

## Strategies for Developing Communicative Competence in English As A Second Language (ESL) Situation

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**Abstract:** In recent years, there has been a change of emphasis from presenting language as a set of forms which has to be learned and practiced to presenting language as a functional system which is used essentially to fulfill communicative purposes. There are even views that the essence of English teaching is communication. Accordingly, developing the communicative competence of ESL learner is the initial and ultimate goal of English teaching in Nigeria. Nevertheless, success in a language means more than just scoring high in an intelligence test. It involves turning ones considerable dormant grammatical competence into a real practical mastery of the language by using it effectively and appropriately in everyday activities like shopping, collecting water, discussing issues, apologizing to someone, expressing an opinion, asking for direction, buying items from the market and going to the post office. Communicative competence in English requires both linguistic and pragmatic competence because speech acts cannot be built as independent of their socio-cultural setting since the same speech act may vary in meaning in different contexts.

**Key words:** ESL • English Language • Communication and English Teaching

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### INTRODUCTION

In developing communicative competence in the English language, the user must not only know the language but must possess the ability to handle linguistic variations and the various uses of the language in the context [1]. Hence, it encompasses a much wider range of abilities than the homogenous linguistic competence of the Chomskyan tradition. In view of this, Adejare states that the sociocultural context of Nigeria should define communicative competence for Nigerians [2]. In other words, the ESL learner should know when to speak and when not, what to talk about, with whom, when, where and in what manner [3]. However, the crux of the matter in this study is to find out those strategies, techniques or guidelines that will aid the ESL learner in the development of communicative competence both under formal and informal situations and instructions [4].

**The Place of English in Nigeria:** The position of the English Language in Nigeria has remained unchallenged among other indigenous languages; it is recognized, predominantly, as the second language. However, as the official language in Nigeria, English has come to be seen probably as the country's most important language

because it is the language of the government, law, bureaucracy, banking, education, mass media and most of the inter-ethnic communication [5]. And adequate knowledge of English is an indispensable requirement for anymore to rise above or to live in any wider context than the village. As a second language, its acquisition makes the Nigerian user either bilingual or multilingual. This bilingualism in a native Nigeria language and English, in turn, result in mutual interference between the two languages in contact. In spite of this a great majority of Nigerians encounter the English Language only in a formal classroom situations, this makes communicative competence a difficult task [6]. Consequently, the variety of English available to average Nigeria is the literary and formal one which he puts to use for all occasions, even when his need in English goes beyond situations that require this variety. Nevertheless, Nigerians have evolved their own dialect (Nigerian English) which has its distinct and probably unique characteristics as a result of the mode of acquisition and the socio-cultural setting in which it is now used. According to Achebe [7],

Nigeria English is a language belonging to Nigerians but still in Communication with its ancestral home (England) .....altered to suit its New African surrounding.

It should be pointed out at this juncture that Nigerian English is the pidginized form of English but the English language as it is used by the native speaks with its peculiar semantic, phonological, lexical and grammatical deviations [8]. However, the standard form, as used in this study, is the form used by the educated and enlightened members of the society. This form is very close to the English spoken and written by the native users themselves. As an ideal, standard British English or International English cannot be perfectly realized, the Nigerian user, therefore, substitutes the nearest equivalent in the linguistic markers for SBE non-occurring features and symbols. For instance, the Nigerian English morphology shows some differences when compared with the native English. We have furnitures, homeworks and equipments NE but in British English (BE); these nouns are treated as mass and not countable nouns. Lexical variations between the two varieties could be found in the following words:

**Words:**

NE	SBE
Housegirl	Housemaid
Go-slow	Traffic-jam
Watchnight	Watchman
Parlour Living	Sitting room
Head-tie	Head-scarf

However, in the educational sector, the British dialect has remained the ideal being sought after even though it is hardly attained as ascertained by most scholars. There is no question, currently, about the failure of the Nigerian users to communicate effectively in English. In view of this, Mohammed, in his assessment of the Senior Secondary School Syllabus after an appropriate recognition of the unique place of English in Nigeria education, laments that students' proficiency in English as measured by WAEC examinations seems to be declining rapidly, particularly since the failure rate in the last five years has been in the region of 70-75% annually, which is very disturbing and unacceptable [9].

It is therefore, pertinent that any ESL learner who seeks mutual intelligibility beyond the Nigerian environment should become bidialectal. In other words, such a learner should possess both the local and the standardized dialects. The linguistic situation with him, as stated by Adetugbo approximates a diglossic situation in Fishmans's terminology [10]. While SBE satisfies the academic purposes, NE fulfills communicative purpose

within the context of usage. Nevertheless, some linguists have continued to argue that Nigerians should be worried about communicative competence within the ambient of our own immediate environment before we set a too high a goal of international intelligibility or acceptability. The question is, if we set our goal only on developing communicative competence in English as used in the Nigeria sociocultural setting, what will the fate of the ESL user if he finds himself in a wider community.

