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COMMUNICATION: FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDYING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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The article addresses the problem of communication as a social phenomenon and the communication skills in foreign languages from different perspectives: social, psychological, pedagogical, didactic, the emphasis being placed on analyzing the functions of communication and identifying the specific communication skills in foreign languages. The conceptual provisions formulated represent prerequisites for updating the methodological approaches of teaching and learning the foreign languages.

Keywords: communication, communication functions, communication skills, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, paraverbal communication, manner of speaking, communication situations, feed-back in communication.

COMUNICAREA: FUNCȚIILE COMUNICĂRII DIN PERSPECTIVA STUDIERII LIMBILOR STRĂINE

În articol este abordată problema comunicării ca fenomen social, accentul fiind pus pe analiza funcțiilor comunicării, pe competențele de comunicare în limbile străine din diferite perspective: socială, psihologică, pedagogică, didactică, fiind identificat specificul competențelor de comunicare în limbile străine. Prevederile conceptuale formulate reprezintă premise pentru reactualizarea demersurilor metodologice de predare-învățare a limbilor străine.

Cuvinte-cheie: comunicare, funcțiile comunicării, competențe de comunicare, comunicare verbală, comunicare nonverbală, comunicare paraverbală, limbaj, situații de comunicare, feed-back în comunicare.

Introduction

The concept of "***communication***" in the specialized literature is approached from different perspectives: at the level of particular communication theories: social, psychological, philosophical, and pedagogical; at the level of general communication theory, epistemologically substantiated by synthesizing particular researches, thus creating a frame of reference for the development of constituent theories, including foreign languages learning theories; and at the level of communication theories built as an interdisciplinary domain and, first of all, as the informational one (ICT).

The ***science of communication*** has as *a specific object of study* "the professional and institutional circuits of information". In this way, the ***communication science*** tries to ensure for its field of research "its own identity, qualitatively delimited, socially and psychologically, by the extremely wide area of communication, studied by *the communication sciences*".

The development of the specific study object of the ***communication science*** (*professional* and *institutional* communication) is achieved by rigorous defining of the concepts that relate to communication: a) *fundamental concepts*: communication, information; b) *operational concepts*: transmitter - encoding - background noise - receiver - decoding; information flow matrices (allocution, consultation, recording); denotation, connotation; informational support, information market; general information (of general interest), scientific information, professional information; informational set [*apud* 1, p.495].

The ***concept of communication*** is also approached from two other perspectives, complementary to the analysis presented above: a) "process of influencing an entity - individual, group, community - by another entity"; this definition draws attention to the informal dimension and communication; b) "training and research area within which are located advertising, public relations, communication theories, interpersonal communication, group studies, etc."; this definition confirms the social consecration of the field at the academic level (faculties and university degrees of *Bachelor (Licentiate), Master's, Doctorate* in *communication sciences*) [2, p.499-500].

Communication: Theoretical and Conceptual Delimitations

From Latin, ***communication*** means the act of putting things together, irrespective of their nature. The vast field of communication is marked by a considerable historical baggage that does not lack definitions and approaches.

Jean-Claude Abric defines communication as "a set of the processes through which are undertaken exchanges

of information and meanings between the persons in a given social situation" [3, p.14]. Communication is, in essence, a psychosocial act, conscious or not, voluntary or involuntary, which determines a complex process of interaction. Whether or not you want to communicate, that is, to interact, or, more precisely, to convey a message or not, this happens regardless of the intention of the interlocutors. Therefore, communication is a process with objectives, with an outcome, explicit or implicit. Every communicating individual is directly involved in this situation, influenced by his personality, needs and motivations.

Professor A.Mucchielli replaces the communication motivations with its "stakes": "In order to analyze communication between humans, it is necessary to conceive it as social interaction of some actors, present in a situation that they represent in the same way. Communication is global, in the sense that it responds to a set of stakes that constitutes the phenomenological structure of interpersonal interactions" [4].

