

# TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF ESL LEARNERS

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**Abstract.** The article discusses issues concerning the development of future English teachers' communicative competence. It considers the idea that developing communicative competence benefits not only the learner's interactive abilities from an educational standpoint, but also the learner's psycho-emotional characteristics and sociocultural development as a person. As previously stated, communicative competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with others, and competence is defined as a collection of language skills an individual possesses in order to learn a foreign language. This potential contributes to his/her ability to perform at a high level. This paper discusses the theory of communicative competence and several of its models; the significance of developing communicative competence in future English teachers; and the implications of communicative competence in English language teaching and learning. Additionally, the work suggests fundamental methodological principles for developing future English teachers' communicative competence.

**Keywords:** *Teaching English, communicative competence, ESL Learners.*

## 1. Introduction

The growth of global connectivity and mobility has resulted in English usage in multilingual and multicultural settings. The concept of communicative ability has evolved into a sought-after capability in the twenty-first century. As the essential aspect of learning a second language, the communicative ability allows the foreign community to collaborate and engage easily with speakers from various languages and cultural contexts (Savignon, 2018). However, one of the fundamental issues that remain is integrating communicative ability into language assessment and instruction. As this occurs, the status of English spoken by native speakers as a predictor of standardized language tests is being questioned by current and emerging English varieties in real-life contexts (Edwards & Fuchs, 2019; Laitinen, 2018; Tickoo, 2020). For example, world-class universities have accepted more international students, and transnational expats have flooded

multinational corporations. Curriculum, instructional methods, classroom setting, and other facets of language learning are also being changed to accommodate multicultural cultures (Derin & Hamuddin, 2019; Mena & Rogers, 2017; Sleeter & Carmona, 2017). According to the findings of a research conducted by Sipahi (2020), the fact that the anxiety is higher while solving the vocabulary test, while the students are given their own special teaching plans, the debilitating anxiety prevents them from performing a strong and high performance. In this context, therefore, teachers and examiners need to take this into consideration more.

It is incongruous if evaluation of language testing and teaching remains rigid or restricted to the linguistic system's scope without considering the capacity to interact effectively in multilingual environments. As a result, the present research seeks to answer how to measure communicative competence and encourage communicative language testing in the emerging framework of second language testing. The essay starts with a historical analysis of communicative ability and its scholarly debates to accomplish this aim. Following that, valuable mechanisms or templates for assessing communicative skills are added. The discussion then moves on to current debates or research in this area and the implications for language teaching and testing. The paper ends by suggesting potential

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studies on communicative ability, language acquisition evaluation, and multicultural learning environments.

## **2. Defining and Describing Intercultural Communicative Competence**

A thorough explanation of the mechanism involved and a specification of the person's requirements promote the appraisal of an individual's capacity to relate and engage through cultural barriers with individuals from other social classes. It benefits not just the assessor but also the instructor and the learner. Both three will benefit from consistency and openness (Council of Europe, 1993) and must agree on the goals and objectives of the teaching, studying, and evaluation systems in which they participate.

It is, therefore, necessary to note that their goals and objectives are shaped in part by the social frameworks in which they operate – national, domestic, and international – and in part by the preoccupations of organizations, which constitute those of the communities in which they serve. In this first part, I will explain and characterize intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the context of foreign language teaching (FLT). This will include developing a vision of ICC based on current FLT theories and incorporating perspectives from other disciplines to have an ICC paradigm worthy of educating teaching and evaluation discussions by FLT practitioners. Therefore, I would discuss how the model applies to certain particular circumstances to demonstrate the general need to always interpret ICC models following the needs of the circumstances in which learners find themselves.

