

ISSN (E): 2181-4570 ResearchBib Impact Factor: 6,4 / 2023 SJIF(2023)-3,778 Volume-2, Issue-2

MODELS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In this article is devoted to the explore the term communicative competence in a foreign language. It goes through the various definitions and some models of the communicative competence especially those most common models of Hymes and Canale and Swain and Alcon. It shows how the term ‘communicative competence’ has come into existence during the 1970s and how it has become a major aim for teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in many countries.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, English as a Foreign Language, Pedagogical Considerations, Linguistic Competence, CLT

Introduction. Communicative competence means having ‘a competence to communicate’. This competence can be oral, written or even nonverbal. It is an inclusive term that refers to possessing the knowledge of the language as well as the skill to use the language in real life situations for fulfilling communicative needs. Language, according to many researchers, is a means of communication, and it comprises four main skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. To acquire these language skills, one needs not only to learn grammatical rules but to practice such skills till he gets used to all of them. Whenever she acquires the skills of the language and manages to use them effectively and appropriately according to the context in which is involved, we can say that she or he achieves the required level of the communicative competence.

To define the notion ‘communicative competence’ we can delve into the two words that constitute it, of which the word ‘competence’ is the headword. Competence can be described as the knowledge, ability or capability while the word ‘communicative’ has the meaning of exchange or interaction.

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So, we can say that communicative competence is nothing but a ‘competence to communicate’ that is, having the ability that allows the person to communicate in order to fulfill communicative needs.

The term ‘communicative competence’ was first used by Dell Hymes in 1966 in his lecture delivered in a conference on ‘Developing the Language of the Disadvantaged Children’, then it was published as a paper entitled ‘On Communicative Competence’ in 1972 and republished in 2001. Hymes has introduced his notion ‘communicative competence’ in contrast to Chomsky’s distinction between competence and performance. For Chomsky competence is “the ideal speaker-listener knowledge of his language”. He argued that the focus of the linguistic theory is “to characterize the abstract abilities of the speaker listener which enable him to produce grammatically correct sentences”.

Main part. Hymes points out that communicative competence doesn’t only represent the grammatical competence but also the sociolinguistic competence. He has stated that “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” defined communicative competence as “the tacit knowledge” of the language and “the ability to use it for the communication” [8]

From the discussion above, we come to a conclusion that the term competence as used by Chomsky equals the grammatical or linguistic competence in Hymes’ model which represents only one part of the communicative competence.

Savignon defined communicative competence as “the ability to function in a truly communicative setting”. This means that, to her, communicative competence is close to Hymes’ point of view . She considers communicative competence as an ability for functioning in communicative settings and this is something totally different from the linguistic competence by Chomsky as no one can function in real life situation with only grammatical competence. For Savignon, competence is “what one knows” and performance is “what one does” [12;93].

Terrel and Krahen have defined communicative competence as the use of language in social communications without grammatical analysis. They related communicative competence to the communication and didn’t give a focus for the grammatical competence. This means that communicative competence is manifested in the communication. They argued that the primary goal of language learning should be the development of the

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communicative skills. They arrived at a principle that “language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning” [55].

Canale and Swain defined communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skill needed for communication. This view agreed with Hymes and others that communicative competence includes various competencies. Knowledge here refers to one’s knowledge of the various aspects of language and language use, while skill refers to how one can use the knowledge in actual communication. [3]

Widdowson defined communicative competence in terms of Usage and Use; where ‘Usage’ refers to one’s knowledge of the linguistic rules, and ‘Use’ refers to one’s ability to use his knowledge of the linguistic rules for effective communication.

From the discussion above, this paper defines the term ‘communicative competence’ as both the knowledge of the linguistic and non-linguistic rules of communication and the skill to use such knowledge effectively and appropriately in real life situations for the purpose of fulfilling communicative goals. [13]

In his contribution to the research planning conference on Language Development Among Disadvantaged Children in 1966, Hymes introduced the term ‘Communicative Competence’ in his lecture that was later published as a paper entitled ‘On Communicative Competence’ in 1972 to become a prominent term and an issue of debate in the field of second and foreign language teaching and learning. Hymes has mentioned that Linguistic theory, from the perspective associated with transformational generative grammar has two parts: Linguistic Competence (the tacit knowledge of language structure) and Linguistic Performance (the process of applying the underlying knowledge to the actual language use). [8;53]

As performance cannot reflect competence except under the ideal speaker-listener knowledge and use of the language, performance cannot be relevant to linguistic theory. Such a theory of competence posits ideal objects in abstraction from sociocultural features that are considered to be an essential part of their description, and performance is viewed as just a selection among the various options the one that is easiest to be produced and understood. He emphasized Chomsky’s words that his position is also the position of the founders of general linguistics, particularly those as de Saussure in his distinction between Langue (language structures) and Parole (individual speech). Activities that enhance language learning are usually communication-based activities and task-based activities. These activities usually

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play a big role in developing communicative competence and enabling communication skills in comparison to those strategies of imitations, memorization and repetition drills that mainly concern about language and its structures rather than the use of that language. A new trend in the last third of the last century was the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach that recommends teaching English through communication or by using it.

Teachers should understand that classroom is the only place for EFL learners to practice their English and to get exposure to it. As children usually build their abilities for communication in their native language through their exposure to their native language surrounding them, a foreign language learner does not have such opportunities for exposing oneself to the target language in foreign language context except for classroom hours. Teachers should benefit from computer and modern technology in English language teaching. Today, there are so many English programs, recordings, videos that help students to learn English and develop their communicative competence. If the teacher employs such technology in his teaching, it will be very effective in enhancing EFL learners' competence and achieving language acquisition. Using computer oral activities in classroom provide students with opportunities of exposure to native English speakers that learners can not get in their environment.

Chun studied the use of computer-assisted classroom discussion in facilitating the acquisition of interactive competence of the first year foreign language German learners in written discourse. His study revealed that students feel freer in suggesting topics, interacting and asking questions than in the formal instruction as the role of the instructor is decentralized here. The study is transferred, according to Chun, to students' spoken competence as well. [5:17]

Another way to involve students in real life language situation that provide them native language experience inside and outside classroom in foreign language context is motivating them to watch English news, films, online lessons at TVs and to read English newspaper and website news. This will help a lot in developing learners' communicative competence as it will expose them to various types of texts and vocabulary and keep them in touch with English outside the class as well. Such a type of free choice learning activities is so effective in achieving language acquisition.

Conclusion. In sum up this paper has been an attempt to explore the process of defining the term 'communicative competence'. It has gone through the various definitions of the term

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in order to highlight its meaning in foreign language learning and teaching. 'Communicative competence' is viewed as the knowledge of the rules of language and language use and the skill to use such knowledge effectively and appropriately in real-life situations. Communicative competence has become crucial aim for foreign language learning and its models have been developed to include different aspects of language such as linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic, language macro skills.

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