Communication, according to the researcher Gh.Dumitriu, is a fundamental way of psychosocial interaction, a continuous exchange of different messages between interlocutors, meant to create a lasting inter-human relationship to influence the maintenance and modification of the individual or group behavior [5, p.86].

In most works of pedagogy and psychology, communication is mentioned as having a past, a present, but especially a future. It is difficult to imagine an act of communication without regarding the closer or more distant aspects that determine it. Each communication experience is uniquely characterized, two experiences not being identical.

Researchers R.Gherghinescu and Gh.Dumitriu argue that the concept of communication would be the fundamental form of psychosocial interaction. Moreover, Gh.Dumitriu emphasizes that the subjects of this interaction exchange messages, achieve specific objectives, direct and control the activity of a person or a group, influence each other and expect response reactions (positive or negative) in the form of feedback) [6, p.86]. Researcher M.Constantinescu states that communication is at the center of social performance. It consists of a process of transmitting information, ideas, opinions from one individual to another and from one social group to another [7].

It would be also necessary to add here an active engagement in the interaction of the nonverbal manifestation of attention, with appropriate gestures and mimics. The verbal manifestations contain paraphrasing and are obviously accompanied by questions that encourage the interlocutor's expression.

The quantitative aspect emphasized by most authors regarding the achievement of institutional learning marginalizes the qualitative component of the relationship formed in this process. However, one can observe the importance of training the student, but also the teacher, on the vector of establishing their relationships and implications. This aspect is accentuated by the author V.Dospinescu's view, according to whom, communication means primarily the meeting of two actors, each with a well-assumed role and responsibility, the *educator* and the *educated* entering an educational transaction process.

An important quality of communication is empathy, which facilitates its efficiency, along with a positive attitude, sincerity, trust, etc. Communication between colleagues and between partners is also an empathic, implicit type that presupposes the understanding of other people's experiences.

Empathic communication complements and facilitates interpersonal relationships, occupying a central place in a process of human interaction. In addition to empathic communication, the assertive communication is also discussed.

A characteristic widely analyzed in the specialized works is persuasion in communication, which, according to the author G.Albu, is based on two components of the attitude: the *cognitive component*: the attitude represents a structured and dynamic system of knowledge (including images) held by an individual; the *affective component*: refers to our emotional reactions towards the interlocutor; it is modified in direction and intensity; expresses our favorable or unfavorable appreciation (on "I like it" or "I don't like it" dimesions) [8]. An authentic and correct understanding from the interlocutors is determined by the process of verbal and nonverbal communication.

It has often been said that "first impression matters." In other words, it impacts first what we see and then what we hear. Our perceptions are influenced by social-cultural representations, but especially by personal filters. A classification of the communication modalities according to their degree of complexity and their appearance during the phylogenesis is provided by Gilles Amado and Andre Guitlet [9]: in an interaction relation the partners give a greater importance to the nonverbal behaviors that allow the observation of certain aspects of feelings felt by the other, of his/her intentions and personality. In 1963 Argyle mentioned that within the **social communication** the body presents itself as an essential dimension, as it is a mediator of knowing

yourself and the other [*apud* 10]. The social gestures and signs of the social skills model are, in part, nonverbal [11]. The answer that the partners give to a communication obviously depends largely on the nonverbal communication.

F.E.Verza argues that "communication presents itself as a relationship and as a process." As a relationship, it expresses the informational link between the sender and the receiver, the message (verbal or nonverbal) being the central content element of the communication structure, considered both a relationship and a process. The diversity of messages is proportionate to the diversity of affective states about which the information is transmitted [12, p.35-36].

Gh.Dumitriu highlights the psychosocial variables of communication that include personal, situational characteristics, with the role of mediating interpersonal or group interaction in the context of communication [13, p.113]. The difficulty in becoming assertive is that the person who wants this does not realize what he feels, what he would or would not want. The assertive relationship implies a certain compromise of a nature that both parties are satisfied with. A first condition would be the development of communication skills, especially active listening.