## **3. The Historical Review of the Concept and Controversies of Communicative Competence**

Hymes (1972) invented the word communicative competence in reaction to his frustration with Chomsky's (1965) term of grammatical competence. Chomsky defines competence as the mutual knowledge formed between the ideal speaker and listener in a homogeneous speech culture. Linguistic or grammatical capacity becomes the only consideration for language success. The ability of learners to produce an understanding of a

language system is used to assess competence. In contrast, Hymes finds grammatical competence and Chomsky's definition of success too limited to represent the whole individual language behavior and therefore cannot indicate actual competence. Later, Hymes (1972) describes communicative skill as "knowledge of the laws for interpreting and producing both the referential and social sense of words." He believes that the social component is as essential as linguistic information and that linguistic competence help learners recognize and develop grammatically correct sentences.

However, communicative skills aid in understanding and producing more relevant, relevant, and necessary sentences in specific contexts. In a related way, Widdowson (1978) claims that "we not only learn how to write and comprehend right sentences as discrete linguistic units of spontaneous incidence but also how to use sentences correctly to accomplish communicative purposes. He considers language learning to include interpreting a collection of grammatical laws and the capacity to express messages or express the language to others.

Furthermore, learning a language requires remembering terms and sounds, talking and composing vocabulary stocks, and using certain expressions appropriately based on specific speech contexts. Widdowson (1973) also argues that providing English training over six or more years would not guarantee learners' capacity to interact, so the concept of 'once competence is learned, success can compensate' is not sufficient. Furthermore, he recommends that communicative skills be acquired alongside linguistic skills; otherwise, learning only linguistic skills can impede communicative abilities. The realities of English as a lingua franca (ELF), globalization, and intercultural exchange, on the other hand, have called these two original concepts into question. Although Chomsky and Hymes' proposals for language competence vary in several respects, the two philosophers should not understand how to ensure meaningful contact in multilingual and multicultural cultures with the resulting language system expertise, abilities, and mindset. Intercultural research of language teaching and learning has adopted and thoroughly developed combining these elements, i.e., linguistic skills, skills, and attitude.

At this stage, Byram (1997) introduced intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which did not contradict Hymes'

concept of communicative competence, but instead extended it by adding the intercultural component of utilizing a foreign language. This addition incorporates aspects of communicative ability with various language understanding and skills, perceptions toward individuals from diverse contexts, and other cultural interactions. Brown's (2009) ethnographic research on contact barriers among local and international students at British universities illustrates the need for intercultural communicative competence. She says that host students play an essential role in assisting international students in communicating in linguistically acceptable English and understanding the critical social aspects that will enable them to adapt to the local student culture.

For example, I was instructed not to.

"Look at a woman in a straightforward way, or you will get slapped. When I said, 'oh why?' he said, 'because you're not expected to, you don't do that.' He was English, talking about English women, you see. I didn't know that before!" (Brown, 2009)

It also demonstrates the significance of including cultural sensitivity, understanding diverse communities, and mediating between them in language teaching and evaluation. More specifically, the inadequate purely native speaker model was replaced with a new intercultural voice concept.

Young and Sachdev (2011) found that both students and teachers tended to adapt and apply Intercultural Communicative Competence in their classrooms. Byram's ICC has incorporated multi-voiced linguistic notions of foreign language instruction, and it remains narrowly tied to the binary connection between various nations and cultures. As a result, the ICC structure, which is focused on nationalist cultural groupings, can also be contested in terms of global contact. Kramsch (2006) also believes that communicative maturity is insufficient in the current communication conditions in the modern age. Language learners are increasingly likely to communicate with only a native speaker from a single recognizable national community. It also includes speakers who grow up in a multilingual, cultural, and linguistic setting. As a result, she proposes symbolic competence as a broader and more reflexive viewpoint of communicative competence, as well as intercultural communicative competence (Baker, 2016). She goes on to describe symbolic competence as "the capacity to read and understand spoken and written discourse,

recognize the symbolic meaning of terms and metaphors, comprehend their social and historical importance, equate them with metaphors of one's language, and reframe one's perception of events" (2010).

Kramsch does not dismiss communicative competence since symbolic competencies enhance the sophisticated capacity to understand and negotiate the significance that language learners need in conversation in the universal sense. Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) clarify in their analysis that symbolic competence is not merely an aspect of communicative competence or another language learners must acquire. It is described as the capacity to control others' mindset, ideology, identity, and status about what is expected in the speech case. In other terms, symbolic competence is the most recent and current means of comprehending communicative and intercultural competence in multilingual settings.

