

IDEA SHARING:
COMMUNICATION MOBILITY AND
THE ENVIRONMENT FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Language use in the professional sphere gives rise to great complexity of communication as it adds contextual dimensions of both a linguistic and non-linguistic character due to the specific purposes and demands of this environment. The explosion of information for professional needs in foreign languages and expanding international professional communication, cooperation and mobility point to the need to revise the methods of teaching foreign languages to university students in order to increase the competitiveness and mobility of future graduates. Now the quality of professional foreign language training is defined by the ability of specialists to work effectively, to adapt to the rapidly changing and uncertain conditions of the modern world, by the possession of a variety of verbal and non-verbal skills, as well as the ability to access knowledge from different domains to solve problems arising in the course of professional communication.

Problem based learning (PBL) approaches seemed the logical choice for organizing foreign language teaching practices for a number of reasons. First, though the distinction between PBL and other diverse forms of active learning seems rather fuzzy, there are

still essential components forming the backbone of all PBL based teaching strategies (Finkle & Torp, 1995), which reflect current educational goals. These include:

- developing both problem solving strategies and disciplinary knowledge bases and skills;
- placing students in the active role of problem-solver;
- confronting students with 'ill-structured problems' (Walker & Leary, 2009, p.13) that mirrors real-world problems;
- maintaining the cross-disciplinary character of the problems representative of the professional practice.

Second, PBL strategies in different forms are well established both in higher education situations and schools (Savery, 2006) as well as in business (Dutch et al, 2001), so we can find a range of strategies based on vast classroom experience. Finally, there are some findings that favor PBL with reference to learning outcomes in a range of disciplines, such as medicine (Albanese & Mitchell, 1993; Venon & Blake, 1993), engineering (Davis, 1999) and others. This holds true especially when assessment is at the application level and when the strategy uses the full closed-loop approach (Walker & Leary, 2009).

PBL for Language Learning:

Learning a language is a different area for the application of PBL for the apparent reason that, besides mastering disciplinary knowledge about a given language, students also learn facts about a non-linguistic subject. More often than not languages are learned as a tool to enable the user to engage in a variety of substantive matters rather than simply as subject for its own sake. Thus, by nature, a foreign language easily lends itself as a cross-disciplinary companion to another field of study. This fact has a number of implications for teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes:

- It raises the issue of the aim and structure of communicative competence to be developed in a domain-specific area;

- It also presents an entirely different view on what may constitute a problem in PBL;
- It defines the choice of the PBL teaching strategies, the major types being case-study, role-play and simulation.

To define the construct of communicative competence in the manner most appropriate for our purposes of exploring the process of teaching a foreign language, we followed a number of recent models of communicative competence. Each of the following models highlights a particular aspect or aspects of the concept. The model of communicative language ability (CLA) suggested by Bachman (1990) and then Bachman & Palmer (2010) emphasizes the centrality of strategic competence, which is defined as a set of metacognitive strategies or 'higher order processes' that explain the way 'effective schemata interact with topical knowledge' (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 45). Celce-Murcia (2007) analyses the role of discourse and context in language teaching and focuses on dynamic aspects of interaction.

