

THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE MODEL IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract. The communicative competence model has become a cornerstone of modern foreign language education. Unlike traditional grammar-based approaches, this model emphasizes the learner's ability to use language effectively and appropriately in real-life communicative contexts. This article examines the theoretical origins of communicative competence, its structural components, its evolution through different models, and its pedagogical implications. Drawing upon the works of Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990), and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995), the study highlights the significance of communicative competence in shaping contemporary communicative language teaching (CLT). The article also discusses the model's relevance in the digital era and multilingual educational contexts.

Keywords: communicative competence, foreign language education, communicative language teaching, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, applied linguistics.

Аннотация. Модель коммуникативной компетенции стала краеугольным камнем современного обучения иностранным языкам. В отличие от традиционных подходов, основанных на грамматике, эта модель подчеркивает способность учащегося эффективно и уместно использовать язык в реальных коммуникативных контекстах. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические истоки коммуникативной компетенции, ее структурные компоненты, ее эволюция в различных моделях и педагогические последствия. Опираясь на работы Хаймса (1972), Канале и Суэйна (1980), Бахмана (1990) и Селсе-Мурсии и др. (1995), исследование подчеркивает значимость коммуникативной компетенции в формировании современного коммуникативного обучения языку (КТЯ). В статье также обсуждается актуальность модели в цифровую эпоху и в многоязычных образовательных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная компетенция, обучение иностранным языкам, коммуникативное обучение языку, дискурсивная компетенция, прагматическая компетенция, прикладная лингвистика.

Annotatsiya. Kommunikativ kompetentsiya modeli zamonaviy chet tili ta'limining asosiga aylandi. Grammatikaga asoslangan an'anaviy yondashuvlardan farqli o'laroq, bu model o'quvchining real hayotdagi kommunikativ kontekstda tildan samarali va to'g'ri foydalanish qobiliyatini ta'kidlaydi. Ushbu maqolada kommunikativ kompetentsiyaning nazariy kelib chiqishi, uning tarkibiy qismlari, turli modellar orqali evolyutsiyasi va pedagogik oqibatlari ko'rib chiqiladi. Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), Baxman (1990) va Selce-Murcia va boshqalarning asarlariga tayangan holda. (1995), tadqiqot zamonaviy kommunikativ tilni o'qitishni (CLT) shakllantirishda kommunikativ kompetentsiyaning ahamiyatini ta'kidlaydi. Maqolada, shuningdek, modelning raqamli davrda va ko'p tilli ta'lim kontekstlarida dolzarbligi muhokama qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: kommunikativ kompetentsiya, chet tili ta'limi, kommunikativ tilni o'rgatish, nutq kompetensiyasi, pragmatik kompetentsiya, amaliy tilshunoslik.

Introduction

Over the past century, the way we teach foreign languages has changed dramatically. In the past, classrooms were dominated by methods like the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method. These approaches focused heavily on grammar rules, sentence structure, and repetition drills. Students learned how the language worked on paper, but many struggled when it came to actually using it in real conversations.

In other words, learners often knew the rules of the language, but they did not know how to use them naturally. They could form correct sentences, yet they felt lost in real-life communication because they did not understand cultural context, tone, or social expectations.

In the 1970s, a major shift began. Educators and linguists started to see language not just as a system of rules, but as a social tool. This new perspective gave rise to the idea of Communicative Competence, which emphasized that knowing a language means being able to use it effectively in real situations.

Theoretical Foundations: How the Idea Developed

Several important scholars helped shape the concept of communicative competence.

1. Dell Hymes (1972): The Sociolinguistic Perspective

The journey began with sociolinguist Dell Hymes, who challenged the ideas of linguist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky focused on “linguistic competence,” meaning a person’s knowledge of grammar. However, Hymes argued that grammar alone is not enough.

According to Hymes, a speaker must also understand how to use language appropriately in different social situations. It is not only about forming correct sentences, but also about knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it depending on the context. Without this social understanding, grammar loses its real purpose.

Example: A student might correctly say “Could you open the window?” but might not realize that in a formal meeting it is more polite to say, “Would you mind opening the window, please?”

2. Canale and Swain (1980): A Practical Model

To make Hymes’ ideas more practical for teaching, Michael Canale and Merrill Swain developed a four-part model of communicative competence:

- **Grammatical Competence** – knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure.
- **Sociolinguistic Competence** – the ability to speak appropriately in different social contexts.
- **Discourse Competence** – the ability to connect sentences into meaningful, coherent speech or writing.
- **Strategic Competence** – the use of communication strategies (such as paraphrasing or gestures) when facing difficulties.

This model helped teachers understand that communication involves multiple skills working together.

Additional Note: Modern classroom activities often integrate these competencies. For example, role-plays and debates not only practice grammar but also require students to adjust their language based on formality, audience, and purpose.

