

Developing Language Skills and Communicative Competence in Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Language skills, viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing are very crucial in any language learning. They are the basic skills of any language. The students of under graduate courses shall need to master these skills during their studies in the institutions and universities, they should be possessing these skills inside, and outside of their classroom in circumstances where they have to employ their language skills in actions in real life situation may be formal or informal for that matter. The present paper aims at examining level of language skills among the undergraduate students and how that can enhance communicative competence. It is also an attempt to find out the related studies and how are they conducted in the classrooms. This will help reserchers for further studies in this field.

Keywords: language skills, under graduate students, communicative competence, communicative approach

Introduction

Nowadays, the role of the universities and their affiliated colleges is to ensure and prepare the graduating populace in numerous fields and meet the market demands, not only focusing on the aspect of academic accomplishment but also on the soft skills needed for them to be competitive in the global sphere. Besides, great emphasis and importance of on personality and soft skills while deciding their future prospect. This paper will focus specifically on language skills and communicative competence since language skills are essential, especially for those seeking jobs. Undergraduates are supposed to assess their communication and language skills during their job interviews and apply for higher courses. Therefore, it is the role of the universities and their affiliated colleges to guarantee that undergraduates are equipped with the capability to communicate effectively. This paper will deliberate on language skills aspects that undergraduates should be armed with beforehand their graduation.

In the contemporary competitive and challenging world, much success is dependent on an individual's language skills and communicative competence. Besides technical expertise, communicative skills are also of equal importance; in the contemporary world, where students are likely to compete for job positions with the international workforce, having language skills and communication competence comes in handy. There is a need for communication across the globe, which make communicative competence one of the interesting areas. Proficiency in languages like English, an international language, can significantly benefit the competitive world.

Teaching language skills can enhance communicative competence. Communicative competence is a term used to describe an individual's ability to interact with others effectively. Combination of language skills a person has for getting to know a foreign language is how communicative competence is perceived at its most basic. Having such acumen enables an individual to attain a high-performance level. When discussing language skills and how they enhance communicative competence, it is important to focus on the models of communicative competence and why it is always important to inculcate the skill of communicative competence amongst students. Research in the fields of socio-semantics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics has all been increasingly interested in language skills and communicative competence.

Language skills in linguistics in the aspect that have four basic components without which communicative competence cannot be achieved. In teaching language skills for enhancing communicative competence for undergraduates, the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing must all be considered. One cannot be a fluent speaker of a particular language without mastering these four language skills and the language skills is the foundation of learning language. To achieve fluency, one has to start speaking before embarking on reading or writing. a person may have different strengths in different skills, some people struggle with skills like listening and speaking but can be good when it comes to reading and writing while others cannot read and write but can be keen listeners, this is a fact people get to know when they embark on learning language skills for communicative competence. Listening remains one of the important skills of all as it one key way through which information can be perceived when one needs to learn a new language.

It is important to note that the four fundamental language skills normally complement each other, just like in science, learning language skills also uses the assumption for every action, there is always an opposite and equal reaction. For one to be an all-rounded learner of the language, one needs to ensure that all the skills are accorded the attention one deserves. The skills usually function in pairs listening and reading for language consumption and speaking and writing for language production. mastering the four skills is what contributes to language

fluency. Individual language skills should be strengthened if one is to make the best out of one language practice.

To improve the reading skills, one has no option but to start from books if they wish to be perfect in reading. It is often found that if one wants to improve his/her reading skills, has to start reading books; books that are inspiring ones, books that keep our interest in reading. As Fantine (2018:47) rightly said that books are not only important in assisting when learning a new language but also play an important role in helping people discover the culture that is behind the language. Nowadays, a variety of material is available with a click of button. Therefore, reading skills shall improve only by vast reading by the learners.

Speaking skill is very crucial skill as many people normally find language-speaking especially new language an overwhelming prospect. People can study for years but still find it difficult to have a conversation in their target new language. The new learning of English bound to make mistakes while speaking.

Newman-Nowak (2003: 12) mentions that 'Reflection' of an individual's conversation when the conversation is over is another important tool to sharpening the speaking skill for communicative competence. As a learner of a language, one need to have reflection on his speaking after the conversation takes place. This practice could be very helpful in improving the speaking skills. Reflecting on how your conversation went, helps in finding comfortability on the subject and new words encountered so far in the conversation, will increase learner's confidence when they find another opportunity to speak. Conversation reflection is also important as it offers the learner with targeted things to focus and work on for example the vocabularies they never understood.