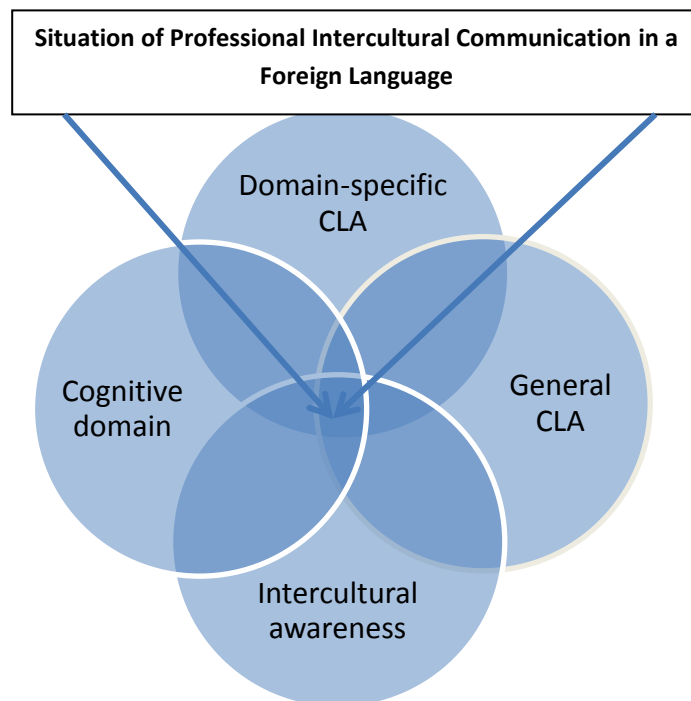
Taking into account the issues raised with reference to teaching a foreign language for professional purposes, we adopted the three-fold essence of the definition of competence by Ezeiza (2009a) which revolves around the criteria of 'transferability', 'capacity' and 'integration.' The aim of developing communicative language competence, especially in domain-specific areas, 'should be to facilitate university students' progressive incorporation into the discourse community in which their academic and/or professional career will unfold' (Ezeiza, 2009a,135).

What Constitutes a Problem in Professional Communication in a FL?

According to Makhmutov (1972), a problematic situation is the mental state of intellectual difficulty that arises when a person cannot explain new facts with existing knowledge or is unable to use familiar methods to perform new actions. In our attempt to propose a model of a problematic communicative situation for professional application,

we apply this definition to the understanding of communication as “an interactive social activity” (Harris, 1987, p.204) and a communicative situation as the specific time, place, activity and people involved in a dialogue, which makes it not only unique as Harris (1987) states, but also dynamic (Celce-Murcia, 2007). The authors of the paper suggest that the graphic representation of the model of a situation in professional communication conducted in a foreign language may be as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: A model of the situation of professional intercultural communication in a foreign language.



As the model presents a highly complex interlocking construct, we may thus presume that a problem that arises in any element of the model renders the whole situation problematic. We think that the complexity of the construct illustrated in Figure 1 may explain why, as Rickheit et al.(2008) stated, problems in communication require an especially high level of communicative competence in order to

analyze and resolve the problem. We have attempted to single out a feature containing the essence of the problem-solving competence in professional communicative situations conducted in foreign languages.

Communication Mobility

According to recent research, the nature of communicative language ability (CLA) involves not only knowledge or competence in the language concerned, but also the capacity to implement this competence (Widdowson, 1983). Bachman (1990) suggests three components of CLA: language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms involved in the actual execution of language. Within this framework, however, the specific nature and demands of professional communication point to the need for some additional quality on which the success of a 'here and now' professional communicative situation depends. It has been expressed in terms of adaptability and flexibility (Raina & Pande, 2012) or some ability 'to cope with ambiguity, time pressure, and stress' in real life situations (Kaminskiene & Januliene, 2006).

We suggest the term **communication mobility** to define *the ability to utilize linguistic and non-linguistic communicative skills and cross-cultural knowledge in unpredictable situations of everyday professional communication*. Communication mobility may also be regarded as a special characteristic of a person, representing his/her communicative ability to quickly react in a non-standard situation of professional communication. The distinctive feature and the great advantage of this competence is the integration of different knowledge domains and communicative, professional and cognitive skills. It reveals itself in a natural human need for flexibility, adaptability and constant change, whether planned or unexpected.

The term mobility is used in different spheres of science. Different aspects of mobility have been studied since the late 1940's by several generations of Russian and foreign scientists from the viewpoint of psychology (Brushlinskiy, 1983; Vasilenko, 1989; Nemov,

2003), educational philosophy (Novikov, 2005), and pedagogy (Amosova,1999; Vershinina,1987; Stefanovskaya,1998; Galskova, 2003). Novolodskaya (2005) has been the first author to study “mobility” as a personal quality. In her opinion, the occupational environment is a constantly changing context that demands dynamic, adaptable and flexible behaviour and the ability to engage in “unexpected self-transformation” (Novolodskaya, 2005, p.22).

