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Communicative Competence in Leadership Linguistic Insights for HR Development

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the role of communication skills in pushing performance in the workplace and facilitating human resource development (HRD). 15 professionals working in 5 various areas were interviewed, and 50 workplace-related documents, such as emails, and speech transcripts, were examined. The findings indicated that the leaders who demonstrated an effective use of sentence structure, polite language, and flexible speaking styles were improved at handling teams, as well as problem solving. Leaders deployed organized messages in the feedback sessions in 43 cases out of the 50 cases, and this contributed to the employees comprehending and receiving

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suggestions. In 29 instances, communication became easier, less tense, and enhanced by the usage of strategy pauses and word selection. It was also established in the research that most of the HR training programs do not enhance leaders to communicate better what they intended to during normal working circumstances; instead, they were just trained in the most basic speaking skills or presentation techniques. A good recommendation is that the HR departments should incorporate lessons on how to provide feedback, how to deal with conflicts, and how to communicate effectively with people who do not share the same cultural group or who do share the same language as them. Leaders can be made effective by teaching these skills with real life examples and teaching them in the workplace scenarios. This study demonstrates that communication is not only speaking fluently, but it entails the use of the proper words in the proper manner to promote teamwork, trust and performance of any given organization.

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Leaders, Communication, Performance, Organization

Introduction

Memorizing a well-developed concept or having authority can no longer be effective ways to lead people. In most professional domains these days that are both diverse and global in nature. Communication skills are one of the most important abilities that qualify a successful leader (Iskindirova et al., 2024) . Communicative competence is not being able to communicate in the first place; it is a competence to communicate in appropriate, strategic and ethical way in a particular social and professional setting. In the human resource field (HRD), communicative competence influences the way leaders motivate, direct conflict-handling, and organizational cultures that favor productivity and synergy(Mayfield et al., 2015). The conception of communicative competence was first produced by Dell Hymes in 1970s, who stated that language knowledge must extend beyond grammatical knowledge. It entails the capacity to exploit language in culturally and socially suitable fashions. Changes that followed this thinking led to the formulation of more proposed models by writers like Canale and Swain where the concept was broadened to four areas of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Such dimensions prove to be extremely pertinent in leadership situations, as leaders need to change between differing roles, different groups of people and levels of language continuously, whilst remaining articulate, powerful and charismatic at the same time(Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002).

Along with the changing organizational forms, globalization and technological expansion, leadership styles have developed. Coming all the way to transactional and autocratic and transformational and servant leadership, communication has always been at the center of the discussion(Shah et al., 2025). As an example, a transformational leader needs the ability to put forward a vision in a striking manner, together with being receptive to criticism. Not only fluence in language, but the ability to engage in linguistic adaptation, or strategic discourse, and emotion resonance are also required. The linguistic side of such leadership is commonly less studied in the general discourse on HR development, typical of which focuses rather on

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the behavior, motivation, and results than the linguistic processes through which they are accomplished. Communicative competence is by far the most important element in the HRD context when it comes to recruitment, training, and evaluation of employees, conflict resolution(Fayyaz et al., 2014). Miscommunication may arise due to poor communication and a negative environment might ruin the morale of employees and even legal actions may be proposed based on poor communication whereas good communicative skills may raise the interest of the employees and growth of the organization. To give an example, in performance reviews, giving input to the performers which are honest but at the same time constructive, aggressive but at the same time respectful will need some linguistic acumen on the part of a leader(Yasmin et al., 2016). The same can also be applied to the process of team-building or strategic negotiation whereby language is not only propagated to discharge information but to harmonize or solicit allegiance. In that way, communicative competence turns into a part and parcel of leadership before becoming an outer skill.

