

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE ACQUISITION BY ECONOMICS MAJORS

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Abstract. This article concerns the problems of evaluation and assessment in ESP teaching. The authors suggest a system of evaluation in acquiring the professional intercultural competence by economics majors participating in international exchange programs. This system of evaluation is integrated in the structure of the linguopragmatic model of ESP teaching and includes such pragmatic forms of evaluation as ongoing formative evaluation of students' performance; student portfolios containing professional writing tasks; final assessment in the form of an oral presentation of a product or service. The suggested assessment criteria fully conform to the linguopragmatic language teaching principles, reflect the pragmatic focus of ESP teaching and provide objective feedback to students' communicative activities in cross-cultural environment.

Keywords: ESP teaching; linguopragmatic approach; evaluation and assessment, performance assessment; assessment criteria; cultural awareness; functionality; pragmatism; professional intercultural communication.

Assessing the quality of instruction, the mastery of the foreign language communicative competence, and the command of communicative and verbal skills are of key importance in foreign language teaching. In the present study we refer to a broad interpretation of the concept of "evaluation of student progress" as a component of the teaching process aimed at "assessing a student's mastery of knowledge, skills and competences... and basing on this assessment evaluating his or her achievement relative to a particular segment of coursework or period of study" [1: 100].

This article presents a system of evaluation and monitoring of progress in acquiring the *professional intercultural competence (PIC)* by students majoring in economics and participating in international exchange programs. This system of evaluation is integrated in the structure of linguopragmatic model of ESP teaching and is used within an elective course in professional communication for students specializing in Economics and Entrepreneurship.

This methodological model of teaching is based on the linguopragmatic approach to ESP teaching. This approach presumes:

- Efficient and effective process of acquiring *PIC*, which is defined as *the ability to communicate successfully and engage in professional communication with representatives of other cultures. Structural components of PIC are language skills, culture-specific and professional knowledge and*

competences, as well as personal attitudes and corresponding communication strategies.

- Communicative and pragmatic focus of foreign language training, when a student is an active agent of the training process involved in learning the basics of professional communication and developing his or her intellectual abilities through implementation of a diverse range of professional communication functions.

- Acquiring the ability to understand the extra-linguistic context of professional situations in the process of intercultural communication, learning to develop culture-specific communication strategies.

Within the linguopragmatic approach to foreign language instruction, evaluation performs two inter-related functions: purely evaluative and that of training and development (educational). This unity of two functions implies that “the contents, devices and methodology of evaluation ought to be educative in nature”, combine the learned material and acquired skills, and ensure that they are revised, rotated, more widely applied and deeply internalized [2: 24].

The objects of evaluation within the linguopragmatic model of teaching English for professional communication include linguistic, intercultural, professional knowledge, skills and competences, as well as professional communicative strategies in relation to each component of PIC (fig. 1).

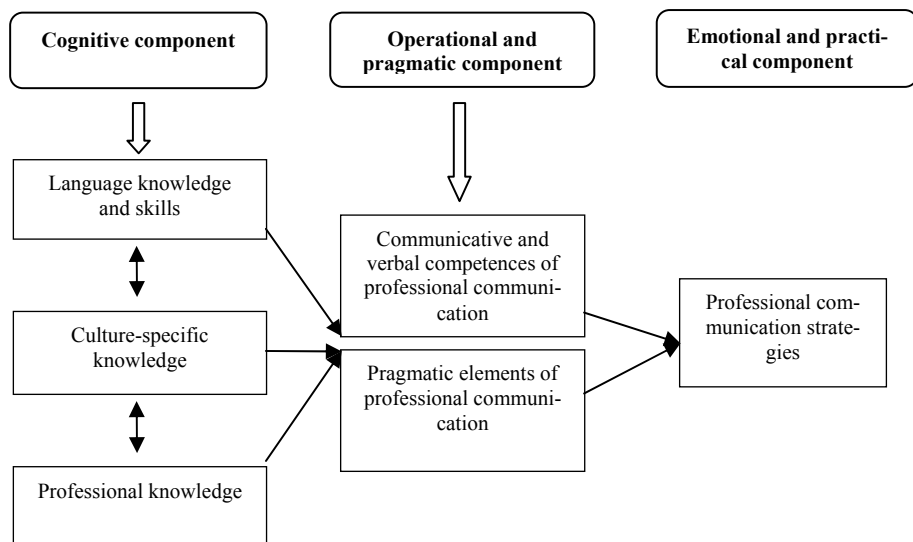


Fig. 1. Objects of Evaluation of Progress in Acquiring PIC

All types of language assessment make claims about students' knowledge and ability based on measurements of their performance under controlled conditions. These claims must be supported with evidence that the

students were given the best chance to show what they could do, and that the means of assessment were as appropriate as possible for the purpose [3: 258]. It is, therefore, important to be clear about the different purposes of assessment. These purposes can be classified as shown in the diagram (fig. 2).

