COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AS THE STRATEGY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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When we acquire our primary language, we do so by learning how to behave in situations, not by learning rules about what to say.
(Halliday)

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem por objetivo verificar em situações de ensino-aprendizagem o desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa dos alunos de língua inglesa e como o ensino da forma gramatical e/ou do uso comunicativo pode levar o aluno a comunicar-se adequadamente em diferentes situações de interação social. Assim, são abordados os seguintes aspectos: o conceito de competência comunicativa desenvolvido por Hymes (1972), a noção de funções da linguagem mencionadas por Halliday (apud NEVES, 1998), a distinção entre habilidades linguísticas e capacidades comunicativas apresentadas por Widdowson (1978) e o modelo de competência comunicativa siste-
matizado por Canale e Swain (apud RICHARDS; RENANDYA, 2002), que apresentam as competências subjacentes à proficiência da comunicação oral. Diante do que foi mencionado, o presente trabalho relata como o ensino da língua inglesa é abordado em sala de aula, com o intuito de levar o aluno ao desenvolvimento de sua competência comunicativa. Para isso, efetuou-se uma análise qualitativa de duas aulas de língua inglesa gravadas em áudio, seguidas de um relato de seus resultados para o ensino da comunicação oral.

**ABSTRACT**

This study aims at verifying in teaching-learning situations the development of English language students’ communicative competence and how teaching grammar and/or the communicative use can lead a student to communicate appropriately in different situations of social interaction. Therefore, the following aspects are discussed: the communicative competence concept developed by Hymes (1972), the language functions mentioned by Halliday (apud NEVES, 1998), the difference between linguistic skills and communicative abilities presented by Widdowson (1978) and the communicative competence model proposed by Canale and Swain (apud RICHARDS; RENANDYA, 2002) who discuss the competences underlying the speaking proficiency. On account of this, the study shows how the English language teaching is dealt in the classroom with the aim of leading the student to develop his communicative competence. To that end, a qualitative analysis of two audio-taped classes was made, which was followed by a report of their results on the teaching of oral communication.
INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a dissertation that proposed to verify the students’ communicative competence through the analysis of two audio-taped English language classes. This article presents and discusses only some excerpts of this analysis.

Foreign language (FL) teaching traditionally involves the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the globalized world where we live, it is noticed that speaking has become the most important skill: people want to learn the English language (EL) to communicate orally and as a result, they value the quality of the oral proficiency. Thus, the learner wants to develop his communicative competence in the EL; in other words, he wants to be able to communicate orally in different situations of real language use and produce different acts of communication, such as invitations, requests, acceptances, refusals, apologies, compliments, and so on. In fact, Hymes (1972) assumes that L2 learners need to know not only the linguistic knowledge, but also the culturally acceptable ways of interacting with others in different situations and relationships. A person who has all the qualities mentioned above can be considered a learner who has the communicative competence in a FL. Besides that, taking into account that the foreign language learning represents possibilities of acting in the world through the discourse, that is, people use the language to build the social world, themselves and the other people around them (BRASIL, 1998), the theme of this study is a result of worries about the quality of EL students’ oral production as a FL in real situations of interaction.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE CONCEPT

Hymes was among the first to understand the significance of communicative competence in language development. “He argued that the ability to speak competently not only entails knowing the grammar of a language, but also knowing what to say to whom, when, and in what circumstances” (apud SCARCELLA; OXFORD, 1992, p. 68).

Halliday (apud NEVES, 1998) points out the language functions. Function is the use to which a grammatical structure is put. Sentences in the imperative form may perform a variety of different functions like the examples adapted from RICHARDS; PLATT; PLATT, 1985:

- *Give me that pen.* (Order)
- *Pass the salt.* (Request)
- *Turn left at the corner.* (Instruction)
- *Try the smoked ham and potatoes.* (Suggestion)
- *Come round on Saturday.* (Invitation)