Mastery over listening and reading skills help in enhancing speaking skills as these skills are interrelated and interlinked, when you work on one skill, it helps you develop the other skills also. Therefore, learners should understand the importance of language skills and their interconnectedness. The learners can build their vocabulary during the class time and further they can develop their speaking skills when they listen to music, watching movies, listening to conversations on radios, and also paying attention to podcasts. Noting down new words when listening, reading, or watching could be a good learning habit. Interesting lexes, slang words, and synonyms should also be noted down and check their meanings as and when required and use in real life situations, will definitely increase the chances of getting the language at large.

Listening which is basic for the other three skills, should also be sharpened and improved so as to develop other skills. Without mastering the listening skill, one cannot move to other skills, therefore requires to go through the listening skill thoroughly first. It has been noted

by some research studies that listening is the most difficult skills to be mastered by the learners as it is not always easy for people to fall into the passive learning pattern. It is not that way easy that just by listening to music or watching a movie that one shall learn the language. Therefore, the process of mastering the listening skill requires lot of practice on the part of the learners, and when it happens in several times, then the learners come to habit formation and begins the process of language learning. To develop communicative competence, learners need to learn the virtue of patience and allow the spoken words to flow out and in of their ears. The brain is also another important aspect in the listening process and people have to study what they are listening to.

To enhance good listening skills, there are numerous listening resources readily available for undergraduate students that they can use to better their language consequently develops their communicative competence. According to Ahuja (1997) the learners of English if use Music, audiobooks, podcasts, and movies appropriately for their language learning, there is great possibility of acquiring the target language in stipulated time. Having short bursts is important for people trying to sharpen their listening skills as there is no stating people should spend most practicing their listening comprehension technique. Shorts burst of at least ten minutes can prove effective in enhancing one's skill in listening, one doesn't have to reach the point of feeling and being overwhelmed to improve their listening skills. Giving the audio some good and full attention can play a vital role in improving a person's listening skills. Listening to audio from a distance is likely not to improve a person's listening skills. However, sitting down and giving the audio some attention and making it look like a study session makes the learner achieve more from it. writing down words one doesn't recognize can also help boost their listening skills, the words can be checked up in the dictionary for further studies. (Lewis) It is often noted that listening to an audio text many times, could surely improves the listening skills. Listening to something multiple times enables learners to learn it inside out and they can confidently recite them back and forth.

As teachers, we must focus on two aspects of listening: listening as acquisition and listening as comprehension, in order to develop the communicative competence of undergraduate students. Listening as comprehension entails the traditional way of thinking about the nature of listening. In most methodologies, manual listening and listening comprehension are usually synonymous (Richards 4). The perception of listening comprehension is based on the assumption that the primary role of listening, particularly in unlearning second language learning, is to facilitate and ensure spoken discourse understanding. The listening acquisition perspective investigates how listening can provide input that prompts the auxiliary development of second language proficiency (Richards 6).

The aspect of Universals of Lexical Simplifications, as stated by Shoshana Blum and E.A. Levenston in 1978, is also important in teaching language skills for improving communicative competence. In this section, students will learn about the lexical simplification strategy, which simply refers to the procedures and/or outcomes of dealing with fewer words. This aspect will be investigated in a variety of linguistic contexts, including translation, language learner and teacher usage, foreign talk, and pidginization. Lexical simplification functions are based on universal principles derived from the mother tongue's semantic competence. The universal principle can be demonstrated through a comparative examination of context, such as translation. This will concentrate on language skills strategies, which Blum and Levenston define as "the method by which the learner arrives at a specific usage at a specific point in time" and process as "the systematic series of steps by which the learner arrives at the same usage over time" (Blum and Levenston 67).

Another important aspect to consider during this course will be Ellen Bialystok's theoretical model for second language learning. This proposed model attempts to explain the disparities that exist in both individual achievement and achievement in various aspects of second language learning. The model emphasises information input via various types of language exposure, information storage for the language learner, and reactions produced as a result of the information stored. This model's operation is explained in terms of learning strategies and the learning process (Bialystok). This model will show how the model will account for performance on a variety of different learning tasks.

Verbal communication is normally one of the most common communication methods where the specific language is usually used in this- two-way process. Verbal communication always has feedback for the received message. Mastery in language skills also equip people with the knowledge on how they can exchange ideas, information, and opinion with an explicit objective.

