

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Communicative Approach to Developing German Speaking Skills (Sprechen)

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Abstract

The development of speaking skills is one of the central objectives of teaching German as a foreign language, because oral communication reflects the learner's ability to use linguistic knowledge in real social interaction. In traditional language teaching, speaking has often been limited to memorized dialogues, grammar-based reproduction and teacher-controlled question-answer exercises. However, modern foreign language education requires learners to express ideas independently, participate in dialogue, negotiate meaning, respond to communicative situations and interact with speakers from different cultural backgrounds. The communicative approach provides an effective methodological basis for developing German speaking skills, known as Sprechen, because it focuses on meaningful communication rather than mechanical language practice. This article examines the pedagogical value of the communicative approach in forming German speaking competence. The study is based on theoretical analysis of scientific literature, methodological synthesis and interpretation of communicative language teaching principles in relation to German language instruction. The results show that German speaking skills develop more effectively when learners are involved in authentic tasks, pair and group interaction, role-play, problem-solving, dialogue, monologue and reflection. The article concludes that the communicative approach improves not only fluency and accuracy, but also learners' motivation, confidence, sociolinguistic awareness and readiness for real-life communication.

KEY WORDS

German language, speaking skills, Sprechen, communicative approach, communicative competence, foreign language teaching, oral communication, language learning methodology.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern education, the ability to speak a foreign language is not considered only as the correct pronunciation of words or the reproduction of grammatical structures. Speaking is a complex communicative activity that requires the learner to select appropriate vocabulary, use grammatical forms, pronounce sounds clearly, organize thoughts logically, understand the interlocutor and respond

according to the communicative situation. For learners of German as a foreign language, Sprechen is especially important because it allows them to participate in everyday communication, academic exchange, professional dialogue and intercultural interaction. The formation of speaking skills therefore becomes one of the main indicators of successful German language learning.

The relevance of this topic is connected with the changing aims of foreign language education. In many educational institutions, the teaching of German still preserves elements of the grammar-translation method and teacher-centred instruction. Such approaches may help learners understand rules and translate texts, but they do not always prepare them for spontaneous oral communication. Students may know grammatical forms but feel uncertain when they need to introduce themselves, express an opinion, ask for information, discuss a problem or present a topic in German. This gap between knowledge about the language and the ability to use the language in communication shows the need for a communicative approach.

The communicative approach emerged as a response to methods that treated language mainly as a system of forms. It views language as a means of communication and emphasizes the learner's ability to use linguistic resources for meaningful purposes. In German language teaching, this means that students should not only learn articles, cases, verb conjugation and word order, but also apply these elements in real or realistic situations. The learner should be able to say why he or she agrees or disagrees, describe daily routines, ask for directions, make a request, participate in a discussion, give a short presentation and maintain a conversation.

The development of Sprechen is also closely related to psychological and social factors. Many learners experience fear of mistakes, lack of confidence and difficulty in finding words during oral communication. If the lesson is organized only around correction and grammatical control, students may avoid speaking. The communicative approach helps reduce this barrier by creating a supportive classroom environment in which language is used for interaction, not only for assessment. It encourages learners to speak, listen, clarify, ask again and continue communication even when their language is not perfect. This is especially important at beginner and intermediate levels, where the formation of communicative confidence is as necessary as the formation of linguistic accuracy.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the role of the communicative approach in developing German speaking skills and to identify the methodological conditions that make this process effective. The article considers Sprechen as a multidimensional skill that includes fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, interaction, discourse organization and sociocultural appropriateness. The research problem is

formulated as follows: how can the communicative approach contribute to the systematic development of German speaking skills in foreign language classes?

The article is based on a theoretical research design. Since the purpose of the study is to clarify methodological principles and pedagogical conditions, the research relies on analysis of scientific and methodological literature rather than on experimental measurement. The main methods used in the study are theoretical analysis, comparative interpretation and pedagogical synthesis. These methods make it possible to examine the communicative approach as a system of ideas and to adapt its principles to the development of German speaking skills.

Theoretical analysis was used to study works devoted to communicative language teaching, communicative competence, task-based learning, foreign language speaking methodology and German as a foreign language instruction. The analysis focused on the relationship between linguistic knowledge and communicative performance. Special attention was paid to the idea that speaking competence cannot be formed through explanation alone, because it requires repeated practice in meaningful interaction. This position is important for German language teaching, where learners often face difficulties caused by grammatical gender, case forms, separable verbs, sentence frame structures and pronunciation features.

