

LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)

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Abstract *Moving from the 'focus on form' teaching approach such as grammar translation. Recently more language teachers have noticed the failure of form focusing approach in developing learners' communicative ability in real-life situations and shifted to adopt the communicative language teaching (CLT). The CLT approach highlights learners' communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) which is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language and successfully achieve communications in real-life situations (Lightbown and Spada, 1999; Power, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the integration of computer-mediated communication (CMC) into English as a foreign language EFL learning can increase both input (exposure) and output (use) of the target language that is needed for learners to promote both their linguistic and pragmatic competence.*

Key words: *Communicative competence, computer mediated communication (CMC), authentic and interactive learning tasks.*

INTRODUCTION

The field of second and foreign language teaching and learning has been an issue of debate since long time. Various theories and various methods of language learning have been introduced. Grammar translation method occupied the field of foreign and second language teaching for many decades and is still of use today. The field has also been dominated by the behaviorist theory and the idea that language is nothing but a social behavior that can be learned as any behavior through the process of habit formation. Many language drills have been designed for the purpose. Students may share the same aim of being able to use language as native like users; but which ability is required for that? and how to achieve it? has been a question for both linguists and methodologists. I intend to reflect on the challenges that might arise in teaching English Language in a Swedish Upper Secondary School from a multicultural perspective. My reflection is

based on the recent project that I am working on with the students regarding giving a speech. In this sense, this paper will critically discuss the theoretical framework in combining digital literacy and information search in language learning in a multicultural classroom. In order to achieve this aim, this paper will focus on students as digital natives, the difference between being a digital native and being digitally literate, with respect to information search and filtering through information. Furthermore, focus will be laid upon the Importance of the spoken word through a critical analysis of the students' communicative competence. 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 s/he acquires the skills of the language and manages to use them effectively and appropriately according to the context in which s/he is involved, we can say that s/he acquires the required level of the communicative importance of 'the spoken word' through a critical analysis of the students' communicative.

As learners develop their language competences, they are able to deal with evermore complex topics, so teaching material needs to offer learners interesting and challenging subject matter.

The project being analyzed in this paper is a 6-phase, 8-week-project on giving a speech. The main outcome of this project is the students' ability to implement digital literacy, information search and application in giving a speech, as well as attaining organizational and pragmatic competence based on their ability to employ collocations, grammar, metaphorical devices and stylistics in English Language (Brown & Douglas 2007, 221). Furthermore, the need for learning the importance of context as in CC cannot be overlooked. The cultural intentions and nuances in language in CC teaching is thus an integral part of this paper. This project is also based on the core contents of English 7 curriculum by the Swedish Educational Board which are: Content of communication, Reception and Production and interaction.

Communicative Competence

In language learning, the importance of content and skills cannot be overlooked. This paper explores how the contents of learning and the skills that a learner acquires in language learning can be applied to attain efficiency in language use. The CEFR's approach to language learning is based on the concept of plurilingualism, which is referred to as the expansion of the cultural contexts of an individual's experience of language and their ability learning can be applied to attain efficiency in language use. The CEFR's approach to language learning is based on the concept of

plurilingualism, which is referred to as the expansion of the cultural contexts of an individual's experience of language and their ability.

DEFINING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

To define the notion 'communicative competence' we can refer to the two words that constitute it, of which the word 'competence' is the main word. Competence can be described as the knowledge, ability or capability. So, we can say that communicative competence can be defined as 'competence to communicate' that is, having the ability that allow the person to communicate in real life situations in order to fulfill communicative purpose. In the following paragraphs, I will survey the various definitions of the communicative competence given by various linguists to get into the details of this term that became a major aim for language teaching and learning in the field of second and foreign language.

Savignon (1972) defined communicative competence as 'the ability to function in a truly communicative setting'. This means that communicative competence for her is close to Hymes' view (1972). She considers communicative competence as an ability for functioning in communicative settings and this is something totally different from the linguistic competence by Chomsky 1965 as no one can function in real life situation with only grammatical competence. For Savignon (1983), competence is 'what one knows' and performance is 'what one does' Terrel and Krahen (1983) have defined communicative competence as the use of language in social communications without grammatical analysis. They related communicative competence to the communication and doesn't give a focus for the grammatical competence. This means that communicative competence is manifested in the communication and it is all the abilities that we need to use for communication. They also argued that the primary goal of language learning should be the development of the communicative skills. They arrived at a principle that language is best taught when it is used to transmit messages, not when it is taught for learning conscious learning.