C.Helena and F.Shoshana consider assertiveness as an opener to communication that allows one to express feelings about an event, without blaming and evaluating the other as an adversary [*apud* 14]. To identify an effective communication, the most commonly used syntagms are *assertive communication* and *assertive behavior*. Demonstrating assertive behavior means being self-revealing, being authentic, imposing yourself without resorting to aggression. Assertive behavior displays respect for oneself and others, being the most efficient way to solve interpersonal problems, based on direct, authentic communication.

Assertiveness is, after all, a communication strategy that allows the individual to express opinions, to manifest himself/herself in a non-aggressive and non-manipulative manner, having the advantage of maintaining strong social relations and a balanced style of life. About an assertive person we can say that he/she knows his/her rights and respects the rights of others. A.Nuta talks about an "assertive expression" when you directly state your needs, perceptions, experiences, thoughts, aspirations, while remaining receptive to what your interlocutor is experiencing.

L.Şoitu addresses the problem of communication from several perspectives: semiotic, actional, educational, etc. According to the researcher, "human communication is the essence of human relations expressed through the ability to permanently decipher the meaning of social contacts made with the help of symbols and social-general meanings in order to obtain stability or changes in individual behavior or at group level" [15, p.3].

Regarded as a process, communication is the transmission and exchange of information (messages) between people. From a formal point of view, communication is therefore a transfer (of quantifiable information) according to an analogous scheme regarding the message path from one individual/group to another individual/ group.
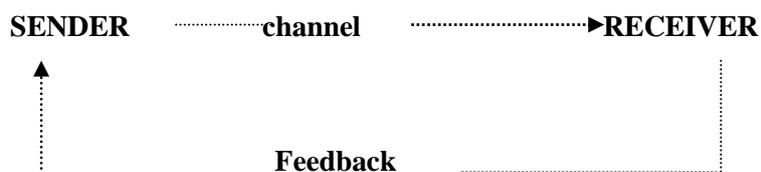

SENDER ········ **channel** ·················▶**RECEIVER**

Feedback

Fig.1. Communication as a process [16].

This is the simplest scheme of communication. In fact, it is unsatisfactory, because many elements of the process are missing. Communicating does not mean a simple transfer, because the exchange of messages becomes interaction. In such a context, we can talk about the response, the feedback. Human communication cannot be conceived without feedback. The communication itself is carried out with a view to an answer.

Admitting that any behavior is communication, we will accept that in such an interaction we do not have a repertoire, but a fluid and polyphonic complex, made up of numerous behavioral patterns – verbal, tonal, positional, contextual, etc. – in which each determines the meaning of the others. Between these various elements, which make up the context of specific and inseparable rules, permutations between the most varied and complex ones are possible, passing from congruence to incongruity. This is why a scheme of communication requires to consist of many more elements, even if we will never be able to find one that will be able to encompass them all [17, p.8-9].

The definition given to the communication by L. Şoitu is the following: "the set of physical and psychological processes through which the operation of putting in relation with one or more persons is performed in order to achieve certain objectives" [18, p.7]. In this sense, we can consider communication as being determined by the processes through which one spirit can "affect" another one, considering all the products of his/her activity generated by the whole human behavior. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between the nature of communication – carried out with a view to a certain objective, to achieve something - and the function of communication – to control and direct the activity of a person or a group.

Competence Versus Message as Communication Tool

Competence represents a level of performance based on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and a motivational optimum that determines the efficiency of the subject in an activity. Communicative competence represents the level of performance that ensures the efficiency of transmitting and receiving the message.

Communicative competence is, to a certain extent, innate, based on a certain primary biopsychical availability, but which is formed by exercises and experience, though effort and will. The message is the most efficient tool to perform this function. The message is that unit which, in most cases, acquires the actual communication value. Changing multiple messages between subjects becomes interaction. The types of interaction are constituted in communication units with a high degree of complexity.