In communication mobility it is important to emphasize the same idea of adaptation, flexibility, and prompt response to changing conditions in a communicative situation. However, communication mobility has not been investigated yet. To date, there is still no data about its nature, component structure, or developed didactic formulas and strategies to develop it in language learners (Ezeiza, 2009b) though there is some research in progress in this area.

Implementation in Language Teaching

One of the primary objectives of the present work is to introduce effective means of providing students with strategies and tactics that promote and develop communicatively mobile behavior. In terms of training, we suggest modeling potentially problematic professional situations of intercultural communication which create the necessary environment for the development of communication mobility. Modeling of the environment is carried out within the context of communication tasks that is designed within the framework of the problem-based professional situations of intercultural communication. These situations are constructed within the overlapping area of the four parameters in the model. The dominant role among the aspects of this situation belongs to its problematic character, which sets the conditions for the actualization of communication mobility. In the most advanced form the problem is both ill-formed and has time constraints.

The design of the optimal organizational framework for developing communication mobility has been grounded on the following premises: creating a problem-based activity emulating non-

standard situations of intercultural professional communication; cross-disciplinary approaches; applying time constraints for a task completion; learning outcomes, formulated in this paper as strategies and tactics, to progressively acquiring the desired quality. See Appendix 1 for the detailed description of the employed strategies and tactics. Following the increasing academic complexity and relevance of the strategies and tactics, the suggested tasks are: cognitive-search tasks, variability tasks, and search-and-react tasks. To some extent we followed Barret's (2005) curriculum matrix. The task types and the sequential integration of the strategies and tactics are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Task types according to the strategies engaged in their fulfilment

Learning outcomes:	Task type		
	Students will be able to employ the following strategies and tactics	cognitive-search tasks	variability tasks
Strategies 1-2		Strategies 1-4	Strategies 1-7
Revisiting the problem to determine if any improvements of the reasoning process and reaction quality could be made at any stages of task completion, as well as the information source and their knowledge.			

Here is an example of a ***cognitive - search task***, which can be expressed by the didactic formula: Situation + Task + Sources of information.

Situation: You work in a Russian company which is going to carry out a joint Russian-American project. A group of your company's experts are flying to the United States to conduct negotiations. You are a member of this group, specializing in the USA. You have been made responsible for giving instructions to your colleagues (the other

members of the delegation) about the important features of American business culture.

Task: Prepare a short instruction focusing on: (a) Americans' attitude to time; (b) recommended manners and behavior during the talks; (c) business cards.

Sources of information are supplied to the students in the form of texts containing the information needed for the task completion. In this particular task relevant texts were chosen from Dean and Peterson (2008) and Moran et al. (2007).

The didactic formula of **variability task** is as follows:
Situation + Options for solutions + Advice.

Situation: After the first business meeting with your British partners you would like to give them a few gifts/some gift.

Options: For this purpose you'll give the partners:

- a) a small business-related present (with a logo of your company)
- b) several business-related gifts
- c) a bunch of roses.

Advice: After the first business meeting it might be nice to give each British partner a small gift related to the business at hand: a sample product, an umbrella or pen bearing your company logo.

The didactic formula for **search-and-play problem-based professional communication tasks** is expressed as follows:
Situation + Task + Implementation Conditions.

Situation: The local authorities of Suzdal region (Russia) organized a tender which takes place in Moscow. The goal of this tender is to choose the best conception for the region's development. There is regional funding of the project which was announced earlier. The main condition for the participants is to offer a project according to the following criteria: environmental sustainability; the possibility of

local residents' employment; range of job options; cultural enhancement.

There are three possible competitors: Japanese, German and Russian representatives.

Task: The students should follow their individual instructions (written on cards) and act out the situation (tender).

Implementation conditions: participants with assigned roles to represent different countries and companies; the last minute changes of the conditions (e.g. a smaller project budget; latest instructions from the company headquarters changing the agenda); no right or wrong solution to be given as advice; monitors to observe the process.

The organizational layout of the *cognitive-search and variability tasks* roughly corresponds to that of case study, and *search-and-react tasks* are organized as a role-play. What distinguishes them is, firstly, focusing on developing a particular ability (communicative mobility) by gradually and intentionally moving from the zone of comfort towards the zone of unpredictability and uncertainty. Secondly, the self-evaluation stage involves not only the content and reasoning/solution analysis but also a closer look at the pace and quality of one's reaction to unexpected stimuli under time limit.

