

コミュニケーション能力：英語学習者の「できないこと」に注目して

Communicative Competence: A Focus on Incompetence

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The principal reason for learning a language is to become a competent communicator (Hymes 1972; Canale 1983). However, to better understand what comprises *communicative competence*, this monograph will dig into the *communicative incompetence* of a NNS from a pre-transcribed sample of authentic data. Having identified insufficiencies, some fundamental suggestions will be offered for enriching the NNS's skill.

The data: “Umm...who’s calling!?”

For the purposes of this paper, the data consists of a transcribed telephone conversation, summarised by Gass (2018:64) as follows:

The NNS had been given a class assignment to call and find out the price of a television set. What he did not realise was that when he looked up a number in the yellow pages, rather than looking under television sales, he had looked under television repairs. The NS is thus speaking from the perspective of a repair shop while the NNS is speaking as if talking to a sales shop.

Reference should be made to Gass (2018:64-65), as necessary.

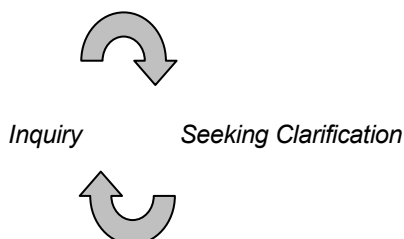
Discussion and analysis:

Appendix 1 constitutes a first-pass analysis of the raw data. Columns 3 and 4 provide an interpretation of the dialogue from speech act and discourse analysis perspectives. It is interesting to note that the NNS was supposed to complete a simple task – a straightforward telephone fact-finding inquiry. Had the query been successful, it would have had a more linear-like structure, something such as:

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Instead, through uncertainties on behalf of both interlocutors (largely due to the NNS's failure to be explicit) the structure was more cyclic in nature. The participants perpetually sought additional information, something like as follows:



Column 5 highlights this cyclic structure. It demonstrates that the NS dominated the conversation (grey shaded cells) through clarifying and questioning, in comparison to the NNS (white cells). The NS asked approximately 12 questions, whilst the NNS asked a mere 5. Importantly, as this was an interrogative task initiated by the NNS, the NNS himself was "supposed to" take on the role of questioner. Clearly this did not occur. Therefore, dominance of the NS in this case is indicative of the NNS's incompetence. Communicative incompetence, in this exchange, generated a role reversal between the participants.

Lack of communicative competence:

Table 1 (below) relates the NNS to Canale's (1983) key components of communicative competence.

Table 1: Communicative Incompetence of the NNS

Key Component	NNS's Proficiency	Evidence in Data
Grammatical Competence	Has ability to construct grammar, but not faultlessly in free flowing real-world situations.	Line 4 marks the beginning of decay. Thereafter, utterances are truncated and grammatically incomplete.
Discourse Competence	Initiates, responds, takes turns, back-channels and so forth – however not always appropriately. Fails to repair.	Throughout transcript. Inappropriate back-channelling and failure to repair seen in lines 22-32.
Sociolinguistic Competence	Limited. Calls wrong store. Fails to make intentions clear. Back-channels	Throughout transcript.

	inappropriately. Fails to interpret NS's dialogue.	
Strategic Competence	Memorises opening line. Back-channels as a "bluff" (a strategy for "catching-up" when uncertain/lost). However, overall, fails to employ successful strategies to achieve communication goals.	No goal reached. No helpful information gained.

In examining Table 1, it is clear that the NNS was not able to understand what was meant by what was said (Thomas 1983:91). Importantly, the NNS's first utterance is not explicit (line 2). It does not convey the speaker's intentions clearly to the listener. Perhaps this lack of clarity is a result of inappropriate transference of speech act strategies from L1 to L2 – thereby being, as Thomas (1983:102) describes, *pragmalinguistic failure*. Nevertheless, from the outset, the NNS's inability to assign sense and reference to the utterances within the conversation causes *communication breakdown* (Hatch 1992:122; Thomas 1983:91-3). Overall, the NNS is lacking in all four key components of communicative competence.

