A Study of Communicative Competence

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Abstract: *This paper presents in brief the process of defining communicative competence. The idea of the term communicative competence and its different components has been a matter of great interest in SLA. To communicate in a real – life contest one should possess the ability to use not only grammatically correct language, but also language that is socially appropriate. A number of theoretical models have been presented to specify its different components. But none of the existing theoretical frameworks is however wholly satisfactory and there seems to be room for further amendment and elaboration. After a brief review of some well – known models an important and novel feature of this new model is presented with psycholinguistic competence which corresponds with strategic competence in the existing models, but is subdivided into a number of other new competences. Several important definitions and models of communicative competence are presented in this paper.*

Keywords: *language, communicative competence, definition of communicative competence, models of communicative competence*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "communicative competence" is comprised of two words, the combination of which means "competence to communicate". Communicating effectively in a language requires the speaker's good understanding of linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of that language. This understanding will enable him to use the right language in the right context for the right purpose and then he can be referred to as communicatively competent. However, the realization of this level of knowledge and understanding is always a challenge for foreign language learners. They often struggle through their journey towards the achievement of this goal and are often met with many obstacles. Therefore, many arguments have been raised against designing language courses and programmes for foreign language contexts to achieve this goal. The term 'communicative competence' was first introduced by Hymes in (1972) as a sociolinguistic concept in reaction to the concept of 'linguistic competence' which was proposed by Chomsky in 1965. Chomsky's concept was "concerned with the tacit knowledge of language structure" but "omits almost everything of socio-cultural, significance" (Hymes, 1972: 270- 280).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Canale and Swain model (1983) is probably the most popular model of all the existing models of communicative competence. This model was an extension of their 1980 model in which they conceptualized three main components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is the same as Chomsky's notion of 'competence', implying linguistic competence, encompassing knowledge of phonological, morphological and syntactical elements of language. Sociolinguistic competence refers to Hyme's idea of communicative competence that is the ability to use language appropriately with regard to the given social contexts. By strategic competence, they meant the ability to handle communication in the face of a communication breakdown, through the use of strategies of communication Canale and Swain revised their scheme in 1983 and added a fourth component to it discourse competence they implied the user's ability to achieve cohesion and coherence in connected texts whether spoken or written. This revision of their earlier scheme however, according to the researcher was unfortunate since there was no need to separate discourse from other elements of language. The ability to connect sentence into larger wholes should be considered appropriately only as one type of linguistic ability, similar to other types of linguistic competence phonological graphological and syntactic all of which involve some kind of organization of linguistic elements.

