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Bachman's (1990) *communicative language ability*, and this will be used in this chapter.

Hymes's work proved to be of substantial influence among English language educationists, coinciding as it did with growing dissatisfaction with the predominantly structural approaches to English language teaching in the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, other influences were at work in the ELT profession. As the field of English for specific purposes (ESP) developed to meet the professional or academic needs of English language users, course designers had to find ways of analysing real-world tasks in order to identify their communicative demands and to specify these as learning goals. At the same time the Council of Europe, in response to the needs of professional mobility between countries, was setting up a syllabus based on functional and situational views of language. Both movements contributed strongly to the development of 'the communicative classroom'.

As the goals for ELT became more concerned with enabling learners to interact successfully with members of other societies, so the explorations of applied linguists into the components of communicative ability assumed increasing relevance and usefulness to the work of classroom teachers and materials designers. The key components, as identified by a number of researchers (for example, Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984; Bachman 1990), can be listed as: *linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and fluency*.

We will now explore these inasmuch as they provide insights into the goals and tasks for English language learners, and the issues which arise for teachers.

2.2 What are the components of communicative language ability?

2.2.1 *Linguistic competence*

Linguistic competence is concerned with knowledge of the language itself, its form and meaning. Stern (1983) includes these two aspects in his characterization of what it means to know a language:

The language user knows the rules governing his native language and he can 'apply' them without paying attention to them.
(Stern 1983: 342)

The native speaker has an intuitive grasp of the linguistic, cognitive, affective and sociocultural meanings expressed by language forms.
(*ibid.*: 343)

Thus linguistic competence involves a knowledge of spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure, and linguistic semantics. We can judge, then, that a learner who is able to list orally and in writing the objects in a bowl, such as an apple, an orange, two bananas, and a bunch of grapes, is developing the ability to select specific vocabulary and knows its pronunciation and graphic forms. A learner who can add prefixes correctly to 'perfect', 'legal', 'happy', 'pleasing', and 'audible' to make the negative equivalents, is developing competence in using word-formation rules correctly. A learner who can describe recent events by using 'have/has' and the past participle of the main verb is developing grammatical competence in forming the present perfect tense. In these various ways the learner is acquiring linguistic competence in the second language.

An important point for the teacher to note is that linguistic competence is an integral part of communicative competence. As Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson point out: 'It is impossible to conceive of a person being communicatively competent without being linguistically competent' (1984: 168). It has perhaps been a misconception about communicative language teaching that it does not aim for a high standard of formal correctness. On the contrary, it is not incompatible to have correctness in the use of rules as an ultimate goal and, at the same time, to tolerate risk-taking and error in the classroom as part of the process of achieving communicative competence.

The role of grammar or formal accuracy has been a major concern in ELT in recent years and teachers need to address a number of issues in designing courses and classroom activities for learners. Acquisition of grammar will probably involve explicit knowledge of grammatical concepts, categories, and rules, and teachers will need to decide which description of these to choose from those available. There is also the question of which procedures for raising awareness of language form and for practising it are most effective: this will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Perhaps the most difficult question to resolve has been how to achieve a balance between 'focused' or 'form-focused' classroom activities which aim at linguistic accuracy and 'unfocused' activities which involve learners in negotiation of meaning and aim at fluency. What might the most appropriate balance of these be in one lesson and to what extent will this be determined by the age, stage of learning, and existing proficiency level of learners? How can these two types of activity be integrated in a lesson or unit of materials? What should the organizing principle be? And how can focused and unfocused activities be balanced and integrated to form a coherent

language learning programme over a period of time? These are key issues in ELT and they will be addressed throughout this book.

2.2.2 *Pragmatic competence*

Pragmatic competence is generally considered to involve two kinds of ability. In part it means knowing how to use language in order to achieve certain communicative goals or intentions. This has also been called *illocutionary competence*. An example would be 'It's so hot today.' This statement could have a number of *illocutionary forces*. It might be a statement about the physical atmosphere, a request to open the window, or an attempt to elicit the offer of a cold drink.

Methodology now tries to ensure that learners are given realistic presentations of language in use and its communicative intentions, for example, the present progressive might be presented through a dialogue, such as:

Jack Hello, Anne, it's Jack here. Can I speak to Robert, please?

Anne Hi, Jack. Robert's working in the garage at the moment. Can I get him to call you back?

Jack Sure. Thanks.

Here is a typical situation in which reference is made to someone's actions at the time of speaking, one possible use of the present progressive. The presentation embeds the form in a *context of use*. This is in contrast to the technique many teachers were taught, myself among them, in the days of the structural approach to ELT, that of giving a running commentary while performing actions in the classroom, for example, 'I'm opening the window'; 'I'm closing the door'; 'I'm writing on the blackboard', and so on. Certainly the latter provided the form and its meaning, but the context of use was less than natural.

