

# COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: ENHANCEMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

*Diseph Florence Ezeh- Origie, Ph.D*

## **Abstract**

This paper examined communicative competence: enhancement of English language teacher education in tertiary institutions. One of the problems identified was English language teacher education was geared towards acquisition of syntactic structures rather than communicative competence. This paper x-rayed: concepts of communication and communicative competence with its components and ways to incorporate communicative competence into English language teacher education programme. The methodology employed was observation and analytical. It was discovered that communicative competence will assist learners to take care of: confusion that may arise between speaker-listener due to improper pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, ill communication with others by engaging in socially inappropriate patterns and strategies to cope with breakdown in communication. It was concluded that successful English language study should not centre on acquisition of grammatical rules and pronunciation alone but on communicative competence which is the ability to use language in actual performance. It was recommended that communicative competence approach should be adopted in teaching English language in higher institutions.

Keywords: communication, communicative competence, grammatical rules, pronunciation.

Tertiary institutions saddled with the responsibility of training English language teachers as classroom educators should not only concern with acquisition of pronunciation abilities and grammatical rules because grammatical competence does not presuppose interaction. Rather, an extra mile should be employed in making sure that trained teachers acquired communicative competence which is the ability underlying the use of language in social context. Language is acquired through communication so it is when language is used in communication that all the functions and components of meaning are operating at the same time.

English language plays a very significant role in many domains of administration, educational setting, government, business, means of international communication and language for inter-ethnic communication. This implies that English is used for instrumental, practical and interactive purposes. In order to communicate proficiently, one needs communicative competence rooted in English Language an instrument of social communication.

---

*Journal of Research Development, Volume 24 No.1, July, 2015*

### **Concept of Communication**

Canale in Austin (2010:15), defined communication as the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral and written\visual modes, production and comprehension processes. So to engage in meaningful communication, one must acquire communicative competence because it serves as a manifestation of one's communicative competence which is the competence underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication. These underlying capabilities comprise knowledge of linguistic rules, knowledge of sociocultural rules and the skill to use this knowledge in socially appropriate ways in authentic sociocultural context. Actual communication involves performance or verbal demonstration of one's underlying competence in concrete social situations. It becomes imperative that English language teachers should be well informed about the nature of communicative competence which is crucially needed for actual communication.

### **Concept of Communicative Competence**

Canale in Austin (2010: 30) posited that communication does not take place in a vacuum but in a social setting and propounded five characteristics of communicative competence to include:

1. Is a form of social interaction, and is therefore normally acquired and used in social context.
2. Takes place in discourse and sociocultural context which provide constrains on appropriate language use and also clues as to correct interpretations of utterances.
3. Always has a purpose (for example, to establish social relations, to persuade, or to promise)
4. Involves authentic, as opposed to textbooks-contrives language; and Is judged as successful or not based on actual performance.

From the foregoing, communicative competence does involve ability to use language in a social context for its meaning to be properly ascertained. Karimnia (2007) stated that communicative competence is a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and social knowledge on how and when to use utterances appropriately. To this end, the learner must be exposed to such structures that will enable him articulate meanings to his listeners during interaction by gaining communicative competence. Language is not just acquisition of appropriate communication skills but the ability to apply language in actual performance. It implies knowing the rules of use in a social context or sociocultural setting. Agbedo (2006) posited that Communicative competence is interactional competence which is the knowledge needed by a speaker or a hearer; Communicative competence provides room for actual use of the language by speaker-hearer.

karimnia (2007), asserted that communicative competence is the ability to produce spontaneously and fluently sentences which shows desire meaning appropriate to the social purpose and context; this implies that Communicative competence is the undyling system of knowledge and skills required for communication, thus to communicate, one needs knowledge of vocabulary (register) and skill in using the sociolinguistic conventions of a given language. Ofili (2007) stated that the learner should not be exposed to grammatical uses and pronunciation alone but needs to apply the appropriate use of these syntactic structures in practical situations. Therefore, Communicative competence is super ordinate process responsible for controlling free flow of communication. Communicative competence enables

learners to communicate in socio culturally appropriate ways in English with both native and non native speakers.

English language teacher education should not be to make the learner know how to speak grammatically correct sentences in the language but the learner should know how to speak in socio culturally appropriate ways, so all English language teachers should marry grammatical and communicative competence in order to achieve proficiency in the language; thus, communicative competence is oral proficiency (Odia, 2011)

Martins (2009) asserted that Communicative competence is not only mastery the rules of grammar and pronunciation but also learning what to say, to whom as well as when and how to say it. It also implies language in use, use of language in a social context and how language functions are realized in speech; hence language should be studied in its social context. Teach learners the appropriate forms of social usage so that learners can use language spontaneously and appropriately in social context.