3. BACHMAN AND PALMER'S THEORETICAL SCHEME

In their model of communicative competence Bachman and Palmer (1982) posited three main types of competence: grammatical, pragmatic and sociolinguistic (Fig 1). A major difference in their scheme line in their isolating vocabulary from, other components of grammatical competence and listing. It as a component of pragmatic competence along with cohesion and organization. The third main element sociolinguistic competence consists of register, nativeness and non-literal language. Here also the term 'nativeness' might raise a number of eyebrows in today's anti-colonial world, in which cultures and nations pride themselves on being themselves. Criticizing this concept of 'native speakerness' Leung (2005) remarks that the concept of communicative competence has 'produced abstracted contexts and idealized social rules of use based on (English Language) native speakerness. It is imperative for ELT to take notice of real world social, culture and language developments in contemporary conditions and to re-engage with a set of reformulated ethnographic sensitivities and sensibilies (Leung, 2005, p. 119). Another important idea in Bachman and Palmer's (1982) scheme is the absence of the component of strategic competence, which is acknowledged by most of other conceptualizations of communicative competence.
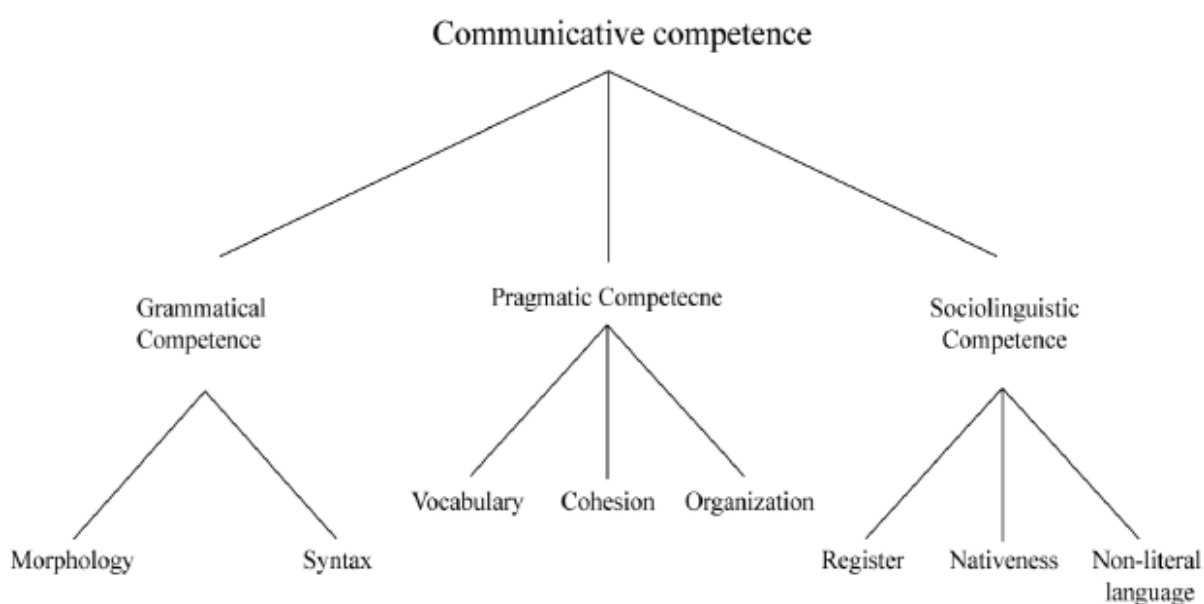

Figure1. *Bachman and Palmar's(1982) model of communicative competence*

Bachman's scheme of communicative language proficiency (1990) is much more comprehensive then Bachman and Palmer's (1982) theoretical framework and adds a number of new components and their subdivisions as the diagram (Fig 2) shows. It mainly differs from Bachman and Palmer's (1982) earlier scheme in that it includes strategic competence as one of the main components. Another important difference lines in the fact that lexis is now listed within grammatical competence rather than pragmatic competence. It also adds psychomotor skills as one of the major competence. However in spite of the new additions the model is faulty and unconvincing in many ways. First of all it makes sociolinguistic competence subservient to pragmatic competence, while in the earlier model of 1987 Bachman and Palmer envisaged this as a separate component on a par with grammatical and pragmatic competence. Pragmatics as a discipline deals with the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (Crystal 1985, p. 240)

