



DEFINING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

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Communicative competence is a term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately.

The term was coined by Dell Hymes reacting against the perceived inadequacy of Noam Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. [2]

Hymes's theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. In Hymes's view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to:

1. whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

This theory of what knowing a language entail offers a much more comprehensive view than Chomsky's view of competence, which deals primarily with abstract grammatical knowledge. [1]

Dr. Lane from University of Kentucky dealt with the problem of defining communication competence. He comes with some examples of identifying communicative competence by some linguists. Initially, Spitzberg defined communication competence as "the ability to interact well with others" (p.68). He explains, "the term 'well' refers to accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness and appropriateness" (p. 68).

Friedrich provided a much more complete operationalization declaring that communication competence is best understood as "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate





adaptive communication performances."

He mentions also Parks who emphasizes three interdependent themes: control, responsibility, and foresight; and argues that to be competent, we must "not only 'know' and 'know how,' we must also 'do' and 'know that we did'" (p. 174). He defines communicative competence as "the degree to which individuals perceive they have satisfied their goals in a given social situation without jeopardizing their ability or opportunity to pursue their other subjectively more important goals" (p. 175).

It must be said some words about the useful framework for understanding communication competence designed by Spitzberg & Cupach and known as the component model of competence because it is comprised of three specific dimensions: motivation (an individual's approach or avoidance orientation in various social situations), knowledge (plans of action; knowledge of how to act; procedural knowledge), and skill (behaviors actually performed).

Rubin explains that communication competence is "an impression formed about the appropriateness of another's communicative behavior" and that "one goal of the communication scholar is to understand how impressions about communication competence are formed, and to determine how knowledge, skill and motivation lead to perceptions of competence within various contexts" (p. 173).

At the end Dr.Lane summarizes that communication competence is the degree to which a communicator's goals are achieved through effective and appropriate interaction. [2]

Communicative competence as a concept was introduced by Dell Hymes and discussed and redefined by many authors. Hymes' original idea was that speakers of a language have to have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language; they also need to know how language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes. [3]

There are four dimensions of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.

Linguistic competence knows how to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language. Linguistic competence asks: What words do I use? How do I put them into phrases and sentences?

Sociolinguistic competence knows how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Sociolinguistic competence asks: Which words and





phrases fit this setting and this topic? How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when I need to? How do I know what attitude another person is expressing?

Discourse competence knows how to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. Discourse competence asks: How are words, phrases and sentences put together to create conversations, speeches, email messages, newspaper articles?

Strategic competence knows how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language and in the context. Strategic competence asks: How do I know when I've misunderstood or when someone has misunderstood me? What do I say then? How can I express my ideas if I don't know the name of something or the right verb form to use? [4].

According to definitions of communicative competence, this term refers to what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. Communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use.

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