### **Components of Communicative Competence**

Canale in Austin (2010:30) posited four components of communicative competence to include: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

#### **Grammatical Competence**

Grammatical competence refers to a speaker's intuitive mastery of the language code (verbal or non verbal) this is exactly what Chomsky (1965) refers 'linguistic competence'. Grammar encompasses: phonology, description of sound system in a language, semantic is concerned with meaning of expression, syntax arrangement of words in a sentence, how to pair sentences in the context in which they are appropriate. The learner should be exposed to rules for forming words (morphological processes) and for constructing phrases, clauses and sentences. The acquisition of grammatical competence for communicative competence should be the acquisition of words and sounds in addition to mastery of structure (grammar) and functions (meaning) in language.

#### **Sociolinguistic Competence**

This is the ability to understand the social context in which communication takes place. This relates to what is socially accepted in a given language, what variety to use in what situation, how to vary the style according to the person spoken to, that is knowing when to speak, who to speak to, how to speak, what gestures are needed to go with a particular speech (which sociolinguistic option to select). Johnson 2007, reiterated that Sociolinguistic competence comprises one's tacit knowledge which helps one not only to produce appropriate language but also to interpret and judge the appropriateness of utterance in diverse sociolinguistic context based on such contextual factors as discourse goal, participant status or role and social conventions or norms of interaction.

By appropriateness, Canale in Austin (2007), referred to both appropriateness in meaning and form of utterance. Appropriateness of meaning is concerned with whether or not an utterance (e.g.

admonishing, rebuking, and commanding), an attitude (e.g. politeness) or an idea is perceived to be proper within a given situation; that is having the ability to make right choices of words to a particular occasion

### **Discourse Competence**

This is mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meaning in coherence and cohesive manner in oral or written mode. Discourse competence embodies vocabulary, cohesion and organization of speech to achieve effect.

### **Strategic Competence**

This is the intuitive mastery of various techniques used to repair breakdown in communication therefore makes communication effective. Leung, (2009) posited that strategic competence is the interlocutor's ability in using communication strategies. Strategic competence comprises avoidance, word coinage, lexical borrowing and code mixing\code switching. Florez (2007) posited that avoidance is when the speaker deliberately ignores concepts he lacks language in the target language. Word coinage is when a speaker translates from his L1 to L2. Lexical borrowing is the act of loaning a word from L1 because there is no equivalent in the L2. Code mixing is when the speaker deliberately fuses the L1 and L2 into the same sentence; while code switching is a complete shift from L1 to L2 which may be to identify with religion, ethnic political or social group.

### **Various Ways to Incorporate Communicative Competence into English Language Teacher Education Programme**

Igbokwe (2008) asserted that the main objectives of teacher education are to develop awareness, knowledge, attitude, skills, evaluation ability and full preparation in the teaching and learning process. Thus since language is acquired through communication and takes place within the context of meaningful communication in real-life. It is in the fitness of things that social interaction and its usage should be used in discerning the social meaning of utterances.

English language teacher education curriculum should focus on all the components of communicative competence: grammatical competence should be about words; expose learners to a wide range of vocabulary and how to put them into phrases, clauses and sentences. Sociolinguistic competence should concern with using words appropriately, given the setting, topic, how to express an attitude, courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect, when to adjust unfavorably sentence to a pleasurable one. Sociolinguistic competence comprises register, nativeness etc, this implies that the learner must be exposed to registers of various fields of human activities so that on acquisition the speaker must apply register of the field of discussion in speech.

Under discourse competence, it should centre on how phrases, clauses and sentences are arranged to create conversation, speeches, messages in articles, magazines, books, occasions, organization, institution etc. strategic competences should concern on how to fill gaps in knowledge of language, Knowing when one is misunderstood and what to do, knowing right verbs, words to use if one does not know the name of a thing because this is the competence that enables a speaker to address a stranger with an unknown status and what language to apply in multilingual society.

A systematic training in phonetics is highly desirable in acquiring communicative competence. Leung (2005) asserted that learners should be motivated to study phonetic technical terms like phonemes, allophone, length mark, segmental (vowels, consonants and diphthongs), suprasegmentals (stress, rhythm, and intonation) such that learners perceive: individual English vowels, consonants and diphthongs, vowel and consonants contrast, stressed and unstressed syllables and intonation so that during communication the learner articulates precisely and accurately individual English sounds, produce sound contrast and such features like rhythm, stress and intonation. Provide tapes to students which they listen to and later communicate the content to others in class. With this knowledge the learner can produce comprehensible spoken English.

One sure way of incorporating communicative competence into English language teacher education is that Communicative objective of the curriculum should include communication processes: (1) negotiating for meaning, (2) information sharing and (3) interaction.

### **Negotiating for Meaning**

Grammatical competence should be geared towards inducting the learner in morphology and syntax. Teachers must be exposed to grammatical structures where the patterns relate to communicative operation of language in use. Thus, all structures should be taught with a notional approach which allows regrouping the structures in a different way from that which they were initially introduced, for example:

Mary stole the money.

The money was stolen by Mary.

It was Mary who stole the money.