With the knowledge of communication skills already established, it is important to focus on how they can have an impact on communicative competence. The aspect of communicative competence has become one of the keys focuses in higher education over the past couple of years that has been stressed by policymakers in the field of education. The ability to effectively communicate is normally included as a key undergraduate learning objective together with basic language skills like writing, listening, reading, speaking, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Communicative competence deals with knowledge of appropriate and effective communication patterns and the ability of a person to make use of a language and adapt the language knowledge in numerous and distinct contexts. For the concept of communicative competence to be understood, one has to unpack and comprehend the knowledge aspect of it which entails having clue on doing something and a better understanding of why things are done

in a given manner, by having the basic communication skills, individuals can enhance their cognitive and communicative competence. As undergraduate students build their basic language skills they will be enhancing and building their communicative competence in the process.

When teaching students language skills meant to enhance their communicative competence, the college professors must have a certain objective that students should be capable of doing to be considered communicative competent by the time they graduate from college. The speaking and listening competencies for undergraduate students by the time they vacate college include; communicating ethically, clearly stating ideas, recognizing the appropriate time to communicate, communication goals identification, effective and appropriate communication medium selection, recognizing and managing misunderstandings in communication, demonstrating credibility, managing communication conflicts, being open-minded to another person's perspective, and being attentive when listening. The above listed are some of the basic competencies that need to stress when teaching undergraduates, language skills. Teaching students these competency skills will enable them to develop their means of assessing their speaking competencies and also mold them for professional listening and speaking that are normally skill-driven.

To develop communicative competence, the undergraduate students will have to understand that the first significant step to achieving this objective is knowing competence dimensions. They have to also be conversant with the fact that communicative competence includes other aspects like non-verbal communication while developing the competence. Communicative competence will enable the undergraduates to understand ethics in communication, cultivate cultural awareness, think critically, and utilize a computer-mediated communication. The aspects of competence like skills, motivations, and knowledge must also be emphasized when handling this topic.

Knowing components of good communication is not enough for one who wants to be communicative competence, they must also possess the drive to reflect upon and better their skills and communication necessary to achieve that. Because individuals during communication have their areas of strength and weaknesses, to achieve competence, decisions to consciously work on the deficiencies should be embraced even if they need considerable effort undergraduate students should be challenged to properly assess some multiple phases of competence as they communicate in their daily lives. The phases normally begin with unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence, then conscious competence, and finally unconscious competence (Hargie 1). Before an individual builds a worthy cognitive knowledge ground of communication notions and reflected and practice on a language skill in a certain area, they are likely to experience unconscious incompetence that is, having no clue there are some elements of communication incompetence in their communication. After learning much about communication and can properly have a vocabulary in place to identify the concepts, they will

exhibit what is known as conscious incompetence a situation where the speaker is aware of the right thing to do but is not doing it in a manner in which they should. Skill development will promote one to experiencing conscious competence that is, having an idea of your good communication skills. The last level which is the stage of unconscious competence will enable one to communicate properly and successfully without trying hard and straining to be competent. People are faced with new communication encounters every day and so there is a possibility of dropping from unconscious competence communication to level to other levels down in the pecking order.

Becoming a more watchful communicator is one of the ways through which we can progress towards the goal of communication competence. A communicator who is mindful fluidly and actively processes information has the virtue of sensitivity to the contexts in communication and can embrace multiple frameworks. A mindful communicator also possesses the quality of adapting to arising communication circumstances (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 10). Having the virtue of communicative competence is important to an individual as it will enable them to detect the deception if any in a communication, achieve their communication objectives, shying away from stereotypes, and helps in conflict reduction. Achieving communication goals is dependent on the level of our communication competence and our communication behavior portrays whether we are mindful or not mindful and these are some of the issues that undergraduate students need to understand.

In teaching the language skills for enhancing communicative competence, the sub-competencies grammatical ability (creating grammatically correct utterances), sociolinguistic ability (capability to produce socio-linguistically appropriate utterances), discourse ability (being able to deliver cohesive and coherent utterances), and lastly strategic ability (which entails the ability to deal with the communication problems when they arise). These are some important aspects of communicative competence that should not be left out when teaching language skills.

Conclusion

From the above illustrations, it is evident that teaching language skills enhances communicative competence as it leads to the development of proficiency in language via the interactions entrenched in meaningful contexts. Language skill teaching will enable one to use and understand the language more effectively for them to be in a position to communicate in places like school and genuine social settings. It is important to undergraduates as through this process they will get to learn about social requirements of language like politeness, formality, and directness, the non-verbal cues, and the social references like background knowledge, expressions, and idioms. All undergraduate students should equip themselves with the language skills mentioned above before they embark on their employment world as it helps them familiarize themselves with how they can communicate.

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