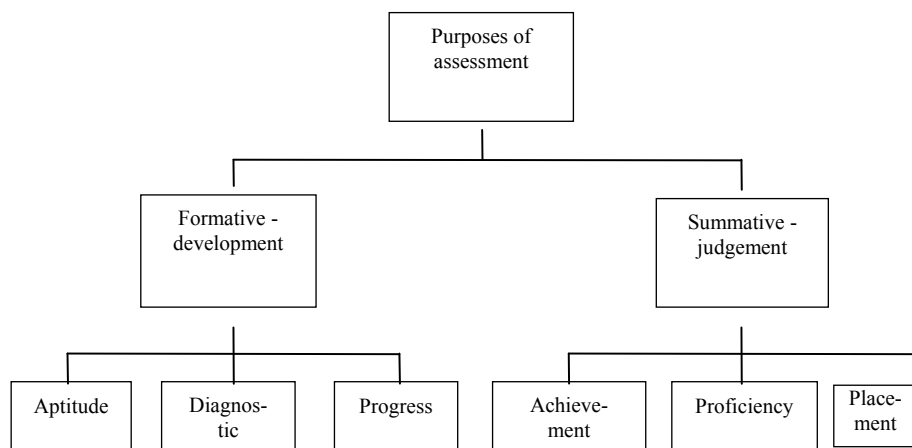


Fig. 2. Purposes of assessment [4: 304]

As we can see this classification distinguishes between formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment is developmental, and is intended to give feedback to improve students' understanding and performance. Summative assessment, on the other hand, is judgemental, and is concerned with permission to proceed to the next stage [5: 9]. These types of assessment are applied to monitor what has been learned or to make predictions about future performance.

Within the elective course in professional communication we use the following **forms of evaluation**:

- *ongoing formative evaluation* of students' performance using suggested techniques at each stage of the training process;
- *student portfolios* containing students' professional writing tasks;
- *final (or summative) assessment* in the form of oral presentations of a product or service delivered in front of one's colleagues or a commission or potential investors.

The suggested forms of evaluation represent pragmatic tests, or *performance assessment*, measuring the progress in acquiring the PIC, i.e. communicative verbal competences in the foreign language and professional communication strategies with regard to culture-specific character of the situation.

Appropriate tests of this type meet the requirements of pragmatism and are designed to evaluate students' foreign language communicative

competence. The concept of pragmatic tests is based upon the Theory of Linguistic Pragmatics that lies at the root of linguopragmatic model of education. Thus, pragmatic tests meet two major criteria: presence of a natural context and its interrelationship with an extra-linguistic reality [6: 358].

Using performance assessment makes it possible to conduct evaluation of student progress in a more natural and real-life setting, and to give consideration to non-verbal pragmatic elements of communication. These considerations determine the selection of samples of coherent natural English speech as the testing groundwork and ensure the integrative character of utilized tests. The aim of integrative tests is not to evaluate the student progress in acquiring specific types of language skills and competences, but in their combination. Further on we will analyze in greater detail each of the outlined forms of evaluation.

Ongoing formative evaluation is designed to provide timely feedback and to facilitate the training process itself. It helps identify gaps in student achievements and to adjust instructional strategies accordingly. This type of evaluation enables tracking student progress in learning profession-specific language material, mastering communicative and verbal competences and communicative communication strategies. Using ongoing formative evaluation allows fulfilling a wide array of functions in relation to foreign language instruction: evaluation, assessment, motivation, training, etc.

Evaluation ensures:

- systemic monitoring of student learning;
- conformity of training activities with course-specific learning objectives and learning outcomes;
- highest degree of similarity to real-life contexts of communication;
- timely and objective feedback to students communication activities in cross-cultural environment;
- students involvement in the process of planning and adjusting learning outcomes for a specific course, which encourages students to develop their abilities for self-reflection and self-study.

