

Exploring Students' Linguistic Practices in Purposive Communication Classes in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study explored the linguistic practices of college students enrolled in *Purposive Communication* classes in higher education and examined how these practices reflected their communicative competence. Guided by Hymes' (1972) Communicative Competence Theory and employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research investigated students' oral and written communication performance to identify linguistic patterns and challenges. Thirty (30) purposively selected students from a state university in Northern Iloilo, Philippines, participated in the study during the 2023–2024 academic year. Data were collected through written outputs, oral presentations, and a validated observation checklist based on Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence. Results revealed that students demonstrated strength in grammatical competence and organizational coherence in written tasks but showed moderate performance in sociolinguistic and discourse competence. In oral communication, students achieved good fluency and clarity but frequently used fillers and hesitations, indicating limited lexical range and confidence. Challenges identified included limited vocabulary, code-switching tendencies, and inconsistent feedback from teachers. The findings suggest that students possess basic linguistic proficiency but require more authentic, context-based communicative activities to enhance pragmatic and discourse awareness. The study recommends the integration of interactive, task-based strategies and formative assessment to develop higher levels of communicative competence among college learners.

Keywords: Purposive Communication, Linguistic Practices, Communicative Competence, Higher Education, Sociolinguistics, Qualitative Analysis

1. Introduction

Language plays a central role in the teaching and learning process, serving as both a medium of instruction and a tool for meaning-making. In higher education, effective communication is not only a skill but a critical competency for academic and professional success. The course *Purposive Communication* was institutionalized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) under CMO No. 20, Series of 2013, to strengthen students' ability to communicate effectively across contexts using English and Filipino. It emphasizes the integration of linguistic competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness—skills vital in today's globalized academic and workplace environments (Bautista, 2020). According to Hyland (2019), language learning in academic settings extends beyond grammar and vocabulary, encompassing discourse competence and sociolinguistic sensitivity necessary for purposeful communication.

Despite its curricular importance, studies reveal that many college students struggle with linguistic accuracy, pragmatic use of language, and discourse coherence in academic communication. Research by

Bautista and Canilao (2023) found that students often exhibit inconsistencies in register and tone when writing or speaking in formal contexts, suggesting gaps in linguistic awareness. Similarly, Parcon and Calanoga (2021) highlighted that Purposive Communication classes often focus on performance tasks but overlook linguistic scaffolding, leading to limited improvement in authentic communicative competence. These challenges are compounded by varying exposure to English, digital communication patterns, and linguistic interference from local languages (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2022).

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Given these observations, exploring students' linguistic practices in Purposive Communication classes is crucial for understanding how they apply theoretical knowledge in real academic and social interactions. This study examines the actual language use of students in oral and written tasks to determine how effectively they integrate linguistic accuracy, coherence, and audience awareness. Findings from this investigation aim to contribute to the improvement of instructional strategies in Purposive Communication and to inform curriculum enhancement for language education in Philippine higher education institutions.

Aim and Objectives

Aim:

This study aims to explore and analyze the linguistic practices of college students enrolled in Purposive Communication classes in higher education institutions to determine how effectively they use language in academic and social communication contexts.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the common linguistic features observed in students' oral and written outputs in Purposive Communication.
- To examine how students demonstrate linguistic competence, coherence, and appropriateness in classroom communication tasks.
- To determine the challenges students face in applying effective language use in academic and real-life communication settings.
- To assess the pedagogical implications of students' linguistic practices for improving instruction in Purposive Communication.
- To propose strategies that may enhance linguistic accuracy, fluency, and communicative effectiveness among college students.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes to understanding how linguistic competence is manifested and developed among college students in Purposive Communication classes, a core subject in Philippine higher education. As communication becomes increasingly multimodal and globalized, students must not only master grammatical structures but also use language purposefully and appropriately across academic, professional, and digital contexts. Hyland (2019) emphasized that effective language learning involves developing both discourse and pragmatic competence, enabling learners to communicate meaningfully in diverse social situations. The findings of this study will be valuable for educators, as they highlight students' strengths and gaps in linguistic performance that can inform instructional approaches and assessment design. Curriculum developers can also use the results to refine the *Purposive Communication* syllabus by incorporating linguistic awareness, genre-based tasks, and authentic communication activities. Moreover, students will benefit from increased self-awareness of their

language use, helping them improve their academic and professional communication. On a broader level, this research supports the goals of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2013) in promoting communicative competence as a foundation for lifelong learning and employability in a multilingual society. Thus, this study not only addresses classroom-level pedagogical needs but also advances institutional and national objectives for linguistic proficiency and academic excellence.