**Linguistic Competence:** The term, competence as postulated by Chomsky is used to indicate that, underlying the concrete behaviour or performance of the language user, there is an abstract rule system of knowledge and the user uses the rule that governs his language without having any detailed awareness of the underlying system. The underlying knowledge of the grammar of the language by the native speaker is his linguistic competence [11]. Huddleston describes it as the innate linguistic knowledge of the native speaker-listener. He goes further to say that the speaker-listener is competent in the language if he has internalized the rules of the language. Consequently, he is able to create an infinite number of sentence, guided by the innate rules. Furthermore, he can judge a sentence as grammatical or ungrammatical. Affirming this, Lamidi says that in language acquisition, a three-year old child who is a native speaker of a language can be a linguistic adult if he is able to produce and understand any sentence in his language [12]. Nevertheless, for this linguistic adult, it has been discovered that linguistic competence is one thing (as in the case of many Nigeria ESL learners) while his ability to communicate effectively is another. When he speaks or writes, he is usually constrained by such extra-linguistic factors like money failure, distractions, self-corrections, deviations from the rule of grammar, stage fright, false starts, change of course; from the original speech plan, etc. However, Yule says that an ideal second language learner should be able to use the language naturally in communicative situations. It is believed that this is the goal sought by second language learners, to be practical and effective users of English [13].

**Communicative Competence: Meaning and Origin:** Communicative competence is a concept commonly used among linguists, applied linguists and language methodologists. It is a very crucial term in second language teaching and learning. It came as a reaction against what other linguists regard as the inadequacy of linguistic competence which was proposed by Naom

Chomsky. In 1965, Chomsky tried to distinguish between competence (a speaker's intuitive knowledge of the rules of his native language) and performance (what he actually produced by applying these rules). According to him, the native speaker knows intuitively which sentences are grammatical and which are not. This natural ability is as a result of his linguistic competence which is the natural knowledge of the grammatical rules. However, Hymes considered Chomsky's monolithic, idealized notion of linguistic competence inadequate and he introduced the broader, more elaborated and extensive concept of communicative competence which embraces not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence. Campbell and Wales point out that Chomsky's competence omitted the most important linguistic ability; to produce or understand utterance which is not so much grammatical but, more important, appropriate to the context in which they are made. By context, they mean both the situational and verbal context of the utterance [14]. Cumperz and Halliday were also opposed to Chomsky's view on the grounds of the narrowness of his linguistic competence. Hymes, in particular, questioned what else the native speaker has apart from linguistic competence? They, therefore, proposed that the Chomskyan notion of competence should be extended beyond purely grammatical competence to include a more general communicative ability. Language, according to them, does not occur in isolation as Chomsky seems to suggest, but in a social context, reflecting social rather than linguistic purposes. In view of this, Hymes state that a child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate to the context in which they are made. He suggests that the child knows when and when not to speak, what to talk about, with whom, when, where and in what manner [15]. In view of this, Radford makes the following assertion:

We are not only interested in the grammatical competence of the ESL learner but also his pragmatic competence to the extent that both written and spoke forms of the target language reflect his competence.

However, since its introduction, communicative competence has been variously defined by many authors. According to Yule, it is the ability to use the L2 accurately, appropriately and flexibly [16]. Paulston defines it as knowledge of the rules of understanding and producing the referential and social meaning of language. Williams refers to it as the ability to use language in its sociocultural, interpersonal aspects, beyond the sentence, that is the discourse level. Furthermore, Campbell and Wells state that flexibility in L2 use is a key element in

communicative success. In essence, it helps the learner if malleable enough to overcome potential communication problems during interaction even though, he needs adequate knowledge of the educated spoken English to perform this function effectively. Furthermore, Canale and Swain classify communicative competence into the following principle strands. They include:

- Grammatical Competence
- Sociolinguistic Competence
- Discourse Competence

**Strategic Competence:** Grammatical competence means the acquisition of phonological, morphological semantic and syntactic rules and orthography. Today, it is usually called linguistic competence. Concentration on grammatical competence alone as Yule explains will not provide the learner with the ability to interpret or produce words appropriately.

Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the culture, register, dialect, accent and interaction skills of the target language. This enables the learner to know when to say, according to context, "Can I have your pen?" Hence, this is the ability to produce and understand utterance which is appropriate to the context in which they are uttered [17].

Discourse Competence is the knowledge of the rules regarding the grammatical links and appropriate combination of communicative functions of various types of discourse. Canale and Swain emphasize that sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse. Canale and Swain emphasized that sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse are crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when the literal meaning of an utterance does not lead to the speaker's intention easily. Strategic competence is the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to communicate effectively. These strategies compensate for breakdowns such as self-correction and at the same time, enhance the effectiveness of communication such as recognizing discourse structure, activating background knowledge, contextual guessing and tolerating ambiguity. From the foregoing, one would deduce that communicative competence in ESL is the ability of ESL user to use the target language in such a way that depicts mastery of its grammar, syntax and the recognition of the socio-cultural norms and social context in language use and the recognition of the socio-cultural norms and social context in language use and the ability to effectively use language strategies in communication. However, apart from the

strategies we are going to present in this study, research has also shown that communicative competence in ESL can be achieved through communicative language teaching [18].