Widdowson (1978) also talks about teaching language as communication. He makes a distinction between linguistic skills and communicative abilities. Linguistic skills refer to the way in which the language system is manifested, as usage. Communicative abilities are defined with reference to the manner and mode in which the system is realized as use. For Widdowson (1978, p. 2), “when we acquire a language we do not only learn how to compose and comprehend correct sentences as isolated linguistic units of random occurrence; we also learn how to use sentences appropriately to achieve a communicative purpose”. When Widdowson points out activities
associated with spoken language, he uses three different terms, such as *speaking*, *saying* and *talking*. Look at this chart:

**LINGUISTIC SKILLS AND COMMUNICATIVE ABILITIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKING</th>
<th>SAYING</th>
<th>TALKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T: When’s your birthday? (Repeat)</td>
<td>T: When’s your birthday</td>
<td>T: When’s your birthday?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ss: When’s your birthday?</td>
<td>S: It’s July 22</td>
<td>S: It’s July 22. And yours?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from PLATERO, 2002.

*Speaking* refers to the manifestation of language as *usage* whereas *saying* and *talking* refer to the realization of language as *use* in spoken interaction.

Building on Hymes’ theory, Canale and Swain (apud RICHARDS; RENANDYA, 2002) propose that communicative competence includes the following competences: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic.

• Grammatical competence

It reflects knowledge of the linguistic code itself. It includes knowledge of vocabulary and rules of word formation, pronunciation, spelling, and sentence formation. For Scarcella and Oxford (1992, p. 75), “the optimum development of grammatical competence requires that grammar be presented in meaningful, authentic language contexts rather than in isolation.”

• Discourse competence

It is the ability to organize spoken and written texts meaningfully and appropriately and to apply the rules of cohesion and coherence. “It enables speakers to start a conversation by using appropriate greetings (Hi! How are you?) and keep a conversation going by using appropriate pause fillers (um, er, as I was saying)” (SCARCELLA; OXFORD, 1992, p. 72).

• Sociolinguistic competence

It enables learners to know when to say Can I have some water? versus Give me some water! according to the person they are talking to. “Such competence enables speakers to vary their language appropriately according to the addressee. It allows speakers to signal levels of politeness and formality and to establish their credibility” (SCARCELLA; OXFORD, 1992, p. 72).

• Strategic competence

It is the ability to overcome potential problems in interaction. For example: if a speaker wants to say ‘ferradura’ in English and he doesn’t know the English word, he can use a communication strategy and can say the things that horses wear under their feet and the listener can understand that he is talking about a horseshoe.
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO AUDIO-TAPED ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

ANALYSIS OF CLASS 1

• 7 students
• Basic Level
• Extension Course

In the excerpt below, the teacher starts a new unit. He presents the present continuous tense.

(1)

Prof.: (professor escrevendo na lousa) *present continuous* nós temos que entender o seguinte olha... como é do que é formado o tempo verbal e depois quais são as situações que a gente usa esse tempo verbal então veja primeiro a formação ((aluno bocejando)) o que que nós temos aqui que nós já conhecemos...

I am  you are he is she is it is we are you are they are

[  
AL: it is we are you are they are

Prof.: então esse é o presente do *verbo to be* não é

AL: uhn

Prof.: não é isso? e o que que apareceu diferente?

AL: o ING

[  
AL: ING
Prof.: o ING do verbo principal então olha são dois verbos chamado tempo composto quando você diz *I'm working* eu estou trabalhando mas são dois verbos para dar uma terceira ideia por isso que se chama tempos compostos... entenderam isso aqui agora então olha presente do verbo *to be* e o verbo que você quiser conjugar você toma o verbo e coloca o quê?

AL: ING

Prof.: então essa forma do ING é chamado gerúndio é o verbo... no gerúndio está certo? então E.... aqui está escrito *I'm working* como é que você me diria eu estou estudando

AL2: éh:: *I'm... studying*

Prof.: *I'm studying* eu estou bebendo cerveja

AL2: *I'm... drinking beer*

Prof.: *I'm drinking beer*

AL2: *beer*

Prof.: eu estou comendo um sanduíche

AL2: *I'm éh:....*

Prof.: *I'm..*

AL2: *I am*

Prof.: como que é o verbo comer?

