

## COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN MEDICINE

Baeva Tamara Achmatovna, Konstantinova Yulia Abramovna

Department of Foreign Languages, North-Western State Mechnikov Medical University, St. Petersburg, Russia  
E-Mail: tamarabaeva@mail.ru

**Abstract.** *In the communicative approach, also known as the communicative language teaching, the central concept is “communicative competence” which is, in our case – the ultimate goal of teaching Medical English. The present article describes examples of exercises aimed at formation of all components of foreign language communicative competence, presented in a new tutorial for medical students based on the communicative approach.*

**Key words:** *communicative approach, foreign language communicative competence, language skills, medical students, tutorial*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the knowledge of foreign language is important for the modern doctors not only for getting the necessary information from scientific journals but also for the successful communication with their foreign colleagues and English-speaking patients.

We suppose speaking a foreign language to be the most difficult part in language learning because students need ample practice in speaking to be able to say a few words of their own in connection with a professional situation. The psychological factor must be taken into account when teaching students to speak a foreign language. It is necessary to create a situation when students feel the need to inform someone (a colleague, a patient) of something, to explain something, and to prove something to someone. In general the structure of oral language activity as psycho-linguistics states comprises:

a) Motivation, i.e. what induces a person to speak. Some methodologists say that the key problem is not how to teach a foreign language, but how to motivate the learner;

b) Aim of communication – to inform somebody about something or to get information from somebody;

c) Means – verbal means or verbal behavior;

d) Condition – reciprocity or mutual action of speaker and hearer in certain situations.

There are endless methodological possibilities for teaching/learning situations. In the artificial conditions of teaching and learning a foreign language one can use both real and close-to-real situations. Since “language is not a substance, it is a process” (N.Brooks) and “language doesn't exist. It happens” (P. Strevens) we should know under what conditions “it happens”. So, let's enumerate the psychological characteristics of oral language. They are as follows:

1. Speech must be motivated, i.e. the speaker expresses a desire to inform the hearer of something interesting, important, or to get information from him/her. Suppose the

patient is talking to the doctor. Why is he talking? Because he wants to either tell the doctor about his complaints, or get information from him about the treatment. This is the case of inner motivation.

2. Speech is always addressed to an interlocutor. It is necessary to organize the teaching process in a way which allows the students to speak to someone. Even when the student simply retells the text he will hold his audience when he says something new, something individual.

3. Speech is always emotionally colored for a speaker expresses his thoughts, his feelings, his attitude to what he says. That can be done by giving such tasks as: reasons why you like this method of treatment, prove something using the results of routine medical tests, give your opinion on the case, or on the problem concerned.

4. Speech is always situational for it takes place in a certain situation. While teaching medical students, a real and close-to-real situation (e.g., case histories – the real and imaginary ones) should be created to stimulate student's speech.

Unfortunately the available textbooks for medical students lack the system of training of such communicative skills. We have made an attempt to fill in the existing gap. Professionally-oriented tutorial was worked out with the purpose of forming a communicative competence while developing language experiences of medical students. The ultimate goal of this tutorial is providing the students with the opportunity to read specialized literature, write research papers and acquire communicative competence in their specialized fields of medicine in the future with the help of broad knowledge of medical terminology. It is supposed to act as a bridge between the students' present English ability and their future necessary competence of medical English. As to the content of the tutorial, it is the following:

- Specialized medical vocabulary;
- Writing medical notes and reports;
- Analysis of medical histories;
- Medical role playing and discussions;
- Internet based learning

For introducing and learning medical vocabulary we used the exercises which enable the students to develop skills of oral speech and translation:

### 1.1. Examples

1.1.1. Look at these sentences that doctors often say to patients. Fill in the gaps with these words:

*problem back feeling taking look eaten*  
*allergic temperature prescription symptoms*

1. Now, what seems to be the *problem*?
2. How long have you been like this?
3. Do you know if you're to anything?
4. What have you recently?
5. Here's a for some painkillers..

1.1.2. Listen and check your answers.

**1.2. Cross out the incorrect words/phrases:**

I've been feeling *terrible/great/virus* lately.

I've got *asthma/a rash/throw up*.

**1.3. Choose the correct words/phrases:**

1. A *surgeon/A GP* is a doctor who does operations.

2. An *operating theatre/A surgery* is the place where you have an operation.

**1.4. Fill in the gaps with the words in brackets:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ gives you a nose and makes you \_\_\_\_\_. (*hay fever; sneeze; runny*) 2. An operating \_\_\_\_\_

2. Food \_\_\_\_\_ can often make you \_\_\_\_\_ and give you \_\_\_\_\_. (*diarrhea; poisoning; sick*)

3. \_\_\_\_\_ is a type of \_\_\_\_\_ and is usually a \_\_\_\_\_. (*pill; painkiller; paracetamol*)

Using a method of communicative tasks, based on the identity of the processes of learning and communication, we presented the tasks in a form of a **polylogue**:

1. Work in pairs. Write the first half of a conversation between a doctor and a patient. Write about the patient's symptoms only.

– *Hello, Mr. Newman. What seems to be the problem?*

– *Well, I haven't been feeling very well recently. I've got...*

2. Swap papers with another pair. Write the rest of the conversation. Suggest treatment for the patient's symptoms.

3. Practise the conversation in pairs until you can remember it.

4. Work in groups of four. Take turns to role-play the conversation for the students who wrote the beginning. Do you agree with the other pair's suggestions for treatment?

The abovementioned tutorial includes a whole system of exercises improving foreign language reading and communicative skills. To demonstrate the main idea of the given tutorial the following types of exercises after the special medical texts are represented here:

1. *Fill in the gaps with missing medical terms;*

2. *Practise a short dialogue and then try to fill in the missing sentences in the same way in the similar dialogue;*

3. *Listen to the dialogue in which a doctor interviews a patient. As you listen, note the patient's present complaints;*

4. *Work with a partner. Ask your partner where the pain is. Then ask two other appropriate questions to help you reach a diagnosis. You may use "The language Functions" (Appendix 1). Practise this short dialogue.*

5. *Study the following information: the doctor's findings on examination, look at the possible diagnoses for the patient, the data of the investigations carried out for this patient, the final diagnosis. Suppose you are discussing with your colleague the given case history;*

6. *Make up your own dialogue on the basis of the case history given above: an interview between a doctor and a patient. You should play the part of the doctor and your partner should play the part of the patient.*

As for the Internet based learning, our students are encouraged to work with the website **Medical English online exercises and games**. Course suitable for doctors ... [www.englishmed.com](http://www.englishmed.com). The site presents videos and cartoons on medicine, after watching which, the students do online interactive exercises that promote the formation of language and professional competence:

1. Matching

*Match each of these up to get the correct answers. Move the items on the right by holding the mouse down and dragging them to the left.*

2. Collocations

*Match these medical collocations (Expressions/Phrasal Verbs). Choose the correct answers, by selecting them from each list.*

3. Gap filling

*Rebuild the medical English sentences, fill in the gap(s).*

4. Document Gap filling

*Rebuild the medical English article by filling in the gaps.*

5. Word order

*Rearrange these medical English sentences. Grab the panels below and sort them into the correct order on the lines.*

6. Hangman

*Hangman exercise.*

## 2. CONCLUSION

Future doctors should acquire a sound knowledge of Medical English in order to avoid any confusion resulting from insufficient language skills. So, while teaching medical students it is necessary to use modern communicative approach to develop the students' ability to comprehend and express medical language in situational circumstances.

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