The present progressive, of course, has a number of functions, as the following examples demonstrate:

He's coming up the steps.

I'm leaving in five minutes.

Sally is always complaining.

The first, if said to one burglar by another on lookout at the window of a house, observing the progress of a policeman towards the scene of their crime, could function as a warning. The second, if said by a parent to dawdling children, could be a reprimand. The third might function as criticism. Students will appreciate, through comparison with their first language, that these pragmatic conditions of use are likely to apply in any

language. However, in recent years, the functional approach has attempted to show the varying functional use of language forms by using functions rather than structures as their organizing principle. Some coursebooks arrange content in units entitled, for example, 'Talking about recent events', 'Inviting', or 'Speculating about the future'. In this way, a particular structure such as the present progressive can be revisited in units entitled 'Talking about present actions' (for example, 'She's washing her hair'); 'Talking about the immediate future' (for example, 'They're moving house tomorrow'), or 'Describing current situations' (for example, 'The Prime Minister is trying to defuse the situation').

Thus, one element of pragmatic competence is knowing how to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly. In order for communication to be successful, however, spoken or written messages must also be appropriate to the social context in which they are produced. Learners need to know the appropriate social conventions.

If it is the case that one language form can express a variety of functions, the converse is also true. A function can often be expressed in a variety of ways. Take these two responses to a telephone request:

If you'd kindly wait a moment, I'll see if he's able to talk to you.
Hang on a minute, love, and I'll get him.

The first is highly formal and polite and might be said, for example, by a young clerk in a chamber of barristers to an elderly peer of the realm. On the other hand, the second is familiar, and might be said informally by one member of the family to another. The message is identical in both cases but the choice of vocabulary and structure depends on the setting, the relative status of the speakers, and their role-relationship. Some contemporary ELT coursebooks attempt to demonstrate this variation in style. For example, in the case of the set of requests presented in Materials extract 2.B, learners are encouraged to think about the conditions under which each phrase might occur. Through such activities learners build awareness of the relationship between language and the context of its use.

It can be seen, then, that social knowledge is necessary to select the language forms to use in different settings, and with people in different roles and with different status. This has also been called *sociolinguistic competence* (Bachman 1990). It can relate as much to non-verbal as to verbal communication. For example, a person accustomed in their own society to summon a waiter by clicking their fingers would meet with little success in many English-speaking cultures and would probably cause offence. It can also relate to knowing when to speak and when to be silent, or what to say in certain circumstances. Social small talk in some societies, but not in others, might allow guests at a party to ask what other people earn. Part of communicative

*Materials extract 2.B***1 Polite formulas**

Asking for permission is a type of request.
Grade the formulas below.

*	not very polite
**	polite
***	very polite
****	extremely polite

- Could I use your phone?
- Might I possibly use your phone?
- Sorry to trouble you, but do you mind if I use your phone?
- Would you mind if I used your phone?
- May I use your phone?
- I'll use your phone, OK?
- Can I use your phone?
- I wonder if I could use your phone.

(Viney and Viney: *Handshake SB*, page 68)

competence in a foreign language is knowing what is appropriate, what is incongruous, and what might cause offence.

In these ways, the sociolinguistic component of pragmatic competence enables a speaker to be 'contextually appropriate' or in Hymes's words, to know 'when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner' (1972: 277).

2.2.3 Discourse competence

Consider the following example. The teacher is asking her English class about the Great Storm of 1987 in Britain:

Teacher What did the hurricane do?

Of the responses, she commends Student D for a number of reasons.

Student A The hurricane uprooted the trees.

Student B The trees were uprooted.

Student C Hundreds of trees were uprooted by the hurricane.

Student D It uprooted hundreds of trees.

All of these responses are grammatically acceptable, but Students B and C put new information first, and as Widdowson (1978) points out, it is more normally the case in discourse that shared information (about the hurricane)

precedes new information (about its effects). Furthermore, Student D uses a reference item, 'It', as a cohesive device to relate the answer to the question and this fits in with the normal pattern of oral discourse. In this way, a unified spoken text is achieved.

Learners of English will need to become aware of how discourse works in terms of the common cohesive devices used in English. These can be demonstrated by working backwards in a conversation (Crystal and Davy 1969) between two speakers in which the final exchanges are:

- B Well, it feels healthier, doesn't it?
A Yes.
B And seems healthier ...
A Yes.
B The theory is that they distract each other ... but that's life, isn't it?