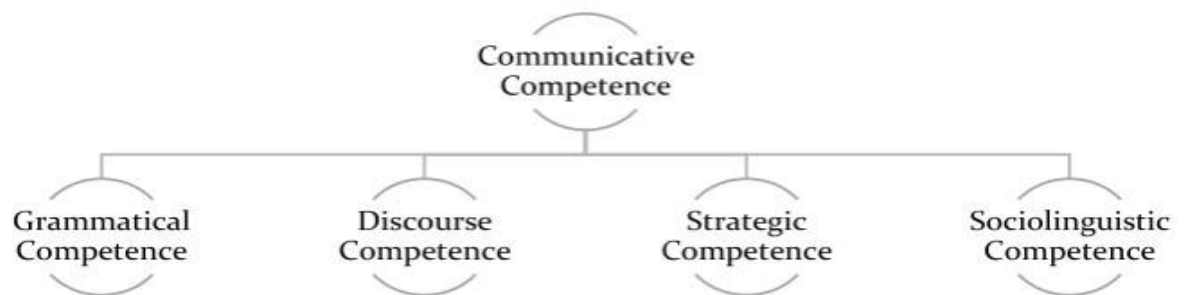


Figure 1. Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence.

3. Lyle Bachman (1990): Assessment and Communication

Later, Lyle Bachman expanded the concept by focusing on language testing. He introduced the idea of Communicative Language Ability (CLA), which combined language knowledge with the ability to apply it in real situations.

Bachman distinguished between:

- **Organizational competence** (knowledge of grammar and structure)
- **Pragmatic competence** (understanding meaning, intention, and context)

His work influenced modern language exams by shifting focus away from isolated grammar questions toward performance-based tasks.

Example: Instead of answering multiple-choice questions about verb tenses, students might write an email to request information or give directions, demonstrating real-life communicative ability.

4. Celce-Murcia (1995): A Teaching-Oriented Model

To make communicative competence easier to apply in classrooms, Marianne Celce-Murcia, along with Zoltán Dörnyei and Sarah Thurrell, proposed a model that placed discourse competence at the center.

They argued that real communication happens through connected speech and writing, not isolated sentences. Therefore, grammar, culture, and strategies must all support the creation of meaningful texts. This model remains highly influential in curriculum design today.

Additional Point: Task-based approaches, such as writing blogs, conducting interviews, or creating presentations, emphasize discourse competence while naturally integrating grammar, sociocultural norms, and strategic problem-solving.

What Communicative Competence Means Today

Today, communicative competence is seen as a combination of interconnected skills:

- **Linguistic knowledge** – grammar and vocabulary as tools for expression.
- **Pragmatic awareness** – understanding politeness, tone, and implied meanings.
- **Coherence and cohesion** – organizing ideas logically in speech or writing.
- **Strategic ability** – handling communication breakdowns smoothly.

A competent language user is someone who can adapt, express ideas clearly, and continue communication even when facing difficulties.

Changes in the Classroom

The rise of communicative competence transformed language teaching. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the teacher is no longer just a lecturer but a facilitator. Students actively participate in discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks.

Two important approaches became popular:

- **Task-Based Learning (TBL)** – students learn language by completing meaningful tasks.
- **Authentic materials** – using real-life texts instead of artificial textbook dialogues.

The classroom became more interactive and student-centered.

Additional Note: Technology now supports communicative teaching. Online discussion forums, video conferencing, and interactive apps provide learners with real-time opportunities to practice language with native speakers or peers worldwide.

Communication in the Digital Age

In the 21st century, communication is increasingly digital. As a result, communicative competence now includes:

- **Multimodal literacy** – understanding how text, images, and audio work together.
- **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)** – communicating effectively across cultures in a globalized world.

Today's learners must not only speak correctly but also navigate online communication, social media, and international environments.

Criticism and Challenges

Despite its popularity, the communicative approach is not perfect. Some critics argue that focusing too much on fluency can lead to errors becoming permanent, a process known as fossilization.

Additionally, in exam-oriented educational systems, teachers may struggle to balance communicative activities with test preparation. Limited classroom resources can also make implementation difficult.

Conclusion

The development of communicative competence represents one of the most important changes in language education. It shifted the focus from memorizing rules to meaningful human interaction, emphasizing that language learning is not merely about accuracy, but about being able to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Learners are encouraged to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and adapt their speech according to context, audience, and purpose.

Language is not just a system of grammar—it is a bridge between people. Mastery of a language includes understanding social norms, cultural conventions, and the subtleties of pragmatics, such as politeness, tone, and implied meaning. A competent speaker or writer can convey their thoughts clearly while interpreting others' intentions, even when facing linguistic challenges or gaps in knowledge.

Furthermore, communicative competence extends beyond face-to-face interactions. In today's digital and globalized world, learners must navigate multimodal communication through emails, social media, video calls, and other online platforms. This requires intercultural awareness, the ability to interpret multiple forms of media, and sensitivity to diverse audiences. As such, communicative competence is not only a

linguistic skill but also a social and cultural competence that fosters connection in an increasingly interconnected world.

Ultimately, the goal of language learning is not just to produce correct sentences, but to build meaningful relationships, understand others deeply, and participate fully in diverse communities. Communicative competence empowers learners to connect across borders, share ideas, and engage in authentic exchanges, making language a truly human and transformative tool.

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