AL6: *eat /et/

Prof.: *eat /iyt/ eat /iyt/

[ *

AL2: *eat eat /iyt/

Prof.: então a estrutura toda
AL2: *I am eating* éh:: a sandwich

Prof.: a sandwich na verdade o que que eu estou fazendo A...eu estou conjun-gando o verbo *to be* não é isso oh *I am working you are working he is working she is working* certo G. dúvida nisso? então veja nessa nessa lição nessa unidade *a new apartment*... leia o enunciado pra mim o.... J.

We can see in the excerpt presented that the teacher has the concept that first the language structures should be worked. Then the use of language in appropriate situations should be understood. Read this part below:

(2)

Prof.: ((professor escrevendo na lousa)) present continuous nós temos que entender o seguinte olha... como é do que é formado o tempo verbal e depois quais são as situações que a gente usa esse tempo verbal então veja primeiro a formação ((aluno bocejando)) o que que nós temos aqui que nós já conhecemos... *I am you are he is she is it is we are you are they are*

However, the drills that are used to practice the structures don’t show the use of language in appropriate situations. For example:

(3)

Prof.: então essa forma do ING é chamado gerúndio é o verbo... no gerúndio está certo? então E.... aqui está escrito *I’m working* como é que você me diria eu estou estudando

AL2: éh:: *I’m... studying*

Prof.: *I’m studying* eu estou bebendo cerveja

AL2: *I’m... drinking beer*

Prof.: *I’m drinking beer*

AL2: *beer*
Prof.: eu estou comendo um sanduíche

AL2: *I’m* êh::....

Prof.: *I’m*.

AL2: *I am*

Prof.: como que é o verbo comer?

AL6: *eat* /et/

Prof.: *eat* /iyt/ *eat* /iyt/

[ ]

AL2: *eat* eat /iyt/

Prof.: então a estrutura toda

AL2: *I am eating* êh:: *a sandwich*

Prof.: *a sandwich* na verdade o que que eu estou fazendo A....eu estou conjungando o verbo *to be* não é isso oh *I am working you are working he is working she is working* certo G. dúvida nisso? então veja nessa nessa lição nessa unidade *a new apartment*... leia o enunciado pra mim o.... J.

This drill doesn’t fulfill a communicative function. We have a series of responses to a verbal cue but these responses are not replies in any normal sense. The students “are demonstrating their knowledge of usage by manipulating the sentence pattern but they are not doing so for any other purpose” (WIDDOWSON, 1978, p. 5).

It seems to me that an over-concentration on usage may often have the effect of putting the language being learned at a remove from the learner’s own experience of language. [...] By focusing on usage, therefore, the language teacher directs the attention of the learner to those features of performance which normal use of language requires him to ignore. (WIDDOWSON, 1978, p. 17)
According to Widdowson (1978), knowing a language means knowing what signification sentences have as instances of usage and what value they take on as instances of use.

The term signification is used to refer to the meaning that sentences have in isolation from a linguistic context or from a particular situation in which the sentence is produced. This is distinguished from what is called value, and this is defined as the meaning that sentences take on when they are put to use in order to perform different acts of communication. These different acts of communication depend on the contextual and/or situational circumstances in which the sentence is used. For instance:

*The boy is wearing a white t-shirt and black pants.*

This sentence in the present continuous tense might take on the value of part of a description (a boy that is lost in an amusement park), or some other act of communication.

In class 1, the English language was presented to the learner as a number of sentence patterns and words produced by the linguistic skills. The focus was on the linguistic skill (SPEAK) instead of on the communicative abilities (SAY/TALK).

**ANALYSIS OF CLASS 2**

- 15 students
- Intermediate level
- *Letras* Course

In class 2, the lesson is about the students’ next vacation and they are supposed to use *will* and *be going to*. Read the excerpt below:
Prof.: how are you?

AL: fine (vozes indistintas)

Prof.: let’s start?

AL1: no:

AL2: yes

Prof.: no

Prof.: ah:: last class you were answering some... ah:: questions... when you decided to leave yes do you remember? hi

AL3: hi

Prof.: ah:: exercise three page twenty-nine... I asked you to finish them at home do you remember?

AL1: yes

Prof.: yes?

Prof.: have you finished it?... yes or no class? (ruído)

AL2: (what?)

