

From 'Communicative Competence' to 'Strategic Competence' through *Hamlet*

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Abstract

This paper defines 'grammatical competence,' 'sociolinguistic competence,' 'discourse competence,' and 'strategic competence.' The various stages of 'communicative competence' and 'strategic competence' are explained based on psychological teaching-learning theories such as 'Behaviourism,' 'Cognitivism,' 'Constructivism,' and 'Social Constructivism.' It points out that 'strategic competence' is based on one's basic 'communicative competence.' It explains the 'strategic competences' that are embedded in Polonius's advice to Laertes and Ophelia in *Hamlet*. It does not fail to point out human efforts to master 'strategic competence' from the time of antiquity without mastering 'communicative competence,' that is needed to accomplish it. In this context, the paper insists on the point that reading of Shakespearean plays will play a pivotal role in transforming the 'communicative competence' of the students into 'strategic competence.'

Keywords and Phrases

Communicative Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, Discourse Competence, Strategic Competence, Behaviourism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, Social Constructivism.

Introduction

Human language is the product of a series of interactions between man and his environment. Language is used by a variety of people in a variety of contexts. The process of communication starts gradually from speech perception to speech production. Language acquisition is the process by which a person acquires the competence to perceive and comprehend the message conveyed through the phonic and graphic signs used by the communicator. The reciprocator also uses the same signs to respond to one's communication.

Every human language is composed of certain specific components such as 'phonemes' (the smallest units of sound that may cause a change of meaning within a language but that do not have meaning by themselves), 'morphemes' (the smallest units of a word that provide a specific

meaning to a string of alphabets/letters, which are called phonemes), ‘lexemes’ (the sets of all the inflected forms of a single word), ‘syntax’ (the set of rules by which a person can construct sentences), ‘semantics’ (the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences), ‘context’ (that explains how all these components within a language work together to convey a particular meaning, to a particular person, at a particular place, at a particular time), and ‘pragmatics’ (meaning that happens in the context of discourse). All languages have these inbuilt structural rules that make meaningful communication possible. If any mismatch creeps into the existence of these programmed components of a language, it will lead to the committing of extrinsic mistakes, lapses and errors, which occur due to breach of codes or errors in the use of codes, in the process of reception and expression of communication among individuals and groups of communicators. Mistakes, lapses, errors, and breach of codes do occur in while using the codes because of the lack of ‘grammatical competence’ of the learners, which is also known as ‘linguistic competence.’ It gets manifested in the form of the lack of ‘communicative competence’ of the users in the target language. Therefore, it is made clear that the phrase ‘grammatical competence,’ refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but does not include the ability to speak or write fluently. It acts as an impediment to produce grammatically correct sentences in the form of communication. Thus, it simply means that the speaker or writer does have knowledge of grammar of the target language, but the person is unable to use the knowledge to communicate in the target language. Similarly, the phrase ‘communicative competence,’ refers to the ability to show not only linguistic or grammatical competence, but also rules of use. It means when and where to use language appropriately. Sometimes, owing to practice, a person who is able to communicate in the target language accurately lacks grammatical knowledge of the language in which the person communicates.

Henry Widdowson presents a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. He focuses on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes (*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2001, p. 160). ‘Communicative competence’ is further grouped into four dimensions by Canale and Swain. They are: a. grammatical competence, b. sociolinguistic competence, c. discourse competence, and d. strategic competence” (*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2001, p. 160). Before one starts analyzing the four dimensions of ‘communicative competence,’ one has to keep in mind the admonition F. J. Newmeyer gives to all language learners in connection with the development and inter-play of two dichotomies that prevail in Linguistics namely “Competence vs Performance and Theoretical vs Applied” (*Historiographia Linguistica*, 17, 1990, pp. 167–81).

Communicative Competence

In linguistics, ‘Communicative Competence,’ refers to a language user’s knowledge of phonemics or phonematics, morphology, phonology, lexis, syntax, grammar and the like, as well

as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. The four components of communicative competence are as follows: linguistic or grammatical competence, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. ‘Communicative competence’ is important because it is based on the idea that it is the objective of language acquisition. ‘Communicative competence’ denotes the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication.

