



Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching-Some Perspectives

R.Calaivanane

Assistant Professor(Senior)-Languages Division-VIT University

Dr.M.A.Mohamed
Sahul Hameed

Associate Professor-English Division-1- VIT University

Dr.R.Srinivasan

Associate Professor-English Division-1- VIT University

ABSTRACT

The paper titled "Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching" begins with an introduction on the importance of English in the present scenario and the status it enjoys among all other languages and moves with the definition of 'competence' in academic and professional contexts. The paper discusses various methods of teaching in English classrooms with a view to enhancing the communicative competence in English. It highlights certain notable shortcomings in the approach towards teaching of English. It advocates some practical suggestions for developing the communicative competence in English.

KEYWORDS : Language , Communication Competence ,Methodology.

Introduction:

"Language acquisition occurs when language is used for what it was designed for, communication". – (Krashen, 1)

Acquisition of language learning skills is essential for one's academic and professional prosperity. It is the effective use of language that helps in the assessment of one's leadership qualities. One cannot be just satisfied with the mere definition of language as a tool for communication, but it has to be effectively and purposefully used. One who possesses communicative competence comes off with flying colours in any field he / she chooses. Though communication is the exchange of thoughts, ideas, feelings, sentiments and so on, the ladder of accomplishments is available to those who are blessed with communicative competence in English.

'Competence' is not just mastery over any language, rather is a term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Besides, real communicative competence is the capability of linguistically competing with others with courage and confidence. It can be well-termed as a 'verbal war' in the competitive world full of challenges. It is one's sound knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language and the rules for appropriate use in social, academic, professional context as well.

Importance of English:

Of all languages, English, for more than a century, has been occupying a privileged and prestigious status in the world. It has been playing a pivotal role in the system of education and in every sphere of activity of the world. English is the first language of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand. English, with the wealth of literature and knowledge enshrined in it, has had a tremendous growth as a language. In India English enjoys an official or semi-official status. The supremacy of the British rule in India for considerably a long period might, perhaps, have resulted in the domination of English over other languages. English is considered lingua franca of the world and one of the best means to interact with the world. In other words, the world has shrunk not only due to the world wide use of internet connections but also the use of English as the common medium of instruction and interaction. The best use of language helps us develop ourselves culturally and materially so as to compete with the best in the world of mind and matter.

To keep abreast of the latest developments in science and technology, a sound knowledge of English is indispensable. Knowledge of English is essential for people with ambitions and aspirations to have their upper hands in all challenging fields of science, engineering and

technology and to compete with others in the global market to stand with indigenous technology equal to that of the developed countries in order that our nation's economy could be promoted. Realizing the importance of English language teaching and learning, and of developing the communicative competence of learners in English, the experts in English language teaching leave no stone unturned to make the process as successful as possible. Although innumerable methods of teaching are implemented and experimented, the ultimate purpose of teaching any language is to develop the communicative competence which requires mastery in four areas; words and rules, appropriateness, cohesion and coherence and the use of communication strategies.

Communicative Competence:

According to Widdowson (1983), ability is not a component of competence. It does not turn into competence, but remains an active force for continuing creativity.

Canale and Swain (1980) understood communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlined system of knowledge and skill essential for communication. In this concept of communicative competence, knowledge refers to the (conscious or unconscious) knowledge of an individual about language and other aspects of language use. There, according to them, are three types of knowledge; knowledge of grammatical principles, knowledge of effective use of language in social, academic and professional contexts in order to fulfil communicative functions with respect to discourse principles. Besides, their concept of skill refers to how an individual can use the knowledge of in real life situations. According to Canale (1983) skill requires a further distinction between underline capacity and its manifestation in real communication, that is to say, in performance.

Communication is an activity in which symbolic content is not a mere transmission from source to source, but an exchange between human agents, who interact within a shared situational or discursive context.

Communicative Competence for Prosperity:

"The powerful seven C's (courtesy, clarity, conciseness, concreteness, correctness, consideration and completeness) of communication govern the composition of all our messages whether we speak or write. We cannot escape their influence. If we ignore them, we are trapped by the inability to encode and process our message composition. Messages may turn out to be either harsh or incomplete or incorrect". (Sen, Leela p-24).

