

Chapter 2

Communicative Competence

2.1 Introduction

Communicative competence is difficult to define and operationalize. It seems that nothing has changed since the time of Aristotle's rhetoric. Techniques such as persuasion, rhetoric, empathy, interpersonal communication add to the construct of an effective communicator (Dilbeck, McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2009). However, as the process of communication is complex, defining communicative competence and effective communicator is not very simple.

From the historical perspective, the notion of communicative competence has been redefined many times (Kurcz, 2005) (Table 2.1).

Hymes (1972), for example, argued with Chomsky's linguistic theory of "an ideal speaker-listener with perfect linguistic knowledge, which is supposed to be unaffected by cognitive and situational factors during actual linguistic performance" (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008, p. 17). In his definition, Hymes (1972) relates communicative competence to practical needs and natural communication. What is more, he does not support the dichotomy of competence and performance. According to him, competence is the ability needed for performance. Hymes (1972) proposes four questions which should be asked in order to investigate the nature of communicative competence:

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 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 (Hymes, 1972, p. 54).

Hymes stresses the necessity of empirical study of actual communicative performance. He believes that each communicative behaviour should be evaluated in

Table 2.1 Definitions of communicative competence

Name	Focus	Definition of communicative competence
Chomsky (1965)	Dichotomy of competence and performance	“(…) a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)” (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4)
Hymes (1972)	Natural communication	“(…) to use language to communicate successfully requires much more than linguistic competence. One must be able to translate intentions into words and do so in such a way that those intentions will be recognized by the recipient” (Holtgraves, 2008, p. 207)
Allen and Brown (1976)	Strong and explicit relationship between competence and performance	“competence in this perspective, is tied to actual performance of the language in social situations” (Allen & Brown, 1976, p. 248)
Wiemann (1977)	Successful accomplishment of communicative goals	“the ability if an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors” (Wiemann, 1977, p. 198)
Larson et al. (1978)	Context and appropriateness	“the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation” (Larson et al., 1978, p. 16)
Bachman (1997)	Three components of communicative competence: language and strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms	“knowledge, or competence, and the capacity of implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use” (Bachman, 1997, p. 84)

terms of its possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and the success of an actual performance. A similar definition is provided by Wiemann (1977) who perceives a competent communicator as a person who performs competent behaviours:

communicative competence is the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he (she) may successfully accomplish his (her) own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his (her) fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation (Wiemann, 1977, p. 198).

Larson et al. (1978, p. 16) define communicative competence as “the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behaviour in a given situation”. McCroskey (1982) quotes one more definition of communicative competence by Allen and Brown (1976, p. 248): “competence in this perspective, is tied to actual performance of the language in social situations”. In their definition the relationship between competence and performance is very

explicit. McCroskey (1982) claims that various definitional problems are encountered in the process of conceptualizing communicative competence. As a result, McCroskey (1982) does not agree with the definitions by Allen and Brown (1976) and the one advanced by Wiemann (1977). He is in favour of Larson et al.'s (1978) definition; however, he does not claim that all other researchers are wrong. Clearly, most authors believe that competence equals either competence or effectiveness. Wiemann (1977) equates communicative competence with the successful accomplishment of communicative goals. Since such a definition of communicative competence brings ambiguity to the research, it may result in unreliable estimates of the competence. If it is a wrong definitional criterion, effectiveness may lead to inappropriate assessment of an individual communicator. According to McCroskey (1982), performance is the only way of judging one's competence.

McCroskey's view is quite consistent with the fact that usually competence develops before performance; however, the order may be reversed. Additionally, appropriate behaviour cannot be equated with the understanding of this behaviour since understanding does not mean the ability to actually perform the task. In other words, communicative competence and communication performance should be separated as two notions.

Language proficiency is both competence and performance since performance is the actual realization of the competence (Rodrigues, 2000). Teachers cannot predict all communicative contexts that learners will communicate in, however, it is possible to organize syllabuses around most frequently appearing learners' communicative needs. Learners also need to be equipped with a developed strategic competence which helps to overcome communication breakdowns.

2.2 Communicative Language Ability

Bachman (1997) proposes the following theoretical framework of communicative competence and calls it communicative language ability (CLA): it is both "knowledge, or competence, and the capacity of implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use" (Bachman 1997, p. 84). According to him, CLA consists of three components, namely language and strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms. Moreover language competence can be described as consisting of organizational competence (grammatical and textual competence) and pragmatic competence (illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence):

Recent formulations of communicative competence thus provide a much more inclusive description of the knowledge required to use language than did the earlier skills and components models, in that they include, in addition to the knowledge of grammatical rules, the knowledge of how language is used to achieve particular communicative goals, and the recognition of language use as a dynamic process (Bachman, 1997, p. 83).