Pragmatics then does not seem to be distinguishable from sociolinguistics in the light of Crystal's definition, as far as a speaker's communicative competence is concerned, as it encompasses all the participant-related temporal and spatial constraints inherent in a communicative act. I contend that pragmatics should properly be viewed as a discipline on a par with semantics in which the meanings of sentences are studied in terms of context of use, but in considering communicative ability, pragmatic competence should be considered as similar to sociolinguistic competence.
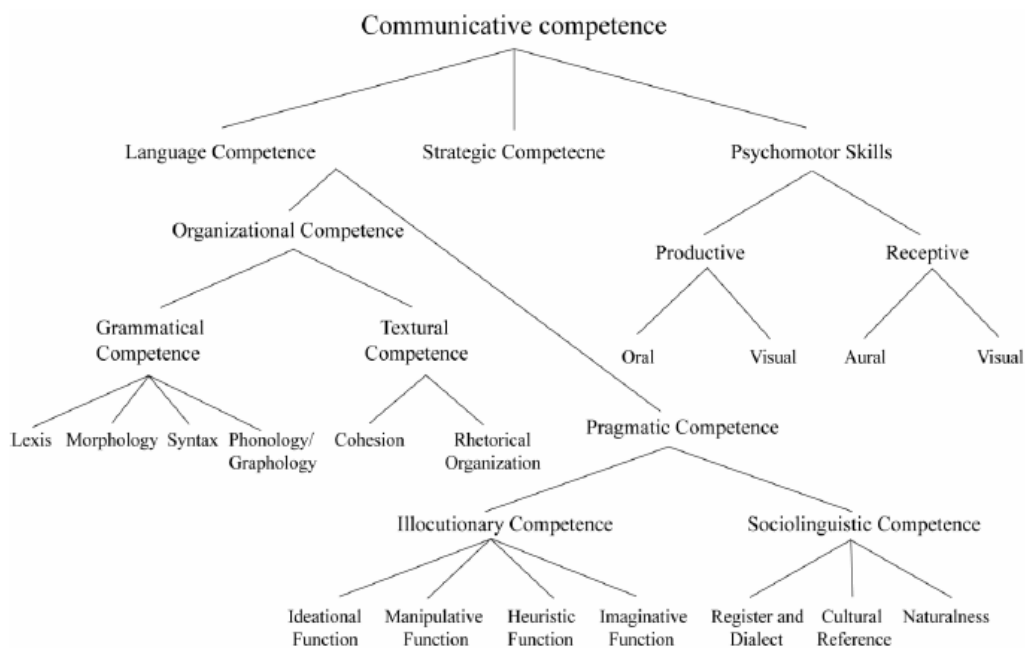
Figure2. *A Framework for Communicative Language Proficiency (Bachman, 1990)*

The components listed within Bachman's (1987) pragmatic competence are illocutionary competence are sociolinguistic competence. While illocutionary competence refers to the ability of performing different functions through language, sociolinguistic competence is concerned with factors such as variation of language according to i) register and dialect. ii) cultural references and figures of speech and iii) naturalness. It must be noted that the ability to perform functions as well as the ability to use language according to varying social contexts should be together included into sociolinguistic competence, as language is always used to perform some or other social function. Sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence should be considered as the same, and in lieu of pragmatic competence Bachman's model should have chosen the term 'sociolinguistic competence' since the former term is considerably ambiguous. Morris (1938) referred to the term pragmatics as a branch of inquiry within semiotics parallel with syntactic and semantics, which he defines as the study of the relation of signs to interpreters'' (1938, p 6). As Levinson (1983) noted ''since Morris's introduction of the trichotomy syntax, semantics and pragmatics, the term pragmatics has been in use with two very distinct senses. While the first sense of the term is very broad and encompasses matters as diverse as psychopathology of communication and the evolution of the symbol system, the second sense is narrow and is restricted to investigation of the meanings of utterances in terms of the users of the language. In short, in the view of the present research since the term pragmatics is so laden with ambiguity, it would be advisable to prefer the term sociolinguistic (which is clear in meaning) to the term pragmatics. Also, a significant deficiency in Bachman's (1987) model is that while he has elaborated other components in considerable detail, he has left strategic competence at the mere mention of the name.

4. A REVISED MODEL OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The researcher has attempted in this section to present and propose a revised model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) with their three major components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. It has borrowed its fourth component i.e. psychomotor skills from Bachman's (1987) model. A special feature of this revised scheme is that it subdivides each category into a hierarchical framework (see Fig.3).

The revised model of communicative competence has the following four major components:

4.1. Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is the same as Chomsky's 'competence'. or Canale & Swain's (1980) grammatical competence which encompasses the knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax as well as discourse. In including discourse within grammatical competence, it differs from Canale and Swain's (1983) model and agrees with Bachman's (1987) model.

