Components of Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain (1983) identified four components of communicative competence:
1) grammatical competence
2) sociolinguistic competence
3) discourse competence
4) strategic competence

Grammatical competence means understanding the skills and knowledge necessary to speak and write accurately. Grammatical competence includes:
1) vocabulary
2) word formation
3) meaning
4) sentence formation
5) pronunciation
6) spelling

Sociolinguistic competence involves knowing how to produce and understand the language in different sociolinguistic contexts, taking into consideration such factors as:
1) the status of the participants
2) the purpose of the interaction; and
3) the norms or conventions of the interaction.

Discourse competence involves the ability to combine and connect utterances (spoken) and sentences (written) into a meaningful whole. Discourse ranges from a simple spoken conversation to long written texts.

Strategic competence involves the manipulation of language in order to meet communicative goals. It involves both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Speakers employ this competence for two main reasons:

1) to compensate for breakdowns in communication such as when the speaker forgets or does not know a term and is forced to paraphrase or gesture to get the idea across; and

2) to enhance the effectiveness of communication such as when a speaker raises or lowers the voice for effect.

Competence Vs. Performance

According to Chomsky (1965), competence consists of mental representations of linguistic rules that constitute the speaker-hearer's internal grammar.

This internal grammar is implicit rather than explicit. It is evident in the intuitions, which the speaker-hearer has about the grammaticality of sentences.

Performance consists of the use of this grammar in the comprehension and production of the language.

Communicative competence is that aspect of the language user's competence that enables them to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts.

Language is a form of communication that occurs in social interaction. It is used for a purpose such as persuading, commanding, and establishing social relationships. No longer is the focus on specific knowledge of grammatical form. Instead, the competent speaker is recognized as one who knows **when, where,** and **how** to use language appropriately.

Language Learning

Behaviorist's views of language learning and of language teaching were predominant in the two decades following the second world war. These views drew on general theories of learning propounded by psychologists such as Watson (1924), Thorndike (1932), and Skinner (1957).

- *Dakin (1973) identifies three general principles of language learning derived from these theories.*

  - According to the law of exercise, language learning is promoted when the learner makes active and repeated responses to stimuli.

  - The law of effect emphasizes the importance of reinforcing the learners' responses and correcting non-target-like ones.

  - The principle of shaping claims that learning will proceed most smoothly and rapidly if complex behaviors are broken down into their component parts and learned bit-by-bit.

Underlying these principles was the assumption that language learning, like any other kind of learning, took the form of habit formation, "a habit consisting of an automatic response elicited by a given stimulus.

✓ Learning was seen to take place inductively through analogy rather than analysis.

✓ According to behaviorist theories, the main impediment to learning was interference from prior knowledge.

✓ Proactive inhibition occurred when old habits got in the way of attempts to learn new ones. In such cases, the old habits had to be unlearned so that they could be replaced by the new ones.

✓ The notion of unlearning made little sense as learners did not need to forget their L1 in order to acquire an L_2.

✓ For this reason, behaviorist theories of L_2 learning emphasized the idea of "difficulty." This is defined as the amount of effort required to learn an L_2 pattern.

✓ The degree of difficulty was believed to depend primarily in the extent to which the target language pattern was similar to or different from a native language pattern.

Input and Interaction

✓ L_2 acquisition can only take place when the learner has access to input in the second language. This input may come in written or spoken form.

✓ Spoken input occurs in face-to-face interactions. Non-reciprocal discourse includes listening to the radio or watching a film.

✓ Behaviorists claim that presenting learners with input in the right doses and then reinforcing their attempts to practice them can control the process of acquisition.

✓ Chomsky pointed out that in many cases there was a very poor match between the kind of language found in the input that learners received and the kind of language they themselves produced.

✓ Comprehensible input (Krashen's, 1985 Input Hypothesis) proposed that learners acquire morphological features in a natural order as a result of comprehending input addressed to them. Long (1981a) argued that input which is made comprehensible by means of the conversational adjustments that occur when there is a comprehension problem is especially important for acquisition.

✓ Swain (1985) proposed the comprehensible output hypothesis which states that learners need opportunities for "pushed output" in speech or writing that makes demands on them for correct and appropriate use of the L_2.

The Role of the Native Language in Second Language Acquisition

○ The role of native language in second language acquisition has come to be known as "language transfer."

○ It has been assumed that in a second language learning situation learners rely extensively on their native language.

○ According to Lado (1957) individuals tend to transfer forms and meanings, the distribution of the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture.

○ This transfer is productive when the learner attempts to speak the language.

○ This transfer is receptive when the learner attempts to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by native speakers.

○ Lado's work and much of the work of that time (1950's) was based on the need to produce pedagogically relevant materials. A contrastive analysis of the native language and the target language was conducted in order to determine similarities and differences in the languages.
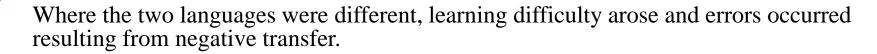
Framework for Explaining L$_1$ Transfer

✓   The L$_1$ system is used for both comprehension and production.

✓   The interlanguage system is also used in comprehending and receiving messages.

✓   The L$_1$ system is used in hypothesis construction responsible for interlanguage development.

✓   Comprehensible input serves as a major source of information for hypothesis construction.

✓   L$_2$ output may be used for hypothesis construction.

Toward a Theory of First Language Transfer

➢ An important distinction not always made in discussions of transfer is between transfer in L_2 communication and transfer in L_2 learning.

➢ Transfer in communication involves the use of the L_1 either to receive incoming messages (reception) or to process output (production).

➢ Transfer in learning occurs when the learner uses the L_1 in an attempt to develop hypotheses about L_2 rules.

➢ There are several possibilities for transfer:
1) it is primarily a characteristic of communication
2) it is primarily a feature of learning
3) both communication and learning transfer are significant and interrelated aspects of L_2 acquisition.

Language Transfer

✓ Where the two languages were identical, learning could take place through positive transfer to the native-language pattern.

✓ Where the two languages were different, learning difficulty arose and errors occurred resulting from negative transfer.

✓ Chomsky (1959) set in motion a re-evaluation of many of the behaviorists claims. This reevaluation included area such as:

- ✓ the dangers of extrapolating from laboratory studies of animal behavior to the language behavior of humans were pointed out;
- ✓ the terms stimulus and response were exposed as vacuous where language behaviour was concerned;
- ✓ analogy could not account for the language user's ability to generate totally novel utterances; and
- ✓ studies of children acquiring their L_1 showed that parents rarely corrected their children's linguistic errors, thus casting doubt on the importance of reinforcement in language learning.

✓ All this led to the reconsideration of the role of L_1 in L_2 learning.

The Nature of the Interlanguage Continuum

✓   Cognitive theories of interlanguage claim that with the assistance of   learning strategies, learners build mental grammars of the second language.

✓   Learners draw on the rules they have constructed to interpret and   produce utterances.

✓   Learner's utterances are only erroneous with reference to the target language norms, not to the norms of their own grammars.

✓   The interlanguage continuum consists of a series of overlapping grammars. Each share some rules with the previously constructed   grammar, but also contains some new or revised rules.

✓   A rule has the status of a hypothesis.