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## With Reference to Yemeni EFL Context

Yasser Alrefae

Anita Mudkanna

### Abstract

Never before has learning a foreign language been more crucial than in the era of globalization. Until recently, cross-cultural communication was restricted to a small proportion of the world population. The huge leap in transportation and communication technologies and the declining importance of political borders under free trade policies have dramatically increased the possibility of interaction and mobility among nations and people around the globe, figuratively shrinking the earth to a global village. More than ever in human history, countries have become more interdependent regarding business, academics, and politics. Pragmatic competence has recently occupied a prominent place in the field of second language acquisition. Lacking this knowledge, L2 learners, even those with good proficiency levels, are expected to exploit their L1 sociocultural rules (pragmatic transfer) that may bring about intercultural misunderstanding and cause serious consequences.

### Introduction

Communicative competence is widely recognized by practitioners in the field of language teaching as a major pedagogical goal. Thus, pragmatic instruction has become a necessity and an important component in English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) curricula (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). This simply means that EFL/ESL learners should be exposed to the actual use of the target language in order to acquire the pragmatic norms of L2. That is, besides the acquisition of grammatical abilities, EFL learners have to be familiar with the appropriate use of the language within a sociocultural context.

This kind of pragmatic transfer results in communication breakdown. The pragmatic transfer of Yemeni EFL learners could be attributed to the lack of exposure to the L2 use in social contexts and to their unfamiliarity of the appropriate utterances used in different social contexts (Alrefae, 2018).

### Communicative Competence

The conception of communicative competence stems out in reaction to the following assertion made by the generative-grammarians. Chomsky clearly distinguished the description of "language form" (competence) and "language use" (performance) and established that the speaker-listener's internal grammar that judges the grammaticality of sentences should be the main object of investigation for linguists. Hymes' (1962, 1974) pioneering work emphasized the importance of language as a system of communication in which knowledge of language use is as important as grammatical knowledge. While grammatical knowledge is still very important, especially as argued by Chomsky (1965), the knowledge of rules that govern the appropriate use of language is particularly important. It is claimed that without this knowledge a speaker cannot interact adequately with other members in a given speech community. That knowledge would particularly allow a speaker to know, for example, what to say, when to say it, to whom and how to say it in a socially and culturally appropriate way. Hymes defined communicative competence as comprising of an individual's capabilities in terms of both knowledge and ability for use of language. The notion was further developed in his model of communicative competence in which he pays more attention to the factors that characterize the individual's underlying knowledge and ability for language use. In fact, Hymes as a sociolinguist comes up with the notion of

  
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communicative competence in his research in the sociology of language and sociolinguistics. His insight was focused on the person rather than on the communicative system. That is the reason why he devoted most of his work to the description of sociolinguistic competence in which he suggests the standards for judging the appropriateness of a given utterance in a particular social context.

#### **Canale and Swain Model of Communicative Competence**

In their often-cited article on communicative competence in relation to second language pedagogy, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a theoretical framework in which they outline the contents and boundaries of three areas of communicative competence: The communicative competence is, then, distinguished from what Canale calls "actual communication," which is defined as "the realization of such knowledge and skill under limiting psychological and environmental conditions such as memory and perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distractions, and interfering background noises" (Canale, 1983: 5).

If we are to compare Canale and Swain's construct of communicative competence with that of Chomsky's in a broad sense, Chomsky's "competence" is equivalent to the "grammatical competence" mentioned by Canale and Swain, and all other areas of their framework are lacking in Chomsky's definition. As far as performance is concerned, Chomsky's performance and Canale and Swain's actual communication point to roughly the same phenomenon of uttering sentences in real communicative situations. The four areas of communicative competence are briefly outlined below:

*Grammatical competence* refers to the mastery of L2 phonological and lexico-grammatical rules and rules of sentence formation; that is, to be able to express and interpret literal meaning of utterances (e.g., acquisition of pronunciation, vocabulary, word and sentence meaning, construction of grammatical sentences, correct spelling, etc.)

*Sociolinguistic competence* refers to the mastery of sociocultural rules of appropriate use of L2; that is, how utterances are produced and understood in different sociolinguistic contexts (e.g., understanding of speech act conventions, awareness of norms of stylistic appropriateness, the use of a language to signal social relationships, etc.) As it is clear from the way their framework is described, their intention was to discover the kinds of knowledge and skills that an L2 learner needs to be taught and to develop the theoretical basis for a communicative approach in the second language teaching based on an understanding of the nature of human communication (Canale and Swain, 1980). In addition, their framework indicates that it is the rules that an L2 learner must learn for accumulation of their knowledge and skills to be communicatively competent in the use of their target language and that these rules are not confined to systematic rules of grammar only but are also applied to all aspects of a language. Since they put forward their first framework of communicative competence in detail, there have been numerous studies that have analyzed it more comprehensively or employ it in SLA research (Bachman 1990 & Kasper and Rose, 2002).

#### **Bachman Model of Communicative Competence**

Ten years after Canale and Swain had introduced the influential framework of communicative competence, a more comprehensive, stratified model was proposed by Bachman, who stressed the importance of describing "the processes by which [the] various components interact with each other and with the context in which language use occurs" (Bachman, 1990: 81). He pointed out the fact that earlier theories on language proficiency, particularly the frameworks constructed by Lado (1961) and Carroll (1961, 1968), apparently failed to take into account the distinction between linguistic knowledge and the four basic language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading), arguing that it was difficult to see whether the knowledge

  
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different modalities and channels, or whether they are fundamentally different in quality (Bachman, 1990). Illocutionary competence enables a speaker to use his or her language to serve a variety of functions and a hearer to interpret the illocutionary force of an utterance or discourse required of him or her. One needs, however, more than illocutionary competence to successfully execute an act to intend a certain communicative function; he or she must have knowledge of appropriateness based on the language use context in which he or she finds himself and herself when engaging in a communicative exchange. In his framework, sociolinguistic competence and illocutionary competence are put together to form a speaker's pragmatic competence, which, in turn, composes, along with grammatical competence, his or her language competence.

#### Pragmatic Competence

As can be seen from the above explained model of communicative competence, pragmatic competence involves a complex set of inter-related factors, both linguistic and socio-cultural. It comes as no surprise then that this kind of knowledge is very difficult for non-native speakers to acquire. Language learners often fail to follow the socio-cultural rules that govern language behavior in the target language, and this has been referred to in the literature as pragmatic failure. Thomas (1983) explains that there are two reasons for this pragmatic failure: a) learner's lack of linguistic means to convey his or her pragmatic knowledge, and b) cross-cultural differences as to what constitutes appropriate cultural behavior. When learners lack this socio-pragmatic knowledge of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior in L2, they often draw on their knowledge of appropriate language behavior from L1. This important phenomenon has been referred to as pragmatic transfer.

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#### Yasser Alrefaee

Albyadaa University, Yemen. PhD Candidate at BAMU, Aurangabad (MS)

#### Dr. Anita Mudkanna

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jawahar Art, Science and Commerce College Andur,  
Tal. Tulajpur, Dist. Osmanabad. (MS)

  
Principal

Jawahar Arts, Science & Commerce College,  
Andur Tal. Tulajpur Dist, Osmanabad