



THE ROLE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCES IN THE TEACHING OF BULGARIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AT THE PRIMARY STAGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract: The article analyses the pedagogical role of sociolinguistic competences in fostering communicative development in the teaching of Bulgarian Language and Literature at the primary stage. Grounded in the communicative-speech orientation of contemporary pedagogy, the study argues that linguistic learning in the early years should transcend the mechanical acquisition of grammatical rules and instead cultivate the child's ability to use language as a medium of communication, social interaction, and cultural expression. The discussion synthesises the theoretical contributions of key Bulgarian scholars such as Gerdzhikova, Dimchev, Ivanova, and Videnov, who emphasise the interdependence between linguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural, and discourse competences. It demonstrates how sociolinguistic competence- understood as the ability to apply language appropriately within varied social contexts- integrates multiple dimensions, including linguistic variation, pragmatic sensitivity, sociocultural awareness, and critical reflection on language and power. Within the framework of Bulgaria's State Educational Standards and curriculum reforms, the article situates these competences as essential for developing pupils' communicative autonomy, intercultural understanding, and capacity for social participation. The analysis also highlights the pedagogical implications of sociolinguistic instruction, where teaching becomes an interactive process shaped by learners' strategies, social identities, and contextual awareness. Ultimately, the research underscores that the development of sociolinguistic competence in primary education is not only a linguistic objective but also a formative process contributing to pupils' moral, aesthetic, and cultural growth.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic competence, Communicative orientation, Bulgarian language education, Pragmatic competence, Primary education.

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INTRODUCTION

The communicative-speech orientation of teaching Bulgarian language, as its defining characteristic in the primary stage of basic education, presupposes the formation of communicative competence among pupils. Through language instruction, pupils refine their ability to navigate communicative situations, to select appropriately expressive linguistic means for achieving a communicative purpose, to participate in dialogues on specific linguistic topics, and to produce both oral and written texts (Ivanova, N., 2019). Within the framework of the State Educational Standards (SES) and the new curricula in Bulgarian Language and Literature for Grades I-IV, the communicative-speech orientation of instruction implies that language learning at school should be perceived as the unity of language and speech, that is, as the acquisition of linguistic knowledge and of language as a medium of communication. The formation of initial linguistic competence is one of the principal aims of Bulgarian Language and Literature education at the primary stage of basic schooling. According to N. Gerdzhikova, linguistic competence may be viewed as a socially representative manifestation of each child's

innate capacity to use their mother tongue in a practically unlimited number of linguistic constructions (Gerdzhikova, N., 2005). The dynamics of linguistic competence reflect the dynamics of linguistic norms and of the processes of their acquisition and mastery. The linguistic information incorporated into the specific curricular content, in accordance with the psychophysical characteristics of children of primary-school age, is not assimilated for its own sake but rather within the context of speech- both oral and written. The communicative-speech orientation of Bulgarian language teaching thus entails the refinement of pupils' ability to apply, consciously and purposefully, the linguistic knowledge they have acquired, adapting it appropriately to the concrete communicative situation and to the intended communicative purpose (Ivanova, N., 2018).

EXPOSITION:

According to M. Georgieva, communicatively oriented instruction in Bulgarian language takes into account the fact that natural speech activity is always motivated and goal-directed. Genuine verbal communication is characterised by informativeness



and meaningfulness, by causal and logical relations between communicative acts, and by a clear sense of purpose and result. The communicative orientation of mother-tongue education influences all aspects of the teaching process: the objectives of instruction, the selection of learning content, the methods and techniques of teaching, and the organisational forms of classroom activity (Georgieva, M., 2005).

As K. Dimchev emphasises:

- *“What is specific to mother-tongue instruction is that it is not simply a form of verbal communication, as is the case with all other school subjects. It is an activity through which pupils become acquainted with the nature and functions of speech communication and with the linguistic means that, under certain conditions, are employed to achieve desired communicative goals. It is precisely the study of the mother tongue as a means of communication that offers the greatest opportunities for raising the linguistic culture—and indeed the general culture - of the younger generation”* (Dimchev, K., 1998).