This pattern allows for structural practice which relates to basic patterns of meaning in the language thereby creating some element of novelty to the learner's ability. In the teaching of reading comprehension, regrouping of sentence patterns gives room for learners to look beyond the superficial differences and focus on the content of a sentence and the way it contributes to the main theme of the passage of which it is a part. This will enable the learner to infer denotative and connotative meaning. In communication process, the speaker may face communication breakdown, the listener may ask for clarification, confirmation or repetition, the speaker may reconstruct his message in a way to buttress further understanding, in this way the speaker and listener are involved in negotiating meaning. Expose learners to strategize to negotiate for meaning through asking for clarification. So opportunities should be created for communication where learner controls the topic and discourse (Florez, 2001).

Morphology which is a part of grammatical competence is the formation of words and their structural properties; it is how words are formed by means of affixation which implies adding suffixes and prefixes to root of certain words. Affixation are inflectional (how words form their plurals, singular and tenses) and derivatives (how new words are formed from existing ones), this allows words coinage thereby creating additional meaning in words e.g. nation-national-nationalism-nationalist-nationalistic-nationality-nationalize. With such knowledge, the learner can construct meaningful sentences when he speaks or writes in that language.

### **Interaction**

Language is created through trial and error by the individual, so social interaction activities should include: conversation and discussion sessions, dialogue, simulation, skits, improvisations, role plays and debates. Interactive roles demand group conversation, create scenarios for students to interact or talk with others in the target language.

Lessons should be planned such that it provides scaffolding for learners to make an in road in knowledge and skill for successful interaction, learners should initiate interaction, let them experiment and take risk with the language to gain effective communication (Florez and brown, 2001). While interaction goes on between learner and learner, the teacher should facilitate and monitor students, varieties of questions should be employed, for example, yes and no, who, what, how and where. Students should be encouraged to listen to experts interact so that they gain firsthand knowledge in the language.

### **Information Sharing**

The curriculum should spell out target areas for discussion: travel, business, education, shopping, personal identification, requesting, information, expression obligation, agreement or disagreement; interaction should be through information sharing.

Johnson (2001) posited that Context is relevant in shaping the meaning of words. Initiate some language games that can bring opportunities for learners to know the importance of context in shaping the meaning of words. Students should read constantly and widely to abreast certain difference context in which certain particular words can be used in the situation in which particular meaning is more appropriate.

Communicative competence should be tested through: information gap, role play activities for speaking, letters for writing, note taking and summary through listening and writing competences.

### **Findings**

English language is acquired through communication.

Communicative competence is knowledge oriented and skill oriented.

Communicative competence will assist teachers to use language proficiently in avoidance of confusion arising from improper pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary,

Communicative competence will assist speakers to desist from ill communication with others by engaging in socially inappropriate pattern.

It provides strategies for identifying and correcting communication breakdown.

Communicative competence will ease interpersonal level when interacting with a native speaker

Sociolinguistic competence is complementary to grammatical competence therefore assist to determine the social meaning of utterance.

Communicative competence will assists learners to use the language in different social context.

### **Conclusion**

It was concluded that successful English language study should not centre on acquisition of grammatical rules and pronunciation alone but on communicative competence which is the ability to use language in actual performance.

### **Recommendation**

It was recommended that communicative competence approach should be adopted in teaching English language in higher institutions.

Language is created through trial and error by the individual so continuous exercises guarantees communicative competence.

Learners should struggle to communicate so that target linguistic system will be acquired.

### **References**

- Abgedo, C.U. (2000), *General Linguistic: An Introductory Reader*, Nsukka: ACE Resources Consult
- Austin, J.A. (2010), Applied linguistic: [coeril.utexas.edu/~jigsaw-php](http://coeril.utexas.edu/~jigsaw-php).
- Florez and Bruit (2001), *teaching by example: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*, , NY: London. White plans.
- Igbokwe, U. I. & Eze, U. N. (2008), *Innovative practices for effective teaching of English language for quality assurance in secondary schools*. In
- B.G.Nworgu, *Education in the information age: Global challenges and enhancement strategies*, Nsukka: University Trust Publishers
- Johnson, k. (2001), *An introduction to foreign language learning and teaching*, Harlow: Pearson education limited
- Karimnia, A & Izadparast, M. (2007). *On communication and linguistic competence*, *International Journal of communication*: New Delhi: Bahri retrieved June, 27, 2012.
- Leung, C. (2005), *communicative competence'* international Journal of Applied Linguist, retrieved June 27, 2012.
- Odia, A.U. (2011). *The functionalist approach to language teaching and its influence in the 21th century*. A paper presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual national conference of the school of languages, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe Anambra State. 24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> October, 2011
- Ofili, A.U. (2007). *Achieving communicative competence in the Junior Secondary School Classes through role-play*. A paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> ELTT annual conference of national association of teachers and researchers in English as a second language (NATREST) at Federal University of Technology, Owerri