

## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS BY OVERCOMING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

### *DESENVOLVENDO COMPETÊNCIA COMUNICATIVA EM UNIVERSITÁRIOS TÉCNICOS SUPERANDO A BARREIRA LINGUÍSTICA*

### *DESARROLLO DE LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS TÉCNICOS SUPERANDO LA BARRERA DEL IDIOMA*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article deals with the development of communicative competence in technical university students by overcoming the language barrier when studying a foreign language. The author examines the notion of "language barrier" and analyse the main problems associated with the term. Diagnostics should be aimed at assessing not only linguistic material used in teaching and lesson structure but also the psychological component of the interaction within the system "teacher – student – group". The language barrier during learning and using a foreign language as a communication means is the main obstacle to efficient communication. The author analyses the consequences that students face when the language barrier emerges, including emotional breakdowns and insecurity, reduced academic performance, hindered motivation for language learning, development of the incorrect interpretation of the interlocutor's behaviour, etc. It is noted that the lack of communicative practice in the English language is one of the main causes of the language barrier.

**KEYWORDS:** Language competence. Language barrier. Foreign language. Scientific and practical student conference. Professional foreign-language communication.

**RESUMO:** *O artigo trata do desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa em estudantes universitários técnicos superando a barreira linguística ao estudar uma língua estrangeira. O autor examina a noção de "barreira linguística" e analisa os principais problemas associados ao termo. O diagnóstico deve ter como objetivo avaliar não apenas o material linguístico utilizado no ensino e a estrutura da aula, mas também o componente psicológico da interação dentro do sistema "professor – aluno – grupo". A barreira do idioma durante o aprendizado e o uso de uma língua estrangeira como meio de comunicação é o principal obstáculo para uma comunicação eficiente. O autor analisa as consequências que os alunos enfrentam quando a barreira linguística emerge, incluindo colapsos emocionais e insegurança, desempenho acadêmico reduzido, motivação prejudicada para o aprendizado da língua, desenvolvimento da interpretação incorreta do comportamento do interlocutor, etc. Nota-se que a falta de prática na língua inglesa é uma das principais causas da barreira linguística.*

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Competência linguística. Barreira de língua. Língua estrangeira. Encontro Científico e Prático de Estudantes. Comunicação profissional em língua estrangeira.*

**RESUMEN:** *El artículo trata sobre el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa en estudiantes universitarios técnicos a partir de la superación de la barrera idiomática al estudiar una lengua extranjera. El autor examina la noción de "barrera del idioma" y analiza los principales problemas asociados con el término. Los diagnósticos deben tener como objetivo evaluar no solo el material lingüístico utilizado en la enseñanza y la estructura de la lección, sino también el componente psicológico de la interacción dentro del sistema "profesor-estudiante-grupo". La barrera del idioma durante el aprendizaje y el uso de una lengua extranjera como medio de comunicación es el principal obstáculo para una comunicación eficiente. El autor analiza las consecuencias a las que se enfrentan los estudiantes cuando surge la barrera del idioma, entre las que se encuentran las crisis emocionales y la inseguridad, el rendimiento académico reducido, la motivación entorpecida por el aprendizaje del idioma, el desarrollo de la interpretación incorrecta de la conducta del interlocutor, etc. Se observa que la falta de comunicación la práctica del idioma inglés es una de las principales causas de la barrera del idioma.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Competencia lingüística. Barrera del idioma. Idioma extranjero. Congreso científico y práctico de estudiantes. Comunicación profesional en lengua extranjera.*

## Introduction

One of the key areas of modernization of Russian higher education at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is associated with the inclusion of Russian universities in the process of internationalization of education. An aspect of this process is the internationalization and globalization of higher education which involves the active development of academic mobility of students associated with the development of export and import of higher education (POLYAKOVA, 2015). An indisputable incentive in the formation and development of the communicative competence of modern society is the study of foreign languages as the key to efficient cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Language is an essential paradigm for cross-cultural dialogue. Foreign languages make great contribution into strengthening and revitalization of global partnership for sustainable development.

The study in the field of the development of communicative competence in technical university students through overcoming the language barrier when studying a foreign language is currently relevant. This relevance is determined by the need to resolve the contradiction between the requirements of the modern society for the training of future specialists who can perform communicative actions in the situations of professional foreign-language

communication and the existing system of foreign language training at universities where the language barrier factor would be considered in foreign language teaching. The purpose of this study is to determine the key causes of the language barrier in students and seek ways to minimize them.

## **Literature review**

The elimination of the language barrier is essential due to the recent emergence of new types of verbal communication: "distant" dialogues and polylogues in the global language; enhanced interaction between oral and written forms of speech in the native and foreign languages; accelerating the development of the micro-language of science and technology. These consequences are characteristic features of the restructuring within the communicative mechanism of professional scientific and technical activity (MAKAEV, 2011).

