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MODELS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper represents an attempt to explore the meaning of the term *communicative competence* with its main components in a foreign language, as well as the importance of its achievement. It starts with different definitions and models of communicative competence, showing how this term came about and how it became the main goal of teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language in many countries worldwide. The paper also recommends some activities, which can be of great importance when it comes to mastering English and acquiring communicative competence by applying a communicative approach in teaching a foreign language.

Key words: English language, communicative competence, models of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a second or foreign language has long been a central topic in numerous discussions among professional circles. Some of the theories and methods applied during the long-term language learning in education have been dominant for decades, such as the grammar-translation method which, to some extent, continues to be used among students in non-English speaking environments. The theory of behaviorism, which advocates the idea that language is nothing but social behavior is widely present in the foreign language teaching classroom. The common goal is to master the language and reach its most adequate use in communication. For advanced communicative skills, the latest trends in the methodology of foreign language teaching are focused to increase the communicative competence in students. To perform communication in real-time has become the main goal of learning a second or

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foreign language, as numerous published papers in this field acknowledge (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018; Savignon, 2018; Romanowski, 2017; Wan, 2017).

The communicative approach to foreign language teaching is "marking the beginning of a major shift in the twentieth-century language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 81). Foreign language teachers implement the concepts of the above-mentioned approach into classroom teaching (Brown, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) to develop student's skills and abilities in language performance. The development of communicative competence represents the very essence of language learning.

According to some researchers (Burns & Siegel, 2018; Newton, et al, 2018), language is a means of communication and contains four main skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To acquire skills in foreign language performance is to improve abilities to acquire the knowledge of the language use in real-time situations. When someone has sufficiently mastered foreign language skills and managed to use them efficiently and successfully in an appropriate way and following a certain language context, we can say that he/she has succeeded in reaching the required level of communicative competence.

This paper's goal is to discuss in more detail the theoretical background of communicative competence in learning English, and to show what exactly is meant by communicative competence, what are its main components and the basic models and how to successfully promote the skill in the context of English as a foreign language.

DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Competence is described as knowledge and the ability to take part in communication, in the exchange of ideas and thoughts while interacting with group members to meet certain communicative needs.

The term communicative competence was first used by the American linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes to respond to Noam Chomsky's statement about the difference of competence and performance, which was introduced earlier as part of his theory that refers primarily to the ideal speaker or listener (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). According to Hymes, communicative competence represents not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic competence. He claimed that the knowledge of grammatical rules is completely useless unless the participant in the communication does not use the appropriate grammatical rule to give a certain meaning to his statement. To possess the skill of communicative competence is to show the ability of both grammatical and linguistic competence (Savignon, 2018). Therefore, Savignon (2018) believes that communicative competence is the ability to take part in communication and this definition is quite different from the linguistic competence that Chomsky advocates for.

According to the definition given by Canale and Savignon, communicative competence is a synthesis of the system of knowledge and skills needed for communication (Canale, 2014, Savignon, 2018). Language knowledge refers to one's knowledge of various aspects of language and its use, while language skill refers to how that knowledge can be used in actual communication.

Widdowson defined the term communicative competence by using the terms *usage* and *use*, where the former refers to one's knowledge of language rules and the latter to one's ability to actively apply that knowledge of language rules for effective communication. According to him, "Communicative competence is defined as the ability to interact effectively with others. At its most basic, competence is seen as a combination of language aptitudes an individual has for learning a foreign language. Such student's potential contributes to his/her attaining high levels of performance" (Abdeighani 2016, p.183). "Knowledge of the language is often understood as knowledge of its proper use". The use of this knowledge should be complemented by the knowledge of the so-called "adequate" use. (Remache, 2016). A conclusion can be drawn that communicative competence implies knowledge of language rules to acquire the ability to communicate adequately in real-life situations.

MODELS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The concept of communicative competence has been evolving over many years, and different scientists have offered different models. In the following passages, each of the models will be presented in their most basic outlines, while the rest of the paper will be dedicated to the implications of the models used by foreign language teachers when applying the communicative approach to foreign language teaching in the classroom.

1. *Dell Hymes's model of communicative competence.* We have already stated that according to the position of communicative competence in learning the language that Chomsky advocated for in his work "Syntactic Structures" (1965), the term competence refers to the ideal speaker or listener in a homogeneous speaking community who knows his language perfectly. As a speaker or listener one has no memory limitations of any kind and cannot be distracted during communication by external influences, such as noise, that would lead him to grammatically irrelevant usages which would slow down or interrupt communication by making it inefficient (Chomsky, 2014).

