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FROM COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE TO COMMUNICATIVE FLEXIBILITY: A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

The article conceptualizes communicative flexibility as an adaptive process of coordinating and reorganizing communicative resources in response to changes in the interlocutor, purpose, context, and mode of communication. The article distinguishes communicative competence and communicative flexibility: competence encompasses resources needed for successful communication, while flexibility concerns their adaptive coordination under dynamic conditions. Six dimensions are substantiated: linguistic, pragmatic, interactional, intercultural, strategic, and multimodal. Eight methodological principles are identified: contextual variability, communicative unpredictability, meaning negotiation, strategic adaptation, interactional repair, intercultural responsiveness, multimodal engagement, and reflective adaptation. A model of communicative flexibility development is proposed as a cyclical sequence of perception, selection, adaptation, interaction, repair, reflection, and transfer of experience to new situations. Based on the model, a typology of communicative tasks is proposed, including contextual variability, information gaps, ambiguity, communication breakdowns, role shifts, intercultural adaptation, and multimodal transformation. A five-point assessment framework focuses on noticing changes, adapting behaviour, selecting alternative strategies, repairing breakdowns, and transferring successful adaptations. The system integrates the dimensions, principles, developmental model, task typology, and assessment framework and can support General English and English for Specific Purposes course design in higher education institutions and programmes. The assessment framework is theoretical and methodological and requires empirical validation of validity, reliability, and effectiveness.

Key words: communicative competence; communicative flexibility; methodological framework; pragmatic competence; interactional competence; intercultural competence; strategic competence; multimodality; adaptive coordination; assessment framework.

(статтю подано мовою оригіналу)

A university graduate using English professionally moves, often within a single day, between a negotiation, a seminar, and written correspondence, each shifting in purpose, interlocutor, medium, and formality. Established models of communicative competence detail the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, pragmatic, strategic and interactional resources such communication requires [1; 2; 7; 8; 9; 10; 15], specifying precisely what a learner must know, but less precisely how several such resources are coordinated and reorganized at once as conditions change within or across episodes – for instance, when register, purpose, and medium shift together. This is not to claim that competence models are static; contemporary work already treats language use as context-sensitive [2; 16; 19]. The gap is narrower: a dedicated methodological account of the coordinated reorganization of multiple resource types under changing conditions.

Communicative competence entered language pedagogy as a corrective to a narrowly structural view of language ability. Hymes [15] argued against Chomsky's [11] idealized linguistic competence, insisting that a speaker's knowledge includes judging whether an utterance is grammatical, feasible, appropriate, and actually performed within a speech community, shifting language teaching from sentence-level accuracy to socially situated appropriateness. Canale and Swain [8] and Canale [7] translated this into a componential model: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, the last covering compensation for breakdowns. Bachman [1] and Bachman and Palmer [2] reorganized this territory into language competence (organizational and pragmatic) and strategic competence, reconceived as metacognitive goal-setting, assessment, and planning. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell [10], and later Celce-Murcia [9], added actional and interactional competence, governing turn-taking and conversational management.

This line of research has three methodological strengths: componential models give a defensible basis for syllabus and test specification, since each component can be operationalized into observable behaviours; the models are cumulative, each reformulation absorbing the previous one, most visibly with strategic competence, evolving from a compensatory device [8] into a general regulatory mechanism [2]; and the structure is compatible with performance- and task-based testing and with dynamic accounts of interactional [19; 20] and pragmatic [16; 21] competence. Yet a specific question remains under-addressed: existing models are organized around distinct components, each with its own literature and syllabus place, but this does not explain how a learner coordinates several components jointly when more than one condition changes at once – for instance, when a shift in interlocutor coincides with a shift in medium and cultural expectation. Strategic competence comes closest, but in most formulations its scope is

compensation for a linguistic gap rather than joint recalibration of linguistic, pragmatic, interactional, intercultural, and multimodal resources together. Scholarship on multimodality and translanguaging [23; 24; 25] and on Global Englishes [5] documents related phenomena but offers no dedicated pedagogical model for this coordinated reorganization.

