a great expert in his field, but also has general knowledge and skills, and speak a foreign language fluently at appropriate level.

Professional orientation training includes the assimilation of training material and at the same time the formation of practical language skills. Today, the future specialist shouldn't just read and translate professional or technical texts, but the communication in professional context is taken as a priority: communicating with colleagues, taking part in various discussions, preparing presentations and reports, handling all types of business correspondence. In this age of globalisation, the number of international projects is increasing, cross-cultural communication and collaboration is on the rise; this is particularly so for the now international practice of technical field specialists (M. J. Riemer, 2002). Employers insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. (J. Richards, 2006).

This is reinforced in N. Grunwald's study of competencies required by the engineer of tomorrow, which includes hard skills like good foreign language skills. He goes even further to claim cross-disciplinary language skills are not sufficiently taught (N. Grunwald, 1999). This indicates a lack of a direct fit between learner's skills and those required by industry.

English often serves as a global language between two people from two different cultures. For example, collaboration at Airbus industries between English, French, German and Spanish companies utilised English as the communication medium between workers. One more example comes from the Swedish transport manufacturer Volvo, which has made the language for managers at its new plant in South Korea, with English lessons being taken by some employees during production breaks. Some multinational corporations in Europe use English as the prime form of communication in the office. In this case, multinational firms influence the educational policies for language learning. Therefore, nowadays the communicative approach to language learning is the most popular in the modern world and the international labour market.

Theoretical Background

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a cover term for a number of approaches that developed in the 1970s in critical reaction to audio-lingual teaching methods and their unsatisfactory results. They all criticize the mechanistic nature of audio-lingual pattern drills which fail to prepare learners for a productive use of the target language in the many different communicative situations of every day life. (M. Koosha, 2013). Communicative language teaching rose as a result of many desperate developments in both Europe and the United States (S. Savignon, 2000). First, there was an increased demand for language learning, particularly in Europe. This increased demand put pressure on educators to change their teaching methods from grammar translation to learning through social process. Chomsky had

shown that the structural theories of language prevalent at the time could not explain the creativity and variety evident in real communication (J. Richards, 2001; T. Rodgers, 2001). In addition, British linguists such as Christopher Candlin and Henry Widdowson began to see that a focus on structure was also not helping in language learning. They saw a need for students to develop communicative skill and functional competence in addition to mastering language structures (J. Richards, 2001; T. Rodgers, 2001).

In the United States, the linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes developed the concept of communicative competence. This was a reaction to Chomsky's concept of the linguistic competence of an ideal native speaker (S. Savignon, 2000). Communicative competence redefined what it meant to "know" a language; in addition to speakers having mastery over the structural elements of language, according to communicative competence they must also be able to use those structural elements appropriately in different social situations (S. Savignon, 2000). This is neatly summed up by Hymes's statement, "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." (M. Rosamond, 1994). Hymes did not make a concrete formulation of communicative competence, but subsequent authors have tied the concept to language teaching, notably Michael Canale (M. Rosamond, 1994).

An influential development in the history of communicative language teaching was the work of the Council of Europe in creating new language syllabi. Education was a high priority for the Council of Europe, and they set out to provide syllabi that would meet the needs of European immigrants (J. Richards, 2001; T. Rodgers, 2001). Among the studies used by the council when designing the course was one by the British linguist, D. A. Wilkins, that defined language using "notions" and "functions", rather than more traditional categories of grammar and vocabulary. Notional categories include concepts such as time, location, frequency, and quantity, and functional categories include communicative acts such as offers, complaints, denials, and requests. These syllabi were widely used (J. Richards, 2001; T. Rodgers, 2001).

In the mid of 1990 it was focused on communicative approach to language teaching through real conversations about the real subjects so that communication became the engine of learning. This type of communication would lead to explanation, and that would lead to further communication (L. Meddings, 2004).

The application of communicative language teaching (CLT) to English as a foreign language context has recently been debated extensively. Although the CLT approach attempts to involve learners in more authentic and interactive learning tasks that promote both comprehensible input and learners' language output, teachers still find it difficult and challenging to adopt the approach and maximize the learning.