(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 102)

It is immediately apparent that this is taken from an ongoing conversation as the pronouns 'it', 'they', and 'each other' substitute for previous noun phrases or even whole situations described earlier in the conversation. The comparative 'healthier' used in a parallel structure shows both continuity of meaning and development of an earlier suggestion. Interpretation of the topic by a listener who came in at this point would be impossible. The exchanges preceding these give more clues but still the use of 'ones' has to be interpreted.

- B ... it still tends to be true that most of the best ones are single sex ...
A Mm ...
B As far as I can gather ... best in terms of ... you know ...
A Records to show ...
B Yes ...
[...]
A I can't see why because I'm convinced that mixed ones are the soundest ... I mean overall ... the soundest ...

(adapted from Crystal and Davy 1969: 101, 102)

A culturally aware listener, coming into the conversation here, might be able to interpret that the conversation is about schools, single sex and mixed ones, but many listeners would be lost if they had not heard the conversation from the beginning, where the mention of a single school starts the discussion.

This extract of authentic conversation between native speakers shows three other aspects of competence in conversational use of language: how to perform the turns in discourse; how to maintain the conversation, and how to develop the topic. Second language learners will need to acquire useful language for strategies such as initiating, entering, interrupting, checking,

and confirming in conversation. For example, they will need to learn the typical discourse markers which signal the direction of discourse such as 'By the way ...' (introducing an incidental remark); 'I'd like to take up an earlier point ...' (returning to consider an earlier argument), and 'That's all very well but ...' (challenging an argument).

Learners will also need to develop a similar kind of competence for written texts. For example, students reading technical English will have to follow the structure of different types of expository prose such as descriptions of processes, cause–effect analyses, and comparisons of systems. They will need to understand the relationships between the propositions of adjoining sentences and to interpret these relationships through formal devices, as in this example:

The population is ageing. That is to say, there is a higher percentage of people over the age of sixty than at any time previously this century.

Here, the second sentence is a reformulation of the proposition in the first and serves as an explanation. The connective 'That is to say' links the meaning of the two.

These various abilities needed to create coherent written texts or conversation, and to understand them, have together been termed *discourse competence* (Canale and Swain 1980; Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984), or *textual competence* (Bachman 1990).

2.2.4 Strategic competence

Canale and Swain define *strategic competence* as 'how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open' (1980: 25). Strategic competence consists of using *communication strategies*. These strategies come into play when learners are unable to express what they want to say because they lack the resources to do so successfully. They compensate for this either by changing their original intention or by searching for other means of expression. For example, in this conversation between a native speaker of English and a Swedish student, it is possible to see a number of strategies at work.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Student | Every summer we go for a for ... , you know, erm, ...
<i>fjorton dagar</i> , ... um ... fourteen days ... a for ... I
mean ... |
| Native speaker | Oh, a fortnight. |
| Student | Yes, a fortnight. We go for a fortnight to our summer
stuga. |
| Native speaker | What's that? |

Student It's a small house in the country. It has, you know, a garden around it ... [gestures a circle to show an area of surrounding land]

Native speaker Oh, like a cottage, a country cottage ...

The Swedish student only half remembers the word 'fortnight' and doesn't know the word 'cottage'. In the first instance of 'fortnight' she uses the Swedish word and then gives a literal translation of it, 'fourteen days'. She continues with the paraphrase 'two weeks'. At the same time, she invites co-operation from her listener through the implicit appeal for help in 'you know' and 'I mean'. In the second instance, 'cottage', she code-switches to Swedish first then paraphrases, assisted by gesture, and again appeals for help with 'you know'. In summary, all of her strategies could be termed *achievement strategies*. She perseveres with what she is trying to say and finds ways of compensating for her insecure or inadequate knowledge of English.

This student's efforts can be compared with an example from the classroom. A Spanish student has been asked to make statements of probability to practise 'She might have ...', 'She could have ...', and 'She must have ...' about a picture of a sombre, black clad woman. The student ventures:

It's a picture of a woman. She ... I think she ... I think she is at a funeral. Perhaps her son has died. She is very sad.

This might be called a *reduction strategy* as she avoids the forms of which she is uncertain and selects the 'perhaps' structure which she knows.

The above examples demonstrate a number of strategies. Accounts of others can be found in Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson (1984) and Ellis (1985). Clearly the advantages of using achievement strategies or taking risks with the language is that they keep the conversation going and may encourage the listener to provide the necessary language. Second language acquisition research suggests that the exposure of learners to language provided at a point of need and in a meaningful context which they have created for themselves in trying to express something is a good situation for acquisition.