The most efficient *teaching techniques* used to evaluate the progress in acquiring PIC by Economics majors include: analysis of an authentic text / article / video clip / audio podcast; discussion; interactive lecture; case studies; modeling of professional communicative situations (oral and written); business games (briefings, roundtable discussions, business negotiations, product presentations). Interactive exercises using information and communication technologies are employed at all stages of communication training and involve using IT-technologies that maintain a virtual training space: search for information, provide distant communication (search engines, e-mail, social networks), conduct on-line video-conferences and webinars (e.g., via Skype), etc. For example, one of the suggested discussion topics is “*Successful entrepreneurs expand the size of the economic pie for*

everyone”; a theme for a business-briefing: “*Venture Capital is a Time Bomb*”, the business game is previewed by the video about raising venture capital provided by Stanford University's Entrepreneurship Corner; students prepare a *three-minute presentation about the Competitive Edge of the product* based on their written project reports; etc.

Student portfolios contain students' written tasks and presentations in profession-related topics. Relevant teaching techniques used within the linguopragmatic model primarily involve written modeling of professional communicative situations, including writing business letters, official documents, reports, press releases, etc. with the help of authentic materials relevant for students' professional specialization.

The portfolio of a student who has completed the elective ESP course should contain the following items:

- Written presentation of analyzed information on a professional topic in the form of essay, comment, or brief presentation.
- Business reports and marketing materials related to Economics and Entrepreneurship: figures, diagrams, charts, minutes, project reports, written concepts, press releases and other marketing materials related to a product, service or project.
- Talking points for a brief oral description of a business idea (elevator pitch) related to a specific product or service.

Final (or summative) assessment is intended to evaluate the progress a student made in terms of acquiring PIC, namely linguistic (phonetic, lexical, and grammar skills in the area of professional communication), diagnostics abilities (analytical skills, culture-specific strategies selection), and professional communication strategies (presenting facts: product description, press-release and concept; persuasion of a client or investor: an elevator pitch and investor presentation; taking responsibilities: oral and written promises, agreements of mutual understanding, contracts with potential clients; etc.). Summative assessment is predominantly judgemental and serves to evaluate students' achievements and proficiency in foreign language skills and professional communicative strategies acquisition.

To evaluate progress achieved by students as a result of completing the elective course in professional communication for students specializing in Economics and Entrepreneurship, the teacher asks students to make an investor presentation of a product or service in front of group mates, or an expert committee of entrepreneurs, or potential investors.

Presentation outline:

1. State a real-life business problem.
2. Give a detailed product description.
3. Describe your potential competitors and customers.
4. Describe your marketing strategy.
5. Prepare financial forecasts and estimate investments required.

At the final stage of training the students participating in international exchange programs are given an assignment to fulfill ***out-of-class communication activities*** within natural English-speaking environment. The purpose of these tasks is to give students firsthand experience interacting with members of another culture. Students then write about their experiences using concepts introduced in class and include this to their portfolios. They should reflect the essence of the communicative situation, communicative and verbal skills employed, give the information on whether the communication goal is achieved or not. And if not, then what the possible reasons for it might be. For example, these possibilities are offered to students, and they either choose one or suggest their own equivalent.

1. *General cross-cultural observations:*

Attend a celebration organized by members of another culture, such as a wedding, coming-of-age ceremony, national celebrations, and so forth. Pay attention to hosts and guests' behavior (greetings, congratulations, leave-taking), food, presents, conversation topics, language style (formal, informal, friendly, official, etc.), particular culture-specific phrases and idioms.

Attend meetings of a group of foreign students who meet because of their nationality or a common interest. Try to point out discussion topics, their common interests, differences from your own and host country culture; compare your findings with the cultural classifications you studied in class (individualism-collectivism, attitude to time, change, work, etc.).

Interview an international student concerning a topic about which there are probably large cultural differences. During initial contacts, try to avoid topics that might put the student on the defensive because many international students feel that they are representatives of their countries and will therefore be less likely to disclose anything negative about their country. Ask about less controversial subjects such as how they celebrate their national holidays, what types of food they eat, and how typical teenagers spend their afternoons. If a good relationship with an International student is already established, more provocative topics can be covered: for example, arranged marriages, governments' relation to press coverage of national events, different markers of distinct social classes within a country, the differential prestige given to various professions, and so forth.

