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### Communication and Communicative Competence:

#### **I- Communication:**

Communication can best be summarized as the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver in an understandable manner. The information conveyed can include facts, ideas, concepts, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, instructions and even emotions. The communication process is the guide toward realizing effective communication. It is through the communication process that the sharing of a common meaning between the sender and the receiver takes place. Individuals that follow the communication process will have the opportunity to become more productive in every aspect of their profession. Effective communication leads to understanding.

The communication process is made up of four key components. Those components include **encoding, medium of transmission, decoding, and feedback**. There are also two other factors in the process, and those two factors are present in the form of the sender and the receiver. The communication process begins with the **sender** and ends with the **receiver**.

The communication process consists of a message being sent and received. The message may be verbal or non-verbal. Effective communication involves a message being sent and received. Added to this however, is the element of feedback to ensure that the message sent was received exactly as intended. This concept may be illustrated using the three-step communications model.

**The encoding-decoding model** views human communication as a matter of encoding information (e.g. formulating a sentence), transmitting that message (e.g. speaking), and decoding the message (e.g. listening and understanding). Successful communication requires clear channels of transmission, and shared codes. Misunderstandings result from mistranslated messages or from gaps or extraneous noise in the message.

Roman Jakobson's model of the functions of language (1960, pp. 350-377) distinguishes six elements, or factors of communication, that are necessary for communication to occur: (1) context, (2) addresser (sender), (3) addressee (receiver), (4) contact, (5) common code and (6) message. Each factor is the focal point of a relation, or function that operates between the message and the factor.

#### **II-Communicative Competence:**

If a language learner is asked what they think the goal of a language course is, they would probably answer that it is to teach the grammar and vocabulary of that language. However, if they are asked what *their* goal is as language learners, they would most probably answer that it is to be able *to communicate* in that language.

Communicative competence is a term coined by Dell Hymes in 1972 in reaction to Noam Chomsky's (1965) notion of "linguistic competence". Communicative competence is the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language usage. As Hymes observes:

*"...a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others".*

(Hymes 1972, 277)

In other words, a language user needs to use the language not only correctly (based on linguistic competence), but also appropriately (based on communicative competence). Of course, this approach does not diminish the importance of learning the grammatical rules of a language. In fact, it is one of the four components of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

**1-Linguistic competence** is the knowledge of the language code, i.e. its grammar and vocabulary, and also of the conventions of its written representation (script and orthography). The grammar component includes the knowledge of the sounds and their pronunciation (phonetics), the rules that govern sound interactions and patterns (phonology), the formation of words by means of e.g. inflection and derivation (morphology), the rules that govern the combination of words and phrases to structure sentences (syntax), and the way that meaning is conveyed through language (semantics).

**2-Sociolinguistic competence** is the knowledge of socio-cultural rules of use, i.e. knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately. The appropriateness depends on the setting of the communication, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Moreover, being appropriate depends on knowing what the taboos of the other culture are, what politeness indices are used in each case, what the politically correct term would be for something, how a specific attitude (authority, friendliness, courtesy, irony etc.) is expressed etc.

**3-Discourse competence** is the knowledge of how to produce and comprehend oral or written texts in the modes of speaking/writing and listening/reading respectively. It is how to combine language structures into a cohesive and coherent oral or written text of different types. Thus, discourse competence deals with organizing words, phrases and sentences in order to create conversations, speeches, poetry, email messages, newspaper articles etc.

**4-Strategic competence** is the ability to recognize and repair communication breakdowns before, during, or after they occur. For instance, the speaker may not know a certain word, thus will plan to either paraphrase, or ask what that word is in the target language. During the conversation, background noise or other factors may hinder communication; thus the speaker must know how to keep the communication channel open. If the communication was unsuccessful due to external factors (such as interruptions), or due to the message being misunderstood, the speaker must know how to restore communication. These strategies may be requests for repetition, clarification, slower speech, or the usage of gestures, taking turns in conversation etc.

These four components of communicative competence should be respected in teaching a foreign language —and they usually are by modern teaching methods employed in second language teaching. Usually most of the above are best learned if the language learner immerses into the culture of a country that speaks the target language. Wouldn't it be great if the language teaching methodologies helped language learners reach communicative competence to a great degree even if the learner has never immersed into the target culture?

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