Aim and Objectives of the Article

The aim of the article is to provide an ELT-specific conceptualization of communicative flexibility and develop an integrated framework comprising six dimensions, methodological principles, the Communicative Flexibility Development Model (CFDM), a task typology, and an assessment framework for university English learners. The objectives are to identify the methodological gap in existing competence models; define communicative flexibility and distinguish it from related constructs; justify its six dimensions and methodological principles; develop the CFDM; and propose aligned task and assessment frameworks.

Communicative flexibility is not a new term, but its novelty here lies in an ELT-specific methodological framework for teaching and assessing it. The article is theoretical and methodological, with empirical validation proposed for future research.

The Concept of Communicative Flexibility

Communicative flexibility is defined as the learner's capacity to dynamically select, modify, coordinate and reorganize available linguistic and communicative resources in response to changing interlocutors, purposes, contexts, interactional demands and communicative modes. Two clarifications matter. First, flexibility presupposes competence: a learner cannot coordinate resources not yet acquired. Second, flexibility is not a seventh competence alongside grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, pragmatic, strategic, and interactional competence; it is an adaptive process operating across the dimensions of communicative ability already identified in the literature, coordinating them as conditions change.

Communicative flexibility names this coordinating process rather than any single resource type it draws on: Linguistic + Pragmatic + Interactional + Intercultural + Strategic + Multimodal resources → Adaptive coordination → Communicative flexibility.

The construct must also be situated against neighbouring constructs. Pragmatic competence [16; 21] covers contextually appropriate meaning-making within a given exchange; the framework adds recalibrating multiple resources jointly as several contextual parameters change at once. Strategic competence [2; 8] covers metacognitive planning and compensatory strategy; the framework adds coordinating strategy choice with the other five dimensions. Interactional competence [19; 20; 22] covers turn-taking and local management of talk-in-interaction within one format; the framework adds movement between interactional formats and non-interactional modes. Intercultural competence [3; 6] covers the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to interpret and relate across cultural frames; the framework adds treating interculturality as one of several conditions a learner adapts to in situ, alongside interlocutor, purpose, and mode.

Communicative flexibility must also be distinguished from communicative adaptability, developed in interpersonal communication research [13; 14] and operationalized in the Communicative Adaptability Scale, which measures dispositional traits – social composure, experience, confirmation, appropriate disclosure, articulation, and wit – as stable individual differences in first-language interpersonal communication. Communicative flexibility, by contrast, is a second-language pedagogical construct concerned with reorganizing resources across languages, cultures, and modes, developed through instruction rather than measured as a stable trait. A related precedent is the mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural repertoire strand of the CEFR Companion Volume [12], which recognizes that language users draw flexibly on an uneven, cross-linguistic repertoire; the present framework extends this into a dedicated instructional model. No established ELT-specific framework combining these elements was identified in the literature consulted.

The six dimensions draw on established research on organizational, pragmatic, interactional, intercultural, strategic, and multimodal competence [1; 2; 3; 6; 8; 16; 17; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25], but reinterpret these resources through an adaptive lens. They are treated not only as capacities to be acquired but also as resources to be selected, modified, coordinated, and reorganized as communicative conditions change. This adaptive re-reading distinguishes communicative flexibility from the componential description of communicative competence while preserving the theoretical foundations of each dimension. Table 1 summarizes the six dimensions, their research foundations, adaptive additions, and observable evidence.

Table 2 contrasts communicative competence and flexibility in terms of resources versus their adaptive coordination.

The following eight principles translate the construct into methodological commitments for course and task design, each addressing a distinct source of rigidity in conventional task design (Table 3).

The Communicative Flexibility Development Model (CFDM)

The Communicative Flexibility Development Model (CFDM) is the article's principal methodological contribution: a cyclical instructional sequence – Perception, Selection, Adaptation, Interaction, Repair, Reflection, and Transfer – operationalizing the eight principles above into a repeatable classroom procedure (Table 4).

