

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STYLES OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Boyet L. Batang, Ph.D.

Associate Professor IV,
Department of Secondary Education
College of Teacher Education,
Isabela State University, Cabagan, Isabela, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at exploring the possible relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning styles of prospective teachers of English. Results of the study on overall competence show test results that the prospective teachers of English are fairly competent users of English with a total mean of 23.97 with standard deviation of 5.44. In terms of their language learning styles, results of the study also show that their style of orientation belonged to sensory orientation scale with a frequency of 39 or 69%. Correlation analysis, however, shows the insignificant relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning styles of prospective teachers of English. This indicates that the language learning style has no bearing on the level of communicative competence of prospective teachers of English. Therefore, it is recommended that experiences in actual school environments for prospective teachers of English should also be enhanced in addition to a series of courses that will develop language learning style and communicative competence of prospective teachers of English.

Keywords: Communicative competence, language learning style, prospective teachers of English, language performance.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most popular words in the 20th century is “communication”. This has a great influence in the language teaching world not only because of its high frequency appearance in the research world but also because of its essential meaning that represents the gradual globalization in the past century. Since Hymes, a linguistic anthropologist proposed the concept of “communicative competence”, Chomsky’s scope of linguistic theory confronted an attack of breaking Chomskyian’s idealism. For Chomsky, he focuses his attention on the rules of language for a generative grammar.

However, for Dell Hymes, his concern is not only on grammatical possibilities in a language, but on feasibility and appropriateness as well (Spolsky, 1989; Grenfell & Harris 1999 cited in Xin 2007). In like manner, once the communicative competence approach embarks on the academic and pedagogic world, many linguists enrich the contents and features of communicative competence. After Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) are the representatives who have developed and extended the notion of communicative competence, which attempts to include all these dimensions: the grammatical, the social and psychological (Xin, 2007). However, these are not just some developments in linguistic theory, but an impetus to establishing a concept of language learning and teaching.

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed their own theory of communicative competence that minimally includes four main competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Grammatical competence includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence, grammar semantics and phonology. They pointed out that grammatical competence would be an important concern for any communicative approach whose goals include providing learners with knowledge of how to determine and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances. Sociolinguistic competence is made up of two sets of rules: sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse.

Discourse competence refers to the interpretation of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text. Further, they believe that knowledge of these rules would be crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when there is a level of transparency between the literal meaning of an utterance and the speaker’s intention. Finally, strategic competence is made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient grammatical competence as to how to help students acquire communicative competence in the classroom.

On the other hand, learning style is inherent and pervasive (Willing, 1988) and is a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements (Ehrman and Oxford, 1988). Language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how-and-how well our students learn a second or foreign language. A second language is a language studied in a setting where the language is the main vehicle of everyday communication and where abundant input exists in that language.

According to Oxford (1990b), the term learning style is used to encompass four aspects of the person: cognitive, which are preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning; patterns of attitudes and interests that affect what an individual will pay most attention to in a learning situation; a tendency to use certain learning situation; a tendency to seek situations compatible with one’s own learning patterns; and a tendency to use learning strategies and avoid others.

With the foregoing premises, this paper is aimed to explore the possible relationship of the level of the communicative competence and the language learning styles of prospective teachers of English.

Specifically, it attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of communicative competence of prospective teachers of English as measured through the following variables?
 - 1.1 Linguistic
 - 1.2 Discourse
 - 1.3 Sociolinguistic
 - 1.4 Strategic

2. What are the language learning styles of prospective teachers of English?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning styles of prospective teachers of English?

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The present study made use of a survey research design. Data of the study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively using correlation technique, multiple regression, percentages, mean score, average, and standard deviation. This study also made use of standardized tests for the language learning style (Oxford, 1990b) and the communicative competence (Danao, 1987).

A total of 56 prospective teachers of English consisting of 31 junior Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) English majors and 25 senior Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) English majors were drawn purposively from the College of Teacher Education of the Isabela State University from the cluster campuses of Cabagan, Echague, and Cauayan, Isabela, Philippines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

As gleaned in Table 1, it is unfortunate to note that three from the four criteria components of communicative competence revealed that prospective teachers of English are fairly competent users of English. Therefore, saying, that they are not communicatively competent. Results of the present study further showed that in terms of Linguistic Competence, prospective teachers of English obtained a fairly level competence with a mean of 30.64 with a standard deviation of 7.15 followed by a mean of 30.43 with a standard deviation of 8.11 under Discourse Competence. This time prospective teachers of English obtained a competent level of competence. Criterion 3, on the other hand, on Sociolinguistic competence show that prospective teachers of English obtained a fair level of competence. Similarly, prospective teachers of English scored fairly on Strategic Competence performance. As a whole, as earlier mentioned, the overall performance of prospective teachers of English of the Isabela State University obtained a fair level of competence.

Table 1: Level of communicative competence of prospective teachers of English

Criteria	M(SD)	Interpretation
1. Linguistic Competence	30.64 (7.15)	Fairly Competent
2. Discourse Competence	30.43 (8.11)	Competent
3. Sociolinguistic Competence	25.82 (5.44)	Fairly Competent
4. Strategic Competence	9.00 (1.06)	Fairly Competent
Over all	23.97(5.44)	Fairly Competent

This implies therefore, that the quality of language teaching instruction the prospective teachers of English receive depends largely upon the skill and competence of teachers. Hence, any attempt to solve the incompetence of the pre-service in Isabela State University must start with the in-service teachers.