4.2. Sociolinguistic Competence

The second major component is sociolinguistic competence, which refers to using language appropriately according to varying social contexts, and it is of the following types (This classification roughly corresponds with Corder's (1973) types of appropriacy): Role-oriented/stylistic. This involves the ability to vary language in accordance with speaker-hearer relationship. For example, language varies on the basis of whether a person is speaking to his son or to his friend
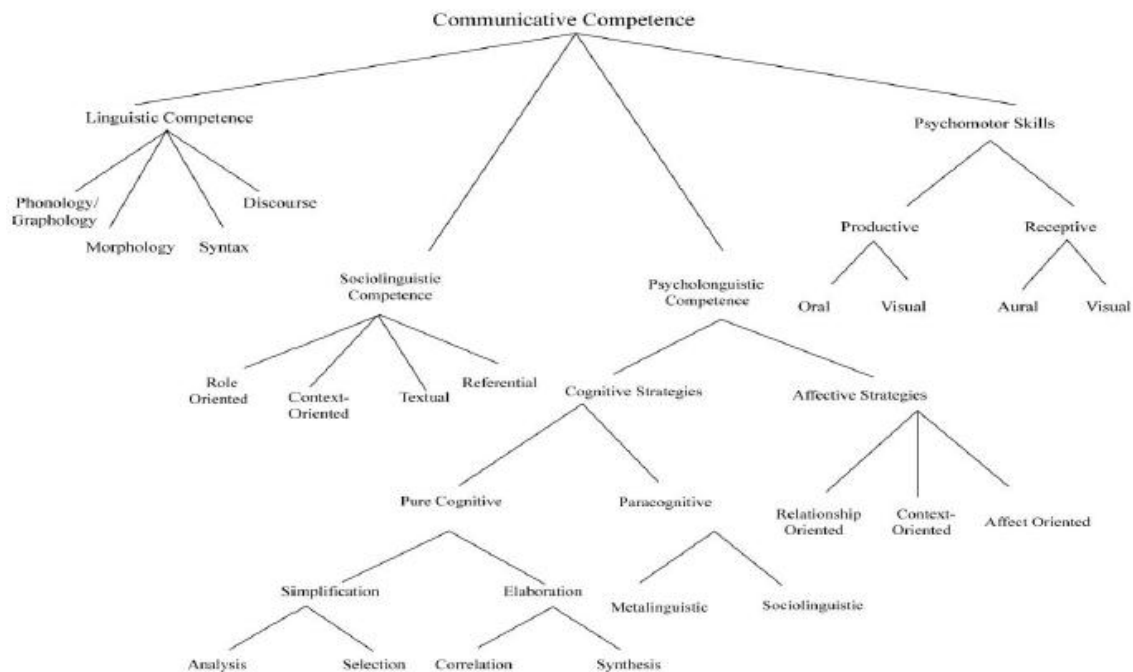

Figure3. *Components of Communicative Competence*

1. Context-oriented: This refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to the given social contexts considering the various temporal, spatial, functional and user-based constraints. Use of language vanes on the basis of temporal setting i.e., whether at the beginning or the end of a function or meeting; on the basis of physical setting i.e.. whether at an office or in market, on the basis of linguistic functions i.e., whether one is trying to persuade a client or scolding one's child.

2. Textual-competence: Textual sociolinguistic competence here is distinct from Bachman's (1987) use of the term. Nor does it imply Canale and Swain's discourse competence. It refers to the ability to vary language according to the linguistic text in question whether spoken or written. Thus, language has to vary according to the relevant register and dialect. Use of different registral varieties in the sports column, in the editorial column, and in the cooking column of a newspaper or magazine can be taken as an example.

3. Referential-competence: This refers to the ability of using language in conformity with referential truths or world knowledge. Communication has to be appropriate in accordance with truth conditions or whether something is possible or not. For example, an utterance would be considered bizarre if someone inquires ''From which tree did you pluck this dress?''

4.3. Psycholinguistic Competence

The third major component in the scheme is psycholinguistic competence which is broadly divided into two main types: cognitive and affective.

4.3.1. Cognitive Competence

This corresponds with strategic competence in earlier schemes and refers to the use of cognitive strategies of communication which might be of two types: pure cognitive and paracognitive. Pure cognitive strategies are inborn mental processes of the mind employed in all communication, as well as learning. The pure cognitive strategies of communication and learning have been proposed and labelled by the present researcher as consisting of only two mega strategies: simplification and elaboration (Husain,2006). Simplification involves simplifying the input or output through either of the sub strategies of analysis or selection. Elaboration on the other hand involves relation one item to

another and synthesizing them if necessary. Hence, while analysis and selection are proposed as the two sub strategies of simplification: correlation and synthesis are proposed as the two sub strategies of simplification; correlation and synthesis are proposed as the two sub strategies of elaboration.. Paracognitive competence refers to the use of metalinguistic strategies of communication involving planning, monitoring and evaluation of communication, as well as the sociolinguistic strategies of communication such as asking for clarification or repetition, or feigning understanding.