The message is an element of the communication circuit. In general, it is trasmitted, sent by a sender, circulates on a channel and reaches the receiver, but it is not just so. It can be described as an element of a representation process, as an intermediary between reality and the image of that reality. This aspect, however, often remains unknown. In the theory of communication we observe the tendency to limit the study to the actual message, its content ignoring the reality to which it refers. From this perspective, the double positioning of the message at the intersection of two processes - communication and representation – is of particular interest to the actors of the action and its results.
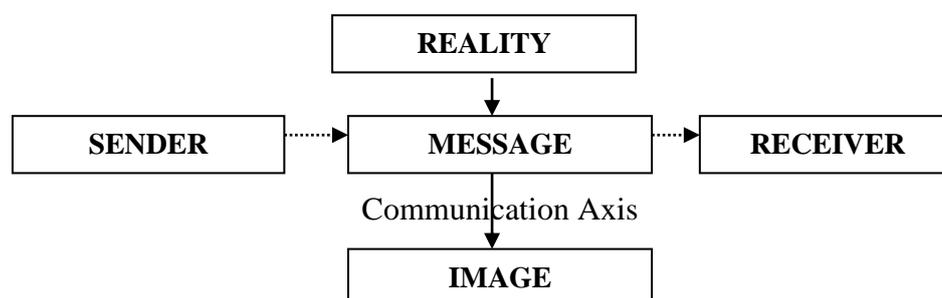
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│   SENDER    │┈┈▶ │   MESSAGE   │┈┈▶ │  RECEIVER   │
└─────────────┘    └─────────────┘    └─────────────┘
              Communication Axis
                           │
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                    │    IMAGE    │
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Fig.2. Structure of Communication Act [19].

In our vision, the double positioning of the message allows us to establish the connections between "communication" as a process and the teaching strategies as a tool for carrying out this process. B. Schiuner distinguishes between two types of messages: those that act on the other; those aimed at training the other within the message.

R.Jakobson argues that any message fulfills several functions that can be hierarchized taking into account a fundamental function. The *expressive function* is centered on the sender of the message, expressing his/her attitude towards the content of his/her message and towards the situation. The message provides information about the sender's feelings, emotions and ideas. The expressive message bears the mark of the subjectivity of the transmitter.

The *conative function* is oriented to the recipient (receiver). The message refers to exercising an action on it, like an order, a request or a task. The advertising or propaganda message is related to the conative function, the message concentrating mainly on the characteristics and reactions of the receiver that this message tries to influence.

The *referential function* is centered on the referent. The message focuses on the object to which it refers and to which it describes the characteristics. The scientific discourse, the objective information by which concrete facts are related are messages with a referential function. In general, the expressive function is centered on the *ego (me)* of the discourse, the connective function on you, and the referential one on *him/her*.

The *metalinguistic function* is code-centered. It aims to provide explanations, clarifications on the code and its use. Therefore, it refers to the words or all the other signs that will constitute the communication support. Through these messages the interlocutors verify whether they use the same code, lexicon or syntax. Thus, the dictionary fulfills a metalinguistic function.