Table 2 shows the language learning styles prospective teachers of English. Results of the study show that in terms of sensory language learning style, the third year student-respondents of Echague campus obtained 9 or 16.1% while the third year student-respondents of Cabagan campus obtained 6 or 10.7%. In terms of combination or over all orientation style, the third student-respondents of Echague main campus got 2 or 3.6%.

The results of the study shows that the from among the language learning styles being used by the prospective teachers of English, sensory language learning style obtained the highest with a frequency of 39 or 69.6%. This goes to show that prospective teachers of English remember things better if they write down. It brings very important variables to the forefront of language learning and can contribute significantly to the construction of a unified theory of language learning (Brown, 1994).

Table 2: Language learning styles of prospective teachers of English

LANGUAGE LEARNING STYLES	ISABELA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF TEACHER EDUCATION												F	%
	Cabagan				Echague				Cauayan					
	3 rd Year		4 th Year		3 rd Year		4 th Year		3 rd Year		4 th Year			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Sensory	6	10.7	6	10.7	9	16.1	3	5.4	7	12.5	8	14.3	39	69.6
Ideas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.8	1	1.8	2	3.6
Overall	1	1.8	-	-	1	1.8	-	-	1	1.8	-	-	3	5.4
Combination	1	1.8	2	3.6	2	3.6	4	7.1	2	3.6	1	1.8	12	21.4
Total	8	14.3	8	14.3	12	21.5	7	12.5	11	19.7	10	17.9	56	100

Note: F-frequency, % - percentage

Learning a second language is similarly viewed by language proponents as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions. Canale and Swain (1980) present four dimensions of communicative competence: Linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale, 1983). The theory of communicative competence is an issue for discussion among the language teachers in the world.

Relative to the results of the study presented above, Fatt and Kasper (1983) in their study examining the vital role of higher education in developing communicative competence in university students, concluded that as English is taught, university graduates are supposed to be structurally competent. However, most of them soon find themselves communicatively incompetent when they enter the job market. A communicative approach based on communicative and linguistic criteria is proposed to bring language learning closer to the needs of the industry.

Table 3 shows insignificant relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning styles of prospective teachers of English. This asserts that the language learning style has no bearing on the level of communicative competence of prospective teachers of English.

Table 3. Relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning style of prospective teachers of English.

Components	r-value	Inference
Linguistic	-.134	Insignificant
Discourse	-.092	Insignificant
Sociolinguistic	-.099	Insignificant
Strategic	.072	Insignificant

The null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the level of communicative competence and language learning styles is accepted. The results of the present study contradicted the findings of Reid (1987) that in the language classroom, learners rarely report using cooperative behaviors (behaviors that one would infer to reflect a cooperative style).

However, this finding might well be related to instructional methodologies that often preclude cooperation and foster competition.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. That style orientation shows that the prospective teachers belonged to sensory orientation scale with learning styles mediating between emotion and cognition. The present study supported the findings of Dela Cruz (2000) that almost half of the prospective teachers were sensory-visual oriented;
2. That the level of communicative competence of prospective teachers of English was fair with a total mean score of 23.97 and standard deviation of 5.44
3. That there is no significant difference between the level of communicative competence and language learning style of prospective teachers of English.

Thus, since the language learning style has no bearing on the communicative competence of prospective teachers of English, experiences in actual school environments for prospective teachers of English should be enhanced in addition to a series of courses that will develop their communicative competence and language learning style.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Bachman, L.F. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [2] Brown, D.H. (1994). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Prentice Hall Regents, Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.
- [3] Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In Jack C. Richards & Richard W. Schmidt (eds.) *Language and Communication*. Longman, London.
- [4] Canale, M. and Swain M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative competence to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1 (1), USA.
- [5] Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- [6] Danao, N. D. (1987). *A Communicative Test for College Students*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Ateneo De Manila University-Philippine Normal University-De La Salle University Consortium.
- [7] Dela Cruz, N. C. (2000). *Language learning strategies, learning styles and English performance of first year college students*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Leyte Normal University, Philippines.
- [8] Ehrman, M. and Oxford R. (1988). Ants and grasshoppers, badgers and butterflies: Qualitative and quantitative exploration of adult language learning styles and strategies. Paper presented at the symposium on Research Perspectives on Adult language learning and acquisition, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA.
- [9] Fatt C. and G. Kasper (1983). *Plans and strategies in foreign language communication*. Strategies in inter-language communication, Longman, London.
- [10] Grenfell, M. and Harris (1999). *Modern Language learning and learning strategies: In Theory and Practice*, USA: Routledge.
- [11] Hymes, D. H. (1985). "On Communicative Competence," in Sociolinguistics, J.B. Pride, and J. Homes, Eds. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- [12] Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In Pride, J.B. & Janet Holmes, (Eds.). (1972). Great Britain: Penguin.
- [13] Hymes, D.H. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia: university of Pennsylvania Press.
- [14] Lawrence, G. (1984). A synthesis of learning style research involving the MBTI. *Journal of Psychological Type* (8). USA.

- [15] Oxford, R. (1990b). Styles, strategies and aptitude: Connections for language learning. In TS Parry & CW, Stansfield (Eds.), Language Aptitude. New Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [16] Spolsky, B. (1989). Communicative competence, language proficiency, and beyond. Applied Linguistics, 10(2), 138-156
- [17] Reid, J.M. (1987). The learning style performances of ESL students. TESOL Quarterly. Washington D.C., USA.
- [18] Willing, R. (1988). Learning styles in adult migrant education. National Curriculum Resource Center, Adelaide, Australia.
- [19] Xin, Z. (2000). From communicative competence to communicative language teaching.SINO-US English teaching, ISSN, 4(9).