At a large airport, spend time observing the behavior of people at the arrivals lounge attached to the gates where international flights arrive. Try to grab from the speech what language the passenger speaks, which culture he or she belongs to, his or her emotional state upon arrival, communication with airport staff, etc. [7: 184-185].

2. *Specific professional issues:*

Attend an introductory meeting at your host university, make observations about the behavior of your foreign colleagues (their greeting, questioning strategies; emotional state; formal or informal attitude towards new stu-

dents), the questions you were asked about your particular entrepreneurial interests and business idea.

Join a networking event and try to make as many professional contacts as possible, try to model after the behavior of the more experienced colleagues of yours.

Attend a class (a lecture and a seminar) in economics at your host university and compare the US and Russian teaching methods: techniques to present the information, to interact with the audience, to explain specific economic notions, etc.

Talk to an international student about up-to-date economic issues, entrepreneurial culture in his or her home country. Try to compare the approach to these problems in Russia and other countries. Possible observation criteria may include, but are not limited to: degree of economic globalization; WTO accession: pros and cons for national economies; attitude to entrepreneurs among common people; state support of small and medium enterprise; innovative entrepreneurship development.

Attend a business idea discussion / presentation and point out the structure of the speaker's talk, the speech plan, verbal and non-verbal means used during the talk, the ways of interaction with the audience.

As a result while reflecting on acquired culture-specific knowledge, communicative, verbal and pragmatic skills, the students develop their ability to use appropriate speech acts with relevant language structuring, vocabulary and grammar. Also, they start considering their particular intercultural and professional communication needs.

Information on learning outcomes has both quantitative and qualitative aspects, including verbal descriptions, judgements, total number of points earned in the course of completing the tasks. Teacher performs this evaluation on a day-to-day basis in the course of his or her routine communication with students, as well as basing on the results of interim and final assessments of test results performed by students orally and in written form.

When selecting evaluation and assessment criteria and developing portfolio feedback sheets, we considered the following rules:

- The criteria and weighting of marks reflect the focus of the course.
- The feedback is easy for students to understand.
- The teacher's feedback is likely to be fairly consistent for all students.
- Points awarded to students are translated into a message.
- The wording used for evaluation does not invite misinterpretation.
- The assessment sheet provides useful information, even after the test papers are taken back [8: 294; 9-11].

The assessment criteria fully conform to the linguopragmatic language teaching principles and are as follows:

1. *Accuracy of vocabulary / grammar / style.* To achieve a communication goal, the student uses lexical and grammar structures that are in line

with the norms of the English language; operates with special terms, concepts, and phrases employed in a professional context.

The student is capable of adjusting his or her choice of vocabulary in accordance with the functional and stylistic register in which the communication occurs (such as formal, informal, neutral).

2. *Cultural awareness*. A student has appropriate understanding of the language concept of culture, which allows him or her to describe it and express his or her attitude to it using the means of the English language; is aware of the notion of “cultural dialogue” and culture-specific features of professional communication; can develop and implement culture-specific behavioral strategies typical of business culture of Russia and English-speaking countries; can cope with stressful situations in the context of intercultural communication and “cultural shock” and can adapt to living in a foreign language setting.

The student demonstrates personal qualities that will be necessary for him or her to succeed during professional and academic activity in the international environment. These qualities should include, but are not limited to, independence, maturity, motivation, flexibility, open-mindedness, self-discipline.

3. *Functionality*. A student constructs his or her discourse grammatically and strategically correctly with the aim to achieve a final goal of communication in accordance with the functional needs of communication participants. A student can comfortably implement professional communication strategies relative to functional needs of professionals specializing in Economics and Entrepreneurship (work with information, preparing reporting and marketing materials, oral product presentations, conducting negotiations with foreign investors, etc.).

4. *Pragmatism*. A student uses communicative and language-related abilities and pragmatic elements of communication (kinesics, proxemics, chronemics, and others) in accordance with extra-linguistic factors of a given professional and business situation. Utterances made in English contain models of linguistic behavior typical of the business culture of international partners.

A student selects language means based on professional communicative needs and exerts influence on a partner with the aim of realizing his or her communicative intentions. Lexical and grammar units used are related to the student’s professional field, are common for its context and correspond with modern norms and standards of the language and respective functional and stylistic register.