Other research has also shown that it is not so much easy for the teachers to utilize CLT as an asset to reach the final goal of language teaching in their context with their students. Based on a study that assessed the attitudes of Hong Kong educators toward using CLT in the local context, Chau and Chung (1987) reported that teachers used CLT only sparingly because it required too much preparation time. However, the communicative approach to language learning is still the most popular in professional language teaching / learning process all over the world.

Issues in engineering education

A recent report from Melbourne, Australia, stated that employers now seek graduates with skills beyond the standard paper degree; this includes an excellent level of skills in:

- * Communication;
- * Decision-making;
- * Teamwork

Three sources of weakness that can significantly impact on an engineer's communication skills education were identified as:

- * Students' attitudes to communication.
- * Insufficient course content.
- * Deficient or inappropriate teaching methods (J.D. Roulston and R.W. Black, 1992)

Another significant element included the lack of opportunity for students of technical specialities to be able to practise communication skills, particularly the oral component. (J.D. Roulston and R.W. Black, 1992). Ineffective communication skills only reinforce negative stereotypes of the engineer. Thus, oral communication skills were considered very important in the graduates' new work environments, but this was in the face of the low level of oral communication skills imparted during their studies. (M. J. Riemer, 2002). There is a clear necessity for effective English communication skills for students of technical field in the current globalized environment.

Research Aim is to explore the students' attitude towards the use of various communicative methods in the professional English learning/ teaching process.

Research Object - effectiveness of study programmes in light of the results of the students' attitude questionnaire.

Research focuses on the following aspects:

1. Students' attitudes towards the variety of communicative methods used in professional language teaching / learning process.

2. Advantages and disadvantages of use of communicative methods;

Research methodology. At the end of the semester an attitude questionnaire was administered to 80 first and second year students of technical specialities of Šiauliai State College. The research was conducted with full and part-time students. The analysis was done quantitatively and descriptively.

Methods - literature, internet sources analysis; data collection – questioning survey, consisting of two parts; data analysis – descriptive statistics (percents).

Communication skills development, methods and teaching material

Teaching foreign language for students of technical specialities at Šiauliai State College has a clear professional orientation. Šiauliai State College prepares specialists in various technical areas, such as Car Electronics, Automobile Technical Exploitation, Transport Logistics, Automation, etc. The training content of the study program is different, which helps students to deepen their professional knowledge.

The development of professional language skills is aimed at solving the following issues of learning a foreign language:

1. To develop skills of learning a foreign language (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Successful mastery of conversational speech is determined by the ability to engage in dialogue and exchange all kinds of information on various topics in professional activities. Monologue implies the ability of the student to prepare a report for the conference or a business meeting. Listening shows the student's ability to hear and understand the information transmitted by other people. Reading skills allow students to read specialized technical literature, such as the magazine 'Top Gear', technical documents and instructions, UK Traffic Code ' ', Manual Honda '. Writing skills help students make annotations, prepare reports, translations of technical texts in writing, make business letters such as orders, invitations, brochures, contracts / barter agreements, and so on.

2. To master certain linguistic phenomena (phonetics, grammar, word formation, vocabulary). Such knowledge is gained during the entire training period, as each proposed topic or task contains a particular linguistic phenomenon and is due to its assimilation.

3. To establish socio-cultural knowledge that reveals the traditions and culture of the other native speakers. In this case, the importance of comparison of differences in two cultures becomes essential. The students work with authentic texts in the field of modern technologies, such as: car driving and traffic rules in the UK. The educational material is focused on:

3.1. *Phonetics*. You should keep in mind, if the text is written in British or American English, then the pronunciation differences should be stressed respectively.

3.2. *Vocabulary*. When translating the words, terms in the native language, students should understand the realities of other countries. And if the students know well such realities as the BBC, Big Ben, Tower, Pub then the realities in the field of technology may be completely new and unknown for them. For example: Hard shoulder (shoulder, exit the main road), state-of-the-art equipment / devices (new, innovative, the latest equipment). Very often, the teacher chooses a definition (description of event / reality) and then translates the term into their native language. Students often encounter difficulties of translation of terms and phrases such as: shoe brake (foot brake), contact breaker (switch contact), valve train (number of pistons), major road (the main road), etc.