Dell Hymes, on the other hand, believes that in addition to producing grammatically correct sentences, a person should also acquire some knowledge about when and in what way he should speak. He argues that there are certain rules for the use of language, without which grammatical rules would be useless. As a linguist and anthropologist, he pledged the importance of the speaker's knowledge of certain

cultural and sociological norms of behavior to be able to use the adopted foreign language adequately and without hindrance. The term communicative competence, therefore, does not only include acquired language knowledge, but also the ability to apply that knowledge appropriately in situations that require such language application. "It is a central notion in sociolinguistics and other socially-oriented approaches to the study of language" (Theresa Lillis 2005).

Dell Hymes's model of communicative competence appeared as his reaction to "Noam Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance ... Hymes was particularly critical of Chomsky's idea of linguistic competence and his failure to account for linguistic variation"² (Johnstone, B. & Marcellino, W. 2010)³.

Hymes frequently noted, ungrammatical utterances may be socially appropriate, just as grammatical utterances can be socially inappropriate (Hymes, 1972, 1972b, 1989). The distinction between linguistic competence (advocated by Chomsky) and communicative competence (advocated by Hymes) led to the development of Hymes's ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964). This was his new approach to understanding the language in use. Terminological, as well as linguistic disagreement refers to Chomsky's belief that a person is born with an innate ability to speak the language while communication is learned and developed during life. Hymes on the contrary strongly developed his theory that communicative competence depends on the social context in which the way of speech is mastered. It is not only the matter of grammatically correct utterances but abilities to perform the language used to master cultural and social behaviors as a part of the social context that must come to the forefront of the speaker's ability to use the acquired knowledge of language skills.

2. *Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence.* Another model of communicative competence was introduced by Canadian applied linguists, Michael Canale and Meryl Swain, in 1980. According to them, it represents the basic system of vocabulary knowledge and language skills with which the sociolinguistic rules of a given language can be applied. They also advocate an attitude based on when they see grammatical competence as an integral part of communicative competence, and not something that is separated from it. They, unlike Hymes (according to whom there are grammatical rules that would be useless without the rules of language use), believe that there are rules of language use that would be useless without the rules of grammar. However, they believe that their notion of communicative competence is different from the concept represented by Hymes because, unlike him, they do not include the notion of usability in their definition. In the book "Theoretical bases of

² <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.657.1418&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

³ <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.657.1418&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
(Johnstone, B. & Marcellino, W. 2010).

communicative approaches to second language teaching", Canale and Swain propose five leading principles of the communicative approach, which are based on the following views. In addition to grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, there is strategic competence as well. Their concept is based on the communicative approach focused on the communicative needs of the student when learning a foreign language. He should be allowed to participate in meaningful communicative interaction with competent language speakers. In the early stages of learning another language, the aspects of competence in communication are similar to the acquisition and active use of the mother tongue. In a word, the main goal of a foreign language learning program, which is based on applied communicative skill must provide students with information and experience needed to master their communicative needs in another language.

Taking into account these principles, they propose a model of communicative competence that includes three main components (Savignon, 2018) and they are:

1. grammatical competence
2. sociolinguistic competence
3. strategic competence

Grammatical competence includes knowledge of appropriate grammatical rules, while sociolinguistic competence consists of sociocultural rules of language use and discourse that help language users create and understand language data based on speech components and communicative events. A feature of strategic competence is the existence of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that are used to compensate for interruptions in communication, which in certain situations occur due to insufficient language knowledge or insufficient student competence.

3. *Canale's model of communicative competence.* Canale in 1983 presented a revised model of communicative competence proposed earlier by both Canale and Swain. In addition to the components that exist in the previous model, the fourth component is mentioned here, i.e. discourse competence, which refers to mastering grammatical forms and meanings to arrive at a unified spoken or written text in different genres, using cohesion and coherence. Thus, communicative competence represents the ability to connect uttered statements or written sentences into a coherent discourse understood as a whole to participants in communication. Strategic competence in this model is expanded and includes mastering verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that can be related not only to compensate for certain errors in communication but to increase the efficiency of the communication itself.

4. *Buckman's model of communicative competence.* Another important model of communicative competence or "theoretical framework of communicative language ability", as Buckman said, is the one that he proposed in 1990, which emerged as the result of his empirical research of an earlier model of communicative competence that

was in 1982 conducted by Buckman and Palmer (Schauer, 2016). This model includes three components and they are:

1. Language competence or language knowledge consisting of specific knowledge components used in communication.
2. Strategic competence, which represents the mental capacity to include components of language competence in the contextualized use of language.
3. Psychophysiological mechanisms related to psychological and neurological processes that form an integral part of language as a physical phenomenon.