Four Dimensions of Communicative Competence

a. ‘**Linguistic Competence**’ is also known as ‘Grammatical Competence,’ which means having the ability to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language in communication. ‘Grammatical Competence’ means the ability to use the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of a language correctly. The Chomskyan concept of ‘linguistic competence’ is referred to by Dell Hymes as “formally possible.” The expression ‘communicative competence’ is coined by Hymes in his ethnography of speaking in order to contrast a communicative competence, a view of language that Chomsky has on the concept of competence versus performance. It concerns only with the linguistic capabilities of the ideal speaker-hearer, so that the social function of language remains unaddressed (*Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, 1996, p. 208). It also states that how individuals must develop their ‘communicative competence’ if they are to be able to communicate with one another appropriately in the changing situations and conditions. In this model, speaking is understood as the action of transmitting symbols (i.e. interaction) (*Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, 1996, p. 208).

Through the phrase ‘communicative competence,’ Chomsky refers to “the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language” (*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2001, p. 159). Chomsky points out the dichotomy between general linguistic ability and individual language use, which is connected to de Saussure’s distinction between ‘langue’ and ‘parole.’ ‘Competence’ is that knowledge about the native language which is acquired along with the language which is used by an ideal speaker/listener of a homogeneous speech community. It is totally free from dialectal and sociolectal variations. Due to sounds, words and syntactic rules, the speaker can theoretically produce and understand an infinite number of utterances. Although ‘performance’ refers to this, it also refers to the ability and knowledge of the speaker on the grammaticality of sentences. The goal of transformational grammar is to formulate a grammar that illustrates as truly as possible the ability of a speaker’s competence, and at the same time to offer a hypothesis about language acquisition. Linguistic theories based on the notion of competence have been reproached for being too idealistic, which has led to a broadening of the original concept to mean ‘communicative competence.’ Though ‘competence’ (Chomsky) is understood as a dynamic concept and mechanism that helps one generate language endlessly (*Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, 1996, p. 212), ‘langue’ “is the system of a language, the language as a system of forms” (*Saussure*, 1985, p. 29). ‘Langue’ “is what the individual assimilates when he learns a language”

(Saussure, 1985, p. 29), according to de Saussure, is understood as a static system of signs. The terms ‘performance’ (Chomsky) and ‘parole’ (de Saussure) “is the executive side of language” and for Saussure, it “involves both the combinations by which the speaker uses the code of the linguistic system in order to express his own thoughts” and “the psycho-physical mechanisms which permit him to externalize these combinations” (Saussure, 1985, pp. 29-30), can be used almost interchangeably.

“Hymes says that there are rules (conventions) of use without which rules (formulations) of grammar will become useless” (*Modern Applied Linguistics: An Introduction*, 1992, p. 101). Grammar can be classified into two types. The type of grammar is known as ‘Formal Grammar’ and the second is known as ‘Functional Grammar’. ‘Formal Grammar’ refers to grammar which is taught in a formal way. It is also called the ‘Prescriptive Grammar’ or the ‘Traditional Grammar,’ which deals with the definitions and rules of the language. B. F. Skinner perceives grammar as a necessary discipline, which can be made fascinating. As language is basically meant for communication, teaching of the grammatical rules helps the language learners to use language effectively. Any language course must be organized on the skeleton of grammar, which the language teacher must be conscious of throughout the course. But a care must be taken by the teachers in teaching grammar because according to Comenius, “...language should not be the object of learning but the outcome, the product” (*Modern Applied Linguistics: An Introduction*, 1992, p. 201). In this type of grammar, there are set rules. The learners first learn rules and then practice the rules in speech and writing. Normally, in almost all the educational institutions in India, the first type of teaching grammar is followed in second language classes. ‘Formal Grammar’ develops the learners’ ability to ‘describe’ the language, whereas, ‘Functional Grammar’ develops the learners’ ability to ‘use’ the language. According to Kelly and Titone, ‘Form-focused’ language teaching lays stress on “the rules of grammar, structures, the development of vocabulary and the sounds of language” (*Methods of Teaching English*, 1995, p. 65).