Possible formal classroom contributions to incompetence:

From a behaviouristic perspective, a reinforced response will become habitual (Brown 2014:24; Ur 1996:93-4). Possibly, the NNS has been exposed to this (teaching/learning) approach – as noted in line 2 by the – to all intents and purposes – apparent memorisation of prescribed material (a behaviouristic feature). Unfortunately, the NNS did not get an anticipated response, if this frame of reference is at all on the mark. Thus, he was unable to respond in a habitual or predetermined manner. The conversation began to immediately breakdown – compare, for example, lines 2 and 4. In-class preparation for the NNS has here, then, failed to develop the ability to understand the constraints of real world contexts, which place restrictions upon what is said, when it is said, where it is said, who says it, and, how it is said (Thompson 2000:14). Thus, this NNS has minimal pragmatic competence and has next to no ability to cope with the unpredictable nature of real-life exchanges during transactional talk (McCarthy 1991:136-144).

We must note that memorisation of basic conversation structures and expressions, as Ur (1996:94) contends, should eventually stand this NNS in good stead for future verbal exchanges. Memorised formulaic utterances provide a language learner with a starting point and, eventually, contribute to language mastery.

Bialystok (1993 in Thompson 2000:11-18) identifies three elements of pragmalinguistic competence:

1. *The ability to use language to achieve pragmatic goals.*
 - The NNS did not achieve any goal in this conversation, hence he failed to achieve this competency.
2. *The ability to infer a speaker's intentions from what is said (and, correspondingly, to imply one's own intentions through the linguistic choices one makes as a speaker).*
 - The NNS spent a large portion of this conversation lost and/or confused. In addition, he did not make himself clearly understood at any point during the conversation. Thus the NNS failed to achieve this competency.
3. *The ability to employ appropriate discourse resources (e.g. turn-taking, cohesive devices) to create a coherent interaction.*
 - The NNS's salutation and closing utterances were present, however they were truncated and abrupt. Throughout, turn taking was constrained. Cohesion and the use of strategies such as interruption were poor. Thus, the NNS has minimal capability with regard to this competency.

Learning-based problems:

There are widely held distinctions between communicative competence and communicative performance (Brown 2014:34). The NNS shows considerable weakness in both. Tables 2 and 3 outline his incompetence:

Table 2: Lack of Communicative Competence

Covert Indications of Incompetence
• Telephoned wrong store.
• Failure to make needs clear to NS.
• Back-channelling inappropriately.
• The conversation is terminated too abruptly and appears somewhat impolite (in English speaking contexts).

Table 3: Lack of Communicative Performance

Overt Observations of Incompetence
• Failure to nominate the topic clearly (as an utterance).
• Unable to adapt to the demands of the event (i.e. inability to seek clarification and/or interrupt the NS where necessary).
• Inability to employ strategic devices to achieve goal and/or engage "repair" (Canale and Swain 1980).
• Failure to attain the true intended goal. (It could be argued that "a goal" was achieved, in that no price was available and, so, the call was concluded.)

Environmental problems:

As a listening only task, the challenges were many here for the NNS. The conversation provided no opportunity for extra-linguistic cues to aid comprehension (such as kinesics or eye contact). However, competent speakers need to be very adept at making appropriate selections from lexis, syntax, intonation (and more) to match the requirements of a particular context. Also, competent speakers use their knowledge about the implications of such selections to help them interpret what they hear (McCarthy 1991:136; Thompson 2000:12). It is clear that the NNS is not yet able to demonstrate a satisfactory standard of competence with regard to listening tasks. It could be said that the NNS did not match the situation adequately in any regard.

Affective interference:

Brown (2014:63) notes that people are influenced tremendously by their emotions. As this conversation flowed poorly from the outset, the NNS presumably experienced some fear and apprehension. Thus, the NNS's confidence and concentration would have diminished. In fact, from the first utterance the NNS fails to provide controlled or selected attention toward the stimulus (NS) – a classic case of affective interference (Brown 2014:63-6, 141-158).

Social distance refers to the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures that come into contact within an individual (Brown 2014:188). In this regard, the NNS possibly felt intrusive, invasive, culturally dissimilar and/or subordinate to the dominant NS culture. Such factors would also have interfered negatively with language production here.

Learner language:

Corder (1993) describes four broad stages of learner language. The NNS embraces the second, *emergent*, stage of Corder's classification. This is shown by the learner beginning to internalise certain rules. These rules are not necessarily correct by TL standards, but they are nevertheless legitimate in the mind of the NNS. Examples include:

- functionally appropriate phatic communion marking the salutation and conclusion of the conversation;
- competent turn taking throughout (on the surface level); and,
- back-channelling (frequently inappropriately).