The abilities responsible for controlling, comprehending and ordering the formal structure of language create organizational competence. Its first component, grammatical competence, is the knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology. The knowledge how to join and order information so as to form a text is called textual competence. Pragmatic competence, the ability to produce utterances successfully in a given context, is believed to have two dimensions. The first one includes the ability and knowledge to use language in a number of functions and to interpret language used in different contexts. The second one is the sociolinguistic competence which enables speakers to use language appropriately in a particular context (Baker, 2011).

The second component of CLA is strategic competence. Tarone (1983, p. 13) uses the interactional definition which refers to the term of strategic competence as “a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared”. Tarone also claims that the following criteria need to be fulfilled when we are speaking about communication strategy: a speaker wants to convey the meaning to a listener, s/he does not possess the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure in order to communicate the meaning, the speaker either avoids communication or attempts to use other strategies. Canale (1983) defines strategic competence as a separate component of communicative competence:

(...) mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies both (a) to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to insufficient competence or to performance limitations and (b) to enhance the rhetorical effects of utterance (Canale, 1983, p. 7).

On the basis of Færch and Kasper’s (1983) model of speech production, which serves as the explanation of the function of communication strategies in interlanguage communication, Bachman (1997) extends their work and presents a more general model of strategic competence which includes three components: assessment, planning and execution:

The interpretation of discourse, in other words, requires the ability to utilize available language competencies to assess the context for relevant information and to then match this information to information in the discourse. It is the function of strategic competence to match the new information to be processed with relevant information that is available (including presuppositional and real world knowledge) and map this onto the maximally efficient use of existing language abilities (Bachman, 1997, p. 102).

Thanks to the assessment components the speaker is able to identify information needed to convey the message together with abilities of the interlocutor. The planning component enables the speaker to use his/her resources (grammatical, textual, illocutionary and sociolinguistic part of communicative competence) in order to obtain the goal of communication.

2.3 Communicative Skills

As pointed out by Rickheit, Strohner, and Vorwerg, (2008), the notion of communicative competence is complex. There are numerous interactional skills which influence the competence of an individual: non-verbal communicative skills, discourse and conversation skills, production of a clear message (Komorowska, 2001), reception skills and impression management skills. Rickheit and Strohner (2008) stress the fact that communicative skills, like any other, depend on particular contexts and situations which suggests that people display different skills in different situations which usually results in the change of their self-image. In the process of communication people can't feel totally secure—they constantly need to protect their face and/or defend the face of somebody else (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2010).

Along with interactional skills as one of the characteristics of communicative competence, Rickheit and Strohner (2008) enumerate effectiveness and appropriateness. As communication is the process of achieving a goal, effectiveness seems to be one of the key components of successful communication. On the other hand, appropriateness is believed to be also of great importance since different communication and social contexts require different communicative skills (Hymes, 1972). The effectiveness of communication is measured by the way aims are reached. Therefore, according to Morreale, Spitzberg, and Barge, (2001) while communicating people can be:

- a. appropriate and effective—it is an optimal version of communicative behaviour: people accept the needs of others but on the other hand they are assertive and competent communicators;
- b. appropriate and ineffective—means that interlocutor is a passive participant of the communication act which usually leads to nothing in terms of goal realization;
- c. inappropriate and effective—such maximized approach towards interaction is characteristic of an assertive and/or aggressive person;
- d. inappropriate and ineffective—in this type of communication the interaction is minimal, a person gets minimal results from the interaction and what is more, people become disaffected with him/her.

Language competence, which consists of organizational and pragmatic competences, is not enough to understand and produce messages. What is also needed, apart from the general knowledge of the world and cultural constraints, is what the interlocutor knows about the other people involved in communication. Such information includes interlocutor's goals, emotions, competences and skills (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008).

Dilbeck and McCroskey (2008) name two more characteristics of an effective communicator: assertiveness and responsiveness. According to them, the aforementioned personality traits can be defined in the following way:

1. assertiveness is concerned with requests, active disagreement, positive and negative expression of personal rights and feelings, initiating, maintaining and disengaging from conversations, maintaining self-respect, satisfying personal needs, pursuing personal happiness, defending personal rights and standing up for one's self without attacking others
2. the responsiveness orientation describes a person's willingness and capacity to be sensitive to the communication of others, by recognizing others' needs and desires; it involves good listening skills, being other oriented, making others comfortable in speaking situations (Dilbeck & McCroskey, 2008, p. 273).