Therefore, today, it is becoming increasingly important to study such phenomena as the language barrier and the mechanisms that contribute to its occurrence at the earliest stages of a student's education. Diagnostics should be aimed at assessing not only linguistic material used in teaching and the lesson structure but also the psychological component of the interaction within the system "teacher – student – group". Only when the above factors are considered, it is possible to make a comprehensive assessment and timely correct the language barrier (FIRSOVA, 2013).

Linguist O.G. Vetrova considers the language barrier "misunderstanding due to miscoding or misinterpretation of transmitted messages" (VETROVA, 2005). In their research, Umanskaya and Kiryushina (2018) identify four types of language barrier problems:

1. The first problem is the difficulty in understanding speech in a foreign language. This problem is associated with understanding the meaning of words, phrases, subtext and hints in a foreign language. The reason for the lack of understanding lies in the underdevelopment of listening skills and in understanding the meanings of only individual words and phrases in speech.

2. The second problem is associated with a person's ability to speak a foreign language. Here, one should not only know a foreign language but also formulate and express their thoughts clearly and understandably.

3. The third problem is associated with the difference in the native culture and traditions of the country whose language is studied. What is unacceptable in one tradition and culture can be perfectly normal in another. The difference in traditions can cause stupor and resentment.

4. The fourth problem is that if one must pronounce phrases in a foreign language, there is a fear of making mistakes and losing the respect of the group (UMANSKAYA; KIRYUSHINA, 2018).

We should note that the issue of the language barrier can be observed not only at the initial stage of mastering a foreign language but also at a more advanced stage (ZHELTUKHINA *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, research shows that advanced students are much more likely to experience language anxiety and fear than beginners. This is primarily due to the fear of not meeting the expectations associated with their language competence, as well as the fear of being worse than more successful students of the same level (KRASHENINNIKOVA, 2014). Overcoming the language (or communication) barrier requires self-improvement and a lot of work in learning the language in general. Due to the language barrier, the language learner's confidence decreases. Earlier progress in learning becomes unimportant as with such a barrier, one feels like one cannot use the accumulated baggage of lexical and grammatical knowledge and cannot comprehend and reproduce foreign speech in a foreign language environment (MAKAEV, 2011).

The lack of communication practice in English is also one of the reasons for the emergence of a language barrier. A person can know grammatical structures and have a good vocabulary but due to the lack of verbal practice cannot use them in free speech. A student of a new language must have the automation of both language and speech skills so that the student can apply in real life everything that they have learned in a foreign language class. The solution to this problem is to create conditions and situations as close to reality as possible. The student must understand that each specific word and structure are used to get out of a particular situation (NEUSTROEVA, 2015). Communicative behavior in its structure (activity through speech) includes certain speech skills and abilities. Nevertheless, these skills and abilities significantly differ from similar elements of pure speech activity, since in this case, they reflect the situation and are accordingly motivated, that is, correspond to a specific speech task and life situation (NAGOVITSYN; BARTOSH; RATSIMOR; NEVEROVA, 2019). Such skills and abilities have a specific purpose and, when included in speech, determine, together with the situation, a single context. In practice, the difference in proficiency in these two aspects of the language (social and psychological) is commonly observed. Often, a student who can quite confidently

compose a sentence, retell the prepared text with hardly any mistakes and accurately and fully answer questions, nevertheless, reaches a dead-end, feels uncertainty in the most simple but unexpected situations, precisely when it becomes necessary to use speech in practice (DOMBROVSKAYA, 2016).

The language barrier in the process of learning and using a foreign language as a means of communication is the main obstacle to efficient communication. The language barrier causes emotional breakdowns and insecurity, reduced academic performance, hindered motivation for language learning, development of the incorrect interpretation of the interlocutor's behavior, etc. Moreover, many students conclude that they are "by nature" not gifted with any abilities essential for overcoming the language barrier (KOTELNIKOVA; SHPORTKO, 2017).

One can overcome the language barrier if the following conditions are met: the reasons for its emergence are clear, there is motivation to overcome it (interest, desire), there are resources in the form of vocabulary, audio and video materials, professional help, etc. Group creative work is rightfully considered one of the most efficient means of developing and forming the speaking skill in teaching foreign languages (DOMBROVSKAYA; POLESHHUK, 2009). Modern information technologies make great influence on information industry changing approaches, methods, and forms of education. Transition to on-line education opens new possibilities in educational practice including the sphere of foreign language education. However, to achieve the efficiency in the educational process it is necessary to change the tools and methods of education as the digital mode of education requires different approaches.

Today, many researchers note the importance of using information technologies to overcome the language barrier and improve foreign language skills in general (NAZARTSEVA; MORYA; ZUBANOVA, 2019). New information technologies influence the modern education system, providing great opportunities for optimizing and improving the quality of the educational process. Conclusions are made about the need to use advanced technologies to form cross-cultural professionally-oriented communication when teaching a foreign language at a university (KOROTAEVA, 2020). Besides, modern authors assign a major role to the development of personal creative and critical thinking to master a foreign language. Network active development can be considered as a tool to overcome students' language barrier.