Models of communicative competence

Dell Hymes' Model of Communicative Competence:

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 on 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 (1972) introduced the

concept 'Communicative Competence' in contrast to Chomsky's distinction between 'competence' and 'performance'. Chomsky argued that the focus of linguistic theory is to characterize the abstract abilities of a speaker which enable him to produce grammatically correct sentences, whereas Hymes reacted that linguistic theory with its primary focus on linguistic abilities should be viewed as a part of a more general theory that incorporating communication with sociocultural settings. He adds that coping with the realities of the children as communicating beings requires a theory within which sociocultural factors have explicit and constitutive role.

Hymes 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, that is, encoding and decoding. As performance can't 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 social cultural features that are considered to be a major 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 *la langue* (language structures) and *Parole* (individual speech).

Hymes believes that knowledge of language structure and sociocultural rules and the ability to use such knowledge in real life situation are both important in language acquisition. The learner acquires knowledge of language not only as grammatical but also as appropriate.

He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when no, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. (Hymes, 1972,) By this discussion, Hymes shows that grammatical knowledge or linguistic knowledge in Chomsky's linguistic theory is not sufficient to explain the child's competence to accomplish communicative needs. He continues that 'there are rules without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Here, we can understand the importance of sociocultural knowledge as a controlling factor for linguistic form and their role in conducting and interpreting social life. Based on his above mentioned discussion, Hymes reaches a point that for the theory of language users and language use to be developed, the judgments and abilities must be recognized not only in

grammaticality and acceptability as in Chomskyan model of competence and performance, but in four levels. He suggests this framework for integrating linguistic theory with theory of communication and culture; and raised these four questions on which his framework based on:

1-Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;

2- Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of means of implementation available;

3- Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate 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.

Alcon's model of communicative competence

Though the previous models of the communicative competence have emphasized the importance of language for communication, they did not show clearly the position of the four language macro skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in their model. They just deal with the various components of the communicative competence related to various aspects of the language, stressing the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of the language as well as the pragmatic meanings. What I am satisfied with as a model for communicative competence within the context of the foreign language is that one raised recently by Alco, though it is not been so common in literature. According to Jordà (2005: 56), Alcon's model of communicative competence comprises three main components: Discourse competence, Psychomotors skills and competencies and strategic competence. The discourse competence comprises linguistic competence, textual competence and pragmatic competence. The psychomotors skills includes the language four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Developing EFL learners' Communicative Competence

Learning strategies are activities that are rationally selected by learners for enhancing their learning (Oxford, 1990). Communicative language teaching includes a set of activities that involve learners in communication and meaning negotiating. In the following, I will sum up some of the activities that may help in developing students' communicative competence in English as a foreign language:

Oral conversation and dialogue: Teacher should encourage students in oral conversation in pairs and groups. These activities proved to be of high value in cultivation students' communicative competence as classroom is mostly the only place for students to practice English.

Teacher – student interaction: Teacher should play the role of a facilitator and assistant for the learning to take place. He should interact with his students. Studies have shown that teachers who spend long time lecturing their students while students listening and take notes often fail to cultivate the communicative competence of the students.

Using Literature: Literature, whatever the genre drama, short stories, novels, etc. It is considered to be useful in developing EFL students' communicative competence as it provides students with authentic language as well as equip them with English culture. If movies acted by Native English actors are shown to the students, it will help them to understand English pronunciation. Such literary texts serve in developing linguistic text through offering student's new vocabulary and grammatical rules. It also helps the learners to understand English culture and which language is used in each context.

Simulation and role-playing activities: These activities are so useful for promoting student's communicative competence. The most important condition here is that students should consider themselves as in a real situation.

English language teaching videos and records: Teachers should benefit from the English language teaching videos and records as such materials expose learners to authentic language by native speakers.

Reading English news and watching English news TVs: Another way to involve students in real life language situation that provide them with native language experiences outside classroom in foreign language context is motivating students to watch English news, films at TVs and to read English news through internet resources.

Investing social media as e-mail, what's up and Facebook in promoting learning language: These social media tools are so important in developing communicative competence as it will provide them opportunities to use language and learn from each other as in group discussion. Students may feel shy to speak in face- to- face discussion but it will be easy for them to share voice records or a piece of writing via social media devices. It provides them opportunities to learn from their mistakes through their discussions. Such activities will increase the linguistic competence of students as well as the other competencies.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to define the term 'communicative competence'. It goes through the various definition of the term 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 ability to use such knowledge effectively and appropriately in real life situations. Communicative competence has become a major aim for second and foreign language teaching and learning. Linguists and methodologists suggest communicative language approach and its activities for the purpose of achieving the communicative competence in the target language.

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