#### **4. The Frameworks of Communicative Competence**

According to Bagari and Djigunovi (2007), three models have emerged as the foundations of methodological and theoretical studies on communicative competence. The first is the Canale and Swain system (1980). In the same vein as Hymes (1972), their first paradigm combines three critical components of language and abilities: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence, which Canale (1984) later switches several sociolinguistic elements into discourse competence. Grammatical knowledge, according to them, allows the learner to comprehend and apply linguistic information to articulate the literal interpretation of utterances.

Semantics, phonetics, syntactic, morphological, and vocabulary skills are all included in this component. Canale and Swain have Hymes' definition of language usage appropriateness in several social settings when assessing sociolinguistic competence. Furthermore, this skill assesses learners' understanding of language usage in specific sociolinguistic or sociocultural contexts. Canale (1983) identifies strategic maturity as an aspect that can improve communication efficiency through understanding verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that can mitigate communication breakdown. Repetition, paraphrasing, reluctance, message



alteration, and so on are all examples. Finally, discourse competence is the capacity to interact utilizing coherent and cohesive language output that results in substantive spoken and written texts. It can be analyzed by looking at how learners use readable devices like pronouns, conjunctions, parallel structure, and a logical association between groups of sentences.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) suggest two broad fields that contain language capacity, namely language knowledge and strategic skill, in a more detailed, systematic, and specific context than the previous model. Organizational and pragmatic skills are the two critical components of language knowledge that supplement each other for efficient language usage. Administrative experience, which consists of grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge, is the one that controls the usage of structured language in this model. Grammatical knowledge is the awareness of vocabulary, grammar, phonology, morphology, and other concepts that measure language learners' ability to comprehend and produce grammatically correct sentences. Textual knowledge, on the other hand, is the ability to generate coherent spoken or written text.

It addresses learners' ability to choose acceptable cohesion devices such as conjunctions, paraphrases, organizing sentences, and so on and their ability to discuss the subject with a suitable form of text such as narration texts, interpretation, argumentation, etc., causation, and so on. In the case of pragmatic understanding, it encompasses two fields of competence: the ability to communicate and translate specific language functions and recognize and establish explicit linguistic norms appropriate in a given setting. The third paradigm is the communicative language competence model outlined in the CEF, or Common European Framework (2001), intended to aim for both language testing and language teaching and learning.

Language competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence are these paradigm's three essential communicative competence elements. Language competence, which requires grammatical competence, allows language learners to understand language material, such as lexical, textual, phonological, and grammatical competence, to produce formal utterances. Sociolinguistic competence will enable learners to articulate practical language

usage in a given social setting, while pragmatic competence highlights two abilities: rhetoric competence and useful competence.

## **5. Current Debates in Assessing Communicative Competence**

The preceding segment examines the historical evolution of communicative competence in second language teaching, learning, and testing through reflecting and elaborating on prominent communicative competence viewpoints and their context that could be used to devise a method to measure learners' communicative competence. The latest debates on communicative ability would focus on two main topics. The first step is to measure communicative proficiency in the classroom. Second, what is the issue with measuring communicative ability in high stakes or formal language tests? Two significant challenges arise in language assessment when it comes to communicative proficiency in the classroom. The first is the conflict between language curriculum goals and communicative maturity requirements (Derin, Nursafira, Yudar, Gowasa, & Hamuddin, 2020). From high school to doctoral programs at universities, most educational establishments place a premium on writing abilities. The majority of school and university tasks do not use oral competence as an appraisal indicator. There is a growing disparity between oral and written assignments. As a consequence, there is no adequate structure or paradigm for evaluating communicative competence.