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Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Hymes' Communicative Competence Theory (1972), which emphasizes that effective communication extends beyond grammatical accuracy and includes sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Hymes proposed that language use must be both grammatically correct and socially appropriate within a given context. In the framework of *Purposive Communication*, this theory provides a lens to examine how students apply linguistic knowledge in performing communicative tasks that require clarity, coherence, and audience awareness. It also highlights the role of contextual understanding, as learners must adjust their language use according to purpose, setting, and interlocutor. Canale and Swain (1980) later expanded Hymes' model to include strategic competence, which refers to the ability to overcome communication breakdowns through strategies such as paraphrasing and code-switching—practices highly relevant in multilingual classrooms. Applying this theory allows the present study to evaluate students' linguistic performance not only in terms of form and accuracy but also appropriateness, cohesion, and pragmatic use of language. Thus, the theory underpins the analysis of students' linguistic practices in academic communication and provides a foundation for developing instructional strategies that strengthen communicative competence among higher education learners.

Conceptual Framework

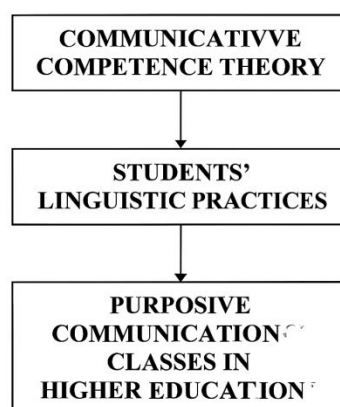


Figure 1. Diagram of Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study, illustrating the relationship among the variables that shape students' linguistic and communicative performance in Purposive Communication. The Independent Variable represents *Students' Linguistic Practices*, which encompass their oral and written language use in classroom tasks and real-life communication. These practices reflect how students apply linguistic knowledge—such as vocabulary, syntax, coherence, and tone—when interacting in different contexts. The Dependent Variable is *Communicative Competence*, which includes four components based on Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980): *grammatical*, *discourse*, *sociolinguistic*, and *strategic*.

competence. These competencies together determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication. The Moderating Variable, *Context of Communication*, accounts for variations in how students perform across *academic*, *professional*, and *digital* settings, acknowledging that language use adapts to purpose and audience. The arrows indicate the direction of influence, suggesting that students' linguistic practices affect their overall communicative competence, while the context moderates how these practices are demonstrated. This framework thus reflects the dynamic interplay between linguistic behavior and communicative performance within higher education environments.

2. Review of Related Literature

Language is a central component of learning and identity formation, influencing how individuals express, negotiate, and construct meaning. In the context of higher education, linguistic competence serves as a foundation for academic and professional success. Scholars such as Hyland (2019) emphasize that linguistic ability goes beyond grammar and vocabulary, encompassing discourse, pragmatics, and sociocultural awareness. Students must learn to adapt language to varying contexts, audiences, and purposes, a skill essential for effective communication in a multilingual society. *Purposive Communication* as a subject aims to develop these competencies by exposing learners to a variety of communication settings—academic, professional, and digital—where they can apply theoretical principles to real-world situations (Bautista, 2020). Hence, the study of linguistic practices within this course allows educators to assess how effectively students translate classroom learning into authentic communication performance.