The *poetic function* highlights the "tangible side of the signs". Everything that, in a message, brings an additional meaning through the play of the signs structure pertains to the poetic function. In art and literature, the message, through its form, gains autonomy beyond the communication situation that created it: depending on the quality of the organization of words and forms that compose it, the message ceases, at a certain moment, to be a simple instrument of communication, becoming its object. These functions can be represented by the following scheme:
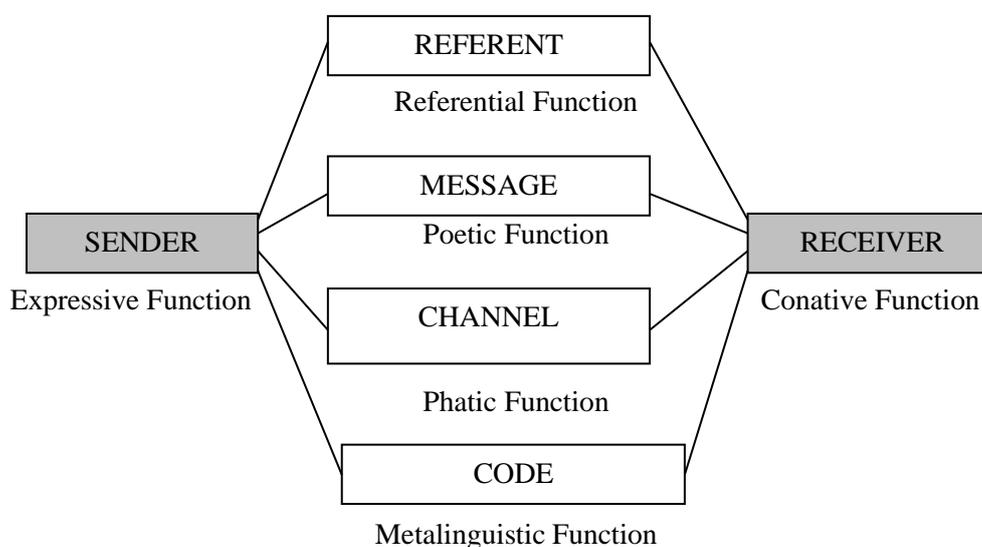

Fig.3. Message Functions in Communication Process [20].

These six functions of the message are not mutually exclusive; in a more or less privileged way, they are present in any communication. Therefore, in order to understand the purpose of communication, we must be able to decode its predominant function. Knowing these functions allows us to identify the most efficient ways to carry out a communication process by selecting the appropriate tools (in our case, interactive teaching strategies).

The notion of *communication* implies a certain reciprocity, being more general and complete than infor-mation, whereas the latter is only a variety or a side of communication. Communication involves a circular processuality, which is part of a certain temporality that it takes into account and which, in turn, shapes it. Moreover, time seems to be a relevant element, with a strong informative character in certain discursive contexts. Temporality can be converted into an additional semiotic agent for the teacher who masters the art of prefaces through language of the past - present - future coordinates. Temporality of speech is something other than objective time. If the chronological time is a single one and cannot be altered, the discursive one is metamorphosed into "times", such as: subjective time, fictional time, time of characters, situations and facts invoked, time to state and time of enunciate, which can establish previous relationships, simultaneity or posteriority, suggesting and emphasizing cognitive elements and ideological configurations through various syntactic constructions and/or lexical combinations. The present discourse never presents a complete universe, but only a fragment that enriches itself along the way. As time goes on, other "signs" will be profiled, which will gradually become increasingly broader and more complete meanings [21, p.333].
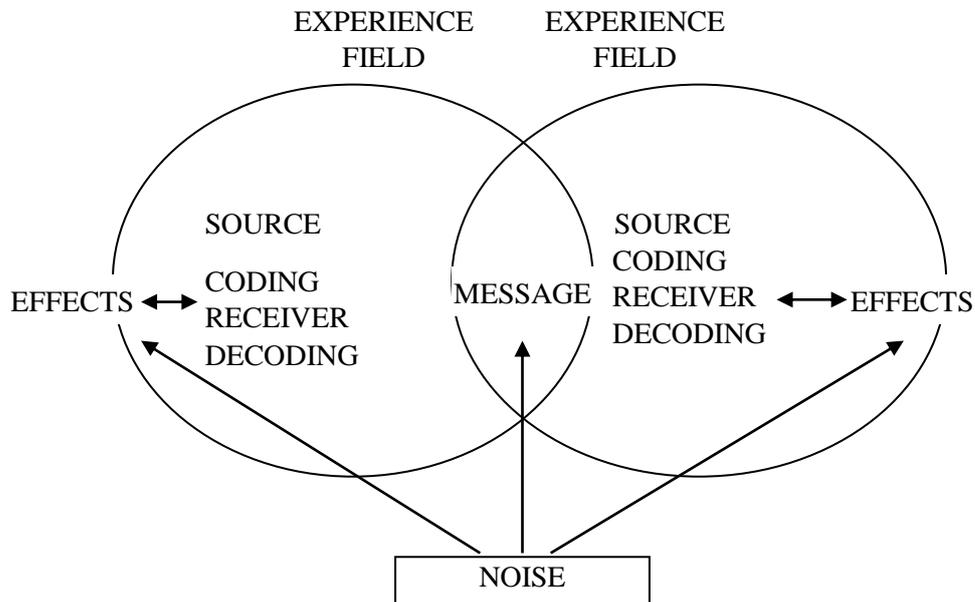
Fig.4. Universals of Interpersonal Communication [22].