In this regard, Oliver, Haig, and Rochecouste (2005) study the teaching and evaluation of oral tasks in a Western Australian secondary school. They explain that teachers had difficulties judging students' verbal functions due to the curriculum's emphasis on written ability. Teachers agree that they lack the expertise and guidance needed to evaluate communicative skills, even though both teachers and students believe that communicative maturity is required. Furthermore, Canagarajah (2006) considers that there is a need to shift pedagogical preferences away from the emphasis on discrete-item tests on structured grammatical competence and toward implementing instruments capable of assessing performance and pragmatics.

Also, he stresses that "the new appraisal will concentrate on negotiation techniques, positioned results, communicative repertoire,

and language awareness” (p. 229). However, the principle is not the only aspect that needs to be improved. According to Savignon (2018), the rectification of school practice should be promoted as well. Teachers must work with community resources to facilitate both pre-service and in-service teachers in strengthening their abilities to educate integrated communicatively. Harding (2014) asserts that there is an immediate need to change the nature of language research from narrow textual standards to test constructs that are adequate to represent existing communicative requirements in the field of formal language testing. Elder, McNamara, Kim, Pill, and Sato (2017) report three research that examines language evaluation for English in the basic intent sense in a more recent review. Their results present almost the same question about whether language can and can be measured critically and independently from meaning, as they discovered in studies where most non-linguistic expertise placed less focus on test-takers’ precision and more emphasis on participants’ communicative skill in transferring the message.

Similarly, Morrow (2018) contends that communicative language research aims improve language test validity. A test of this kind can use authentic resources and practices focused on test-takers’ real-world language usage to assess different forms of appropriateness for social, cultural, and pragmatic norms. Even though the construct of communicative language testing differs significantly from the well-established psychometric testing models, a shift toward communicative language testing must be encouraged.

## 6. Implications for Language Teaching and Testing

Observing advancements in language training against communicative competence, the current study contends that second language education can focus on communicative language testing rather than simply assessing linguistic competence. To meet the validity criteria, the second language exam should also emphasize sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. It includes a test that incorporates various English varieties due to the type of communication required in the twenty-first century. It is consistent with Harding’s (2014) suggestion of “adaptability” in the construct of communicative language research.

He goes on to say that adaptability is a general indicator of “test takers’ need to cope with various varieties of English, to use and recognize relevant pragmatics, to cope with the complex communication habits in digital contexts, and to note and adapt to the formulaic linguistic trends correlated with different realms of language use” (p.194).

## 7. Conclusion

This study suggests three consequences for language testing based on the theoretical analysis and existing controversies in measuring communicative ability and communicative language testing. First, English has recently been taught and utilized by millions of people worldwide in various contexts, including higher education. Students of higher education will hear a variety of English dialects. High-stakes or graded language tests should recommend testing test takers’ willingness to deal with various English dialects. The test should also include such communicative abilities, such as the ability to express and react to pragmatic language use, the ability to tolerate potentially unfamiliar language varieties, the ability to negotiate to mean and avoid communication breakdown, the ability to communicate with interlocutors from different language background and culture, and the ability to use appropriate language.

Second, communicative language testing and evaluation may provide several communicative research instruments. Language usage, for example, maybe measured using a carefully constructed and immersive role-play. The test interviewer will be able to measure the test takers’ usage of proper language form as well as effective use of language pragmatics in this manner. A role-play game with various positions and social statuses may be used to test language learners’ sociolinguistic competence. It investigates the utility of Bachman and Palmer’s image answer test as another sample operation. To rely on pragmatic conduct, he employs this approach rather than composing a written verbal audio-lingual prompt.

Third, utilizing blogging, social networks, wikis, and other interactive spoken or written correspondence forms, language classroom evaluation may combine novel tasks with

technology-enhanced language teaching and testing. Teachers could use collective writing and note-taking, multimodal understanding, video conferences, and other tasks to assess language success. It is demonstrated that using a media literacy technique, such as exposing students to authentic online news stories, will improve their oral communicative competence. This teaching method and evaluating language would represent the real-world context of language usage and modern literacies, as mobile devices increasingly achieve communication.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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