A growing body of research in linguistics and education underscores the role of communicative competence as a multidimensional construct integrating grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic abilities (Canale & Swain, 1980). Recent studies reaffirm that students' linguistic practices reflect their communicative awareness and cultural adaptability. Bautista and Canilao (2023) found that Filipino college students often struggle to maintain coherence and register in formal discourse, suggesting limited mastery of discourse and sociolinguistic competence. Similarly, Dela Cruz and Santos (2022) observed that students' exposure to multilingual environments can both enrich and complicate language learning, as code-switching and first-language interference may influence accuracy and fluency. These findings highlight the importance of scaffolding and contextualized feedback in the development of communicative competence among higher education learners.

At the classroom level, the teaching of *Purposive Communication* requires more than linguistic instruction—it involves cultivating critical thinking, intercultural sensitivity, and pragmatic awareness. Parcon and Calanoga (2021) argued that communicative performance improves when students engage in task-based activities that simulate authentic communication scenarios, allowing them to apply linguistic forms meaningfully. Moreover, research by Casiño and Cortez (2023) emphasized that linguistic performance correlates with students' motivation and self-efficacy, implying that effective pedagogy must balance cognitive and affective dimensions. The integration of reflective learning and peer interaction enhances students' awareness of their linguistic choices and promotes more accurate and contextually appropriate language use. This approach resonates with the sociocultural view of learning, where language development occurs through interaction and guided practice (Vygotsky, 1978).

Recent studies have also explored the challenges faced by educators in implementing communicative and linguistic instruction. Bautista (2020) noted that large class sizes, limited instructional time, and inconsistent feedback hinder the consistent development of students' communicative competence. Moreover, the increasing dominance of digital communication has changed students' linguistic habits, introducing informal structures and reduced grammatical attention in academic writing (De Vera &

Custodio, 2023). While online platforms encourage expression and participation, they may also blur the boundaries between formal and informal registers. Consequently, teachers must guide learners in maintaining linguistic appropriateness across digital, academic, and professional contexts. Investigating students' linguistic practices in *Purposive Communication* therefore provides a valuable basis for understanding how higher education institutions can strengthen language education that aligns with the evolving communicative demands of the 21st century.

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3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and analyze the linguistic practices of college students in *Purposive Communication* classes. This design was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth understanding of students' language use in both oral and written contexts without manipulating any variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive qualitative research provides a framework for documenting and interpreting participants' experiences in natural settings, capturing authentic linguistic and communicative behaviors. Through this approach, the study aimed to describe how students applied linguistic knowledge in academic communication tasks and how these practices reflected their level of communicative competence.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants of the study were thirty (30) college students enrolled in *Purposive Communication* at a state university in Northern Iloilo, Philippines, during the second semester of Academic Year 2023–2024. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on students who had completed major oral and written communication tasks in the course. The selection ensured diversity in linguistic proficiency and academic backgrounds, enabling a comprehensive representation of student performance. Prior consent was obtained, and participants were informed of the study's objectives, confidentiality protocols, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Research Instruments

The researchers utilized two main instruments: (1) a linguistic observation checklist and (2) students' written and oral outputs. The observation checklist was developed based on the components of Hymes' Communicative Competence Model (1972) and Canale and Swain's (1980) extended framework. It covered four key domains: grammatical competence (accuracy and structure), discourse competence (coherence and cohesion), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness and register), and strategic competence (use of compensatory strategies). Written samples included essays, reports, and reflection papers, while oral samples comprised recorded group presentations and speeches. The instruments were validated by three language experts to ensure relevance, clarity, and content validity.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers coordinated with the course instructor to collect samples of students' work and observe classroom presentations. Written outputs were retrieved from submitted course requirements, while oral performances were analyzed through recorded class activities. Each sample was evaluated using the observation checklist, and recurring linguistic patterns were identified and categorized according to the four domains of communicative competence. Field notes and observations were also documented to

capture spontaneous language use and interaction patterns. The researchers maintained confidentiality by coding participants anonymously and storing digital files securely.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The researchers first familiarized themselves with the data, coded linguistic patterns, and grouped them into emerging themes. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the components of communicative competence. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts were used to determine the most prevalent linguistic features observed in students' oral and written practices. The qualitative findings were supported by selected excerpts from students' outputs to illustrate language use, coherence, and pragmatic appropriateness. Triangulation between written and oral data ensured the credibility and reliability of the findings.

