

COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract: Communicative competence is one of the fundamental concepts in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English Language Teaching (ELT). It refers to the ability of language learners to use a language effectively and appropriately in different social and communicative contexts. Unlike the traditional view of language proficiency, which mainly focused on grammatical knowledge, communicative competence includes not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to understand meaning, use suitable expressions, and interact successfully with other speakers. This study explores the main components of communicative competence and their importance in foreign language learning. Based on theoretical perspectives developed by scholars such as Dell Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence consists of several interconnected components, including grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Each component contributes to learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Key words: components, learners, ability, competence, situations, grammar, proficiency, expressions.

In modern English Language Teaching (ELT) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA), communicative competence has become one of the most important concepts for understanding successful language learning. The traditional view of language ability mainly focused on knowledge of grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, researchers later recognized that knowing a language involves much more than producing grammatically correct sentences. Effective communication requires the ability to use language appropriately, understand social meanings, organize ideas, and overcome communication difficulties in different contexts.

The concept of communicative competence was first introduced by Dell Hymes (1972) as a reaction to the limited view of linguistic competence proposed by traditional linguistic theories. Hymes argued that a person who knows a language should not only understand its grammatical system but also know how to use that language appropriately in real social situations. For example, a learner may know the grammatical structure of a question, but successful communication also requires understanding when and how to ask that question. Later, researchers such as Canale and Swain (1980) developed a more detailed framework

of communicative competence by identifying several essential components. They suggested that communicative competence consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Later, Canale (1983) added discourse competence as another important component[1]. These components provide a comprehensive understanding of what it means to communicate effectively in a foreign language.

Analysis

The concept of communicative competence has become a central element in modern English Language Teaching (ELT) because it provides a broader understanding of what it means to know a language. Traditional approaches often considered language ability as the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, researchers argued that a person can produce grammatically correct sentences but still fail to communicate effectively. Therefore, communicative competence includes not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different social and communicative situations.

The theoretical foundation of communicative competence was introduced by Hymes (1972), who criticized the idea that language ability could be measured only through grammatical knowledge. According to Hymes, a competent language user should know not only whether a sentence is grammatically correct but also whether it is appropriate in a particular context[2]. For example, the sentence:

"Open the window."

is grammatically correct, but its appropriateness depends on the situation. When speaking to a close friend, it may be acceptable; however, in a formal situation, a more polite expression would be expected:

"Could you please open the window?"

This example demonstrates that successful communication requires social and contextual awareness.

Later, Canale and Swain (1980) developed a more detailed framework of communicative competence and identified several important components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Later, Canale (1983) added discourse competence as another essential component. These components together explain how learners use language effectively. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge of the linguistic system of a language. It includes vocabulary, grammar rules, sentence structures, pronunciation, and spelling[3]. This component allows learners to produce accurate sentences and understand how language is organized.

For example, a learner with grammatical competence understands the difference between:

"She has lived in London for five years."

and

"She lived in London for five years."

The first sentence indicates an action that started in the past and continues until now, while the second refers to a completed period in the past. Understanding such differences helps learners express precise meanings.

However, grammatical competence alone is not enough for effective communication. A student may know many grammar rules but still be unable to participate in a real conversation. For example, a learner may understand the structure of the present perfect tense but hesitate when answering:

"How long have you studied English?"

Therefore, grammatical competence is an important foundation, but it must be combined with other components.

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social situations, cultural norms, and relationships between speakers. It involves understanding levels of formality, politeness, and cultural expectations.

For example, when requesting help, a learner should understand the difference between:

Informal:

"Give me your pen."

Formal:

"Could you lend me your pen, please?"

Both sentences communicate the same basic meaning, but they are used in different contexts. Speaking appropriately demonstrates sociolinguistic competence.

This competence is especially important for English learners because communication styles vary across cultures. For example, Uzbek learners may transfer their native communication patterns into English, which can sometimes cause misunderstandings. Teaching sociolinguistic competence helps students understand not only the language but also the cultural meanings behind expressions.

Discourse competence is the ability to connect sentences and organize ideas logically in spoken and written communication. It helps learners create meaningful conversations, essays, presentations, and discussions[4]

A learner with strong discourse competence can use linking words and organizational patterns effectively.

Example:

"Many people believe that technology has improved education. However, excessive use of technology can create some problems. Therefore, students should use digital tools responsibly." The words **however** and **therefore** help connect ideas and create a logical

flow. In speaking, discourse competence allows learners to maintain conversations by responding appropriately and developing ideas.

Example:

A:

"What do you think about online learning?"

Weak response:

"Good."

Better response:

"I think online learning is useful because it provides flexibility. However, students need strong self-discipline to study effectively."

The second answer demonstrates better discourse organization.

Strategic competence refers to the ability to overcome communication problems by using different strategies. Even advanced learners sometimes experience difficulties because of limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, or misunderstanding. For example, if a learner does not know the word "thermometer," they may explain it:

"It is a tool that we use to measure body temperature."

Instead of stopping communication, the learner uses description as a communication strategy.

Other examples of strategic competence include:

asking for clarification:

"Could you repeat that, please?"

checking understanding:

"Do you mean that we should start tomorrow?"

using simpler words:

"It is a place where you can borrow books" instead of saying *"library"* if the word is forgotten.

Strategic competence helps learners maintain communication despite difficulties. The four components of communicative competence work together to create effective communication. A successful language user needs grammatical knowledge, social awareness, the ability to organize ideas, and strategies for solving communication problems.

For example, during a job interview, a candidate needs:

Grammatical competence to produce correct sentences;

Sociolinguistic competence to use polite and formal language;

Discourse competence to organize answers clearly;

Strategic competence to handle unexpected questions.

If one component is missing, communication may become less effective.

The concept of communicative competence has strongly influenced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Modern English lessons focus not only on grammar explanations but also on activities that develop all components of communication.

For example, instead of teaching the topic "Making Suggestions" only through grammar rules:

Traditional activity:

Learn the structure *should* + *verb*.

Complete sentences.

Communicative activity:

Students discuss:

"Your school wants to improve students' learning conditions. What suggestions do you have?"

Possible answers:

"The school should create more study areas."

"Students should participate in more speaking clubs."

Through this activity, learners practise grammar, vocabulary, interaction, and real-life communication.

The analysis of communicative competence demonstrates that effective language learning involves much more than memorizing grammatical rules. Grammatical competence provides linguistic accuracy, sociolinguistic competence ensures appropriate language use, discourse competence helps organize meaningful communication, and strategic competence allows learners to overcome difficulties. Together, these components create complete communicative ability. Therefore, modern English language teaching should focus on developing all components of communicative competence to help learners become confident, flexible, and successful users of English in real-world situations.

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