Table 1

Six Dimensions of Communicative Flexibility

Dimension	Theoretical basis and adaptive addition	Observable evidence
Linguistic	Organizational competence [1]; selecting alternatives as register/channel changes	Register-switching; paraphrase
Pragmatic	Pragmatic competence [16; 21]; recalibrating speech acts as relationships shift	Adjusting directness/politeness
Interactional	Interactional competence [19; 20]; moving between interactional formats	Adapting turn-taking
Intercultural	Intercultural competence [3; 6]; adjusting style to cultural cues	Modifying directness/self-disclosure
Strategic	Strategic competence [2; 4; 8]; selecting alternatives as problems change	Switching strategies
Multimodal	Multimodality/translanguaging [23; 24; 25]; transforming content across modes	Converting spoken content into writing

Table 2

Communicative Competence vs. Communicative Flexibility

Aspect	Communicative Competence	Communicative Flexibility
Core focus	Resources for communication	Adaptive coordination
Orientation	Componential	Process-oriented
Context	Responds to context	Adapts as context changes
Adaptation	Implicit	Explicit instructional focus
Breakdown	Uses compensatory strategies	Coordinates repair and adaptation
Assessment	Accuracy and appropriateness	Adaptation and effectiveness

Table 3

Methodological Principles for Developing Communicative Flexibility

Principle	Rationale	Classroom implementation
1. Contextual variability	Flexibility requires changing contexts.	Revisit the same goal across contexts.
2. Communicative unpredictability	Flexibility develops under partially unpredictable conditions.	Introduce controlled unpredictability.
3. Meaning negotiation	Adaptation requires joint meaning-making.	Use information-gap and jigsaw tasks.
4. Strategic adaptation	Flexibility depends on selecting effective strategies.	Reflect on and rehearse strategies.
5. Interactional repair	Flexibility requires managing communication breakdowns.	Embed misunderstandings for learners to repair.
6. Intercultural responsiveness	Adaptation requires noticing cultural cues.	Integrate cultural expectations into role-play.
7. Multimodal engagement	Communication may require movement across modes.	Require re-expression across two modes.
8. Reflective adaptation	Reflection consolidates adaptive choices.	Include structured reflection in each cycle.

Table 4

The Communicative Flexibility Development Model (CFDM)

Stage	Adaptive mechanism	Learner activity	Teacher role	Observable outcome
Perception	Noticing change	Identifies change	Stages changing situation	Identifies key change
Selection	Matching resources	Chooses resources	Prompts justification	Justifies choice
Adaptation	Reshaping resources	Modifies resources	Models alternatives	Produces adapted message
Interaction	Sustaining exchange	Uses adapted resources	Facilitates interaction	Sustains communication
Repair	Resolving breakdown	Addresses breakdown	Models repair	Resolves breakdown independently
Reflection	Consolidating awareness	Reviews choices	Guides reflection	States transferable insight
Transfer	Applying awareness	Applies insight	Designs new context	Adapts strategy to new context

The CFDM is cyclical rather than linear: the situation into which a learner carries a consolidated insight after

Transfer is itself a fresh instance of Perception, so each completed cycle starts the next. Flexibility is thus built incrementally, through repeated cycles addressing different dimension combinations, rather than demonstrated once and assumed thereafter. Any dimension can be foregrounded at any stage, and a well-designed sequence should rotate emphasis across dimensions over a course rather than coordinating all six simultaneously in every task.

The seven task types operationalize the CFDM by making a specific combination of communicative change and required adaptation the structural core of each task. Examples are pitched at approximately B2–C1 level (Table 5).

Table 5

Typology of Communicative Flexibility Tasks

Task type	Communicative change	Required adaptation	Dimension(s)
Variable-context	Same pitch for peer, investor, and audience	Adapt register and framing	Linguistic, pragmatic
Information-gap	Reconstruct picture through questions	Adjust questioning after failure	Interactional, strategic
Ambiguity	Key information is missing	Interpret possibilities; hedge response	Pragmatic, strategic
Communication-breakdown	Interlocutor misunderstands mid-call	Repair and confirm understanding	Interactional, strategic
Role-shifting	Note-taker becomes meeting chair	Adapt turn-taking and register	Interactional, strategic
Intercultural adaptation	Directness/small-talk norms differ	Adjust directness and pacing	Intercultural, pragmatic
Multimodal transformation	Oral argument becomes brief and infographic	Preserve intent across modes	Multimodal, linguistic

Assessment Framework

Because communicative flexibility is an adaptive coordinating process, assessment should attend to observable adaptive behaviour rather than accuracy or appropriateness within a single fixed scenario. The framework below uses the six dimensions as the basis for observable indicators and a five-point rubric, following the general precedent of task-based assessment frameworks linking rating criteria to performance [18] (Table 6).