Language in leadership adopts particular importance in a multicultural and multilingual environment. When working in such settings, leaders will have to operate in language variation, power distance, norms of politeness and culture specific modes of speech. Let us take an example whereby a leader may use English to converse with a Pakistani, Chinese or German subordinate who may require the leader to interpret indirectness, silence, disagreement or deference differently according to their own cultural background (Anwer & Gill, 2020). Knowledge of sociolinguistics that screens the awareness of the variability of language use associated with social groups and contexts to interpret and react responsibly and adequately to the variance is an essential competence that leaders ought to embrace. HR development programs are finally realizing that in addition to training leaders in managerial or strategic thought, there is also a requirement that leaders be trained in communication skills that foster trust, promote dialog and eliminate tension(Yawen et al., 2023). This is composed of training on active listening, persuasive speaking, effective writing and intercultural communication. But in the absence of a theoretical basis in linguistics, most such training can be characterized as superficial or generalized. The current article attempts to address that by providing linguistic knowledge on conceptualizations, measurement, and improvements of communicative competence through more efficient leadership development, especially in HRD settings. Communicative competence is complex. Grammatical competence denotes appropriate syntax, morphology and phonology use. Although very essential, it is not enough to be able to lead. The skill of constructing clear and coherent speech or writing, or discourse competence is important when making presentations or social policy writing. Strategic competence entails fixing the breakdown of communication or switching language modifications on the fly, like in case of a crisis or a misunderstanding(Rahmawati & Mege, 2023). Lastly, sociolinguistic competence enables leaders to control politeness, tone and formality depending on the situation. All these four dimensions are linguistic, but they directly concern the performance of leadership and HR practices.

Existing studies in business and leadership often refer to "soft skills" without fully unpacking their linguistic foundations. Terms such as "clarity," "persuasion," and "empathy" are used descriptively but not analytically(Adongo, 2025). Linguistic

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perspective can assist the HR professionals and the trainers of the leadership to be in the structured comprehension as opposed to the intuitive. As an example, the knowledge of using hedging, metaphor, indirect speech and framing mechanisms can enhance the capacity of a leader to diminish or escalate situations(Piekkari et al., 2005). Moreover, as a diagnostic instrument, discourse analysis can be utilized to assess the verbal or written communication of the leaders and guide individual-based training. Technology affects leadership too in its communicative aspect. Emails, chatting and memos in written form of communication matter more when there are virtual teams and workspaces. Leaders who had used all the tricks of the trade (body language and tone of voice) now must demonstrate some sense of authority, warmth, and responsiveness in an email. This necessitates a higher level of pragmatic competence such as cognizance of the effect of punctuation, paragraphing and word usage(Bhatti & Mamadjanova, 2025). Then, HRD professionals are called to structure communication training reflecting this change and include the use of digital communication style into leadership training. Communicative competence is also connected with gender and power relations. Studies also indicate that women leaders are picked up less as compared to those who are more assertive when it comes to their speech because women leaders are viewed to be aggressive, as men are confident. Being aware of such biases is essential in terms of equality in leadership validation and HR policies. Linguistic analysis should be used to help to deconstruct such biases by pointing to structural and sociocultural influences on language use and perception. Code switching and multilingualism are normal practices by leaders in multicultural environments. A Pakistani manager in a team of local and international people can switch between Urdu, English and regional language in response to the people being addressed. Although this can increase solidarity or clarity it can also lead to miscommunication or feelings of not being included. HRD programs must therefore address the linguistic reality of multilingual workplaces by preparing leaders to be both culturally and communicatively competent(Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008). Conclusively, communicative competence among leaders is an important but least studied aspect of HR development. It also involves linguistic capabilities beyond grammar and vocabulary to a comprehension of how to apply language strategically in changing and frequently high-stress contexts. This article aims to explore the concept of communicative competence in linguistic context taking into account how grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence operates in leadership. The results of the research are intended to provide HR professionals with useful information and instruments which can assist them to create communications-based leadership programs to enhance the communicative infrastructure of the organizations(Cernicova- Buca, 2020; Hackman & Johnson, 2013). This research is aimed at three goals, including, first, developing the conceptualization of communicative competence in leadership using the existing linguistic models; second, examining the influence of communicative competence on the HR development outcomes, including training effectiveness, engagement, and performance in organizations; and third, offering practical recommendations to improve the current HR development model with the help of communicative competence in leadership. This research helps to achieve a more holistic view of leadership development in the 21st century workplace by basing the analysis on

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linguistic theory in addition to the practice of HR development.