Comparative interpretation was applied to distinguish the communicative approach from more traditional approaches to foreign language teaching. In a traditional model, the teacher usually explains the rule, gives examples and asks learners to reproduce the form. In a communicative model, the teacher organizes a situation in which the form is needed for expressing meaning. For example, the dative case may be practised not only through isolated exercises, but also through role-play in which students give presents, describe locations or ask for help. This comparison helps reveal why communicative teaching is especially useful for the development of Sprechen.

Pedagogical synthesis was used to formulate an integrated view of German speaking development. The study interprets speaking not as a single skill but as a combination of several components: pronunciation, vocabulary selection, grammatical control, fluency, interactional ability, discourse coherence and sociolinguistic appropriateness. The methodological conclusions were drawn by connecting these

components with classroom activities such as dialogue, pair work, group discussion, role-play, simulation, problem-solving tasks, presentations and reflective feedback. The reliability of the conclusions is supported by their correspondence to recognized theories of communicative language teaching and to practical needs of German language learners.

The analysis shows that the communicative approach creates favourable conditions for developing German speaking skills because it transforms the learner from a passive receiver of language material into an active participant in communication. In such a lesson, speech is not the final result after long grammatical preparation, but the main process through which language is acquired and strengthened. Learners begin to understand grammar and vocabulary as instruments for expressing meaning. This changes their attitude toward German: it becomes not only an academic subject but also a living means of communication.

One of the main results is that speaking skills develop more effectively when classroom tasks are based on communicative purpose. If learners repeat sentences only to practise structure, their attention remains on form. If they use the same structure to solve a communicative task, they begin to connect form with function. For example, when students practise the topic "Im Restaurant", they should not only memorize phrases from a dialogue. They should act as customers and waiters, ask about dishes, express preferences, clarify prices, respond politely and solve small communication problems. In this process, vocabulary and grammar are activated naturally, and learners understand why a particular expression is needed.

Another important result is that pair and group work increase the amount of speaking practice. In teacher-centred lessons, only one learner usually speaks at a time, while others listen or wait. In communicative lessons, several learners can speak simultaneously in pairs or small groups. This increases speaking time and gives students more opportunities to use German. At the same time, pair and group work develop interactional competence. Learners practise asking questions, giving short answers, reacting to others, interrupting politely, agreeing, disagreeing and asking for clarification. These elements are essential for real conversation, because communication is not a monologue but cooperation between speakers.

The communicative approach also supports the development of fluency. Fluency does not mean speaking without mistakes.

It means the ability to maintain communication without unnecessary pauses and fear. German learners often stop speaking because they try to construct a perfect sentence before saying it. Communicative activities help them understand that successful communication is possible even with limited language resources. When the teacher creates tasks where the focus is on meaning, learners learn to continue speaking, use familiar words, paraphrase difficult ideas and rely on context. Gradually, fluency and confidence increase.

At the same time, the communicative approach does not reject accuracy. A common misunderstanding is that communicative teaching ignores grammar. In fact, grammar remains important, but it is taught in connection with use. German grammar is complex, and learners need systematic explanation and practice. However, grammatical forms should be integrated into communicative situations. Word order in subordinate clauses, modal verbs, perfect tense or adjective endings become more meaningful when students use them to narrate events, describe people, make plans or express necessity. Accuracy develops best when learners first experience the communicative need for a form and then receive clear feedback.

Pronunciation is another essential component of Sprechen. German pronunciation includes sounds that may be difficult for learners, such as the *ich-Laut*, *ach-Laut*, umlaut vowels, long and short vowels, word stress and sentence intonation. The communicative approach helps develop pronunciation not only through repetition but also through purposeful oral interaction. When students speak in dialogues, perform role-plays or give presentations, pronunciation becomes connected with meaning and listener understanding. The teacher can correct pronunciation selectively, focusing on errors that prevent communication. This approach is more productive than interrupting every minor mistake, because excessive correction may reduce learners' willingness to speak.

The analysis also shows that authentic and semi-authentic materials strengthen speaking development. Short videos, audio dialogues, interviews, announcements, menus, maps, advertisements and social media texts can provide realistic language input. After working with such materials, learners can discuss content, reconstruct dialogues, express opinions or create similar communicative situations. Authentic materials expose learners to natural speech patterns and cultural context. For German, this is especially important

because polite forms, formal and informal address, regional variation and culturally appropriate behaviour are part of communicative competence.