Language competence includes organizational and pragmatic competencies, whereas organizational competence includes grammatical and textual abilities or competencies involved in the creation and understanding of language. Pragmatic competence, according to this model, includes illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Another major component of communicative competence in Buckman's model is strategic competence. Unlike the previously mentioned models, where strategic competence is at the same level as grammatical and sociolinguistic ones, this model is committed to the main component to be at the same level as linguistic competence. The reason for this, according to Buckman, is that previous models imply that communicative strategies are necessarily linguistic or verbal, whereas his model shows that strategic competence is at the level of language competence, not just one part of it.

5. *Celce-Murcia, Thurell & Dorney's model of communicative competence.* Celce-Murcia, Thurell, and Dorney, 1995) proposed a model of communicative competence, which, to some extent, is a continuation of the previously presented Canale and Swain's model. Their model includes five competencies and they are the following:

1. language competence
2. strategic competence
3. sociocultural competence
4. action competence
5. discourse competence

This model aimed to develop sociolinguistic competence, which is separate from discourse competence and which the authors divide into sociocultural and action competence. As Celce-Murcia, Thurell, and Dorney point out, there are two terminological differences between their model and the model represented by Canale and Swain. The first discrepancy in attitudes is observed in the preference for terms linguistic competence over the term grammatical competence to indicate that vocabulary and phonology are two components included in morphology and syntax. Another difference relates to the use of the term sociocultural instead of sociolinguistic competence, so that action competence can be distinguished from any of the appointed competence. Discourse competence refers to the possibility of achieving cohesion,

coherence, the generic and conversational structure of the language. It is believed that discourse competence is very important for communicative competence and language learning. Action competence refers to the transmission and understanding of communicative intention, i.e. the harmonization of action intention with the language form based on the knowledge of verbal schemes that have illocutionary strength. Celce Murcia et al. emphasize that their conceptualization of action competence is mostly limited to oral communication while rhetorical competence is shown to be parallel to action competence in written communication. In their opinion, action competence is divided into two main components: knowledge of language functions and knowledge of a set of speech acts. Sociocultural competence refers to the speaker's knowledge of how to properly express messages in the social and cultural context of communication. Strategic competence in this model represents knowledge of communicative strategies representations.

6. *Littlewood's model of communicative competence.* One of the newer models of communicative competence is the one presented by Littlewood (Littlewood, 2011) whose basic starting point is Canale and Swain's model to which a fifth component has been added with some terminological adaptation. The components of communicative competence in Littlewood's model are as follows:

1. Linguistic competence, which includes vocabulary, grammar, semantics, and phonology. Linguistic competence was the focus of interest within the traditional foreign language learning aspects.
2. Discourse competence, which enables speakers to engage in continuous discourse, e.g. by connecting ideas in longer written texts or oral expressions, allows them to participate in interaction while starting and ending conversations.
3. Pragmatic competence enables speakers of a foreign language to use their language resources to convey and interpret meaning in real situations, including those where they encounter possible problems due to a lack of knowledge.
4. Sociolinguistic competence consists primarily of knowledge to use language properly in social situations. This is about the use of appropriate levels of formality or directness.
5. Sociocultural competence includes awareness of cultural knowledge and assumptions that affect the exchange of meaning. In some situations, it can lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Littlewood 2011). This last component indicates the possible existence of psycholinguistic aspects regarding the level of knowing a second or foreign language. This is considered important for the development of the communicative use of language.

IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODELS

Despite certain terminological differences, communicative competence models have in essence the same general concepts which researchers try to improve and develop. One of the competencies shared by all models is grammatical or linguistic competence. The models proposed by Canale and Swain and Canale and Buckman, is about grammatical competence. Celce Murcia and others use the term language competence, indicating that this component includes vocabulary and phonology in addition to morphology and syntax. Littlewood, as well as other researchers, uses the term language competence when advocating for communicative competence. A foreign language teacher who forces the application of the model of communicative approach in his classroom teaching aims to help students develop their communicative competencies. The teacher, therefore, should serve as a model of communicatively competent speaker. This ability and language skill is very important because on some occasions misconception can arise that the communicative approach to language teaching requires speaking abilities whereas the knowledge of grammar is not of similar importance. The fact is that learning grammar and acquiring the skills of its adequate application in speech creates a good basis for the development of students' communicative abilities (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Chung, 2017; Morrow, 2018; Arnold, Dornyei, & Pugliese, 2015).

Another common feature of these models of communicative competence is that they all include a textual component. This textual or discourse component implies that the teacher when applying the communicative method, should have the ability to produce and understand cohesive and coherent texts, orally and in writing thus helping his students to develop such competence as well. Sociolinguistic or sociocultural competence is another common competence in different models. This competence requires that teachers who apply a communicative approach to language teaching have a high level of awareness of cultural norms and rules so that they can help students develop such competencies themselves. This means that it is not enough to possess only good grammatical and discourse competence, but it is also very important to have good intercultural competencies.

