

## DIGITAL TOOLS FOR THE STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: A LINGUISTIC-DIDACTIC APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines digital tools for the criterion-referenced assessment of communicative competence from a language teaching perspective, demonstrating how online platforms and services (Moodle, Canvas, Flip, VoiceThread, Zoom, Kahoot, etc.) enable the specification and transparent application of assessment criteria for learners' oral and written language skills. It analyses how the use of digital rubrics, scenario-based tasks and portfolios contributes to the development of communicative and digital literacy among language students within a digital educational environment.

**Keywords:** Communicative competence, criterion-based assessment, digital tools, language teaching approach, rubrics, digital literacy, portfolios

### АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматриваются цифровые инструменты критериального оценивания коммуникативной компетентности в лингводидактической перспективе, показывается, как онлайн-платформы и сервисы (Moodle, Canvas, Flip, VoiceThread, Zoom, Kahoot и др.) позволяют конкретизировать и прозрачно применять критерии оценки устной и письменной речи обучающихся. Анализируется, как использование цифровых рубрикаторов, сценарных заданий и портфолио способствует развитию коммуникативной и цифровой грамотности студентов-лингвистов в условиях цифровой образовательной среды.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникативная компетентность, критериальное оценивание, цифровые инструменты, лингводидактический подход, рубрикаторы, цифровая грамотность, портфолио

### INTRODUCTION

In the current context of the digitalisation of the educational environment, the importance of criterion-referenced assessment of communicative competence is growing as one of the key elements of the language teaching quality management system. Criterion-based (criterion-oriented) assessment involves comparing a learner's speech activity with pre-defined criteria and descriptors that describe the required level of communicative competence, rather than with the results of other participants in the learning process. From a language teaching perspective, this approach is regarded as a means of formative assessment, enabling the systematic monitoring of the development of the multifaceted communicative competence of language students and the timely adjustment of the teaching process.[5]

The theoretical basis for the criterion-referenced assessment of communicative competence lies in multifaceted models that incorporate linguistic, interactive, perceptual, cognitive and motivational components of speech activity. In such models, assessment is not limited to testing linguistic knowledge, but is aimed at identifying the learner's ability to successfully solve real-life communicative tasks in both oral and written contexts, taking into account the context, genre requirements and characteristics of the communication partner. The linguodidactic approach emphasises the personal and activity-based nature of speech activity; therefore, criteria are formulated to reflect not only the product (the finished text or utterance) but also the process of communicative interaction, including strategies for overcoming communicative difficulties, reflection on errors, and the use of speech tactics.

In recent years, digital technologies have become a defining feature of the educational environment, driving the transformation of traditional assessment procedures into digital formats. To implement criteria-based assessment of communicative competence in language teaching practice, LMS systems (Moodle, Canvas, Google Classroom) are actively used, integrating tasks for oral and written expression, as well as digital rubrics and assessment scales. These platforms enable the creation of a unified digital course space where the teacher uploads instructions, criteria, samples and tasks, and learners complete them in formats that closely resemble real-life communicative situations. [6]

Platforms for recording and discussing spoken work occupy a special place among digital tools. In particular, Flip (formerly Flipgrid) is widely used in foreign language teaching to set video assignments, in which students record short statements in response to questions from the teacher or their classmates. In Flip, students' audio recordings can be assessed against criteria using rubrics based on parameters such as lexical and grammatical accuracy, discourse structure, pronunciation and interactivity, and can also incorporate elements of self- and peer-assessment, which reinforces the reflective component of communicative competence development.