Table 6

Observable Indicators by Dimension

Dimension	Observable indicator
Linguistic flexibility	Reorganizes register when addressee or medium changes.
Pragmatic flexibility	Recalibrates directness and speech acts as relationships change.
Interactional flexibility	Adapts turn-taking and topic management when the format shifts.
Intercultural flexibility	Adjusts style when cultural cues appear, avoiding stereotypes.
Strategic flexibility	Selects alternative strategies when the initial strategy is ineffective.
Multimodal flexibility	Preserves communicative intent when content shifts across modes.

Table 7 presents a five-point rubric based on noticing change, appropriateness, range of alternatives, and effectiveness of adaptation, including repair and transfer. The highest level requires independent adaptation, repair, and transfer.

Table 7

Five-Point Assessment Rubric

Level	Descriptor
1 – Rigid	Does not notice change; maintains a single approach.
2 – Emerging	Notices change but adapts partially or inappropriately.
3 – Developing	Usually adapts appropriately; repair and transfer remain inconsistent.
4 – Proficient	Adapts appropriately and repairs most breakdowns independently.
5 – Flexible	Adapts across varied and unexpected changes; repairs independently and transfers successful adaptations.

A learner's profile is best represented as six separate dimension scores rather than a single composite figure, since the pedagogical value of the rubric lies in identifying which dimensions require targeted instructional attention.

Discussion

The methodological contribution is the integrated framework comprising six dimensions, eight principles, the CFDM, task typology, and assessment framework. It provides a teachable and assessable approach to communicative flexibility in university English language teaching, particularly in English for Specific Purposes.

Implementation may require additional preparation time, while analytical rating across six dimensions is more demanding than holistic scoring. Partial adoption may therefore be a practical starting point.

Conclusions. The article addresses the identified gap by conceptualizing communicative flexibility as adaptive coordination rather than an additional competence, and by positioning it relative to neighbouring constructs, including communicative adaptability [13; 14]. Future research should pursue, at minimum, empirical validation of the six-dimension structure, classroom-based studies comparing CFDM-organized instruction with competence-focused instruction alone, and inter-rater reliability studies of the proposed rubric.

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Осецька Н. Ф. Від комунікативної компетентності до комунікативної гнучкості: методологічна модель навчання англійської мови

У статті комунікативну гнучкість розглянуто як адаптивний процес координації та реорганізації комунікативних ресурсів відповідно до змін співрозмовника, мети, контексту та способу комунікації. Запропоновано розмежування комунікативної компетентності та комунікативної гнучкості: якщо компетентність охоплює ресурси й здатності, необхідні для успішної комунікації, то гнучкість пов'язана з їхньою адаптивною координацією у динамічних умовах. Обґрунтовано шість вимірів комунікативної гнучкості: лінгвістичний, прагматичний, інтеракційний, міжкультурний, стратегічний і мультимодальний. Визначено вісім методологічних принципів її розвитку: контекстна варіативність, комунікативна непередбачуваність, переговори щодо значення, стратегічна адаптація, інтеракційне відновлення, міжкультурна чутливість, мультимодальне залучення та рефлексивна адаптація. Розроблено модель розвитку комунікативної гнучкості як циклічну послідовність сприйняття, вибору, адаптації, взаємодії, відновлення комунікації, рефлексії та перенесення досвіду на нові ситуації. На основі моделі запропоновано типологію комунікативних завдань: варіативність контексту, інформаційні прогалини, неоднозначність, комунікативні збої, зміна ролей, міжкультурна адаптація та мультимодальна трансформація. Розроблено п'ятибальну рамку оцінювання, орієнтовану на здатність помічати зміни комунікативних умов, адаптувати поведінку, добирати альтернативні стратегії, долати комунікативні збої та переносити успішні адаптації на нові контексти. Система інтегрує виміри, принципи, модель розвитку, типологію завдань і рамку оцінювання та може використовуватися для проєктування курсів з англійської мови загального й професійного спрямування у закладах вищої освіти. Рамка оцінювання має теоретико-методологічний характер і потребує емпіричної перевірки валідності, надійності та ефективності.

Ключові слова: комунікативна компетентність; комунікативна гнучкість; методологічна рамка; прагматична компетентність; інтеракційна компетентність; міжкультурна компетентність; стратегічна компетентність; мультимодальність; адаптивна координація; рамка оцінювання.

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