Starting from the premise that communication processes always have a unique configuration (given by the context and situation in which they are performed) and involve an interpersonal exchange between at least two subjects, the researcher L.Ezechil identifies and analyzes different (universal) variables within this process.

   a)   *Context of Communication*. The concept of context is multidimensional:

   ✓ physical context - it is ensured by the concrete environment in which the communication process is carried out: the classroom, the degree of brightness and heating, the accusative, etc.);

   ✓ sociopsychological context – refers to the way in which the communication process is influenced by social roles, norms, customs;

   ✓ temporal context – it concerns the influence it exerts on the communication processes "the historical moment", "the moment of mastery or of the day" in which they take place.

   b)   *Double Source/Coding* – receiver/decoding – shows that each of the two partners is simultaneously sender (encoder) and receiver (decoder), manifesting itself at the same time as transmitter and receiver of its own message. This relationship also highlights that any one of the participants in the interaction first carries on a dialogue with himself (intrapsychic communication), from which he then launches into the interpersonal circuit.

   c)   *Messages of Communication* can be of different forms (verbal and/or nonverbal) and can be transmitted by any combination between the sensory organs: vocal – auditory, gestural – visual, chemical – olfactory or skin – tactile. J. Naisbitt (1989) mentions that we rarely resort to communication on a single channel and that most of the time we realize, consciously or not, a reinforcement, improvement or cancellation of the message transmitted through a channel by the one transmitted through another/other channels.

   d)   *Feedback* refers to messages that are relayed to the source to inform them about how they were received. In certain circumstances, feedback is provided by the source itself (when we hear ourselves and adjust our verbal broadcasts on the go). In interpersonal relationships, the feedback facilitates the regulation of the sender's behavior depending on the verbal or mimic-gesticular response of the interlocutor. This adjustment can be made immediately after receiving the caller's response (immediate feedback) or at a certain distance in time (delayed feedback). In the most synthetic definition, feedback refers to informing the cause about the effect.

   e)   *Noise* refers to everything that distorts messages on the route from sender to receiver. Various noises are present in any kind of communication, having external causes (jams, poor acoustics of the classroom, the vocal characteristics of the speakers, etc.), but also internal causes (the state of inattention, for

example), which acts as a psychological noise. The way in which the noise intervenes in the communi-cation circuit is appreciated according to the extent to which the received message differs from the transmitted message, despite the fact that the transmission was executed correctly and the receiving device has a good state of functionality.

f) *Field of Experience* is related to the way in which the personal history and the whole set of the life situations that the partners of a communication relationship have crossed differently influence the informational and interpersonal exchange. In our case, the teacher and the student are two absolutely unequal partners: they have different value systems and also different perceptions about the same events and situations. These types of differences influence both the content and the manner in which the communication processes take place.

