

# DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF LEARNERS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF TEXT-ORIENTED APPROACH: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

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Nowadays a great deal of interest has been generated internationally on the development of the **text-oriented approach** in foreign language classrooms. A basic goal of the approach is the expansion of literacy to increase learners' communicative competence.

The given paper is devoted to the use of alternative texts and methods developed on the precepts of the communicative-text-oriented approach in Armenian schools.

The relevance of the research is determined by the reforms in the sphere of school education in Armenia which demand modernization of the teaching methods as well as the contents of teaching.

The main goal of the research is to analyze the incorporation of text-oriented approach in Armenian schools.

## ***1. Texts in foreign language classroom***

The text is the trace of at least one utterance act, whether realized in terms of a verbal, linguistic trace, or of non-verbal one. Text refers to the connected sequences of signs and signals, under their conventional meanings, produced by the speaker and by the addressee – certain of which point to possible ways of grounding the discourse to be constructed within a particular context. Text is essentially linear, due to the limitations imposed by the production of speech in real time situations.

Texts are very important to develop communicative competence of learners.

Interest in communicative language teaching has grown and spread since the 1960s. The major objective of communicative language teaching is to enable learners to produce language for the purpose of performing tasks which are important or essential to their everyday existence.

Dell Hymes, an American socio-linguist, coined the term communicative competence (1972), in contrast to Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence (1965). He has made similar distinction between linguistic competence and performance. According to Chomsky "competence is the native speaker's knowledge of his/her language and the ability to produce and understand large amount of sentences. Performance is the actual use of these utterances in everyday life" [1].

According to Hymes, communicative competence is the ability to communicate in everyday situations and includes both structural and functional aspects of language. It includes knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, rules of speaking and responding and use of language appropriately in different social contexts.

Savignon notes: "Communicative competence is relative, not absolute and depends on the co-operation of all the participants involved" [2]. It is important for learners to know how to use grammatical rules for producing meaningful sentences in real life situations, it is also necessary for them to know what kind of language is used in particular situation; when they should be silent and when they should perform.

Thus, textual competence is one of the most important structural components of communicative competence.

**Textual competence** refers to the ability to understand and produce well-organized and cohesive text in both written and spoken contexts.

Textual competence isn't developed based on rules or only development of some linguistic skills, instead, it is developed through the various strategies that students employ depending on the subject, audience, purpose and text-type to be produced.

We should not ignore fostering students' textual competence in English teaching. While we promote students' oral competence in class, we may take a selective method, which accepts the best teaching techniques from other methods according to the actual situation. Teachers are required to use

communicative language teaching as a method while accepting elements of the traditional method. **Textual competence should be incorporated in English classes since it is widely known, that textual competence directly influences English reading comprehension.**

There is a great variety of **comprehension exercises**: Paused reading, Blank fill exercises (Cloze exercises), Question forming exercises, Replace the endings exercises, Condensing, Multiple choice exercises, True or false, Correct the errors, etc.

## ***II. The description of the experimental teaching based on text-oriented approach***

During our internship we decided to check experimentally the possibilities of using different types of texts and exercises in order to develop the learners' communicative competence (with all its structural components).

Our experiment was conducted with the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students of secondary school N1 of village of Karmirgyugh (Gegharqunik Region, Republic of Armenia).

UNIT 3 from the textbook by S.Bagdassarian, S.Gurdjayants, H.Avagyan was chosen for the teaching [3]. Before starting our experimental teaching we had studied the Program and criteria for the high school as well [4].

In total 30 students were involved in the teaching.

The texts were selected according to the topic of the lessons taking into account the linguistic background of the learners.

**The main aim of the experimental teaching** was to see if additional text materials can lead to the effective development of the text and discourse competences of the learners and finally to the development of English communicative competence.

**The specific objectives of the experimental teaching** were the following:

- to analyze the potential of the texts provided by the textbooks;
- to choose texts in addition to the ones provided by the textbooks;
- to develop various types of exercises and tasks which can motivate the interest of the learners towards the English language;
- to conduct the experimental teaching based on the developed didactic materials;
- to analyse the effectiveness of the suggested methodology based on the feedback.