Prof.: exercise three page twenty-nine... have you answered the questions at home?

AL1: no::

AL2: no

Prof.: no?

AL3: b or letter d?
Prof.: b
AL3: b?
Prof.: b
AL3.: yes but... no:
AL2: can I do it in five minutes?
Prof.: ok so I’m going to give you some time ah:: to finish answering the questions ok?
it is letter b page twenty–nine... do you remember? you have to think about your next
vacation ok? and answer the questions... if you are SURE what are you going to use?
AL2: I’m going to
AL1: I going to
[  
AL3: I’m going to
[  
Prof.: GOING TO if you are NOT so sure you are going to use?
AL: WILL ((vozes indistintas))
Prof.: will all right

Then an activity is done in groups and it aims at using the future
to talk about the students’ next vacation.

(5)

Prof.: your answers too ok? because I’m not going to check them no you are going
to check in the groups ((vozes incompreensíveis)) I want to listen to you speaking
English ((ruído)) English ((professor andando pela sala, auxiliando os alunos nas
atividades)) ((vozes incompreensíveis)) ((alunos trabalhando em grupos))
AL3: M. when I use probably I need to put... will first or after the word probably?

Prof.: where is the sheet of paper I gave you last class?... were you here?

AL3: (yes)

Prof.: yes I think so... probably position take a look

AL3: ai probably probably first but this is a rule?

Prof.: yes this is a rule you have to follow the rules... are you talking about will... not won’t or only will?

AL3: will (G. put) will

Prof.: ok read the sentence

AL7: yes my girlfriend will probably travel with me

Prof.: yes ah:: you don’t have to write this yes... ok? ah:: ok no that’s ok then you are going to talk about it

AL3: não but people talk my girlfriend WILL probably NOT probably WILL

[ ]

AL7: will probably

Prof.: ok so look here

AL3: it’s right or wrong?

Prof.: it’s right look here to talk about probability so “I will probably play tennis my girlfriend will probably go with me” all right?

AL3: ah ok

AL: M.

Prof.: because this is affirmative sentence... all right?

AL6: nowhere... nowhere ((ruído))
Prof.: *it depends on what you are going to say*

AL6: (     ) *I'm going nowhere*

Prof.: *I'm going nowhere... and what about I'm not going?*

AL6: (     ) *eu não vou*

Prof.: *ok complete the sentences I'm not going*

AL6: *I'm not going nowhere*

Prof.: *ANYwhere*

AL6: (     ) *ANYWHERE?*

Prof.: *because you have not* ((vozes incompreensíveis))

AL1: *ah... não pera aí quando eu ... I'm going...*

AL3: *I'm going nowhere agora se você falar ( ) anywhere*

[   ]

Prof.: *  anywhere*

AL3: *você tem que trocar*

Prof.: *yes any éh... any negative sentence*

AL6: *pensei que eu tivesse falado ( )*

Prof.: *no your sentence was correct... ok class*

AL2.: *ok teacher*

This activity in groups provides an appropriate communicative function in a specific situation, that is, the students are using the language in a real situation of interaction because they don’t know what the other students are going to do or will do on their next vacation. Therefore, the activity offers an example of an act of communication.
Besides, the knowledge of linguistic rules (the difference between anywhere and nowhere and the position of the adverb probably) is being learned by students through the use of the language to achieve a communicative purpose.

In this English language class, the teacher emphasizes the communicative abilities through an interactional relationship that allows the student to be an interlocutor of the discourse when he interacts with other students, starts the interaction and participates actively in the teaching-learning process.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of the study demonstrated two different views on the English language teaching:

- one view based on the production of linguistic units in isolation from real language use (Class 1);
- and another based on an integrated focus that demonstrates ability to use knowledge of linguistic rules to communicate effectively (Class 2).

Taking into account that learning language as communication focuses on linguistic skills and communicative abilities, the analysis of class 2 showed the integration of them: students had more opportunities to interact with the teacher and with other students, negotiate in the EL, and participate in the activities.

Thus, communicative competence, as the strategy in the English language teaching, helps learners during their negotiation of meanings and their linguistic competence development, stimulates classroom interaction, and leads them to acquire language experience as communication.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