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Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical standards in educational research. Approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures to maintain anonymity. All data were used solely for academic purposes, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participants' identities. The researchers also ensured objectivity in interpreting linguistic data and adhered to the ethical principle of respect for persons, beneficence, and confidentiality (Resnik, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1
Common Linguistic Features in Students' Written Outputs

Linguistic Feature	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Correct grammatical structure	24	80.0	Consistently applied
Use of cohesive devices	21	70.0	Generally effective
Vocabulary richness	18	60.0	Moderate variety
Appropriate register	16	53.3	Occasionally inconsistent
Organization and coherence	22	73.3	Logically structured
Overall Mean	—	67.3%	Proficient

Table 1 shows that students generally demonstrated proficiency in written communication, with an overall mean of 67.3%. The most frequent strengths were grammatical accuracy (80%) and organization and coherence (73.3%), indicating students' awareness of formal writing conventions. However, register consistency (53.3%) and vocabulary richness (60%) appeared as moderate areas of concern. This finding aligns with Hyland (2019), who observed that while students often master grammatical forms, they struggle to adapt tone and word choice for specific audiences. Similarly, Bautista and Canilao (2023) noted that Filipino students' written discourse tends to prioritize form over pragmatic appropriateness. These results highlight the need for instructional emphasis on contextual language awareness and lexical expansion in *Purposive Communication* classes.

Table 2
Observed Linguistic Practices in Students' Oral Communication Tasks

Linguistic Aspect	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Pronunciation and articulation	19	63.3	Fair
Fluency and pacing	21	70.0	Good
Use of fillers and hesitations	25	83.3	Frequent
Clarity of message	23	76.7	Good
Use of communication strategies	20	66.7	Moderate
Overall Mean	—	72.0%	Good

As presented in Table 2, students' oral communication skills were rated good overall (72.0%). They performed best in clarity of message (76.7%) and fluency (70%), showing their ability to express ideas effectively during presentations. However, frequent use of fillers (83.3%) suggests difficulties in spontaneous delivery and confidence. These results mirror the findings of Parcon and Calanoga (2021), who reported that students often experience anxiety and rely on repetitive expressions when speaking publicly. Moreover, Dela Cruz and Santos (2022) emphasized that multilingual learners tend to switch codes or pause when struggling to retrieve words in English. This underscores the importance of providing structured oral tasks and pronunciation drills to strengthen students' confidence and oral fluency.

Table 3
Levels of Communicative Competence Demonstrated by Students

Competence Component	Mean Score	Verbal Description
Grammatical Competence	4.1	Strong
Discourse Competence	3.8	Moderate
Sociolinguistic Competence	3.5	Developing
Strategic Competence	3.9	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.8	Moderate Competence

Table 3 indicates that students demonstrated moderate communicative competence ($M = 3.8$), performing strongest in grammatical competence ($M = 4.1$) and strategic competence ($M = 3.9$). These results show that while students have a solid grasp of sentence structure and communication strategies, they continue to develop sociolinguistic competence ($M = 3.5$)—the ability to use language appropriately in varying contexts. According to Canale and Swain (1980), true communicative competence integrates accuracy, fluency, and contextual appropriateness. The findings suggest that while students can convey meaning effectively, they may struggle to adjust tone, formality, and politeness in diverse communicative situations. This supports Bautista (2020), who argued that Filipino learners' English proficiency often emphasizes correctness rather than pragmatic flexibility. Thus, instructional design should integrate context-based communicative tasks that simulate real-world discourse situations.