VoiceThread performs similar functions in a more 'portfolio-based' format; it is a service that allows users to attach audio, video and text comments to slides or texts. In language teaching practice, VoiceThread is used to assess oral speech (e.g. reading aloud, debates, monologues), with the teacher or classmates awarding marks according to pre-defined criteria and leaving specific comments on individual parts of the utterance. In this way, VoiceThread allows for the combination of multi-faceted criterion-based assessment with personalised oral and written feedback, which is consistent with the language teaching principle of the process-oriented development of communicative competence.[7]

Online testing platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz and Socrative, as well as built-in testing modules in LMS systems (Moodle Quiz, Google Forms tests), are increasingly being used to organise assessment and diagnostic tests in a digital environment. These tools allow not only for the assessment of language knowledge, but also for the design of tasks aimed at evaluating specific components of communicative competence: understanding speech tactics, choosing appropriate speech behaviour in different situations, and recognising genre markers and communicative strategies. Thanks to the rapid recording of answers and automatic calculation of results, such platforms create the conditions for prompt diagnosis and subsequent adjustment of the learning process.

To assess interactive and situational communicative competence in language teaching, video conferencing services such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams are used, as they enable the simulation of business meetings, interviews, debates and role-plays in real time. [1] In Zoom or Teams sessions, the teacher can use pre-prepared scenario cards modelling professional situations (e.g., doctor-patient, teacher-parent, business partner-client) and then assess students' speech behaviour against criteria including linguistic accuracy, dialogue strategy, the ability to manage turn-taking, and adaptation of style to the audience. Such digital scenario-based tasks allow for the combination of summative assessment with formative assessment, ensuring a high degree of authenticity in the communicative conditions.

Digital tools for criteria-based assessment are closely linked to the use of rubrics and grading scales on platforms such as Moodle, Canvas and Google Classroom, as well as to built-in feedback mechanisms. In Moodle, for example, a teacher can create a Grading Guide or Rubric by specifying criteria (such as 'lexical and grammatical structure', 'discursive structure', 'articulation', 'interactivity') and levels of achievement, and the system automatically converts the selected levels into a final mark. This approach increases the transparency of requirements, reduces the subjectivity of assessment when multiple experts are involved, and allows for the rapid generation of comparable results across large cohorts of learners.

Digital tools for criterion-referenced assessment serve not only a diagnostic but also an educational purpose, which is consistent with the essence of the language-teaching approach. Personalised feedback provided in a digital environment (audio comments, video notes, text explanations for each criterion, highlighting of errors and successful strategies) stimulates learners' reflective skills and increases their responsibility for their own language development. [3] A number of studies note that the digital environment helps students develop the habit of reviewing their own recordings, analysing errors and comparing current results with previous ones, which creates the conditions for the continuous, process-oriented development of communicative competence.

In a digital educational environment, there are increasing opportunities to combine summative and formative assessment. Rather than a one-off examination, the language teaching approach involves compiling a portfolio of language samples, including recordings of oral presentations, written texts, and the results of online discussions and simulated business communication scenarios. This portfolio-based approach allows not only for the assessment of the level of communicative competence at a given point in time, but also for tracking the development of individual components of competence, analysing, for example, changes in fluency, strategies for selecting lexical items, or the ability to overcome communicative difficulties.

However, the introduction of digital tools for criterion-referenced assessment is associated with a number of problems and limitations. Technological inequality plays a significant role: not all educational institutions and teachers have equal access to a stable internet connection, modern devices and software. Furthermore, there is a risk of excessive automation of the assessment process, whereby attention becomes focused on formal indicators (number of words, speaking rate, absence of errors) at the expense of the content-related, pragmatic and sociocultural aspects of speech behaviour. To use digital assessment tools correctly, teachers require additional methodological and language teaching training, including the ability to

construct meaningful criteria, interpret results, organise effective feedback, and integrate digital tools into the overall teaching process.[2]

A promising area of development is the creation of integrated language teaching systems in which digital assessment tools are seamlessly combined with traditional methods of diagnostic assessment and formative assessment. This approach not only allows for a more accurate measurement of communicative competence but also enables its targeted development in learners within the context of the evolving digital educational environment of the 21st century. [5] In the long term, digital tools for criterion-referenced assessment of communicative competence may become an integral part of the language teaching system for training linguistics students, ensuring balanced quality control of language training whilst simultaneously serving as a powerful stimulus for the development of communicative and digital literacy.

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