

# Communicative competence as the aim of foreign language learning essay sample

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## 1. Introduction

In this paper I will discuss communicative language teaching and its aim: communicative competence. I will also reflect on the aspects of communicative competence, criteria for its assessment and, finally, some ways communicative competence can be developed through classroom interaction.

## 2. Communicative competence

Communicative competence is the ability to use a language properly and suitably to achieve communication goals. The Communicative Approach in language learning is based on the idea that the goal of language acquisition is communicative competence.

This idea was introduced by Dell Hymes. Hymes says that being able to communicate

doesn't only require grammatical and linguistic competence but also communicative competence, in other words: knowing when and how to say what to whom.

To be able to speak in a foreign language the student needs to have knowledge of linguistic forms, meanings and functions. Among numerous forms, the speaker has to choose the most appropriate one, depending on the social context in which the language is used and apply strategies to prevent communication from collapsing. However, sometimes students may know the rules of linguistic usage, but are unable to use the language.

Therefore it is not enough to know the forms of language; the students must also be able to negotiate meaning.

Communicative Language teaching requires language learners to use the language in authentic conversations and to communicate in a broad variety of situations for various uses.

Researches confirm that language learners' interactions with native speakers and more skillful nonnative speakers have a positive effect on the development of language. During interaction, learners can become aware of something about their language use that does not resemble a native speaker's or more skillful nonnative speaker's use. Moreover, communication may break down and the listener may let the speaker know of the confusion by asking for explanation, affirmation, repetition, or by correcting the speaker. The speaker may reply by altering the message in a way in order to make it comprehensible. Both students who are taking part in the conversation are dynamically involved in the negotiation of meaning

The wanted result of the language learning process is the capability to communicate competently and not just the capability to use the language precisely as a native speaker does.

There is a frequent misconception that communicative competence only refers to the ability to speak. That is why it's important to point out that communicative competence consists of listening, reading, speaking and writing. It is equally productive and receptive.

According to Canale and Swain, communicative competence consists of four parts: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE – Knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, word formation, syntax, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE – Using and responding to language properly, depending on the situation, the subject, and the relations between the people communicating.

DISCOURSE COMPETENCE – Combining grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a coherent spoken or written text. Includes the use of cohesion.

STRATEGIC COMPETENCE – recognizing and repairing communication breakdowns, working around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and learning more about the language and proper use of communication strategies.

There are six criteria for evaluating competence which were offered by Canary and Cody.

The criteria include adaptability, conversational involvement, conversational management, empathy, effectiveness, and appropriateness.

ADAPTABILITY refers to the capability to modify behaviors and objectives to suit the

requirements of communication. CONVERSATIONAL INVOLVEMENT considers behavioral and cognitive activity which is established in the course of communication. CONVERSATIONAL MANAGEMENT has to do with how individuals control their interactions and social situations. EMPATHY regards the ability to express consideration and share emotional reactions to the situation. EFFECTIVENESS involves accomplishment of the objectives of the conversation and the speaker's personal aims. APPROPRIATENESS focuses on keeping the expectations for a certain situation.

Communicative competence can be measured by finding out whether the aims of communication are accomplished. Parks defined communicative competence as “ the degree to which individuals perceive they have satisfied their goals in a given social situation without jeopardizing their ability or opportunity to pursue their other subjectively more important goals” (Parks, 1985, p. 175).

Spitzberg & Cupach designed a helpful model for understanding communication competence which is known as the COMPONENT MODEL OF COMPETENCE and it consists of three specific aspects: motivation, knowledge, and skill.

The component model states that communication competence is equally characterized by the interdependency of the cognitive component (concerned with knowledge and understanding), the behavioral component (concerned with behavioral skills), and the affective component (concerned

with attitudes and feelings about the knowledge and behaviors) by interactants in an interpersonal encounter within a specific context.

### 3. How to develop communicative competence?

Here are some activities which help develop students' verbal skills.

1. WORD-GUESSING GAME – this game is useful for practicing speaking in correct sentences.

Before acquiring oral communicative competence, it is significant to start from a simple point – to speak correctly in sentences.

The teacher asks two students to come to the blackboard. One of them faces the class while the other one writes a word which is familiar to most of the students. All the other students try to explain the word for the first student to guess. During the process, the learners try their best to speak the language as correctly as possible. This activity is interesting and productive for both the teacher and the students.

2. DESCRIPTION – useful for developing the ability to speak coherently using cohesion

The goal of this exercise is to teach students to speak in paragraphs, and to be competent to make themselves understood.

\_An example task: \_

Describe the following: a) your house

b) one of your friends

c) an experience

3. DEBATE (argument vs. counter-argument) – this activity helps students compose a formal presentation. The teacher can offer them an outline or a few key words.

\_An example topic\_: Smoking

Students come up with arguments and counter arguments and present them in short presentations.

When the students present their arguments and counter-arguments, teachers should pay attention to the student's fluency more than they should correct errors.

Another way of improving communicative competence is familiarizing the students with the nonlinguistic features of the language.

#### 1. INTRODUCING CULTURAL BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE.

Background knowledge about the target language is very important to language learners because different cultures define various social situations in different ways. Although many social situations are common in different cultures, there are some for which there is no equivalent.

\_Example: \_

In English, a compliment is usually acknowledged with thanks:

A: That was a wonderful meal.

B: Thank you. I'm glad you liked it.

However, a Chinese person most likely won't acknowledge the compliment verbally, because this does not sound suitably humble:

A: That was a wonderful meal.

B: No, I'm sorry the food is not delicious.

Though the person B is probably glad to hear the compliment, it is still refused verbally. Native speakers of English will undoubtedly feel confused and upset if their compliment is refused. This is why it is important to understand the culture of a language which can be realized through seeing films, watching TV programs, reading...

## 2. INTRODUCING PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE TARGET LANGUAGE.

In learning a language, linguistic knowledge is essential, but it is more significant to know when, where, and how to apply this knowledge to various situations, which leads to natural, casual and appropriate communication with native speakers.

\_Example: \_

A: Your pen can write smoothly.

B: Do you like it? I can buy one for you, too.



In this dialogue, B mistaked A's compliment and thought that he wanted the same kind of pen. In Chinese, we often have similar situations. Native speakers of different languages understand some utterances differently. As a result we can frequently hear the following interactions:

A: You are not busy, Mr. Smith, I hope?

B: Yes, I'm very busy. I have a lot of work to do.

Here, B, the native speaker, didn't understand the meaning of the utterance of the first speaker, which is that he hopes Mr. Smith will help him with something. After hearing Mr. Smith's words, A feels hopeless and thinks that Mr. Smith doesn't want to help him.

#### 4. Conclusion

Communicative competence is the aim of every language acquisition. Communicating competently does not only imply grammatical or linguistical knowledge of a language, but also the ability to form proper utterances, and know how to use them correctly. Interaction with native speakers is extremely helpful for developing communicative competence. Other ways of improving communicative competence are: word-guessing games, descriptions and debates.

#### 5. References

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