There is no workplace that just remains unchanged. Infrastructural, administrative and technological changes, the arrival and departure of new personnel, national and international collaborations, signing of MoUs, innovations and implementations in the systems are a few

among the changes that might occur in any workplace. When something important in an environment changes, one must respond appropriately. Change offers tremendous challenges to interpersonal communication. The first challenge is working with new people. Organizational change also presents communication challenges. For example, when an organization downsizes and people are laid off, those who remain often must take on added responsibilities, which require them to communicate with courage and confidence.

The modern employers also are quite aware this aberration in the system and they have made communicative competence a precondition for recruitment to their organizations. Nevertheless, the learners themselves are aware of the growing demand and increasing expectations of employers and strain every nerve to develop their communicative competence in English. They also need to realize the fact that communicative competence cannot be attained within a short span of time, because language learning is like the growth of a plant rather than the construction of a wall. The curricula can no longer afford to ignore the importance of English.

The rules of use and usage need to be understood well and acquired. A good communicator knows what to say, to whom, when, where, why and how and also when to be silent. Constant drill is essential for one to develop the communicative competence in English. The purpose of developing the communicative competence cannot be achieved, if English is taught without relevance, clear objectives, sound methodology and evaluation procedures. When English is taught as a subject, learners acquire knowledge about English, but when English is taught as a language and constantly practised with a great zeal and zest, learners develop their communicative competence.

Methodology:

The methodology adopted in class room matters a lot in the process of developing the communication skills. The experts in English Language Teaching are of the view that no particular method of teaching can be considered the best. That depends upon the proficiency level of the students in English. Even the 'chalk and talk' method of teaching, in spite of its being traditional, cannot be completely dispensed with, just because of the availability of technology for enhancing the communication skills. Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Literature Based Method, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Web Assisted Language Learning (WALL), Activity Based Method are some of the methods in language class rooms.

Apart from adopting methodology, learners must be involved in the whole communicative process. In many class rooms, teachers are the active speakers and learners remain as passive learners. This has to be changed. It is a two way process. Teachers, being role models as

good communicators, must involve students in the communicative process. The key to learning English is its constant use in meaningful practice and interaction. Communicative competence in English can very well be attained through role plays, group Discussions, debates, short Presentations, interactions and various other communicative activities.

Further, a language is best learnt when the learners are actively involved in the language learning skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, but with more emphasize on the productive skills. Interactions not only help learners develop communicative competence, but also help them acquire new habits such as public speaking and stage mannerisms. The way one communicates reflects one's culture. It is not the mere development of a skill, but the refinement of culture that aims at cordiality of human relations through communication.

Besides communicative activities, continuous acquisition of vocabulary is important in enhancing the communicative competence in English. A man of words is the man of the world. Pouring of effective ideas and thoughts is blocked by lack of vocabulary. Good vocabulary is essential for clarity, perfection and precision. Improving vocabulary comes from incidental learning from context, direct learning or a combination of all these. The best incidental learning comes from reading books and associating with people who have a good spoken and written vocabulary. Lack of exposure to speaking is the main factor for lack of communicative competence. Unlike other subjects, English is a skill-oriented subject. A skill can neither be taught nor learned, but acquired by means of constant practice.

"The power of expression in a language is a matter of skills rather than of knowledge. It is a power that grows by exercise, not by knowing merely meanings or rules". – (Thompson and Wyatt, p.15)

Conclusion:

Communication is as fundamental to our social living as eating to our biological existence. We need to do more than communicate just naturally. An effective communicator is aware of certain norms, techniques and methods to excel, when it comes to communication. The difference is similar to knowing how to jump. Anyone can jump, but only those who have the knowledge of minute details of and training in jumping can excel. Hence, training and practice are essential for appropriate, meaningful and effective communication. On the part of the students, enthusiasm and efforts are the prerequisites. Enthusiasm is the propelling force for great undertakings. Communicative competence is a leadership quality. Teachers of English have a long role to play in the process of developing the communicative competence of students in English.

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