## Methods

We used the following methods in the study:

1) Theoretical and methodological analysis of literature on the issue under investigation;  
 2) The questionnaire method. The study of language barriers in students learning a foreign language was held at the Foreign Language Department. One hundred and eight students from the Aerospace Faculty of the Moscow Aviation Institute (National Research University) took part in the study. The study was held from 7 Sep. 2020 to 28 Sep. 2020.

3) The results of the study were processed according to the methods of mathematical statistics.

## Results and discussion

1. Determining the level of comfort in foreign language classes.

**Table 1** – The level of comfort in foreign language classes

Answers	Percentage
yes	87%
no	13%

Source: Prepared by the authors

These answers show that most students feel comfortable in the classroom. However, several students cannot say that their experience in foreign language classes is comfortable.

2. Evaluating interpersonal relations within the group.

**Table 2** – The level of interpersonal relations within the group

Answers	Percentage
firm no	7%
probably no	10%
probably yes	18%
firm yes	65%

Source: Prepared by the authors

As we can see, good interpersonal relationships prevail in groups. Most students can say this with confidence. This is significant as interpersonal relationships often affect the success of language learning. After all, the more pleasant the learning environment is, the easier it is for students to focus on learning.

3. Evaluating the relations with the foreign language teacher.

**Table 3** – The level of relations with the foreign language teacher

Answers	Percentage
good	72%
reserved, neutral	10%
poor	18%

Source: Prepared by the authors

The results of this survey showed that students have developed a good relationship with the foreign language teacher. A good relationship with the teacher also plays an important role in learning a foreign language as the learning process becomes more efficient in the absence of negative factors.

4. Evaluating linguistic difficulties that arise when learning a foreign language.

**Table 4** – The evaluation of the presence of linguistic difficulties that arise when learning a foreign language

Answers	Percentage
yes	83%
no	17%

Source: Prepared by the authors

Therefore, most respondents face linguistic difficulties.

5. Evaluating the main causes of difficulties during foreign language learning.

**Table 5** – Difficulties that students face when learning a foreign language

Answers	Percentage
lack of confidence in one's knowledge	37%
small vocabulary	29%
fear of making a mistake	23%
fear of the teacher's discontent	17%
risk of getting a poor grade	15%

Source: Prepared by the authors

Most students believe that the main reasons that lead to difficulties in learning a foreign language are the lack of confidence in their knowledge and a small vocabulary. Moreover, many students are afraid of making a mistake. This concern stems from a lack of practice. The Department of Foreign Languages is constantly working on this and provides students with an excellent opportunity to engage in language practice and holds conferences of various levels of difficulty.

6. Evaluating key linguistic differences when learning a foreign language.



**Table 6** – The key linguistic differences when learning a foreign language

Answers	Percentage
listening	42%
writing	27%
pronunciation	18%
reading	13%

Source: Prepared by the authors

As we can see, most respondents believe that listening (42%) and writing (27%) cause the most difficulties. The results indicate that students do not quite have enough practice when learning a foreign language.

### Conclusion

Considering the data above, we can make a general conclusion. Good relationships within a group with a teacher provide a favorable environment for foreign language learning. Although half of the students say that they face no linguistic difficulties when learning a foreign language, almost all students note that some aspects are more difficult than others. The fear of not being understood, lack of confidence in one's knowledge, poor vocabulary – all this is caused by a lack of practice and experience. To overcome these difficulties, the Foreign Language Department I-11 "Foreign Language for Aerospace Specialties" offers students a great opportunity to gain experience and practice in using their language skills. The Department regularly holds conferences that allow students to prove themselves, speak on the topics the students are interested in, share the problems that are important to them and prepare a presentation in a foreign language. We should note that currently student scientific and practical conferences are held with obligatory utilization of information and communication technologies. Students get involved in this work as early as possible. Teachers guide them towards using the most advanced ways of searching and presenting information (ABRAMOVA; KOROTAEVA, 2019).

This has a strong positive impact on the process of studying a foreign language in general, as this is an easier and much more interesting way of obtaining new information. Students not only engage in language practice but also learn to communicate with the audience. In this way, students master new skills and, therefore, learn the material much faster and more efficiently.

Special attention should be paid to the analysis of communicative situations at the English lessons in order to reduce the students' language barrier. To make this work effective



a foreign language teacher should possess necessary professional competencies, so the personnel work of the management is of particular importance to improve overall the quality of language education.

Moreover, the accumulated pedagogic experience allows us to give the following recommendations on reducing the language barrier in students who are learning a foreign language to increase the level of communication. For this, one should teach students to:

1) minimize the so-called "noise", namely: enunciate the words, take one's time, make sense pauses.

2) keep track of feedback between participants in communications, i.e. pay attention to the listener's non-verbal behavior which could indicate understanding; not be afraid to clarify if the interlocutor understood the student well and not be afraid of admitting that the student does not understand.

3) paraphrase the question or the sentence if the previous version was unclear.

4) use exact definitions. This means that one should avoid embellishing the reality with various epithets, phraseological units and idioms unless one is sure about their exact meaning.

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