The question arising is whether strategic competence can be trained. Certainly teachers can help students early in a language programme by teaching them appropriate questions for requesting help, for example 'What does this mean?' and 'How do you say ...?', and the language to ask for vocabulary items, for example 'What do you call a person who ...?' and 'What do you call a thing that ...?'. The teacher can also act as listener in classroom interaction and respond to students' appeals for help, providing language at the point of need. There is little in current ELT materials, however, to suggest that learners receive much help in how to deal with problems themselves as they try to express themselves in English. Strategy training is an issue which needs to be further addressed in ELT.

2.2.5 Fluency

The term 'fluency' relates to language production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation. Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson include fluency as a component of communicative competence and distinguish it from strategic competence in this way:

Whereas strategic competence presupposes a lack of [accessible] knowledge, fluency covers speakers' ability to make use of whatever linguistic and pragmatic competence they have (Faerch, Haastrup, and Phillipson 1984: 168).

They list three types of fluency:

- semantic fluency*: linking together propositions and speech acts
- lexical-syntactic fluency*: linking together syntactic constituents and words
- articulatory fluency*: linking together speech segments.
(*ibid.*: 143)

These types can be appreciated in the following extract from a conversation:

- A When will you be taking your driving test?
- B The day after my birthday.
- A And when's your birthday? Remind me.
- B September 27th.

The purpose of A's question is to find out the exact date of B's driving test so that she can send a good luck card. B's answer mistakenly assumes that A knows the date of his birthday. A therefore has to listen, assess that she does not get the information she wants, and formulate another question which will elicit more precise information from which she can deduce the date of the test. This ability to respond coherently within the turns of the conversation, to link the words and phrases of the questions, to pronounce the sounds clearly with appropriate stress and intonation, and to do all of this quickly, in what Johnson (1979) calls 'real time', is what constitutes fluency.

ELT has addressed the issue of how to develop fluency in various ways. Coursebooks in the 1970s often contained fluency drills, but these were aimed solely at increasing the learner's ability to link syntactic segments with ease. For example, the teacher would set up a chain drill and provide each student with a different prompt which they would have to insert in the correct syntactic position, as in:

- Students** I went to the theatre last night.
Teacher My aunt's house.
Student 1 I went to my aunt's house last night.
Teacher Visited.
Student 2 I visited my aunt's house last night.
Teacher Yesterday.

More recently, teachers have debated whether it is possible to teach gambits to help learners become more fluent, particularly learners who need to use English in their community or in their profession and who need to keep the attention of their listeners. We use gambits in a meeting when we want to hold the floor, for example, 'I'd just like to make another quick point'; to interrupt, for example 'Can I just come in here', or to respond, for example 'I agree with that in part but ...'.

The idea of teaching gambits fits well with insights from recent research into what Nattinger (1988) has called 'lexical phrases'. These are items of prefabricated language, learned holistically as chunks, and include not only phrases but clauses and sentences too, as in the examples above. Nattinger suggests that this kind of lexical learning plays a much stronger role in language learning than previously appreciated. The advantage of teaching lexical phrases is that, if they can be retrieved quickly from memory, they will help learners to produce the language more fluently.

Certainly, practice activities in spoken English will need to involve learners in interpreting and assessing the meaning of what they hear and constructing appropriate responses independently of language input from the teacher or textbook. This implies activities in which students will determine the content of what they say in interaction with other students.

2.3 What are the issues for the communicative curriculum?

Having considered those aspects of communicative language ability which have been defined and explored over recent years, the question then arises of how the ELT profession has responded to the significant implications for teaching and learning a language. A list of such implications could be formulated as in Table 2.1, though this list is by no means exhaustive and teachers might add to each category items which they feel are of especial importance for their own learners. The remaining sections of this chapter will take up the key implications from this list and others will be considered in the relevant chapters of this book.

Table 2.1: Significant implications of communicative language ability for teaching and learning

If communicative language ability consists of the following what does this imply for language learners?
Linguistic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to achieve accuracy in the grammatical forms of the language – to pronounce the forms accurately – to use stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning – to build a range of vocabulary – to learn the script and spelling rules – to achieve accuracy in syntax and word formation.
Pragmatic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to learn the relationship between grammatical forms and functions – to use stress and intonation to express attitude and emotion – to learn the scale of formality – to understand and use emotive tone – to use the pragmatic rules of language – to select language forms appropriate to topic, listener, etc.
Discourse competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to take longer turns, use discourse markers, and open and close conversations – to appreciate and be able to produce contextualized written texts in a variety of genres – to be able to use cohesive devices in reading and writing texts – to be able to cope with authentic texts.
Strategic competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to be able to take risks in using both spoken and written language – to use a range of communication strategies – to learn the language needed to engage in some of these strategies, e.g. 'What do you call a thing that/person who ...'.
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – to deal with the information gap of real discourse – to process language and respond appropriately with a degree of ease – to be able to respond with reasonable speed in 'real time'.