Materials and Methods

The qualitative interpretive approach has been used in this study because of its ability to analyze the complex nature of communicative competence as a leadership task and the ability to experience a holistic approach in areas of human resource development (HRD). It is believed that the qualitative technique is most suitable since it will provide a deep insight into the use of language, using discourse practices and communication behaviors in an organizational context at a real place. The profiling approach provided a subtle dimension of how the leaders helped to create meaning, cope with interaction and social expectations via communication with a specific reference to the HR disciplines like performance management, employee engagement, and professional development. They were based on a multi-method approach of collecting data that included combination of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and samples of naturalistic discourse. Triangulation of the methods was used to provide the depth and the breadth of the findings. No specific sampling strategy was employed; purposive sampling was undertaken to achieve a sample that had a wide variety of respondents with significant experience in the field of leadership and HR development. The sample reached fifteen individuals - senior executives, managers of the HR organizations, consultants, as well as trainers of the leadership capabilities of organizations, in different industries such as banking, higher education, healthcare, manufacturing, and telecommunication. The criteria of selection meant that the individuals had to work as leaders with at least ten years of experience and be actively engaged in some training, mentoring, or HR development processes. The main form of data was found in semi-structured interviews. All interviews were done in English (face-to-face or through other applications such as Zoom and Microsoft teams), taking about 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped, typed as verbatim and thematically coded. Interview questions aimed at prompting opinions about the communicative requirements of leadership positions, hindrances and obstacles during work in multilingual or multicultural contexts, music in feedback providing and receiving, disagreement management, and the degree of assimilation of language training in HR development. Questions such as "How do you adapt your communication style when dealing with different teams?" and "What linguistic strategies do you use when delivering difficult feedback?" had the objective of revealing both the conscious and the unconscious style of leadership communication. Along with interviews, the collection of workplace texts was created to be used in the discourse analysis. These were inside communications through emails, performance appraisal forms, memo, and HR development manuals, and leadership speeches (with permission). The artifacts acquired were chosen since they were relevant in presenting discourse on leadership and HR related communication processes. The texts were examined not merely in the light of their content, but of linguistic form, that is, analysis of grammatical structures, word choices, modality and rhetorical features, i.e. repetition, metaphor, and markers of stance. The appearance of both audio and texts enabled us to analyze the phenomenon cross-modally, providing the results of how communicative competence is realized in various formats and communicative circumstances.

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The initial coding process was held based on a qualitative content analysis framework and was continued by the discourse analysis. NVivo software was used to manage the coding process, as it imported transcripts and texts. The data were initially coded on an open basis and emergent themes could be identified. These were the mentions of language flexibility, lucidity, compassion, negotiation, dictational communication, and conflict management. The codes were subsequently grouped under the four levels of communicative competence outlined by Canale and Swain that include grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic levels. An example is that the use of complex sentence structure, correct punctuation, and conscious vocabulary was coded into the grammatical competence and culturally sensitive languages and speech acts in the right context were coded under the sociolinguistic competence. Verbal discourse analysis concentrated on determining the interaction patterns: turn-taking, inoculation, self-repair, politeness exteriors. There was special consideration on coming up with the features that promoted or discouraged effective leadership communication. For example, the use of hedging ("perhaps," "I think we should") was examined in the context of directive communication to understand how leaders soften imposition while maintaining authority. Instances of metaphorical language ("we are navigating through a storm") were analyzed to assess their impact on team motivation and perception of vision. Code-Switching was also discussed as a power tool in building rapport and negotiating identity at multilingual levels. To increase credibility and reliability of the results, various validation methods were used. Inter-coder reliability was attained through coding 25 percent of the transcripts by a second researcher within the research team. The variations in terms of coding were discussed and reconciled to redefine the analytical framework. Also, member checking was achieved by presenting the early findings to some of the participants to ascertain whether the interpretation was correct or not. This move was to guarantee that thematic presentation of communicative behaviors was coherent with the reality of the participants. The research process was very ethical. The appropriate academic review board was used to obtain ethical clearance. All the participants gave informed consent before data collection was made. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, data handling protocols, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Names and identifiers were made anonymous and pseudonyms set created to report them. All documents and recordings were guarded safely and only the research team could access them. The research design was built in such a way that it could capture the challenge of communicative competence as applied by leaders under diverse positions in organizations. The methodological approach to this topic using both theoretical perspectives in applied linguistics and empirical information in both leadership and HR allowed exploring the issue of language as a leadership tool comprehensively. The level of qualitative knowledge acquired with the help of such an approach is a good basis to proceed to tentative application and implications of HR development in the following paragraphs.