**Topic of the lesson:** *How Britain is governed.*

**Grammar topic:** *The Passive Voice.*

The following textual materials are presented in the textbook:  
*Parliament of Britain, England 1642.*

In addition to the above mentioned textual materials we offered the additional one: *The story of America's first president.*

**Planning the Experimental Teaching.** The experimental teaching was planned as a series of lessons each of which was dedicated to a specific goal. Overall 3 lessons were conducted.

**Day 1: Execution of Lesson 1.** The execution of the lesson was planned as a combination of three main parts. Table 1 below represents the structure of the lesson with the time management.

*Table 1: The structure of lesson 1*

Phase	Time
Introduction	5 min
Explicit Instruction	25 min
Review and closure	10 min

### **Introduction (5 minutes)**

The lesson was initiated with the greeting, marking the absent students and the announcement of the topic of the lesson.

### **Explicit Instruction (25 minutes)**

Students were assigned to read the text, get acquainted with the new words and do some exercises. Before reading the text, we discussed the questions before the text. Some of the students shared their ideas with the others.

**Vocabulary acquisition:** The unknown words of the unit were the following: *decide, defense, govern, law, tradition, respect, responsible, inherit, merit, handsome, devote, honest, defeat, aim, cruel, guilty, character.* Pupils were assigned to guess the meaning of unknown words and use it in their own sentences.

After reading the text we did a comprehension exercise, to understand weather pupils get the meaning of the text or not.

Later students were introduced the following phrasal verbs with give: *give back, give in, give up, give up (doing) something*. Students were assigned to use the given phrasal verbs in their own sentences.

## Day 2: Execution of Lesson2

Table 2: The structure of lesson 2

Phase	Time
Introduction	5 min
Homework check	15 min
Speaking	15 min
Review and closure	5 min

As homework the following exercises from the textbook were given. The first exercise required to translate the Armenian words into English. E.g. Հարգել-respect, Որոշել-decide, Ժառանգել-inherit, etc.

Besides, the following types of exercises were displayed: *match the words with their meanings, fill in the gaps with the given words, choose the correct word from the word family, choose the right word*.

In the next phase, to confirm their skills we did the following exercises regarding the new words: *Choose the correct word, arrange the words, fill in the gap exercise, Match the words, Insert the word, Form the adjectives*.

In the next exercises there were the pictures of Margaret Thatcher, Napoleon I, Tigran the Great, Winston Churchill, Peter the Great, Indira Gandhi. Students were assigned to speak about the people mentioned above, using their new vocabulary.

## Day 3: Execution of Lesson3

Table 3: The structure of lesson 3

Phase	Time
Introduction	5 min
Explicit Instruction	25 min
Review and closure	10 min

In the unit there was a reading text with the information on the formation of the Parliament of Great Britain. As the unit was all about politics we decided to give the students extra reading texts about the story of American's first president. The text was chosen from the online educational source [5]. The text is given below:

### *The story of America's first president*

*All Americans know about George Washington. He was the first president of the United States of America, and his face appears on the iconic one-dollar bill. He has also given his name to the capital city of the USA, Washington D.C, ....and to a state, the state of Washington. No other American is quite so famous!*

### ***An unforgettable president...***

*If you had to **sum up** George Washington's life in one word, that word would have to be unforgettable. George's story is one of travel and adventure, full of risks and, most of all, full of glory. After all, in 1789, he was elected the first president of the United States, a country that was to become the most powerful in the world. At the end of his life, in 1799, George was an international hero. But, if you look back into George's early years, you will see that things were not always so **rosy**. George was sent into the Army as a very young man. For a **colonist** of his generation, it was a respectable thing to do. It gave him an opportunity to **make a living**, and at the same time see the country, which at the time was full of wild animals and Indians. It was a tough life, but an interesting one. One could **hunt** forever in the vast forests. One could explore new lands **seemingly** forever.*

*A lover of Nature, George became a **surveyor** with the Army, a job which led him further and further into the wild, unknown country. As for the Indians, they were generally friendly, and were good **trading partners**. All in all, George's young years were full of **carefree** wandering in a new, virgin land.*