During the *emergent* stage the learner frequently exhibits "backsliding" (Brown 2014:245), in which the learner appears to have grasped a rule (or principle) but then regresses to some previous stage. Upon examining line 2 (and perhaps line 4), the NNS appears to be ready to undertake this

real-world task. Here the NNS appears somewhat "confident," and appears prepared for the challenge of the task and ready for "expected" responses. However, the salesman's unpredicted responses (lines 3, 5 and 7) quickly divert the exchange from the structure that the NNS had probably anticipated. Following line 4, the NNS's output diminished. The NNS had no successful strategic devices to become re-involved in the conversation.

The true goal of the telephone conversation:

This task was an important learning experience for this NNS. On reflection, the NNS should attempt to ascertain what went wrong and why. In doing so the NNS ought to, in consultation with the TL teacher, develop simple strategies for future use that will allow intentions to be better (or more clearly) stated, clarification to be sought and interruptions to be made as necessary. For these reasons, following guided reflection, this telephone conversation could be a very successful learning experience and a tool of language learning.

Was this the true goal of the telephone conversation? The answer is most definitely "yes." This telephone conversation was an out-of-class task that endeavoured to improve the NNS's TL competence. Therefore, on the whole, this task was an invaluable learning device.

In summary, Table 4 lists the consistent errors made by the language learner:

Table 4: Consistent Errors

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal knowledge of the meaning of expressions associated with television repair and/or sales – “off hand,” “how much to repair,” “how old,” and “service call.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misinterpretation of NS's requests.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to recognise the confusion of the NS (an indicator that the NNS was making an inappropriate request in this particular context).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Back-channelling when confused or unsure – this gives the speaker the impression that all is well, when it is not the case.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Truncates when confused.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on prescribed and memorised material.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited exposure to real-world TL situations/interactions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to cope with unpredictable aspects of unscripted dialogues (i.e. variables).

Table 5 offers suggestions for counteracting the NNS's consistent errors:

Table 5: Addressing Communicative Incompetence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the learner with "real-life listening" (as described by Ur 1996:107-108).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a firm attempt to address pragmatic weaknesses, including those perhaps generated by a behaviouristic teaching/learning approach (Thomas 1983:97).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a "process-oriented" approach (Thompson 2000:9), hence developing the NNS's skills through "doing" and analysis of feedback.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide audio recording and listening comprehension exercises to build the NNS's skills of interpretation without the aid of numerous extra-linguistic cues, including spontaneous informal talk (McCarthy 1991:139-143).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide unscripted in-class (telephone) role-plays.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide real telephone conversation practice in-class (if and where possible).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide further out-of-class real-life practice to develop the skills of "language in use" (Thomas 1983:98) in conjunction with task reflection activities.

The above suggestions are designed to develop the skills and abilities of the NNS so that he can better:

- extract required information from a single hearing of the TL at native speakers' speed;
- employ coping strategies in difficult situations (e.g. listening for meaning, asking questions when confused, asking for repetition and so forth);
- clearly state the topic and his intention(s);
- develop *all* aspects of the 4 key components of communicative competence;
- act pragmatically for a given context in order to survive linguistically (McDonough 1995 in Thompson 2000:12); and,
- develop metapragmatic skills (Thomas 1983:98, 109-110) so that he has the ability to analyse language in a conscious manner – a process which Sharwood-Smith (1981:162-3 in Thomas 1983:98) terms "consciousness-raising."

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, basic facets of communicative competence have been explored. The NNS subject was unable to perform adequately due to weaknesses encompassing all skills of communicative competence. To classify this incompetence more accurately, the learner fails Bialystok's (1993 in Thompson 2000:11-18) three competence criteria, and the learner barely falls within the second stage of Corder's (1993) four-point scale of language development.

Through focusing on the incompetence of this language learner, consistent errors were identified. These insufficiencies allowed for a number of solutions to be proposed that ought to boost this

NNS's future real-world communicative performance.

In closure, exposure to realistic situations is crucial if communicative competence is to lead to communicative confidence (Canale and Swain 1980:38). However, the relationship of communicative confidence to communicative competence is perhaps just the reverse; communicative confidence leads to communicative competence (Savignon 1997:45). The NNS should attempt this task a second time by contacting a more appropriate retail outlet. The transaction would obviously flow more smoothly for all interlocutors. In doing so, the NNS ought to achieve his goal without difficulty – boosting confidence *and* communicative competence.