The second type of teaching grammar is known as **Functional Grammar**, which is also called ‘Incidental grammar’. The learners learn this type of grammar, when language learning is the first concern of the learners and knowing the rules of the language is the secondary. John M. Kean and Carl Personke distinguish the grammar of a language from its ‘concept’ and ‘use’ as follows: “Grammar is a description of the expression system of a language, including rules for manipulation of that system” (*Methods of Teaching English*, 1995, p.16). If it is taught inductively through activities without using technical words and rules, the grammar can be learnt with a lot of interest. ‘Meaning-focused’ language teaching “emphasizes language use, communication or fluency, and appropriacy of expression in different situations” (*Methods of Teaching English*, 1995, p. 65). ‘Form-focused teaching’ (Formal/Perspective/Traditional Grammar) is the basic

foundation on which the super structure namely ‘Meaning-focused teaching’ (Functional/Incidental Grammar) can be built.

“Otto Jespersen’s *How to Teach a Foreign Language* advocates the use of contextualized learning material” (*Modern Applied Linguistics: An Introduction*, 1992, p. 204). So, the objectives of teaching and learning English need to be modified suitably. It is also advisable to use grammar not only in contexts but also in a full sentence pattern. It should not be taught and learnt in isolation. Michael Swan while reviewing S. Thornbury’s *How to Teach Grammar* states, “... that a bit of grammar practice is probably all right if it is done tastefully in appropriate communicative contexts...for instance, when embedded in tasks” (*The Journal of English Language Teaching*, Vol. 52/2, 2001, pp. 203-204).

b. Sociolinguistic Competence refers to an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place, the role relationships of the communicators, the shared information of the decoder and the encoder and the purpose for their interaction. ‘Sociolinguistic competence’ means mastery of the socio-cultural code of language use including appropriate use of vocabulary, register, politeness and style in a given context.

‘Sociolinguistic competence’ demands on the part of the learners in knowing and understanding of how to communicate in a given. When one communicates in L1 context, the communicator does not become conscious of the complexities of the process of communication. The communicator concentrates on what and how to communicate to others in a society (*Applied linguistics-I*, 1980, p. 1). In the context of L2, the learner is expected to produce language in different sociolinguistic contexts by following the purposes, status, and conventions of interactions. It can be accomplished by making use of opportunities properly and by practising continuously.

c. Discourse Competence relates itself to how words, phrases and sentences are put together to make communication possible and meaningful. It refers to the interpretation of the elements of individual message in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is presented in relation to the discourse or text. In other words, it refers to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of sentences in a language so that the parts make up a coherent complete whole. The term *discourse* comes from Latin *discursus* which denotes ‘conversation, speech’ (*An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages*, 1992, p. 25). It refers to a written or spoken discussion, conversation, talk, dialogue, communication, debate, consultation, etc.

In this context, it is fitting to recall the words of Zellig Harris, the first linguist who used the phrase in his research paper “Discourse Analysis” published in 1952, in which Harris claims that *discourse* is the next level in a hierarchy of morphemes, clauses and sentences. He argues that

it is the structure that makes *discourse* different from a random sequence of sentences. By 'structure,' he means a pattern by which segments of the *discourse* occur and recur relatively to each other (*Linguistic Discourse Analysis: Introduction and Structure*, <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/39688>). Mukarovsky says that "Dialogue ... appears to be a more 'natural' phenomenon than monologue" and this concept is strengthened by Michael Holquist in when he cites Lev Shcherba's idea that "Language reveals its genuine essence only in dialogue" (*Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, 1990, p. 56). Therefore, it is necessary to train the learners in spoken, discussion, conversation, talk, dialogue, communication, debate, consultation, and written discourses as well as in the four types of discourses such as Narration, Description, Exposition, and Argumentation.

d. 'Strategic Competence' results in appropriate use of communicative strategies. It denotes the coping strategies that communicators 'adopt, adapt, and adept' (*Beginning Theory*, 1995, pp. 192-193) to initiate, continue, repair, maintain, redirect, terminate and resume communication. These various stages of 'strategic competence' can be explained based on the following psychological teaching-learning theories:

i) Behaviourism: The Behaviourists believe that the teacher decides 'what' and 'how' the students should do according to his/her instruction. Teacher transfers information to learners with reward and punishment. When the teacher teaches Present Tense, he/she explains the forms and the norms with examples and trains the students to construct sentences in the target language. The teacher decides what activity the students must do and how they must do it. The teacher teaches, tests the concept/unit taught and ensures the reproduction of it in the target language. The teacher plans to impart knowledge to the students through the activity. The teacher also explains facts and figures, principles and processes involved in the activity. In the context of English language-teaching, the teacher tries to elicit the desired response from the students who are presented with a target stimulus (*Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Volume 26, Number 2 / 2013, p. 46).