Effects of Communication. In the process of human communication, certain effects are produced, both personally and interpersonally. They can be cognitive (intellectual or cerebral), affective (emotional or attitudinal) and/or psychomotor, also having either a manifest, explicit character or a seemingly unexplained character. The magnitude and depth of the effects of interpersonal communication is due to the fact that the informational and interpersonal exchange is, in this case, between at least two subjects and not between two material sources [23].

Communication in Foreign Languages: General-Human Linguistic Ability

The concept of communication competence in foreign languages defines a *general-human linguistic capacity* that can be developed in different specific contexts, which can be approached from an *anthropological, psychological, pedagogical and sociological* perspectives. It can be analyzed as an *operational pedagogical concept* that:

a) reflects the "*ethnography of communication*" as an anthropological field of research, based on "the comparative study of the speech events typical of each society and each culture";

b) *psychologically* exploits the "communicative competence" expressed by "the set of social rules that allow the proper use of grammatical competence"*;*

c) *didactically* supports "the diversity of verbal performances and the social functions of speech, as well as the social and cultural norms that govern them"; *methodological* and *normative*, it implies "description of the *linguistic repertoire* of the community members and of the communication situations" typical for the reference *sociopedagogical* context (family, school, local, national, international community; diplomatic relations, political, economic negotiations, etc.);

d) *sociologically* expresses the culture of the *globalized, postmodern information society* through its "kaleidoscopic" character, which requires the knowledge of foreign languages as multiple *value* (*otherness, difference, novelty* - a resource of "enrichment and extension of its space of expression and representation"; *openness* for other systems of social organization) and as "dimension directly responsible for the social integration of the individual and his/her professional success";

e) *statistically* records the increase in number of the "Europeans who have actually become *multilingual and intercultural citizens*", with significant examples registered in 2006: a) 56% speakers of at least one foreign language (99% in Luxembourg; 97% in Slovakia; 95 % in Letonia); b) 28% speakers of two foreign languages; c) reduction of the number of countries where the majority of the population speaks only the mother tongue (Ireland 66%; Great Britain 62%; Italy 59%; Hungary 58%; Portugal 58%; Spain 56%); d) valorification of the most popular foreign languages (English, French, German; Spanish, Russian) as resources for intercultural communication, in all fields of activity [24, p.472].

From a **pedagogical perspective**, the *formation* and *development* of communication competence in foreign languages becomes a strategic goal, supported at European level of education policy through: 1) the White Paper for education and training, which *"stipulates the necessity of learning three European languages"* starting with the preschool *cycle* (1995); 2) the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, which "caused major changes in the teaching, learning and evaluation of modern languages", promoting "the orientation towards the functional aspects of the language" (2000).

The *operational pedagogical concept of communication competence in foreign languages* is defined at European education policy level. It is set within the eight *key competences* launched by the *European Parliament* and the *Council of the European Union* as strategic objectives necessary for lifelong learning.

In this perspective, the competence of communication in foreign languages defines the following:

✓ A *specific form of language competence*, formed and developed according to the *language competence* acquired at the mother tongue level (sometimes simultaneously with it).

✓ A *specific capacity* expressed through: *essential knowledge* that allows *efficient communication*, verbal and written, in open, variable situations; *basic skills and learning skills pedagogically integrated* in cognitive strategies that allow: - efficient contextual expression; - reading and understanding different texts; - writing simple and complex texts, publishable; superior cognitive and noncognitive (affective, motivational, characteristic) attitudes that allow: - the distinction between essential - non-essential information; - expressing opinions and ideas, verbally and in writing; - valorisation of knowledge, skills and learning skills, integrated in acquired cognitive strategies, as means of intercultural communication, in different fields of activity with positive training effects in terms of psychological and social, intrapersonal and interpersonal (self)-development [25, p. 472-473].

Conclusion

Addressing the concept and functions of communication creates favorable premises for the qualitative transformation of the communication competence into a communication competence in a foreign language, and then into a multilingual and multicultural competence in the perspective of present and future evolutions of the knowledge-based society.

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