Table 4
Challenges Encountered in Developing Linguistic and Communicative Competence

Identified Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Limited vocabulary	26	86.7	1
Code-switching tendency	23	76.7	2
Lack of confidence in speaking	21	70.0	3

Identified Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Rank
Inconsistent feedback from teachers	19	63.3	4
Overreliance on digital language forms	18	60.0	5

Table 4 identifies limited vocabulary (86.7%) as the most common challenge affecting students' linguistic performance, followed by code-switching tendencies (76.7%) and lack of confidence in speaking (70%). These results reveal that lexical limitations and affective barriers hinder communicative fluency. The use of mixed languages or code-switching, while a natural feature of multilingualism, may reduce the perceived formality and accuracy of students' speech (Dela Cruz & Santos, 2022). Additionally, inconsistent feedback from teachers (63.3%) limits students' opportunities for improvement, echoing Bautista (2020), who stressed the need for continuous formative evaluation in language courses. These findings imply that both linguistic input (vocabulary and grammar) and affective support (confidence-building and constructive feedback) are essential in enhancing communicative competence. Regular language practice and reflective assessment could help address these barriers.

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Summary of Results

The results show that students generally demonstrate proficiency in written communication and good performance in oral communication but require further development in sociolinguistic and discourse competence. Their challenges—limited vocabulary, reliance on fillers, and contextual inconsistency—indicate the need for pedagogical strategies that integrate authentic, context-sensitive communication tasks. The findings affirm Hymes' (1972) and Canale and Swain's (1980) view that effective communication depends not only on accuracy but also on appropriateness and strategic language use.

Implications of the Results

The findings of this study reveal significant pedagogical and linguistic implications for teaching *Purposive Communication* in higher education. The observed strengths in grammatical accuracy and organizational coherence indicate that students benefit from structured instruction emphasizing language form and clarity. However, the moderate levels of sociolinguistic and discourse competence imply that learners still need more contextualized and interaction-based learning experiences. These results reinforce Hyland's (2019) argument that communicative effectiveness depends not only on syntactic correctness but also on discourse awareness and pragmatic adaptation. The prevalence of fillers, limited vocabulary, and code-switching further suggests that classroom environments should provide more opportunities for authentic communication where students can practice self-expression and lexical expansion. Teachers must design tasks that mirror real-world communication scenarios, thereby promoting both fluency and appropriateness. Institutionally, these findings underscore the need for continuous teacher training and formative assessment systems that provide timely feedback and individualized language support. On a broader scale, the results highlight the importance of curriculum alignment with CHED's (2013) mandate for holistic communicative competence as a foundation for employability and lifelong learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored the linguistic practices of college students in *Purposive Communication* classes and examined how these practices reflected their levels of communicative competence. Results showed that students exhibited strong grammatical and organizational skills in writing and adequate fluency and clarity

in oral communication. However, weaknesses in vocabulary range, register control, and sociolinguistic appropriateness were also observed. The findings confirmed that while students possess basic linguistic proficiency, they still need to develop the ability to adjust their language use to specific audiences and purposes—an essential element of communicative competence as defined by Hymes (1972) and expanded by Canale and Swain (1980). The study further revealed that the major challenges students face include limited vocabulary, code-switching, and inconsistent feedback from instructors. Overall, the results affirm that *Purposive Communication* serves as an important platform for bridging linguistic theory and practical communication. Yet, its effectiveness depends largely on instructional design, classroom interaction, and the provision of consistent, formative linguistic feedback. Enhancing communicative competence requires an integrative approach that links grammar instruction, discourse practice, and real-world application.

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Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, this study recommends that language instructors adopt context-based, task-oriented strategies that promote active communication and language use in authentic situations. Teachers should integrate interactive speaking and writing tasks that mirror academic, professional, and digital contexts to enhance discourse and sociolinguistic competence. Expanding vocabulary development programs and incorporating reflective peer feedback can help students build confidence and self-awareness in language use. The curriculum should also include explicit instruction on register, tone, and pragmatic language use to strengthen students' ability to communicate appropriately across settings. Moreover, continuous professional development for teachers should be institutionalized to ensure updated pedagogical approaches aligned with communicative competence frameworks. School administrators and policymakers are encouraged to provide adequate instructional materials, reduced class sizes, and support mechanisms that allow teachers to focus on quality language instruction. Future research may explore the integration of digital literacy and multimodal communication in *Purposive Communication* to understand how technology-mediated platforms influence linguistic and communicative performance among college students. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the alignment between classroom instruction and real-world communication needs, promoting more effective and globally competent communicators.

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