According to St. Dimitrova, the pragmatic norms of communication represent established rules governing the selection of linguistic means, as well as the construction of speech formations (utterances and texts) in various types of communicative situations. From this it follows that communicative-pragmatic norms entirely determine verbal interaction, and that without mastering them, a person cannot communicate adequately- not only in a foreign language, but even in their native one (Dimitrova, St., 2001). The formation and development of communicative competence, as F. Boikova observes, presuppose the cultivation of skills for addressing a range of communicative tasks related to verbal interaction. These tasks include the use of speech etiquette, the exchange of information, the expression of the speaker's emotional attitude through linguistic means, and the ability to convey critical evaluation regarding the content of messages. Given the diversity of predictable and unpredictable communicative situations that accompany everyday human life, it becomes both necessary and possible within the process of school education to acquire the most general conventional pragmatic aspects of verbal participation. This is achieved through the observance and application of socially established norms of speech behaviour (Boikova, F., 2005). The formation of communicative-speech competences is a long-term process that begins in early childhood and is shaped by a variety of communicative factors, as well as by the different social roles that an individual assumes over time (Ivanova, N., 2019). According to N. Gerdzhikova, contemporary methodology seeks a synthesis of three key categories- action, learning productivity, and the identity of the learner's personality. Communication becomes a framework category for understanding the processes of perceiving and processing information- verbal, visual, tactile, and auditory- both at the level of subject-matter content and at the level of socio-emotional and personal perceptions. The structurally determining element in the construction of such communication is language itself, together with the purposefully organised instruction aimed at its acquisition. From a didactic perspective, communicative competence may be interpreted through the categories of learning strategy, teaching strategy, and linguistic-behavioural strategy. The pupil's strategy and the teacher's strategy naturally exist in a relationship of reciprocity: the former determines the content-

related steps of the teacher's work, without restricting the teacher's methodological repertoire. The strategy of linguistic behaviour may, therefore, be viewed as a set of diagnostic indicators reflecting the probable communicative achievements of pupils (Gerdzhikova, N., 2005). In addition to the formation of communicative competence at the primary stage of education, K. Dimchev observes that

- *“A prerequisite for the successful performance of speech acts in both classroom and extracurricular activities among young learners is their discourse competence, understood as the ability to produce and comprehend communicatively coherent and meaningful texts.”*

In order to enhance the adequacy of pupils' speech behaviour in relation to the communicative task and the conditions of interaction, it is necessary, during every lesson, to ensure that:

- to enrich the repertoire of linguistic means necessary for accomplishing specific communicative tasks, that is, to enhance pupils' linguistic competence;
- to develop the ability to navigate communicative situations through an awareness of the role of social factors in interaction, that is, to broaden pupils' sociolinguistic competence;
- to refine the skills required for producing and comprehending texts that are communicatively coherent and meaningful, that is, to strengthen pupils' discourse competence;
- to cultivate the ability to overcome difficulties in communication by replacing one speech strategy with another, that is, to improve pupils' strategic competence.

Without doubt, achieving a level of discourse competence that corresponds to the learner's linguistic and social development presupposes a proportional level of their linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic, social, and sociocultural competences (Dimchev, K., 1998).

FORMATION OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

According to M. Videnov:

- *“Sociolinguistics views language as a heterogeneous phenomenon, whose individual variants are conditioned by the existence of communicators belonging to different social groups. For traditional linguistics, the functioning of language is represented as a collection of nominative acts, whereas sociolinguistics is concerned, in the most general terms, with the social motivation behind the renaming of a particular reality, with the social need for the substitution of one linguistic unit with another, and with the switching from one linguistic formation to another”* (Videnov, M., 1982).

Communication in its social dimension lies at the foundation of sociolinguistics. The discipline examines the reciprocal relationship between language and society and investigates a range of interrelated factors, namely:

- the influence of social phenomena, processes, and transformations on the linguistic system and its development;
- the distinctive features of speech within various social communities;

- the functioning of different forms of language- such as the standard language, dialects, and professional jargons- across particular communicative domains and situations;
- the relationships among different languages spoken within the same territory: whether they are equal in status, whether they are used in all communicative contexts or restricted to certain ones, and whether there exists any hierarchy between them as perceived by the population of the given region;
- linguistic contact as an interaction between languages and cultures (for example, situations of bilingualism), including the choice of one or another language in different communicative domains and situations, as well as instances of code-switching;
- the impact of speakers' socio-demographic characteristics- such as age, gender, profession, or place of residence- on the variability of their speech;
- the influence of the specific features of each communicative situation on the variability of speech;
- the attitudes towards the speech of individuals or groups, towards one's own language or other languages, and the value judgments associated with them;
- language policy, including the codification of the standard language and the teaching of foreign languages at different levels of education (Aleksova, Kr. et al).