**Strategies for Developing Communicative Competence in an English as a Second Language Situation:** Strategies, as used in this study, are those techniques, ‘tricks’ which ESL learners can either learn, create or use in order to achieve their goal or desired outcome. According to Ellis L2 learners use these strategies to compensate for their inadequate L2 knowledge. However, in this study, the following are suggested:

**Oral Conversation:** This involves interaction with friend especially fellow bilinguals or native speakers through oral conversation. Communication, which is best achieved in interactions in a friendly atmosphere, helps the ESL learner to think in the target language and talk in a natural, comprehensible and communicative way.

**Storytelling:** This is another way of developing communicative competence because it helps the ESL learner to use language extensively. The speaker shows his ability to communicate effectively. The speaker shows his ability to communicate effectively by using appropriate words and phrases to distinguish characters in the story being narrated.

**Drama:** Spoken proficiency can be acquired by performing a drama. It helps the ESL learner to develop his communicative skills; to create and use language effectively. Where the lines of play are forgotten, he improvises, thereby, showing his linguistic competence.

**Composition Writing:** This is another exercise that promotes communicative competence in English. It combines the skills of reading for exact information and the skill of using the information to organize a coherent text.

**Role-Playing:** Role-play is a game in the target language in which the ESL learners can act out the parts that have been assigned to them in well defined situations. Learners are encouraged to use their knowledge and imagination in process of constructing dialogues.

**Dialogue:** They are intended to be a representation of actual speech encounters in the real world Ideally they are an effective means of practicing the normal give and take in conversation.

**Using Language Acquisition Videos and Other Visual and Audiovisual Aids:** Watching and listening to native speakers during the CNN and BBC news casting on television and radio, watching life events in English films and practicing what has been heard and learnt, aids the ESL learner in developing vocabulary on everyday activities which eventually improves his communicative competence in English. Panscofar, a speech-language pathologist suggests that the use of language acquisition videos is a fun and interesting way to encourage and facilitate second language growth and communicative competence especially in children whether they are yet to talk or already forming words since these engaging videos encourage imitation by using animals, objects and activities that children love. Also, the video series target the basic language skills that will help to give the children a laudable foundation in ESL. They also teach and reinforce the skills of identifying, labeling, imitating and vocalization.

**Consistent Reading and Language Games:** Communicative competence can also be acquired through the reading of books, newspapers and magazines and using language games like the puzzles.

S	B	A	D	
H	O	U	S	E
O	A	U	T	A
W	R	O	N	R
	D	O	G	S

**Asking Questions for Clarification and Cooperation:** The ESL learner asks the speaker to repeat or explain already made statement for clarification purposes. By this, he goes into an interactional dialogue with the speaker who could be either a native speaker or his fellow bilingual and this helps him to develop communicative competence in English.

**Repetition:** The act of repeating continuously what the native speaker says or teaches is another communicative exercise which helps the ESL learner to develop his communicative competence.

**Engaging in Internal Monologue:** This involves the art of talking to oneself which the ESL learner does in the target language to enhance his communicative competence. It could be the recitation of a poem, a piece of writing or self-constructed speech.

### **Achieving Communicative Competence in ESL Through Communicative Language Teaching:**

Applied linguists and other language specialists have identified a peculiar means of helping the ESL learner to develop communicative language teaching. This is an approach to foreign or second language teaching. This is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes the goal of language learning as communicative competence. Richard states that this approach was developed by the British applied linguists as a reaction away from the grammar-based approaches such as the aural-oral approach. Hence, communicative approach was aimed at plunging the L2 learner straight into communicative tasks. To achieve this, the ESL teacher steps out of his traditional didactic and dominant role to co-operate with the learner in joint interpretation of ideas, shared expressions and cooperative negotiations. Classroom activities are task-based and teaching content is based on communication. In fact, there is purposeful language learning and fluency is the target. The teacher integrates all the available strategies and materials to help the target. The teacher integrates all the available strategies and materials to help the learners achieve their goal, which is a practical command of English Language [19, 20, 21 and 22].

Furthermore, Williams suggests a two-stage method in helping the ESL learner to achieve communicative competence. The stages as stated by Osakwe include:

- Pre-communicative activity stage
- Communicative activity stage
- The Pre-communicative Activity Stage

In this stage, the learner is placed in a situation where he is drilled in the structure of the language because he cannot develop communicative competence without the mastery of the basic language structures.

### **The Communicative Activity Stage or the Deep End Strategy:**

In this stage, the learner is plunged straight into communicative tasks. The communicative approach used, involves the ability of the learner to search for circumlocutions when the appropriate language item is not known. It also involves the ability of the ESL learner to search his memory for language items learned long ago or half learned and to muster imperfect linguistic resources to a communicative end continuous exercise in the language helps the learner to correct his imperfections.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, the different strategies or measures that would help the ESL learner achieve communicative competence in English have been identified. The ESL learner will improve in this functional or communicative use of English both at the local and international level if the suggestion in this study are adopted and put into constant use.

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