*Yet suddenly one day, the **threatening** news came: wild animals and Indians were not the only inhabitants of the woods. Virginia scouts had found French soldiers on the other side of the Appalachians. It was said that the French claimed all land west of the mountains for New France. This was bad news for the governor of Virginia, who wanted the same land — at all costs.*

*In his **quest** to get the land beyond the mountains, the governor called upon his best soldier to **deal with** the situation: it was young George Washington, barely 22 years old at the time. The governor told George to go*

*and find the French, and give them a simple message: leave the region immediately, or get ready for battle.*

*Wanting to serve and please his authorities, George did as he was told. He went over the mountains with a small army, found the French, and passed on the governor's message. But, of course, the French did not wish to leave. Inevitably, the conflict developed into a war, known as the French and Indian War; that is, the French and some Indian allies fighting the British colonials.*

*For George, it was a difficult time. **To cut a long story short**, it was the only time in his life that he had to surrender an army — at Fort Necessity, near the **forks of the Ohio**. In that battle, George nearly didn't become the first president of the United States. His army was surrounded by the French and Indians, badly **outnumbered**, so he had to surrender the fort. Luckily for him, the French allowed him and his army to leave with their horses and guns. The battle had been lost, but the English, who were more numerous, eventually won the war.*

*The French and Indian War was a learning experience for George, one that he would later exploit in the War for American Independence. Indeed, twenty years later, George was dressed in an American uniform, and fighting not against the French, but against the British.*

*In this war, it is said that George's **fiery** leadership inspired his American troops when they were **starving** and cold, and he emerged from the war as the greatest general.*

*It was no surprise that the victorious Americans chose him as their first president. As for getting his picture on the dollar bill, that didn't come until after George was long dead and gone, proving that his spirit was truly an unforgettable one.*

The following **Student Worksheet** was used after reading the text:

*1. Select the nearest equivalent to these expressions which occur in the text.*

**1. was to become -**

had become -

b. was going to become -

c. should have become

**2. claimed all land -**

a. had occupied all land -

b. were asking for all the land -

c. considered that all land belonged to them.

**3. passed on the governor's message -**

- a. did not mention the governor's a message -
- b. said that the governor would send them a message -
- c. told them what the governor had said;

**4. nearly didn't become the first president -**

- a. was almost killed. -
- b. almost found the first president. -
- c. almost decided to join the French.

**5. was a learning experience -**

- a. was a new experience. -
- b. was something that taught him a lot. -
- c. was a very difficult experience.

*2. Make up questions to which these are the answers, using the question word indicated.*

- 1. In 1799 (when)
- 2. French soldiers . (what)
- 3. Because he wanted it too (why)
- 4. To go out and find the French. (what)
- 5. The French and the Indians. (who or whom)
- 6. At Fort Necessity. (where)
- 7. With his fiery leadership. (How)
- 8. Much later long after his death. (when)

***In addition to the above mentioned exercises we have worked out a variety of exercises and tasks of different types which are given below:***

**❖ True or False?**

- 1. George Washington was elected the first president of the United States of America in 1789. (True)
- 2. During his life all the things were very easy for him. (False)
- 3. It was 22 years old George Washington to took the responsibility to convey the message of the government to the French soldiers. (True)
- 4. After hearing the message of the government French soldiers left at once. (False)
- 5. Despite George Washington's army was outnumbered they, they won the war. (False)



❖ **Match the words with their meaning:**

1. Glory	a) Nice, fine or subtle
2. Rosy	b) Give up demand
3. Inhabitant	c) High renown won by notable achievements
4. Quest	d) Attempt
5. Surrender	e) A person or animal that lives in a place
6. Fiery	f) Strongly emotional

**Grammar**

As the grammar material of the unit was **the Passive Voice**, we offered the following exercises:

- ❖ Find the sentences about George Washington with the use of the Passive Voice. There are several examples in the article, for example:  
*He was elected the first president of the United States, George was sent into the Army as a very young man.*
- ❖ **Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the verbs in brackets to form the passive voice.**