3.3. *Grammar*. Students have particular difficulties with words derivatives. For example, to convert the verb to the noun: Conceive - Concept (car); Assemble - assembly; Validate - validation / validity, etc.

4. To master the technical terms. Engineering students have to learn a great number of terms and concepts relevant to their future profession, but it's hard to do because only one semester is given for learning professional English language. (6 credits in a modular training system). In such a situation it is important that students are able to work with technical dictionaries, glossaries. Also, the terms are well remembered when using them in speaking and writing (exercises, assignments).

The training material is selected according to the relevance of the proposed topics for the students. For example, for the students of technical exploitation of automobiles the following topics are selected:

- The construction and design of vehicles;

- The technical specifications of vehicles;
- Equipment, tools. Safety rules at the workplace.
- Security and safety systems in the car;
- Innovations in the automotive industry.

Topics must meet certain requirements:

1. The text corresponds to the professional category. Text assumes reading, analysis and interpretation. Also it should constitute a mini glossary of technical terms, for example: students of Logistics become familiar with the terminology: loads and their types, labelling and transportation, etc. Various tasks / assignments are done orally and in writing.

2. The text is relevant, modern, authentic and interesting to students. The texts are available from the British and American periodical publications, books, magazines, the Internet. Before text is proposed to students, it should be adapted.

3. The text motivates students to more in-depth study of the material. Learning motivation increases if analyzed texts match the speciality and expectations of the students.

4. The proposed information is useful and can be used by students while studying other subjects in their speciality, because interdisciplinary connections play an important role in-depth study of the subject. For example the topic Materials and their properties (characteristics) is studied in the discipline of the Doctrine of the Materials; Smart Cars / Future Cars is offered in the studied discipline Intelligent Machines; Electronic devices / Active and Passive Safety restrains is taught in the discipline of the Security / Safety System.

While working with the text, different teaching methods are used: text analysis, monologue, questions, text translation, equivalents matching, synonyms and antonyms, (True / False) statements. Analysis of the proposed texts in the textbooks helps students to read technical documentation, instructions for equipment use, technical books and manuals. Memorizing technical terms succeeds, if the terms are often repeated in the text. For example the frequency of use of these terms is very high: engine, internal combustion, car parts / units, tools, equipment, interior / exterior, etc. In order to strengthen the gained knowledge and test it, the following methods are applied: word dictation, test, examination, monologue, dialogue, oral and written translation, presentation / report (for example: My Dream Car / Concept Car).

Modern information technology helps students learn not only effectively, but also to deepen the knowledge necessary for their future career. Computer Science pursue such didactic problems as increasing the motivation of foreign language use, expanding the active and passive vocabulary, activating logical thinking, using visual material. So when studying the topic 'Car Safety Systems', students are encouraged to use the materials from site www.howstuffworks.com Internet and prepare a PowerPoint presentation. At the proposed site, students can find suitable material. Tables and video materials help students to deepen their professional knowledge and practical skills. Students can choose any topic from the given list, for example: ESP - electronic stability system, Airbags, Seat belts, Xenon headlights, Rigid Roof, ABS, etc. and prepare the PowerPoint presentations. Presentation and discussion lasts for 7-10 minutes.

The site offers a variety of information, motivating students to learn more about their future profession. Information is divided into the following sections:

Table 1

Material proposed on the site www.howstuffworks.com

Section		Information / material
1.	Auto Basics	Various articles on automobiles. (introduction to technical terms). Interesting facts about cars are revealed, as for example: how washing car stations work, the origin / history of the given car names / titles, etc.
2.	Tech&Transport	Articles: Smart technologies used in your home and automobile
3.	Auto Parts&Systems	Articles: The main parts and the principles of their operation Cooperation and collaboration of drivers and car mechanics.
4.	Auto Racing	Articles: Racing, the style of driving, safety.
5.	Buying&Selling	Articles: Purchasing and selling the cars, warrantee. American database on all the registered automobiles, crashes made, identification codes.
6.	Car Models	Articles: The most popular and modern cars on the international Market.
7.	Driving&Safety	Articles: Safety on the road, experts' advice. Online tests.
8.	Fuel Efficiency	Articles: Fuels, pricing. Minimizing the negative effect of fuels on environment.
9.	Motorcycles	Articles: Motorcycle construction, modifications. .
10.	Trucks	Articles: Types and specifications of trucks / lorries.
11.	Under the Hood	Articles: All automobile systems and their repair / overhaul.