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Appendix 1: First-Pass Analysis

Inter-locutors	Utterance	Conversation Structure			Effect for NNS
		Independent function Performing a speech act	Discoursal function Performing a conversation	Control of Conversation	
1	NS: Hello	Greeting	I		
2	NNS: Hello could you tell me about the price and size of Sylvania color TV?	Greeting & Seek Info.	R/I	NNS Leads Questioning	Rehearsed
3	NS: Pardon?	Seeking Clarification	R/I		
4	NNS: Could you tell me about price and size of Sylvania TV color?	Seek Info. (Restating)	R/I (Re-initiation)		Decay
	PAUSE				
5	NS: What did you want? A service call?	Questioning	R/I	NS Leads Questioning	Misinterpret
6	NNS: Uh 17 inch huh?	Indicating/Questioning	R/I		
7	NS: What did you want a service call? Or how much to repair a TV?	Questioning (Restating)	R/I (Re-initiation)		Misinterpret
8	NNS: Yeah TV color.	Indicating	R		Misinterpret
9	NS: 17 inch	Stating	R		
10	NNS: OK	Affirming?	R		
	SILENCE				
11	NS: Is it a portable?	Questioning	I	NS Leads Questioning (Cont.)	
12	NNS: Uh huh	Informing	R		
13	NS: What width is it? What is the brand name of the TV?	Seek Info.	I		
14	NNS: Ah Sony please.	Indicating	R		Misinterpret
15	NS: We don't work on Sony's.	Asserting	R		
16	NNS: Or Sylvania.	Advising	R/I		
17	NS: Sylvania?	Seek Info.	R/I		
18	NNS: Uh huh	Informing	R		
19	NS: Oh, Sylvania OK. That's American made.	Stating	R		Confused
20	NNS: OK.	Affirming?	F		
21	NS: All right. Portables have to be brought in.	Stating	I		Confused
22	NNS: Him hm.	Affirming?	F		Confused
23	NS: And there is no way I can tell you how much it'll cost until he looks at it.	Stating	Cont(!)		Confused
24	NNS: Him hm.	Affirming?	F		Confused
25	NS: And it's a \$12.50 deposit.	Stating	Cont(!)		Confused

26	NNS: OK.		Affirming?	F		Success !?
27	NS: And if he can fix it that applies to labor and if he can't he keeps the \$12.50 for his time and effort.		Stating	Cont(!)		
28	NNS: Hm hm.		Affirming?	F		Confused
29	NS: How old of a TV is it? Do you know off hand?		Questioning	I		
30	NNS: 19 inch.		Stating	R		Misinterpret
31	NS: How old of a TV is it? Is it a very old one or only a couple years old?		Questioning (Restating)	I (Re-initiation)		
32	NNS: Oh, so so.		Indicating?	R	NS Leads Questioning (Cont.)	Misinterpret
33	NS: The only thing you can do is bring it in and let him look at it and go from there.		Stating	I		
34	NNS: New television please.		Stating	I		
35	NS: Oh you want to know		Seeking Clarification	I	NNS Leads Questioning	
	SILENCE					
36	NS: how much a new television is?		Seek Clarif. (Cont.)	Cont(!)	NNS Leads Questioning (Cont.)	
37	NNS: Yeah I want to buy one television.		Confirming	R		
38	NS: Do we want to buy one?		Seeking Clarification	R/I		
39	NNS: Yeah		Affirming	R		Misinterpret
40	NS: Is it a Sylvania?		Seeking Clarification	R/I		
41	NNS: Sylvania TV color		Confirming	R	NS Leads Questioning	
42	NS: Well, you know even, even if we buy 'em, we don't give much more than \$25 for 'em. By the time we fix 'em up and sell 'em we can't get more than		Stating	I		
43	NNS: Hm hm.		Affirming?	BC		
44	NS: \$100 out of 'em time we put our time and parts in it (delivered in rapid speech)		Stating (Cont.)	Cont(R)		
45	NNS: Is it 17 inch?		Questioning	I	NNS Leads Questioning	Success ?! and Misinterpret
46	NS: Well, I don't (long pause) the only thing I can tell you to do is you'd have to come have to come to the shop. I'm on the extension at home. The shop's closed		Stating	R/I		
	SILENCE					
47	NNS: 19 inch? You don't have?		Questioning	I		
48	NS: Do we have a 19 inch?		Seeking Clarification	R/I		
49	NNS: Yeah.		Confirming	R	NNS Leads Questioning (Cont.)	Misinterpret
50	NS: No, I've got a 17 inch new RCA.		Stating	R		
51	NNS: OK. Thank you. Bye.		Closing	I (anc Closure)		End
52	NS: Bye.		Closing	R (and Closure)		