Date: 19ᵗʰOctober-2024

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN TEACHING.

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Annoatation: By this article you can get information about communicative competences and improving communicative competence in teaching.

Key words: Communicative competence, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, sociocultural subcompetence , strategic.

Communicative competence is one of those terms which is so familiar that we no longer consider what it really means. Communicative competence, we rattle off in teacher training courses or to interested outsiders, is our ability to use language in interaction to understand messages and make ourselves understood in turn.

It is important to stress that communicative competence refers to both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when interacting in actual communication. Knowledge would refer to what one knows (consciously or unconsciously) about the language and about other aspects of communicative language use; skill refers to how well one can perform this knowledge in actual communication.

Both knowledge and skill underlie actual communication in a systematic and necessary way, and are thus included in communicative competence. Furthermore, this vies is not only consistent with the distinction between communicative competence and actual communication but depends crucially on it; in particular, this notion of skill –how well one can use knowledge in actual situations- requires a distinction between underlying capacities (competence) and their manifestation in concrete situations (actual communication).

Now that we have clarified a few important points in relation to the very nature of communication, let us deal with the different subcompetences gathered under communicative competence. It is important to realise that these subcompetences are laid out in the Spanish curriculum as being relevant to the teaching of a foreign language.

Communicative competence is the main aim of language teaching, and it is laid out as such in the curriculum. For over twenty five years, many researchers have concentrated on the development of the notion of communicative competence. Theories of this type imply that teachers must do more than just supply learners with a number of language structures to manipulate, that foreign language teachers must focus on the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of language for students to be familiar with. Therefore matching what is taught in the classroom and what they will find outside is of utmost importance. This means that language teaching has to place the students in different communicative situations, the kinds of which they could find in day to day life.

Here the notion of communicative competence is divides up into four subcomponents, or areas of knowledge and skill, which have been mentioned before,

thus, grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence are glossed below.

Grammatical competence simply refers to the mastery of the language code itself. That is to say, the knowledge of the linguistic signs needed in order to communicate through language. It takes into account the need for the speaker to be able to make correct use of language features such as morphology, syntactics, semantics, phonology and lexis. This aspect is important for students to attain a higher level of proficiency where accuracy is important.

Sociolinguistic competence is the appropriate use of utterances in different sociolinguistic contexts. There are different factors that the participants will have to take into account in order to successfully reach that appropriateness: the status of the participants, the purpose of the interaction and the different norms and conventions shared between the people involved in the exchange will have to be taken into account. They will also need to show appropriateness of meaning (eg. communicative functions, different ideas or attitudes which are proper in a given situations, like inviting or commanding) and form (proper verbal and non-verbal forms in a sociolinguistic context). This competence is particularly difficult to achieve as the skilled use of appropriate registers requires sensitivity to cross-cultural differences. So going beyond the sociolinguistic use of the language, we have the sociocultural subcompetence: This is the degree of familiarity with the cultural and social context in which a language is used. The speaker must also know the different norms of conversation that are used by native speakers.

Discourse competence refers to the mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres or types of text (a scientific paper, an argumentative essay, and oral and written narrative among others) according to the purpose of the communicative exchange and the interlocutors involved. The unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. It points to how the different utterances are linked structurally and how they must be understood as a text.

Strategic competence is referred to the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies to solve problems during communication. The main goal to attain with this competence is first, to compensate for breakdown in communication, and secondly, to enhance the effectiveness of communication. To initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication may be achieved by paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, guessing as well as shifts in register and style.

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