ii) Cognitivism: With regard to the Cognitivists, students carry out whatever the teacher says. Materials are designed with interesting features to make students learn the units taught. In the *adopt phase* (*Beginning Theory*, 1995, 192-193), *students recall* the forms and the norms explained by the teacher with examples and reproduce the same examples in the target language. Students must carry out the activity, based on teacher's instruction. Students reproduce in the target language, the concept/unit taught. Students learn facts and figures without knowing the principles and processes involved in the activity (*Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Volume 26, Number 2 / 2013, p. 46). Stephen Krashan's input is equal to "i". Comprehending the input message is marked as "+1". Therefore, "i+1" results in successful communication (*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, 2001, pp. 180, 182).

iii) Constructivism: According to the Constructivists, students construct their own example based on the teacher's model. Students use a range of resources to make sense of the received information on their own. In the *adapt phase* (*Beginning Theory*, 1995, pp. 192-193), students do not reproduce the same examples given by the teacher. They have them as models and construct similar sentences on their own initiative in the target language. Students must construct examples of their own. Students reconstruct new knowledge to fit their own situation based on the concept/unit taught. Students try to understand the principles and processes involved in doing the activity (*Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Volume 26, Number 2 / 2013, p. 46).

iv) Social Constructivism: In view of Social Constructivists, the peers/members of the society contribute to the learning of the students. Students discuss with the peers/members of the society to make sense of the information. In the *adept phase* (*Beginning Theory*, 1995, pp. 192-193), students learn/ acquire the skill of reconstructing the sentences on their own initiative in the target language based on some other models, which they have imbibed from different sources. Students must reconstruct examples based on the model given by the members of the society. Students try to modify the reconstructed new knowledge further based on the inputs given by the peers/ members of the society. Students try to modify their understanding of facts and figures by verifying the principles and processes involved in doing the activity based on the inputs given by peers/the members of the society (*Performance Improvement Quarterly*, Volume 26, Number 2 / 2013, p. 46).

The Constructivists' and the Social Constructivists' points are similar to that of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which refers to the distance between the actual developmental level (Cognitive) and the level of potential development under individual adult guidance (Constructivist) or (Social Constructivist) theories in collaboration with more capable peers of learning. The theory of dialogical action emphasizes the point that the learners must be given freedom to indulge in dialogical action with the teacher or peers ("Tool and Symbol in Child Development," http://www.ulfblanke.com/downloads/activity_theory/vygotsky_1978.pdf).

From these concepts on competences, one can understand that beyond the primary units of language such as phonological, graphical, grammatical and syntactic patterns, the communicative functions of language can be exemplified in discourses. The basic necessity to acquire 'strategic competence' at higher levels of learning and in professional programmes can be made possible only by acquiring the basic 'communicative competence.' For example, an effective salesperson can make a product irresistible for a consumer to buy with the help of his/her 'strategic competence.' The salesperson's 'strategic competence' is certainly based on his/her basic 'communicative competence.'

The following short story of a lawn cutter will reiterate the point further that is being discussed in this context:

A little boy walked into a pharmacy to use the phone. As he did, the store-owner observed and listened to the conversation. "Excuse me," the boy said into the phone, "can you give me a job cutting your lawn?" "I already have someone to cut my lawn," the woman on the other end said. "But I'll cut your lawn for half the price of the person cuts your lawn now," the boy said. "I'm very satisfied with the person who is presently cutting my lawn," the lady said. "But I'll even sweep even your curb and sidewalk," the boy said. "But you'll have the prettiest lawn in town". "No, thank you," the lady said. Smiling, the boy hung up. The store owner, who listened to the entire conversation, approached the boy. "I like your attitude," the owner said. "I like that positive spirit. Would you like a job here?" "No, thank you," the boy said. "But you were just pleading for one," the owner said. "No, sir," the boy said. "I was just checking my performance at the job I already have. I am the one who is working for that lady I was talking to!" This is what self-appraisal means. Every time we think of comparing ourselves to others, we should compare ourselves to our own self instead. Only then we can grow as people! (<https://steemit.com/story/@digitalxing/a-short-story-on-self-appraisal>)