A further result is that the communicative approach increases motivation. Learners are usually more interested in tasks that have a clear purpose and connection with real life. When students can use German to talk about themselves, their studies, future profession, travel, culture or daily problems, they experience the practical value of the language. This emotional involvement supports long-term learning. Motivation is also strengthened when learners see progress in their ability to speak. Even simple success, such as asking and answering questions without reading from a text, can increase confidence and encourage further participation.

The findings confirm that the communicative approach is highly relevant for developing German speaking skills, but its effectiveness depends on the way it is implemented. It is not enough to include several dialogues or games in the lesson. Communicative teaching requires a consistent methodological logic in which the aim, content, activities and assessment are connected with real communication. The teacher should plan lessons so that every stage prepares learners for oral use of the language. Vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation should serve communicative tasks, while tasks should be appropriate to learners' level and needs.

One of the challenges in teaching Sprechen is the balance between fluency and accuracy. If the teacher focuses only on fluency, learners may speak more freely but continue making repeated errors. If the teacher focuses only on accuracy, learners may become afraid of speaking. The communicative approach offers a balanced solution. During the speaking task, learners should be encouraged to express meaning and maintain interaction. After the task, the teacher can organize feedback, draw attention to common mistakes and practise necessary forms. This delayed correction protects communication and at the same time supports linguistic development.

Another important issue is the selection of communicative tasks. Tasks should be meaningful, realistic and level-appropriate. At beginner levels, students can practise greetings, introductions, personal information, shopping, directions, daily routines and simple descriptions. At intermediate levels, they can discuss plans, compare opinions, describe experiences, solve problems and present short reports. At higher levels, learners can participate in debates,

academic discussions, interviews and professional simulations. The teacher should gradually increase the complexity of tasks so that learners move from controlled communication to freer expression.

The communicative approach also requires a change in the teacher's role. The teacher becomes not only a source of knowledge but also an organizer of communication, facilitator, observer and feedback provider. This role is demanding, because the teacher must manage classroom interaction, support weaker students, motivate passive learners and correct errors tactfully. In German lessons, the teacher should also help learners overcome the psychological difficulty caused by complex grammar. The aim is not to eliminate mistakes immediately, but to create conditions in which learners can speak, notice gaps in their knowledge and improve through practice.

Assessment of speaking skills should also correspond to communicative aims. If assessment is based only on grammar tests, learners will focus mainly on written accuracy. Speaking assessment should include fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, grammatical appropriateness, interaction and task completion. Oral assessment may take the form of dialogue, role-play, short monologue, presentation or discussion. Clear criteria help learners understand what is expected from them. At the same time, assessment should be formative, because regular feedback is more useful for speaking development than rare final examinations.

The communicative approach is especially important in non-German-speaking environments, where learners have limited opportunities to use German outside the classroom. In such conditions, the lesson becomes the main space for oral practice. Therefore, classroom time should not be dominated by teacher explanation or translation. Students need frequent opportunities to speak German in meaningful situations. Digital technologies can also support this process. Audio recording, video tasks, online meetings, interactive platforms and digital storytelling allow learners to practise speaking beyond the traditional classroom. However, technology should not replace communication; it should create additional opportunities for it.

The discussion shows that the communicative approach is not a single method but a flexible pedagogical orientation. It can include task-based learning, project work, role-play, discussion, problem-solving and intercultural activities. What unites these forms is the focus on meaning, interaction and

learner participation. For German Sprechen, this orientation is particularly valuable because speaking requires both linguistic control and communicative courage. The more learners use German for real purposes, the more their speaking competence becomes stable, flexible and personally meaningful.

The communicative approach provides an effective methodological basis for developing German speaking skills. It helps learners move from passive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to active use of German in oral communication. The study shows that Sprechen develops successfully when learners participate in meaningful tasks, interact with partners, solve communicative problems, use authentic materials and receive constructive feedback. In this process, fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, interactional competence and sociocultural appropriateness develop together.

The main pedagogical value of the communicative approach lies in its learner-centred and practice-oriented character. It creates a classroom environment in which students are encouraged to speak, make attempts, correct themselves and gradually gain confidence. German grammar and pronunciation remain important, but they are taught as tools for communication rather than as isolated rules. The teacher's task is to organize communicative situations, guide interaction, support learners and provide balanced feedback.

In modern foreign language education, the ability to speak German is necessary for academic, professional and intercultural communication. Therefore, Sprechen should be developed systematically from the first stages of learning. The communicative approach makes this possible by connecting language learning with real-life use. Its implementation can improve students' motivation, independence and readiness to participate in German-language communication. For this reason, communicative language teaching should be considered one of the key methodological directions in teaching German as a foreign language.

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