



Communicative Competence

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Abstract:

Communicative competence is a term which has been gaining popularity in the recent years. This paper discusses the concepts of communicative competence and the obstacles that hinder the process of communicative competence. Suggestions are also given for overcoming the factors that affect the acquisition of communicative competence. Implementation of communicative language teaching is also advised to make the learners acquire communicative competence.

Key words: Competence, conscious, language acquisition, socialization.

Introduction:

Dell Hymes was the first to introduce the concept “Communicative Competence” in 1966. Many linguists discussed and redefined the concept after Hymes. Hymes’s idea was that the speakers of a language should be able to communicate effectively more



than being aware of the grammatical rules of the language. Communicative competence is the ability to communicate competently and it should not be misunderstood as the ability to speak a language like the native speakers of the language.

Competence Areas

Four competence areas are involved in communicative competence. They are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Linguistic competence is the knowledge of grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a language. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the skill of using the language and responding to the language with respect to the situation, topic and the relationship among the communicators. Expressing attitudes and understanding the expressed attitudes also come under sociolinguistic competence. Discourse competence is the skill of putting words, phrases and sentences together in order to create different discourses like speeches, conversations, email messages and newspaper articles. Strategic competence is the skill of identifying and correcting the mistakes in communication.

Acquisition of Communicative Competence

Acquisition of communicative competence is a social process as the language is best acquired in the process of social interaction. The primary function of language learning is to attain socialization. On the first hand, learners should be respected and there should be freedom of self-expression. Communicative competence is not merely knowing the rules of the language but also what, when and how to speak in any given situation. The purpose of learning a language should be to acquire the ability to speak the language competently. The outcome of language learning is not using the language like a native speaker. Acquisition of communicative competence at adult stage requires greater effort whereas this acquisition is achieved with ease and perfection in case of children. In adults, as the acquisition is done deliberately and consciously, it becomes language learning. In the process of achieving communicative competence, the learners should



be made to acquire the language unconsciously while being involved in communicative activities. The teacher should engage the students in communicative activities and the teacher should also play the role of a co-communicator and promote healthy communication among the learners. The persistence of the teachers and the involvement of the learners are the two important factors which decide the success of acquiring communicative competence.

Factors affecting the acquisition of communicative competence

The wrong mentality of the teachers will be a major obstacle. Most teachers are not ready to shift from the comfort zone to practise new methods of teaching. They may complain of large classes and passive learners. Lack of interest among the learners is also a problem. If they are willing to develop their communicative competence, they will try their best to understand and make others understand, thereby participating in communication enthusiastically. Sometimes learners hesitate to participate in group work because of a mental block which emerges due to the fear of committing mistakes in front of their peers. Low English proficiency of the learners also acts as an obstacle in the acquisition of Communicative Competence. The learners should be familiar at least with the basic structure of the language. The educational system also poses a problem. Today's educational system concentrates on the results of the students. The students are trained to study, reproduce and score marks. The skill of students is measured in the scale of marks they score in the examinations. In this scenario, there is very little or no scope to make the learners achieve communicative competence. The strength and time table of the class also add to the trouble of the teachers in the implementation of communicative competence. Both the teachers and the learners are not able to do their best in the limited teaching hours. Completion of syllabus and scoring marks are deemed to be the most important herculean tasks in the process of teaching and learning.



Possible solutions:

Teachers play a major role in the implementation of Communicative competence. The teacher related factor that hinders the acquisition of communicative competence is to be discussed at first. The English teachers should be provided with special training programmes where they will be made to understand the concept of communicative competence. The training should be designed in such a way that it attracts the teachers and motivates their teaching spirit. There should not be any restriction for the teachers to attend the training programme. They should be freed from their duties and they should be able to attend the training in a relaxed and peaceful mood. The teachers should be trained to implement language learning by incorporating various communicative activities. They should be given enough counselling to handle the learners with patience and care. The training should be arranged and conducted with utmost care and responsibility. Experts in CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) may be invited as resource persons to handle training sessions for the teachers.

As far as learners are concerned, they should understand the role of their involvement and interest. The success of teaching does not depend solely on the teachers. Both the teachers and the learners have equal responsibilities. The learners should be motivated and before the commencement of the actual teaching –learning process, the learners should be tuned to the mode of learning. Enough interest and involvement should be instilled in the minds of the learners. Once they are prepared for the learning process, they will receive whatever is fed to them with ease and comfort. The mental block has to be removed from the minds of the learners and they should be given enough confidence to commit mistakes and learn through their mistakes.

The evaluation pattern in the educational system should be designed in such a way that it values the communicative competence and creative thinking of the learners. Separate hours may be arranged for the implementation of communicative competence. Improved teaching resources should be provided and a special curriculum may be designed for English such that it aims at improving the communication of the learners. Communicative



activities should be formulated and practised among the learners in an interesting way. English classrooms should be more activity oriented and the teachers should speak less paving way for the learners to indulge in mutual interaction and communication. Through activities, the learners should be made to acquire communicative competence without any deliberate effort. Games and role plays should be practised in English classrooms.

Conclusion:

Communicative Language Teaching is an emerging method of teaching which aims at the acquisition of communicative competence. Though there are many obstacles and blocks in the process, communicative competence can be implemented and acquired by sincere effort and practise.

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