Such technical information can not always be found in the library, so the Internet is undeniably important and useful tool in professional language learning and teaching process.

Students are trained to prepare subject specific presentations and deliver them successfully paying attention to the content (specific vocabulary, technical terms), visual aids,

language accuracy (grammatical structures, sequence of tenses, pronunciation) and body language (unnecessary mimes or gestures), interaction with listeners (keeping an eye contact, giving feedback). (S.Toropovienė, 2011: 40). Students have a real life challenge; they are interested in the subject because it is related to their future profession and are motivated to invest time and great efforts into the quality of their English assignment. As the students plan, prepare, practise, deliver and finally reflect upon a presentation, they are engaged in a very active learning process which can promote critical and analytical thinking and the selection, evaluation and use of appropriate arguments (Burns, Sinfield 2004: 123). The lectures of foreign language motivate students to deepen their professional knowledge and communicate in it during the entire learning course.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of using communicative methods in language learning / teaching process

Advantages of use of communicative methods are the following:

1. The study process is student-oriented. Student and teacher cooperate actively. The study process is interactive.
2. Students' cognitive skills are developed and it enable students think in a logical way and thus express their own opinion to others.
3. The interest and students' motivation increases.
4. Grammatical structures and phrases are used in different content.
5. Real situations and students' experience are analyzed.

Disadvantages of use of communicative methods are the following:

1. Less attention is paid to grammar and pronunciation mistakes. CLT does not focus on error correction. Attention is paid mostly on getting and comprehending information whether correct use of language.
2. The methods are not suitable for the learners-beginners or for short-term courses, because repetition of communicative models and development of constant language skills are necessary.
3. Control and feedback should be provided efficiently and in time.
4. Student may not see the value in learning English through group work, games, and activities (A. R. Pramodhawardhani, 2011).

Results and analysis

At the end of the spring semester the study was administered to 90 students of technical specialities (Transport Logistics Technologies, The Technical Exploitation of Automobiles, Motor Transport Electronics, Automatics, Electrical Energetics) in order to improve the educational process, and find out their attitude toward the communicative methods applied in professional English learning / teaching process. The research was conducted with full and part-time students. The analysis was done quantitatively and descriptively. The questionnaire revealed how students evaluated the application of such communicative methods as a monologue, dialogue, creative tasks, PowerPoint presentation, analysis and translation of technical texts. Questionnaire findings are shown in a table below:

Table 2

Students' attitude toward communicative methods use

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1.	Use of communicative methods was motivating	95%	5%
2.	Monologue helped me develop the essential topic	88%	12%
3.	Monologue helped me memorize technical terms better	90%	10%
4.	Dialogue was effective method of communication and helped me improve my verbal skills	98%	2%
5.	It was difficult to control the accuracy of speech while talking	70%	30%
6.	Internet was a useful tool for English improvement (creative tasks and presentations)	100%	-
7.	Internet made it easy to integrate many ideas from different resources while preparing for creative tasks and presentations.	86%	14%
8.	The use of Powerpoint was interesting, useful for my future	98%	2%
9.	I had enough skills working with PowerPoint software	60%	40%
10.	It was easy translate technical texts from English to Lithuanian	95%	5%
11.	It was easy translate technical texts from Lithuanian to English	12%	88%
12.	I was able to use online dictionary for technical texts translation	100%	-
13.	Memorization of technical words and word combinations was useful for the development of Professional language competence.	85%	15%

The results show that the majority of students felt that 'Monologue on the selected technical topics helped them to develop the essential topic and better memorise the technical terms'.

Since the training is aimed to communication and cooperation, next question was related to the improvement of dialogue speech. 98% of respondents agreed that dialogue was an effective method of communication. Context-specific role-play can focus the student's attention on the different types of communication required with various groups in potential future work situations. By engaging the students directly in active learning, they learn *by doing*. However, almost two thirds of respondents emphasized that it was difficult to control the accuracy of speech (grammatical structures, verbal clichés) while communicating in a foreign language.