Results and Discussion

Results of the current research indicate that communicative competence has significant influence on leadership effectiveness especially in the field of human resource development. Qualitative examination regarding interviews, documents in

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the working environment, and speeches revealed specific modes of language use which are associated with the dimensions of communicative competence(Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Rabiul et al., 2023). These patterns influence leaders' ability to motivate, manage conflict, deliver feedback, and maintain engagement, thus reinforcing the critical role of communication in HR functions. Grammatical competence is considered the basic but not the most important factor of success in leadership(Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). There was a consensus among majority of the participants to assert that word-perfect is desired, particularly in official records and official communications yet, it is important to note that the power of leadership resides in the clarity and intonation and not in the issue of linguistic correctness. As an illustration, an HR manager of a telecom company said, “A message, although with poor structure, can be emotionally intelligent and topical and that would work better.” It speaks of a change in technical accuracy to functional effectiveness in leadership speech. One of those dimensions that proved to be rather influential was discourse competence(Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Bhatti & Mamadjanova, 2025). When leaders formulated their speech or writings in a coherent manner and employed the use of transitions well as well as maintained the theme focus, they were seen as more credible and organized. One of the top managers observed that when it was time to do performance assessment, it was better to be coherent in the story: by means of writing commendation, mentioning the areas of work where the improvement is necessary, and then end it with the word of encouragement, the employees were in a better position to get the feedback in a constructive way (Adongo, 2025). These more structured discourse strategies have much in common with what is usually referred to in HR personnel communication training although little is specifically related to linguistic theory. The frequency with which certain discourse features have been observed in leadership communication varied per the sampled segments, as well as with their contextual relevance; Table 1 summarizes these findings.

Table 1: Discourse Features Observed in Leadership Communication (Based on 50 samples)

Discourse Feature	Frequency Observed	Primary Context	Perceived Impact
Thematic Structuring	43	Feedback sessions, team briefings	Improved clarity and message flow
Use of Transition Markers	37	Presentations, conflict mediation	Enhanced coherence and understanding
Reiteration and Summaries	31	Policy explanation,	Increased retention and alignment

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		vision statements	
Strategic Silence and Pauses	29	Difficult conversations, negotiations	Strengthening authority and empathy

In hierarchical and cross-cultural communication, sociolinguistic competence played a very crucial role. The respondents referred to their sensitivity to social roles, power distance, and cultural sensitivities on many occasions (Piekkari et al., 2005). It was found that leaders who were able to modify their speech on the culture of subordinates or other stakeholders had a smoother team functioning. Hierarchical workplaces in multinational companies focused on indirect language and polite personifications whereas it was alright to be direct in egalitarian teams. A leadership trainer put it in perspective; Asian persons more effectively respond to being told to act, by hearing instead, thus, learning on their own: I suggest as opposed to You should. This shows how sociolinguistic awareness can help the leaders to retain respect as well as influence. The most observed practice of strategic competence was in conflict resolution or correction where quick adaptation must be done(Rahmawati & Mege, 2023). The presence of repair strategies by using the strategy of rephrasing, clarification and alternating the tone helped leaders to manage difficult conversations. An instance of one such situation was a case of a senior manager who realized the incorrect interpretation of an email chain, so organized a video link to reshape the tone of the message and rebuild the rapport. This flexibility was considered the characteristic of communicative leadership. The content analysis has also found some of the linguistic instruments that great leaders use when claiming credibility and encouraging involvement(Yawen et al., 2023). These were as follows which are inclusive pronouns (we, our), softeners and hedging (perhaps, it might be), metaphorical framing, and the use of rhetorical repetition. Leaders consistently avoided negative absolutes and instead framed challenges as opportunities, reinforcing the organization's learning culture. Table 2 presents a summary of linguistic strategies used by effective leaders and their contextual applications.

