Communicative competence

**1: What is communicative competence?**

Communicative competence consists of a number of different sub-competences. These are: *Linguistic competence.* The nuts and bolts of the language - rules etc., How language and words are made up. *Discourse.* The structure of texts and sentences. *Pragmatic competence.* Using the right language in a certain context. *Strategic competence.* Using different strategies for conveying your message if you lack the vocabulary to do so. *Socio-cultural competence.* The knowledge of cultural norms in the country in question. *Fluency.* The automatization of communication.

(Hedge, 2000, pp. 46-56 & Johnson, 2001, pp. 31-33)

The sub-competences of each main competence are described below.

**Linguistic competence:**

Phonology is the sound of words and letters, morphology is the study of the forms of words, you use affixes to create word families, syntax is how you build sentences with the right word formation and correct order of words in a sentence, lexis is the form and meaning of words, how you understand words, and finally, orthography is a standardized system of writing - the collection of rules that lets us visually represent a language.

(Johnson, 2001, pp. 18-31)

**Discourse/text competence:**

Coherence and cohesion are important aspects of academic writing. Coherence is the overall connection of ideas from start to finish in a text. Cohesion is the connection you make from ideas at the sentence and the paragraph level. Cohesive writing will give the text a natural flow.

(Young-Kyung Min, undated, On coherence and cohesion)

**Pragmatic competence:**

Using language appropriate to a specific cultural and situational context. This means adapting your use of language appropriately to the situational context you are in (Hedge, 2000, pp.48-50). For instance, it would raise more than a few eyebrows if the priest at a funeral ceremony used profanity in his sermon.

**Strategic Competence:**

Communicating the message (e.g. “information gaps”, body language). This competence means being able to use other strategies, like body language, gestures or paraphrasing to convey the message if you lack the vocabulary to do so (Johnson, 2001, pp. 36-37).

**Socio-cultural or intercultural competence:**

Understanding cultural norms (e.g. politeness). This competence involves understanding the rules of use of a particular language. What is appropriate to say and what is not in a given situation (Johnson, 2001, pp. 31-33). We believe that the socio-cultural (intercultural) competence is somewhat similar to the pragmatic competence, in as much as they both cover the field of correct use of language in a given context. Where the socio-cultural competence differs from the pragmatic competence, is in the field of established social norms in a given country.

**Fluency:**

Fluency and strategic competence are opposites. A fluent English speaker has the ability to produce language without strain. To speak fluently one must master *semantic fluency*; linking together propositions and speech acts, *lexical-syntactic fluency*; linking together syntactic constituents and words, and *articulatory fluency*; linking together speech segments (Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1984, p. 143).