According to V. Krastanova, sociolinguistic competence constitutes a complex of sophisticated skills, among which are the ability to perceive the established normative framework of society as valid for the linguistic behaviour of individual social groups, and the ability to assess the appropriateness of linguistic choices from the standpoint of social relations. The model of sociolinguistic competence encompasses a level of implicitly presupposed general contextual conditions that include learners' knowledge of the social structure of society, its values and beliefs, as well as their ability to distinguish between the normative background of roles and the socially acquired forms of life (Ivanova, N., 2019). As S. Dobрева argues, "The formation of an understanding of the sociolinguistic conditioning of speech acts corresponds to knowledge about the use of textual cohesion devices and to skills for making appropriate choices of communicative strategies, for shifting communicative tactics when necessary, and for achieving effectiveness in verbal interaction. Comprehending the text-forming function of lexico- grammatical units their grammatical categories and specific lexical-semantic usages- constitutes an important prerequisite for the adequate interpretation of meaning in existing texts, as well as for the expression of meaning in texts produced by pupils" (Dobрева, S., 2017).

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the speaker's ability to use language appropriately within different social contexts. It involves an understanding of the social norms, rules, and expectations that govern linguistic behaviour, as well as the capacity to use language in a manner most suitable to the communicative situation. Several conceptual perspectives define the nature of sociolinguistic competence, the most prominent of which include the following:

LINGUISTIC VARIATION

This concept, in relation to the development of sociolinguistic competence, focuses on the ability to employ different linguistic forms- such as dialects depending on the social context. The term linguistic variation (or simply variation) refers to regional, social, or situational differences in the ways a particular language is used. All aspects of language including phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, and meanings- are subject to variation (Nordquist, R., 2011).

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

This concept emphasises the ability to use language in a way that is most appropriate to the given context, taking into account factors such as the listener, the communicative purpose, and the cultural norms that underpin the interaction. It also includes the capacity to use language to achieve social goals such as making requests, giving advice, or expressing opinions on various matters. Pragmatic competence should be regarded as an essential component of linguistic competence and as an integral part of the language curriculum. Language teachers must possess not only proficiency in the target language but also a satisfactory level of pragmatic awareness, enabling them to transmit their knowledge effectively to their students. Equally important are the pedagogical skills that allow educators to adopt diverse instructional strategies in the classroom. If the aim of language education is to teach learners how to use a language appropriately and effectively across different communicative contexts, it becomes crucial to enhance their level of pragmatic awareness and to provide them with practical strategies that facilitate effective and successful communication with interlocutors from varied backgrounds (Tülgar, A., 2016).

SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE

This conceptual dimension of sociolinguistic competence highlights the ability to use language in a manner that aligns with the cultural norms and values of a given society. It encompasses an understanding and respect for cultural differences, traditions, and conventions, as well as the ability to use language in ways that acknowledge and honour those distinctions. Sociocultural competence functions as a formative force in shaping an individual's social and cultural values and identity, which, in turn, influence one's actions within a specific socio-professional context. The development of sociocultural competence within the framework of primary education is a crucial component of the curriculum, designed in accordance with the holistic approach to the human being. This approach ensures that institutions of vocational and educational training fulfil their mission of creating conditions for the acquisition of competences that meet labour market demands and facilitate the successful integration of the individual into professional and social life (Anužienė, E., 2015).

CRITICAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

This concept extends beyond the ability to use language appropriately across social contexts, emphasising instead the capacity to analyse how language may serve to perpetuate or challenge social inequalities within a society. It calls attention to the potential of language use as a means of promoting social justice. Overall, sociolinguistic competence comprises a complex set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable speakers to use language effectively in a variety of social contexts while remaining

sensitive to the cultural and societal norms that underlie successful communication.

Conclusion:

In the Bulgarian language textbooks and workbooks for Grades I- IV, linguistic information is not presented in an abstract or self-contained manner, but rather within the context of the tasks and corresponding activities that pupils are expected to perform. New concepts are introduced gradually, at an empirico- descriptive level, in an accessible and engaging form that refines pupils' practically acquired skills in using linguistic and speech units within the natural flow of communication (Ivanova, N., 2019). The study of elements belonging to the different subsystems of language is carried out in accordance with the expected learning outcomes outlined in the Bulgarian Language and Literature curriculum for each grade. The lessons on new linguistic knowledge included in the textbooks support the achievement of these outcomes and contribute to the development of linguistic competences through the systematic study of the language and its structural units. The formation of linguistic competences takes place through every type of lesson within the broader process of Bulgarian language and literature education (Ivanova, N., 2019). In this respect, a key issue in the construction of a comprehensive system of educational content concerns the system of concepts-their classification, integration, and hierarchy. Not only linguistic and literary concepts, but also those expressing the essential aesthetic, moral-psychological, and cultural foundations of individual and social life, play a crucial role in enabling young learners to relate to the problems of the contemporary world. These concepts are vital both for the meaningful comprehension of literary works and for the spiritual and personal development of the learner through literature.

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