5. *Professional communication adequacy*. A student understands the need to acquire PIC for the purpose of becoming a successful professional. He or she demonstrates knowledge and communication abilities realized in situations of business, economical, social and cultural communication within the four key themes: Entrepreneurs and venture capital; Market opportunities and competition; Innovative entrepreneurship; Business climate across cultures. The named themes correlate correspondingly with professional com-

munication functions. Below is a feedback sheet for the evaluation and assessment of written tasks (table).

Student portfolio feedback sheet

<i>Tasks / Criteria</i>	<i>Goals achievement</i>	<i>Discourse planning and organization</i>	<i>Ability to express meaning clearly</i>	<i>Grammatical accuracy</i>	<i>Vocabulary adequacy</i>	<i>Appropriate use of written conventions</i>
Essay / Comment / Short presentation						
Charts and diagrams						
Minutes						
Project reports						
Project concept and press-release						
Talking points for an elevator pitch						
Final product / service presentation						
General comments:						

Scoring scale:

5 = Applies to the student ideally: the student uses language and vocabulary appropriate to the task with almost no grammatical errors, applies relevant style, demonstrates excellent pronunciation; can express him / herself fluently and spontaneously, construct arguments and facts in a coherent presentation using organizational patterns, linking words and cohesive devices in both oral and written language; can use the language flexibly and effectively for academic and professional (economics and entrepreneurship) purposes with appropriate professional communicative strategies adjusted to culture-specific environment, excellent non-verbal language, well-planned and appropriate Anglo-American terms.

4 = Applies to the student very well: the student shows slightly inappropriate use of vocabulary with minor grammatical errors, which do not influence the understanding of the whole discourse, demonstrates mostly relevant style and correct pronunciation; can interact with a degree of spontaneity, construct generally cohesive oral and written texts, use organizational patterns and linking words when necessary; can use the language fairly well for academic and professional purposes with understanding of culture-specific behaviors

and professional strategies, generally good non-verbal communication, fairly coherent speech in Anglo-American terms and phrases.

3 = Applies to the student adequately: the student sometimes uses inappropriate vocabulary and seems to lack sufficient vocabulary to perform the task with significant grammatical errors, demonstrates incorrect stylistic structures and some pronunciation errors; can construct simple connected texts related to personal and professional interests, provide reasoning and explain personal viewpoint; in general can use the language adequately for academic and professional purposes, understands cultural differences but does not demonstrate developed skills to use behavioral patterns relevant for the culture-specific environment, acceptable non-verbal language means, clear speech in Anglo-American terms with few "foreign" elements, which do not cause misunderstanding.

2 = Applies to the student somewhat: the student seems seriously in need of more vocabulary to fulfill the task, has a number of grammatical errors which affect the student's ability to express him / herself, uses clumsy style with a lot of pronunciation errors, which make the discourse difficult to comprehend; can produce simple texts and communicate about familiar and routine matters; can understand general cross-cultural problems, but cannot apply this knowledge to professional communication, non-verbal language different from Anglo-American patterns with a number of "foreign" elements causing misinterpretation.

1 = Applies to the student minimally: the student uses inappropriate and insufficient vocabulary for the task with a lot of grammatical and pronunciation errors, which make listening and reading almost unintelligible; receptive language skills are somewhat developed, however the level of productive language skills is rather low; demonstrates minimum understanding of cultural issues, non-verbal language is very poor, a lot of non Anglo-American behavioral patterns which cause bad impression.

In conclusion it should be noted that acquired language-related, intercultural, and professional skills and abilities, as well as professional communication strategies form parts of the professional intercultural competence and reflect the expected learning outcomes of foreign language training for professional communication. The applied system of evaluation is part of the linguopragmatic model to ESP teaching and includes such pragmatic forms of evaluation as ongoing formative evaluation of students' performance; student portfolios containing students' professional writing tasks; final assessment in the form of an oral presentation of a product or service. Assessment criteria include accuracy of vocabulary / grammar / style, cultural awareness, functionality, pragmatism, and professional communication adequacy.

The results of assessment help the language instructor monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching process and identify its strong and weak points. Thus, the assessment provides grounds for review and correction of teaching process, including goals, methods and techniques, profes-

sional communication situations, evaluation criteria and forms. In case of communication training for exchange students of economics the achieved level of professional intercultural competence will allow them to enroll on a program in economics and entrepreneurship at an international university or go out into the world of work in an English-speaking environment.

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