1. George Washington \_\_\_\_\_ the first president of USA in 1789. (to elect)
2. George \_\_\_\_\_ into the army as a very young man. (to send)
3. He did as he \_\_\_\_\_. (to tell)
4. 20 years later he \_\_\_\_\_ in an American uniform. (to dress)
5. The soldiers \_\_\_\_\_ after a short struggle. (to surrender)

The following additional tasks aimed at the development of communicative competence were used at the end of the experimental teaching:

- **Reading for information:** Pick out as many words and phrases as possible that tell us what sort of a man George Washington was.
- **Developing Discussion Skills:** What makes a superhero?
- **Free expression:** Describe their superhero, and explain why he (she) is so highly considered.

### III. Feedback

In order to measure the outcomes of the experimental teaching we used interviews with the target audience as well as questionnaires to understand the strong and weak points of the teaching and to use the feedback gained from the participants for the self-assessment of the effectiveness of the experimental teaching.

Upon the end of the experimental teaching the student were assigned to answer the following questions:

- 1) Was it interesting to read more texts than in your textbook?
  - a) Yes, it was.
  - b) Yes, but we were overloaded with texts.
  - c) No, it was not interesting
- 2) How did you like the text out of your textbook?
  - a) It was very interesting.
  - b) It was boring.
- 3) How did you like the way of our teaching/learning?
  - a) It was motivating.
  - b) It was not so interesting.
  - c) It was boring.
- 4) Did the additional text prompt you to communicate?
  - a) Yes, it did.
  - b) No, it didn't.

After answering the questions and analyzing the replies we had the following results:

- **Question 1:** For 20 students it was interesting to have more texts than in the textbook, for 10 pupils it was interesting but they were overloaded with texts.
- **Question 2:** For 30 students the texts out of the textbook were interesting and full of important information.
- **Question 3:** For 30 students the way of our teaching was motivating.
- **Question 4:** For 25 students the texts prompted them to communicate and 5 students gave negative answers.

The feedback showed that the majority of students liked the techniques used during the experimental teaching in the perspective of the text-oriented approach.

To sum up the results, text oriented approach is one of the most effective ones to develop learners' communicative competence in general and textual and discourse competences in particular.

**Key words:** *linguistic didactics, communicative competence, text, textual competence, text-oriented approach.*

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**ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱԾՈՂՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑԱԿԱՆ ԿՈՄՊԵՏԵՆՑԻԱՅԻ  
ԶԱՐԳԱՑՈՒՄԸ ՏԵՔՍԱՀԵՆ ՄՈՏԵՑՄԱՆ ՇՐՋԱՆԱԿՆԵՐՈՒՄ.  
ՏԵՍՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԻՑ ԴԵՊԻ ՊՐԱԿՏԻԿԱ**

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Հոդվածը նվիրված է տեքստահեն մոտեցման շրջանակներում ուսումնառողների հաղորդակցական կոմպետենցիայի զարգացմանը: «Տեքստային կոմպետենցիա» հասկացության միջոցով բացահայտվում է տեքստերի դերը լեզվադիդակտիկայում: Մանրամասն նկարագրված է լրացուցիչ տեքստային նյութի և հատուկ մշակված վարժությունների և առաջադրանքների հիման վրա իրականացված փորձարարական ուսուցումը: Ներկայացված են փորձարարական ուսուցման բոլոր փուլերը՝ պլանավորումը, իրականացումը, հետադարձ կապի ապահովումը, տվյալների մշակումը, ինքնագնահատումը:

**РАЗВИТИЕ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ УЧАЩИХСЯ В РАМКАХ  
ТЕКСТОЦЕНТРИЧЕСКОГО ПОДХОДА: ОТ ТЕОРИИ К ПРАКТИКЕ**

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Статья посвящена развитию коммуникативной компетенции учащихся в рамках текстоцентрического подхода. Через понятие текстовой компетенции раскрывается роль текстов в линводидактике. Подробно описано экспериментальное обучение на основе дополнительных текстовых материалов и специально разработанной на основе текста системы упражнений и заданий. Представлены все этапы экспериментального обучения: планирование, реализация, обеспечение обратной связи, обработка данных, самооценка.