4.3.2. Affective Competence

The other main type of strategic or psycholinguistic competence is affective competence while implies the ability to express emotions in keeping with the affective requirements of the social context. This also involves the manipulation of linguistic and non-linguistic means in terms of hiding, suppressing or even feigning emotions which are non-existent. Affective competence can be of the following types.

4.3.2.1. Relationship-Oriented

This refers to the ability to express emotions in keeping with the relationship with the hearer. For example, one usually does not display one's emotions to a stranger.

4.3.2.2. Context-Oriented

This involves the ability to express emotions in keeping with the social context. For example, one's affective behaviour at a funeral is different from that at a party.

4.3.2.3. Affect-Oriented

This relates to the ability to express and engage emotions in keeping with the affective state of the hearer. For example: while speaking to a person in an angry mood, one has to choose one's words cautiously so that the person is not provoked further; rather an attempt is made to pacify his/her.

5. TWO TYPES OF ABILITIES

In addition to the above classification, the researcher is of the view that communicative competence involves tow broad types of abilities. Inherent and developed. Linguistic competence is largely an inherent ability which is the product of the inborn language faculty in the human mind at the time of birth and enables the child to acquire its mother tongue without any instruction. When this genetic faculty atrophies at a certain age, later languages are learnt though the employment of the general cognitive faculty responsible for other types of learning. Sociolinguistic ability, i.e. the ability to use language appropriately according to role-relationships, according to the temporal and spatial constraints of the social context, according to the functional purpose of language use, according to the relevant register and dialect and also in relation to referential truths seems to be an ability largely developed through interaction with one's environment. In the psycholinguistic domain, cognitive strategies are inherent universal mental processes. Paracognitive strategies which consist of metalinguistic and sociolinguistic strategies, seem to be largely influenced by environmental factors. As far as affective strategies are concerned, a human child is born with the ability to express emotions naturally; it cannot hide its feelings of happiness, fear or disappointment, but as the child grows older, it learns to regulate the expression of emotions in keeping with social needs and norms. On the other hand, it can also be the case that a child grows into an emotionally deficient adult as a result of suppression and ill-treatment in childhood and fails to express emotions even when required and as required. It can be said that affective competence like linguistic competence is inherited to begin with, but learnt and developed or warped or stunted through interaction with society.

6. CONCLUSION

There is a lack of consensus about what the term 'communicative competence' means. But in broad terms, it refers to the speaker's ability to use the language appropriately in different linguistic, sociolinguistic and contextual settings. The realization of this level of language use requires a good command of all language skills. To sum up, the above paper has three main sections. First the researcher has briefly reviewed some well-known models of communicative competence. He has subsequently presented his own theoretical framework of communicative competence, built upon the original conceptualizations proposed by Canale and Swain (1980, 1983). He also acknowledges

borrowing the competence of psychomotor skills from Bachman's (1987) scheme. The chief modification introduced by him in the existing models consists in his elaboration of the component of strategic competence, which he has subsumed within psycholinguistic competence, as one of the major components of communicative competence. He divides it further into two main types: cognitive and affective, which imply the use of cognitive and affective strategies of communication.

Though it is necessary to distinguish among the competence types theoretically, it must be noted that in real communicative contexts an interaction and overlapping of all the four types of abilities is evident as other researchers have also remarked (Savignon, 1983; Yalden, 1987). In any communicative act, one has to use one's knowledge of the different element of language, employing one's linguistic competence; and one is also expected at the same time to speak or write appropriately according to the social context, drawing upon one's sociolinguistic ability. The various cognitive and affective strategies are simultaneously in use, while the physical parts of the body such as the tongue and the oral cavity in speech the hands in gestures, or in writing, the eyes in expression play their own role.

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