



USING INDEPENDENT LEARNING TASKS TO
DEVELOP THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
OF PROSPECTIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the linguodidactic potential of independent learning tasks in developing the sociolinguistic competence of prospective foreign language teachers. The research problem concerns the use of independent tasks within mother-tongue education to develop prospective foreign language teachers' ability to communicate in dialogic speech in ways that are appropriate to social situations, pragmatically suitable, and consistent with the requirements of speech etiquette. The study employs theoretical analysis, comparison, classification, and methodological modelling. It proposes principles for aligning independent learning tasks with the components of sociolinguistic competence, a system of task types, assessment criteria, and the main stages of a methodological model. The proposed approach aims to integrate mother-tongue education with professional communication situations and to encourage students to analyse their own speech independently.

Introduction

In contemporary teacher education, the professional preparation of prospective foreign language teachers is not limited to knowledge of grammatical rules and lexical items. Teachers need to communicate effectively with interlocutors of different social statuses and ages, with varying communicative purposes and in different situations. They must select forms of expression appropriate to the context, use forms of address and requests suitably, and



understand the social and pragmatic meanings conveyed in communication. In this respect, sociolinguistic competence is an important component of prospective specialists' professional and communicative readiness. Language proficiency is based not only on knowledge and skills but also on experience in applying them in professional practice. As a scholarly discipline, language-teaching methodology describes the teaching process under specific conditions or identifies the regularities of teaching beyond the particular circumstances in which a language is learned. In this regard, it should be emphasised that Uzbek language teaching methodology is an independent pedagogical discipline that brings together the principles and regularities of language development, methods of language acquisition, and the educational and formative potential of language. In the course of study, students acquire a foreign language as a means of communication and develop an understanding of the system of the language being learned; this, in turn, can deepen their conscious understanding of their mother tongue.

Sociolinguistic competence involves the ability to interpret and use linguistic units appropriately in social contexts, taking into account relationships between communication participants, levels of formality, communicative purposes, and speech norms. D. Hymes's account of communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include the appropriateness of speech in a particular situation.¹ Subsequent approaches likewise identify the ability to select linguistic forms in accordance with social circumstances as an important indicator of communicative readiness.

To enhance the methodological value of this topic, independent work is viewed not merely as a collection of tasks completed outside the classroom, but as a purposeful methodological system that enables students to observe linguistic phenomena, analyse communicative situations, compare speech options, make independent decisions, and evaluate their own performance. Mother-tongue education serves as the methodological basis: by analysing forms of address in Uzbek, expressions of respect and social distance, and ways of making requests, refusing, apologising, agreeing, or expressing disagreement, students develop a conscious understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena. This approach does not equate foreign-language teaching with mother-tongue education. Rather, it uses observation and analysis of the mother tongue as a methodological resource for preparing students for future professional communication.

Methods and Results

Today, being able to speak Uzbek fluently, accurately, and coherently is important, as is the ability to prepare official and business documents correctly. Learning and using the state language should become not only a natural need but also a necessary responsibility. Speaking and writing Uzbek correctly and expressively, safeguarding the purity and richness of the language, and expanding the domains in which it is used are regarded as responsibilities of the state and of every member of the nation. It is also desirable for people from other ethnic backgrounds to learn and speak Uzbek proficiently out of respect for the Uzbek people and for



Uzbek as the state language. In particular, younger generations should continually seek to expand their Uzbek vocabulary and use the language's resources appropriately. Accordingly, proposals have been made concerning methods for teaching Uzbek to students in Russian-medium groups at schools, academic lyceums, and vocational colleges. E. A. Osintseva-Raevskaya, Ya. M. Kolker, and E. S. Ustinova argue that using the mother tongue in foreign-language learning is methodologically justified when it helps improve the effectiveness of the learning process. Drawing on her own teaching experience, E. A. Erokhina emphasises the important role of learners' mother tongues in teaching and learning English. According to E. A. Pavlova, "the use of the mother tongue should be conscious and purposeful and limited to a specific range of situations in which it not only causes no interference but also helps optimise the learning process."² "Relying on their linguistic and cultural experience in their mother tongue, students seek to master the foreign-language system consistently and step by step."³ We consider persuasive the view that foreign-language teaching can involve learning both the foreign language and the mother tongue by identifying similarities and differences between the languages and cultures being compared. R. Eshag reaches a similar conclusion and recommends developing new approaches to foreign-language teaching based on the use of the mother tongue, so that the interaction between the two languages helps students understand the foreign language more deeply.⁴

We would like to discuss several innovative techniques that may be useful in teaching this topic. The "Rapid Question-and-Answer" technique can be used during the lesson stage devoted to reviewing the previous topic and checking homework. Students are asked questions related to the topic and are expected to answer them quickly. It is advisable for students to write their answers, as this also allows them to consider and learn from their peers' responses.

