

ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Annotation: The term «communicative competence» is comprised of two words, the combination of which means «competence to communicate». This simple lexicosemantical analysis uncovers the fact that the central word in the syntagm «communicative competence» is the word «competence». «Competence» is one of the most controversial terms in the field of general and applied linguistics.

Key words: competence, communicative competence, teaching, foreign languages, field, culture.

Its introduction to linguistic discourse has been generally associated with Chomsky who in his very influential book «Aspects of the Theory of Syntax» drew what has been today viewed as a classic distinction between competence (the monolingual speaker-listener's knowledge of language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations)¹. Soon after Chomsky proposed and defined the concepts of competence and performance, advocates for a communicative view in applied linguistics (e.g. Savignon, 1972) expressed their strong disapproval at the idea of using the concept of idealized, purely linguistic competence as a theoretical ground of the methodology for learning, teaching and testing languages. They found the alternative to Chomsky's concept of competence in Hymes's communicative competence which they believed to be a broader and more realistic notion of competence. Namely, Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, thus bringing the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence. During the 1970s and 1980s many applied linguists with a primary interest in the theory of language acquisition and/or the theory of language testing gave their valuable contribution to the further development of the concept of communicative competence. Just a few of them will be mentioned in the following, namely those whose theoretical reflections and empirical work seem to have had the most important impact on the theory of communicative competence. In an attempt to clarify the concept of communicative competence, Widdowson (1983) made a distinction between competence and capacity. In his definition of these two notions he applied insights that he gained in discourse analysis and pragmatics. In this respect, he defined competence, i.e. communicative competence, in terms of the knowledge

of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions. Under capacity, which he often referred to as procedural or communicative capacity, he understood the ability to use knowledge as means of creating meaning in a language. According to him, ability is not a component of competence. It does not turn into competence, but remains “an active force for continuing creativity”, i.e. a force for the realization of what Halliday called the “meaning potential”. Having defined communicative competence in this way, Widdowson is said to be the first who in his reflections on the relationship between competence and performance gave more attention to performance or real language use. Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) understood communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skill needed for communication. In their concept of communicative competence, knowledge refers to the (conscious or unconscious) knowledge of an individual about language and about other aspects of language use. According to them, there are three types of knowledge: knowledge of underlying grammatical principles, knowledge of how to use language in a social context in order to fulfil communicative functions and knowledge of how to combine utterances and communicative functions with respect to discourse principles.

Language knowledge consists of two main components - organisational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge which complement each other in achieving communicatively effective language use. The subcomponents of these two areas of knowledge are listed in Figure 1. In Bachman and Palmer’s model, organisational knowledge is composed of abilities engaged in a control over formal language structures, i.e. of grammatical and textual knowledge. Grammatical knowledge includes several rather independent areas of knowledge such as knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology, and graphology. They enable recognition and production of grammatically correct sentences as well as comprehension of their propositional content. Textual knowledge enables comprehension and production of (spoken or written) texts. It covers the knowledge of conventions for combining sentences or utterances into texts, i.e. knowledge of cohesion (ways of marking semantic relationships among two or more sentences in a written text or utterances in a conversation) and knowledge of rhetorical organisation (way of developing narrative texts, descriptions, comparisons, classifications etc.) or conversational organisation (conventions for initiating, maintaining and closing conversations). Bagarić V., Mihaljević Djigunović J.: Defining Communicative Competence 99 Pragmatic knowledge refers to abilities for creating and interpreting discourse. It includes two areas of knowledge: knowledge of pragmatic conventions for

expressing acceptable language functions and for interpreting the illocutionary power of utterances or discourse (functional knowledge) and knowledge of sociolinguistic conventions for creating and interpreting language utterances which are appropriate in a particular context of language use (sociolinguistic knowledge). Strategic knowledge is conceived in the model as a set of metacognitive components which enable language user involvement in goal setting, assessment of communicative sources, and planning. Goal setting includes identifying a set of possible tasks, choosing one or more of them and deciding whether or not to attempt to complete them. Assessment is a means by which language use context is related to other areas of communicative language ability: topical knowledge and affective schemata. Planning involves deciding how to make use of language knowledge and other components involved in the process of language use to complete the chosen task successfully. At the end of this illustrative description of Bachman and Palmer's model of communicative language ability, one cannot but conclude that this model is more complex, more comprehensive and much clearer than the model of Canale and Swain. It is preferable because of its detailed and at the same time very organisational description of basic components of communicative competence. The last model we will refer to is the model or description of communicative language competence in the CEF, the model which is intended for assessment as well as for learning and teaching of languages. In the CEF, communicative competence is conceived only in terms of knowledge. It includes three basic components – language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Thus, strategic competence is not its componential part. It is interesting, however, that each component of language knowledge is explicitly defined as knowledge of its contents and ability to apply it. For instance, language competence or linguistic competence refers to knowledge of and ability to use language resources to form well structured messages. The subcomponents of language competence are lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. Conclusion. The short outline of the development of the concept and models of communicative competence made in the first two chapters of this article enables the following conclusions relevant for the project «English in Croatia»: 1. From the moment of its introduction into the linguistic discourse, the notion of communicative competence has been constantly changed and adapted to the context of its use. This process was accompanied by a change in the originally used term.

References:

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