Being an effective and competent communicator requires balance between assertiveness and responsiveness. As different communication situations have different demands, competent communicators are flexible enough to adapt to all constraints of communication. The observable behaviour of both assertiveness and responsiveness is possible when an individual becomes sensitive to his/her own communicative goals and the aims of others. Only then can the speaker be described as effective.

In the process of communication there are three other major factors which enable people to communicate successfully: motivation, declarative and procedural knowledge (Morreale et al., 2001). Motivation to communicate is the amount of energy and time a person wants to sacrifice in order to communicate appropriately and effectively. Although positive and strong motivation is needed in communication, interlocutors also have to possess knowledge about the content of the message and procedures of coding it (Morreale et al., 2001). Both declarative and procedural knowledge, that is, the knowledge about communication itself and the knowledge of how to perform a communication task, are developed throughout life; however, what is really important in the process of communication is the way people apply this knowledge in real life situations thanks to their skills. The development of communicative competence is necessary for the learners to behave appropriately in a given communicative context. Therefore, in the context of FL instruction, approaches which aim at developing communicative skills are the most desirable ones.

2.4 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Creating a context resembling authentic communication is one of the major aims of communicative language teaching (CLT). Students learn how to communicate effectively and appropriately in different social settings. The key to a truly communicative classroom is a real communicative purpose since the learners need to communicate what is real and authentic to them (Sato, 2003). What should also be stressed is the need for a focus on fluency and not only accuracy.

Communicative language teaching aims at developing the communicative competence of a learner together with general knowledge about the language and the sociocultural aspects of it. Byram and Mendez (2009) stress the value of learner motivation which should be improved by communicative tasks incorporated in the

process of language learning. As a result learners participate in a genuine act of communication and learn more naturally. Techniques which promote such activities include information gap, role play, drama, etc. Byram and Mendez (2009) call communicative language teaching a “fashion term” and emphasize the need for understanding CLT as an “umbrella term” as nowadays an approach which has no communicative dimension would be difficult to find.

As suggested by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels, (1998), the ultimate goal of current foreign language teaching methods should be to increase willingness to communicate as the development of communicative competence is inherent in language education. Many people tend to be highly motivated for learning but anxious about communicating at the same time. When given an opportunity to use FL some people remain silent while others will speak and communicate. A programme is needed especially for those learners who acquired skills in the classroom but are unable to use them outside the formal learning context. Thus, as stressed by Wysocka (1989), developing speaking skills should be divided into teaching formal and informal communication. She also points to the role of native speakers in the process of learning a language since they activate learners’ willingness to communicate in FL, including outside the classroom.

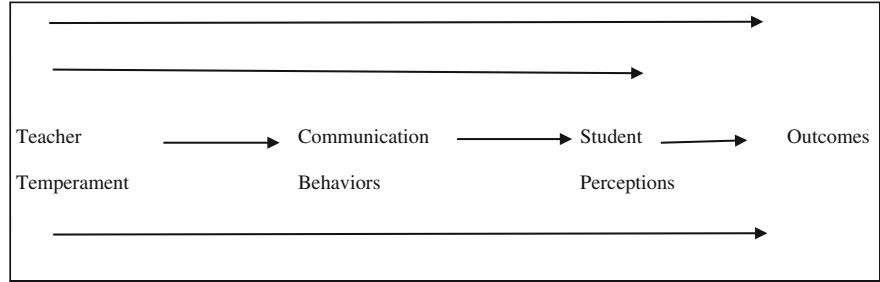
The General Model of Instructional Communication proposed by McCroskey, Valencic, & Richmond, (2004) shows the relations between teacher’s personality traits, learners’ communication behaviours and learners’ attitudes and learning outcomes (Table 2.2).

With reference to this Model, Katt, McCroskey, Sivo, Richmond, and Valencic, (2009) note:

learning outcomes are influenced by teacher temperament, teacher communication behaviour and student perception or teacher credibility and task attraction; that student perceptions are influenced by teacher temperament and teacher communication behaviours and that teacher communication behaviours are influenced by teacher temperament (Katt et al., 2009, p. 240).

Despite the potential value of the Model, Katt et al. (2009) point out that further investigation is needed in order to provide a more detailed analysis of the teacher’s role in the development of the learner’s willingness to communicate:

Table 2.2 The general model of instructional communication (based on McCroskey et al., 2004)



although the Model, as initially studied, does not include the communication environment and/or individual differences among the learners, it does define the general relationships between traits, behaviours, perceptions and outcomes, providing a useful framework for the study of instructional communication variables (Katt et al., 2009, p. 242).

In other words, the General Model of Instructional Communication should be treated as work in progress since it cannot be viewed as a complete system. It still needs further research and theoretical ground for being more precise and to investigate learners' individual differences which influence the affective domain of interpersonal communication.

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