The "Unbroken Chain" technique can help reinforce knowledge acquired during the presentation of new material. The class is divided into groups, and the teacher distributes separate slips of paper containing questions related to the topic. Within a set time, students complete words and sentences in sequence, forming a chain.

The "Project" method can be used during the final stage of the lesson. The time available in class may not be sufficient for students to work independently or to obtain comprehensive information. In such circumstances, the project method can be effective because it encourages independent learning and inquiry.

Theoretical analysis indicates that independent learning tasks can perform at least four functions in developing sociolinguistic competence. First, they enable students to observe linguistic units not only in terms of their form but also in relation to social situations. Second, comparing different speech options helps students recognise distinctions between formal and informal communication. Third, the need to select an appropriate response independently in a



given situation activates communicative decision-making. Fourth, analysing and revising their own dialogues helps students develop reflective skills.

The effectiveness of independent work is determined not simply by whether a task has been completed, but by its content and intended outcome. For example, if a student merely lists forms of address, the outcome remains at the level of knowledge. If the student creates three versions of the same request—addressed to a teacher, a fellow student, and an unfamiliar person—and explains why the versions differ, the task combines sociolinguistic analysis, context-sensitive choice, and reflection. When using mother-tongue materials, it is important not to oversimplify the social meanings of linguistic forms. The appropriateness of a particular expression depends not only on the word itself but also on the relationship between interlocutors, the place and purpose of communication, intonation, and context. Independent tasks should therefore encourage students to analyse situations and justify their choices rather than simply find a ready-made answer.

While completing assignments, students commonly use learning materials independently to prepare notes and pay particular attention to key concepts and relevant terminology. They should avoid copying passages verbatim from the prescribed sources and explain the main ideas in their own words. If the course instructor reinforces independent study of selected topics and work with learning resources through oral questions and answers whenever possible, this can help reveal and develop students' understanding. Different methodological approaches advocate different principles concerning the use of learners' mother tongues. For example, proponents of the direct and natural methods advocate excluding the mother tongue from the learning process. Others support relying on the mother tongue, while still others argue that learners' mother tongue should be taken into account.

According to the principle of relying on the mother tongue, students should regularly compare forms in the two languages and analyse their similarities and differences in order to understand their structures more deeply. This approach, however, is oriented more towards theoretical understanding than practical acquisition. By contrast, the principle of taking the mother tongue into account focuses on the practical acquisition of foreign-language speech. This can be achieved by organising speech material in ways that help prevent interference from the mother tongue. Implementation of this principle is facilitated by properly structuring the process of acquiring foreign-language lexical items. This is important for teachers, who can prevent errors by anticipating likely difficulties.

In such circumstances, the importance of appropriately designed tasks increases. Examples include: collecting forms of address and requests used in different situations and recording their contexts; comparing formal, neutral, and informal versions of the same request; writing a dialogue in which a student contacts the dean's office and asks a fellow student for help; and writing a dialogue involving an apology, an objection, or an attempt to ease a disagreement.



This sequence of tasks progresses from simple observation to the creation of an independent spoken product and reflection. However, the tasks do not have to be used in a strictly linear order: depending on students' preparedness and the course topic, comparative analysis may also follow dialogue writing. The key requirement is that the aim, assessment criteria, and expected outcome of each task be clearly defined in advance.

Discussion

The theoretical and methodological findings indicate that, in order to develop sociolinguistic competence, independent learning tasks should go beyond the repetition of grammatical or lexical material. Work on independent tasks becomes competence-oriented when students are required to identify a sociolinguistic situation, compare several speech options, select an appropriate option, and explain their choice. Research on independent learning emphasises the importance of learners' planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own activity. From this perspective, assessment of sociolinguistically oriented tasks should not be limited to the final dialogue; it should also take into account how students made their decisions and how they improved their solutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research and methodological perspectives discussed in this article make it possible to interpret the development of sociolinguistic competence in prospective foreign language teachers' dialogic speech as an integrated methodological system. Independent tasks in mother-tongue education can support the development of this competence through observation, comparison, context-sensitive choice, and dialogue construction. The methodological effectiveness of independent tasks depends on whether they are context-oriented, have clearly defined outcomes and assessment criteria, require students to explain their choices, and provide opportunities to improve their work in response to feedback.

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² Pavlova, E. A. "The Place and Role of the Mother Tongue in Foreign-Language Teaching." Available at: <http://festival.1september.ru/articles/525159/>.

³ Shumskaya, O. A., & Pridvoreva, I. G. "The Influence of the Mother Tongue on Foreign-Language Learning." *Education: Past, Present and Future. Proceedings of the 5th International Scientific Conference*, Krasnodar, 2018, pp. 5–7.

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