The logical continuation of the strand of task types might be a simulation as an international IT based project for students from different countries. It may increase the problematic level of communicative situations by taking the participants from the safety net of giving a good performance or imitation during a role-play, when their emotions, personalities and ethical motives are supplied to trying to behave professionally in a situation where they keep their own personality.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to suggest a component of communicative competence that we find vital for facilitating success in intercultural communication in the workplace. One of the challenges is to optimize the process of developing this particular

component by joining domain-specific knowledge and language learning to meet the challenges of increasingly demanding professional environment. In other words, it is relevant to students' future careers to place the emphasis on learning how to effectively perform professional tasks which require not only foreign languages and domain-specific knowledge and skills but also 'learning at different (cognitive, functional, social, etc.) levels' (Ezeiza, 2009a, p.135). In this paper we have shared some methodological approaches which might be suited to meet the current demands. We are well aware that the issue is a complex one and requires more research and effort at all stages of design, implementation and assessment.

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Appendix 1
Strategies and Tactics for Communication Mobility

Strategies		Tactics
1. Diagnostic	Identification and assessment of the communicative situation	1.1. assessment of the communicative situation (problematic / non-problematic); 1.2. identification of the problematic component (related to the participants, location, time, changes in circumstances etc.); 1.3. estimation of the problem complexity; 1.4. analysis of the nature of the problem (e.g. professional, cross-cultural, etc.) 1.5. prediction of the development of the problematic component; 1.6. observing time constraints.
2. Schema search	Reactivation of communication experience (professional, interpersonal, intercultural) in a new environment	2.1. comparing new conditions of communication with the ones experienced earlier; 2.2. turning to knowledge and means of previously successful communicative problems solutions; 2.3. identifying the degree of discrepancy between the present communication conditions and the ones experienced earlier; 2.4. discarding stereotypes and habitual ways of communicative behavior; 2.5. overcoming the state of uncertainty/frustration caused by the inability to solve communication problems by familiar methods; 2.6. accepting responsibility for applying new means of communicative problems solutions; 2.7. observing time constraints.

Strategies		Tactics
3. Observation strategy	Gaining problem solving experience from observing instances of problem solving in communicative situations.	3.1. identification of the problematic component (related to the participants, location, time, changes in circumstances etc.); 3.2. formulating possible options to overcome communication difficulties; 3.3. observing the process of solving communication problems; 3.4. analysis of the observed process of the problem solution; 3.5. evaluating one's own options against the observed means of the problem solution; 3.6. identifying the best option; 3.7. designing a personal algorithm for solving problems of the observed type; 3.6. observing time constraints.
4. Individual active strategy	Search for a solution to the problem by obtaining information from the communication partner	4.1. identifying the communication difficulties caused by the lack of knowledge; 4.2. looking for the solution of the communication problem by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.2.1 tapping into the experience of other people; 4.2.2 seeking assistance in finding sources of missing information; 4.3. designing a personal algorithm for solving the problem; 4.4. observing time constraints.

Strategies		Tactics
5. Interactive strategy	Finding a solution to the problem by working with a partner/partners of communication	5.1. formulating possible options of overcoming communication difficulties; 5.2. collaborative search for the solution to the communication problem: 5.2.1. in the external environment; 5.2.2. in the partners' experience; 5.2.3. in the experience of other people; 5.2.4. in various sources of information; 5.3 collaborative designing of the algorithm for solving the problem; 5.6. observing time constraints.
6. Implementation strategy	The implementation of the solution	6.1. application of the algorithm; 6.2. monitoring and self-monitoring of the communication process with the aim of overcoming the communication difficulties; 6.3. rejecting the ineffective algorithm; 6.3. in case of ineffective communication, returning to one of the above mentioned strategies 6.4. observing time constraints.
7. Analytical strategy	Analysis of the effectiveness of the applied solution algorithm/s.	7.1. evaluation of the effectiveness of the decision; 7.2. comparative analysis of several problem solving options with the goal of finding the optimal one.