'Strategic Competence' Embedded in Polonius's Advice to Laertes and Ophelia in *Hamlet*

With the impact of liberalization, privatization, globalization and technical innovations, there is an increased awareness of the importance of English in professional fields. Apart from developing four language skills in the learners, the Courses offered are expected to empower the learners to acquire skills related to group-discussion, role plays, and problem-solving strategies. In the new millennium, employability demands an enhanced competence of using English efficiently, effectively and convincingly. Hence, communicative skills that are scaffolded with 'strategic competence' have gained currency in the world. Therefore, teaching of 'strategic competence' through 'communicative competence' has become an essential and integral part of any academic programme.

Prescription of certain excerpts from Shakespearean texts in the syllabus can help academicians to accomplish this endeavour easily and effectively. Passages culled out from Shakespearean plays can be used innovatively while offering training programmes for professionals who need to develop their strategic skills through communicative skills. Shakespearean plays which are embedded with various skill resources can be re-visited, delved deep, excavated, re-discovered and exploited, especially to develop strategic skills through communicative skills at various levels.

In the works of William Shakespeare, statements with regard to skills development are made up of short sentences which come into existence based on Shakespeare's life-long experience. Shakespeare's works express kaleidoscopic views of life and they have been accepted by people of the world who come from different walks of life. He is known for his universality and profound understanding of human nature. Therefore, it is necessary to epitomize here and explain with example how William Shakespeare converts all the three competences namely grammatical, communicative, and sociolinguistic into strategic competence through discourses with special reference to *Hamlet*. For example, the reading and understanding of the following passage, which presents Polonius's advice to his son and daughter, Laertes and Ophelia (*Hamlet*, Act-1, Scene -3, Lines: 65-86), will make the readers understand the dire need of mastering the strategic competence.

Discourse from <i>Hamlet</i>	Paraphrase
1. Give thy thoughts no tongue, Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.	1. Don't express your thoughts/Keep your thoughts to yourself. Don't put to action any funny/novel idea without much thought or think twice before you put your thought into action.
2. Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar: Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried.	2. Treat people with familiarity, but not excessively so. Hold on to old friends and be slow to trust new friends.
3. Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but being in, Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.	3. Avoid fighting; but fight boldly if it is unavoidable so that your enemies may beware of you.
4. Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice; Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.	4. Be a good listener. Accept criticism, but do not be judgmental.
5. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy; For the apparel oft proclaims the man.	5. Don't spend money like a spendthrift. Don't dress yourself fancifully, but modestly and maintain a proper appearance because one's appearance proclaims his/her character.
6. Neither a borrower nor a lender be; For loan oft loses both itself and friend, And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.	6. Do not borrow or lend money because you will lose the money given as loan and your friend who has borrowed it. Borrowing spoils your maintenance and conservation of resources.
7. This above all- to thine own self be true,	7. Above all, be true to be yourself. It must happen naturally as the Day follows the

And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.	Night. If you follow all these strategic competencies, then you won't prove yourself to be false to any man.
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Conclusion

From time immemorial, human beings have been trying to master 'strategic competence.' They are unsuccessful in their endeavour because they have been lacking mastery in 'communicative competence,' which is needed to accomplish it. In this context, one has to remember the fact that at least certain excerpts from Shakespearean plays, which are store-houses of eclectic skills, will play a pivotal role in transforming the 'communicative competence' of the students into 'strategic competence.' The readers of Shakespearean plays can observe how readily the plays do yield themselves to acquire multifarious skills. One can find examples galore in certain plays, which can be used to develop 'strategic competence' through 'communicative competence.' Shakespearean drama is a great river of life and beauty. All who have thirst for aesthetics, truth of life, and flair for language learning can stoop to drink from its waters to quench their thirst. If anyone feels that this spark is the need of the hour, he/she can transform this spark into campfire around which persons who belong to various walks of life can bask and benefit.

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