Modern technology helps and facilitates learning a foreign language. Each student uses a computer. All respondents indicated that they enjoyed searching for more information in a foreign language to perform creative tasks and presentations. Students agree that this method is useful for their future profession and for the development of their communicative and social skills, because nowadays these skills are seen as essential ones. Unfortunately, almost half of the students (40%) surveyed remarked that they did not have enough skills to work with the PowerPoint program. Students noted that they would like to have even a separate course, how to work with presentations. The majority (95%) of respondents admitted that they found it easier to translate the technical text from foreign language to native one than vice versa. Therefore, we can conclude that the majority of the students cope with text translation quite successfully.

It is obvious, that oral communication and presentation skills are considered one of the best *career enhancers* and to be the *single biggest factor in determining a student's career success or failure* (J. A., Polack-Wahl, 2000).

Their relevance was emphasised recently with the statement that:

Skills such as problem solving, communications, interpersonal skills and critical and independent thinking should be fostered in engineering education, not just because they are qualities that employers look for but because they should be part of any tertiary education (S. Beder, 2000).

Since students need to know a lot of technical terms, they are offered a variety of tasks to consolidate the material. The effectiveness of suggested tasks for knowledge consolidation is analyzed in a table below:

Table 3

Students' attitude on use of different tasks for knowledge consolidation

Tasks		The most useful	The most motivating	The most difficult
1.	Use of synonyms	√		
2.	Use of Antonyms	√		
3.	Word Search		√	
4.	Matching definitions	√		
5.	Filling the gaps			√
6.	Games		√	
7.	Word formation			√
8.	Creating sentences with given words or word combinations	√		√
9.	Puzzles		√	
10.	Multiple word choice	√		
11.	Mind-mapping		√	
12.	Term Translation	√		
13.	Tests / Colloquy			√

The most useful exercises had been recognized as following: synonyms and antonyms, matching the definitions, creating sentences, multiple word choice and terms translation (87%). The most interesting and motivating exercises had been recognized as following: games / crossword / word search and mind-mapping (94%), causing difficulties: filling the gaps, word formation, creating sentences in professional content, multiple word choice (75%). Summarizing the results of the survey, it can be clearly stated that students understand and recognize the importance of the use of communicative methods in professional foreign language learning / teaching process. The students' interest and motivation to learn increases if the acquired knowledge and skills raise their chances of success in their future careers.

Conclusions

This study was administered to find out students' attitude toward the use of communicative methods in Professional English language learning / teaching process. It was found that students of our college were satisfied with variety of used communicative methods. Almost all of the respondents were highly motivated because teaching of foreign language has

a clear professional orientation and raises their chances for better career promotion. The use of communicative methods in teaching professional foreign language for SSC students is appropriate and relevant in terms of competitiveness of today's labour market.

On the basis of the results of students' survey, it can be assumed that some methods need a specific approach and study, especially those that cause the greatest difficulties, such as: word formation, multiple word choice, use of grammatical structures and speech clichés in dialogue and written speech. To fill the gap, more practical tasks or self-study assignments should be included into the study programme.

The use of PowerPoint presentation supports learner-centred approach and makes each student an active part of the studying process. However, the results of the questionnaire show that some students are lack of theoretical knowledge and skills on how to make a good presentation. The findings suggest that some training or theoretical lectures on the technical aspects of Power point use should be included in the Professional English language learning / teaching course or the description of self-study assessment.

The success of the learning outcomes of professional foreign language depends on the students' motivation, interest, relevance of the proposed educational material and teacher's competence in using communicative methods. Teaching professional English to students of technical field is a delicate and demanding matter in terms of content, methods and techniques, and deciding which are appropriate for this particular area of engineering and English. That is the aim in such interdisciplinary course to develop and master relevant communication and professional skills, using English as a means and a kind of mediator in shaping future engineers.

To achieve this goal, ESP teachers have to plan the course they teach and provide the materials for it. The role of ESP teachers thus involves choosing appropriate materials from different, valid sources, adapting them if necessary, and even writing new materials if nothing suitable exists.

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