Strategic competence has different terminology in different models of teaching for communicative competence. The literature points out the important role in how implementing strategies to help students become good users of such learning strategies. Therefore, teachers are expected to be familiar with some active communication strategies, which are crucial for achieving communicative competence. This is to indicate that teachers have numerous responsibilities when they apply different teaching methods in the foreign language classroom.

TECHNIQUES FOR APPLYING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING

Since CLT emerged in the 1980s, this model became predominantly emphasized in foreign language learning classrooms focusing on developing learners' communication and interaction skills. CLT has gained the function of a tool for business success, especially in the age of the Internet and the creation of business partnerships around the world. Successful communication in a foreign language has become a part of life. In modern times of the CORONA pandemic, online language learning sessions became extremely popular worldwide. Speech is produced and conversation consumes most of the actual classroom time in the target language. *"The benefits of the approach are fully realized when the group work is structured to assure such features as positive interdependence, individual accountability, and appropriate uses of teamwork and interpersonal skills"* (Felder and Henriquez (1995: 25).

Writing about the teaching model which relies on the communicative competence approach implies language situations in which communicative skills play the main role leaving grammatical rules aside. However, the importance is to focus on real-world situations to make students practice the language for context and content. The knowledge of grammar is useful and helps students be certain about language forms applied in real-time communication.

"One can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication" (Richards 2006).

Techniques that help develop communicative competence include *repetition* and *modeling* which provide self-consciousness and establish self-confidence as well as self-awareness for manipulating and modeling language forms in a way that suits the personality of the speaker. Techniques such as *pair and group work* are used to create a natural situation for dialogue and communication development.

For CLT class (Communicative Language Teaching) teachers involve learners in *role-play, language exchanges, simulations, discussions, games, and information gaps* which are based on their resourcefulness, knowledge, and skills. Therefore the techniques engage the learners in the communication process.

Student–the student or *teacher–student active interaction* takes up most of the class, regardless of whether it is a direct form of traditional teaching or the teaching in the so-called virtual or online classroom. The mentioned technique embraces the cooperative learner's strategy which is explained by the fact that the success of each student depends on the participation of the whole group through language activity during the class session. The most favorite technique, both for teachers and students, is *role-playing*. Students are involved in dialogues and communication on their own and by improvising and leading a conversation to create real-life communicative

situations. It is a playful component that encourages students' practice in a relaxing atmosphere without feeling pressure.

Collaborative tasks activate the student's memory and knowledge and constantly expose him to a target language while taking part in problem-solving. There could be tasks like *solving puzzles*, *filling the information gaps*, or *determining personality traits* based on photographs and similar tasks that can stimulate and trigger the imagination. "This type of exercise allows not only to enhance students' communication skills but also to experiment with the peer-learning approach, which is useful in strengthening relationships among students" (Felder and Henriquez 1995). The teacher's role is to be supportive of students' needs. If there are technical possibilities, the teacher will record the lesson so that students can self-evaluate their skills in using the target language in free communication. The class recording is seen as an educational tool to improve language teaching efficiency and results.

Information-gap activities have the goal to involve students in finding the information they don't possess. This activity can take place in group or pair-work. Learners inquire in search of information through the technique of an *interview* or a *questionnaire*. Unlike information-gap activities, information-gathering activities, such as surveys, interviews, searches, etc., require the use of the target language to gather information from various types of resources. They could be other fellow students, or resources such as encyclopedias, books, maps, or the like. The goal is always the same: to be actively involved and encouraged to use the target language and be prepared to communicate orally or in writing even out of the classroom situations. The ultimate goal of CLT is to enable students to communicate freely and meaningfully in worldwide communicative environments.

Quite a modern type of teaching and learning activity considers *computer games*. Countless computer games can be included in teaching activities through which students are constantly engaged in the target language. It is important to keep in mind the teacher's ability to choose appropriate educational games through which students will be relieved of the fear of error.

In today's globalized world there is a growing tendency to be fluent in foreign languages, particularly English. Interactive real-world situations develop demands for proper preparation to learn and adopt communication skills that will challenge students to apply the knowledge independently and freely when found themselves in real-life scenarios outside of the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The idea with which we started the discussion of the teaching model based on a communicative approach in learning a foreign language for the needs of global society

in the modern world, proved to be a great challenge for both teachers and students. Teachers organize classes according to principles that open opportunities for students to acquire abilities and skills of manipulating language forms to achieve freedom of independent communication while developing communicative competence in a foreign language. The main principles include the goal of effective, free, and independent communication. The attention is focused on meaning and appropriate usage as well as on fluency and accuracy. The integration of four language skills is seen as the basis in communicative competence development. Communication is practiced and activities are undertaken on materials from original and authentic target language sources.

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