Table 2: Linguistic Strategies and Leadership Functions

Linguistic Strategy	Function in Leadership	Sample Contexts	Reported Outcomes
Inclusive Pronouns	Building solidarity	Team meetings, announcements	Improved engagement and loyalty

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Hedging	Soften imposition, show openness	Feedback, negotiations	Reduced defensiveness
Metaphorical Framing	Conceptualizing abstract ideas	Vision presentations, change management	Enhanced motivation and clarity
Positive Framing	Emphasizing growth over problems	Performance reviews, restructuring	Sustained morale and resilience

Communicative competence was also strengthened by the perception of the participants on the HRD practices. Whereas most organizations implemented communication training as a part of leadership training, this training was usually generic and was not related to the real linguistic issues that leaders had to face. Only a small percentage of HR programs examined the strategic or sociolinguistic aspects of communication instead of concentrating on presentation skills or speaking in public(Anwer & Gill, 2020; Shah et al., 2025). The respondents said that they wanted to have communication modules based on real-life situations, discourse, and cross-cultural pragmatics. Digital communication became an uneasy topic that was not paid enough attention. In a survey of many leaders, tone and clarity were hard to maintain across emails or through messaging apps. In contrast to the in-person correspondence, in digital communication there is no non-verbal communication which is why pragmatic decoding becomes more challenging. One respondent has recalled a case where a brief email meant as a time-saving tool was received as an impolite one by a junior worker. This event shows how crucial it is to train pragmatic competence in the digital environment, which is the aspect many HRD curricula overlook. Interestingly, plural language speaking leaders revealed to have a greater tendency of communicative awareness. The concept of multilingualism seemed to increase strategic and sociolinguistic awareness, being able to move between registers, styles and norms of discourse more easily(Mayfield et al., 2015; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002). This remark is only evidence that language awareness should be included in the leadership training to utilize linguistic diversity as the HR resource instead of an HR problem. In sum, the discussion reveals that communicative competence is a viable and visible asset of leadership performance and HR success (Iskindirova et al., 2024) . The meeting between linguistic understanding and HR growth presents fresh possibilities to formulate more responsive, accommodating and strategic training plans. Communication by leaders cannot be limited to a style or personality: it is a technique that can be built, assessed and perfected.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of this research provide an imperative support on communicative

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competence in leadership especially in the system of human resource development. Leaders that not only present interpersonal skills in observing grammatical correctness, but also in sociolinguistic awareness, discourse organization, and strategic flexibility tend to be more successful in managing human resources, conflict resolution and employee motivation. The textual examination of authentic organizational communication and the interaction of the leaders demonstrated that communicative decisions form the images of authority, empathy, and professionalism. In the real world as well as online, successful leadership depends more on the skill of adapting language to different social and situational needs. Although communication is frequently recognized to be one of the skills to be developed in a leadership training course, this research demonstrates that linguistic background is hardly ever initiated in leadership training courses. This outcome is that leaders can be unable to build on the subtle skills that are needed in inclusive, persuasive, and context-sensitive communication. The statistics indicate the absence of pragmatic spatial division among generic training of soft skills and linguistic reality of organization discourse. Then, the incorporation of communicative competence into HRD not as a fringe attribute of knowledge but as a flagitious, teachable field is necessary in building management capacity in the contemporary workplace that is globalized and multicultural.

Based on the analysis, the recommendation is to introduce the structured linguistic training into HR development programs that would focus more on the practical discourse strategies application as well as the sociolinguistic sensitivity and the pragmatic flexibility during the communication. Leadership development curricula should incorporate real-life case study analysis, reflective communication practices, and scenario based interpretive discussion of communication behaviors so that leaders can be able to build awareness and develop communication behavior. It should also be done in multilingual and cross-cultural organizations including intercultural pragmatics training as well as training on the use of inclusive language. Organizational leaders concerned about greater overall organizational management performances and more robust and responsive workplace cultures should consider communicative competence as a primary source of leadership skills.

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