

## Investigating Awareness of Barriers that Hinder Oral Communicative Competence

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### Abstract:

*This paper aims at investigating awareness of barriers that hinder oral communicative competence. The researcher has adopted the descriptive and analytical methods via questionnaire and observation as tools for gathering the data concerning this study. The sample of this study composed of (70) students studied English in the fourth year at Sudan university of Science and Technology and (50) teachers who responded to the questionnaire selected purposely from different Sudanese universities and colleges due to their experience in teaching oral communication. The data obtained from the observation and the questionnaire have been processed computationally with SSPS program to examine the correctness of the hypothesis of this study. The results from both tools have shown that students of EFL cannot use the appropriate vocabulary and grammar and cannot use suitable communication strategies related to the situation.*

**Key words:** oral communicative competence, Sudanese English students

## INTRODUCTION

Language learning in the dynamic sense of linguistics and languages is considered to be the medium where by human express their thoughts, emotions, attitudes and interact with one another in their everyday life. But certain conditions must

be achieved in order for such a dynamic be fulfilled and linguistically accepted to guarantee the reasonable practices of the speech community in which the language used; represents the spine that systematizes the social, intellectual, cognitive and political orientation of that community. Although there is great interest in the notion of communicative competence in science and real-life application, the concept is not easy to define in a general way. The reasons lie in the complexity of communication, the wide variety of related cognitive and social abilities, and also the huge situational variability. What we need in the field of communication, similar to the field of intelligence, is the specification of domain specific abilities. A recent handbook devoted to communication and social interaction skills.

### **Aims and Scope of the Study**

This study aims to investigate awareness of barriers that hinder oral communicative competence. The scope is limited to students of fourth year at Sudan University of Science and Technology 2015-2016 whose number is composed of (70) students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of communicative Competence**

In the late fifties, there was a revolution in linguistics in America and Europe. Noam Chomsky (1957) was busy sweeping the heritage of the Bloomfield school of linguistics which was interested in the analysis of linguistics structures (Foster-Chohen: 2001:2319). The goal of that "structural linguistics" was simply to develop a system of identifying and classifying the structures occurring in a given language, little or no consideration was given to how the structures might be used (Johnson:1982:10).

Chomsky demon says that the current standard structural theories of language were not acceptable of accounting for the fundamental characteristics of language (Richard: 1986:65). He hypothesized that learning one' language is a natural human capacity that results in a system of linguistics knowledge when combined with experience of a particular language. Besides, Chomsky introduced the notion of "competence" and "performance" He referred to competence as the knowledge that the speaker has of his language and the performance is the actual utterances coming out of the mouth of the speaker. Chomsky's conterbuations led to the emergence of linguistics competence theory in which he clarifies (Chomsky:1965:3):

"Linguistics theory concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and error(random or characteristics) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance"

Communicating effectively in a language requires the speaker's good understanding of linguistics, sociolinguistics and socio-cultural aspects of that language. This understanding will enable him to use the right language in the right context for the right purpose and then he can be referred to as communicatively competent. However, the realization of this level of knowledge and understanding is always a challenge for foreign language learners. They often struggle through their journey towards the achievement of this goal and are often met with many obstacles. Therefore, many arguments have been raised against designing language courses and programmes for foreign language contexts to achieve this goal.

Hymes, (1972) asserts that 'The term 'communicative competence' as a sociolinguistic concept in reaction to the concept of 'linguistic competence' which was proposed by Chomsky in 1965. Chomsky's concept was "concerned with the

tacit knowledge of language structure” but “omits almost everything of socio-cultural, significance”

### **The Development of Communicative Competence's Term**

Hymes, (1972) confirms that ‘communicative competence’ refers to the level of language learning that enables language users to convey their messages to others and to understand others’ messages within specific contexts. It also implies the language learners’ ability to relate what is learnt in the classroom to the outside world. From this perspective described the competent language user as the one who knows when, where and how to use language appropriately rather than merely knowing how to produce accurate grammatical structures.

Hymes’ ideas about the ‘communicative competence’ were later developed by Canale and Swain in 1980 who introduced a theoretical model of ‘communicative competence’. Their concept of ‘communicative competence’ refers to “the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of rules of language use.

Canale and Swain (1980) point that the model of ‘communicative competence’ consists of three domains of knowledge and skills.

They are ‘grammatical competence’, ‘sociolinguistic competence’ and ‘strategic competence’. Grammatical competence refers to accurate knowledge of sentence formation and vocabulary. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the language user’s ability to produce and understand language in different social contexts. Strategic competence refers to the ability of using language to achieve communicative goals and enhance the effectiveness of communication. The complexity of the notion of ‘communicative competence’ Increased by the development of the term ‘*Communicative Language Ability*’ by Bachman in 1990. This term refers to both "knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing or executing

that competence in appropriate contextualized communicative language use”

Bachman (1990) suggests that a framework for *Communicative Language Ability* consists of three components including ‘language competence’, ‘strategic competence’ and ‘psychological mechanisms’. He classified ‘language competence’ into ‘organizational competence’ and ‘pragmatic competence’.

The former includes ‘grammatical competence’ and ‘textual competence’.

The last two types of competencies “ comprises those abilities involved in controlling the formal structure of language for producing or recognizing grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts”

He added that the ‘pragmatic competence’ was divided by Bachman into ‘illocutionary competence’ and ‘sociolinguistic competence’. He explained that ‘illocutionary competence’ can be used for expressing the language to be taken “with certain illocutionary force” and for interpreting these language ‘illocutionary forces’. He defined the ‘sociolinguistic competence’ as the “sensitivity to, or control of, the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context.

In other words, it enables us to use the language appropriately to achieve certain functions in certain contexts. A distinctive feature of this framework is the inclusion of the neurological and psychological factors in language use through the introduction of the component of psychological mechanisms which refers to “neurological and psychological processes involved in the actual execution of language as a physical phenomenon.

It is confirmed that language teachers are able to make easy the realization of the altitude of ‘communicative competence’. These viewpoint consist of: giving more

consideration to speaking and listening skills than reading and writing, practicing more in communicating new information rather than 'already known' information, enhancing students' involvement to overcome passive learning and focusing on practicing the language in meaningful situations rather than on producing well-formed sentences or in individual words. However, it should be mentioned that in search of the objective of developing students' 'communicative competence' should not lead to focus more on speaking and listening than reading and writing skills. The good command of any language requires reaching sufficient understanding of all the language skills.

It is claimed that the importance of working in the field of language we want to master and pointed out the little research conducted on this aspect of communicative competence. Based on the findings of the research which was conducted in West Africa, it concluded that language communicative competence "is dependent on more than the knowledge of and ability to use a given field language in ways that are grammatical and sociocultural appropriate.

This argument may put the goal of developing language learners' communicative competence in terms of native speakers through formal education which does not involve language experience into question.

### **Challenges for Communicative Competence**

Despite the popularity of the term 'communicative competence' many teachers often find it a far reaching goal for foreign language (FL) contexts. Sanoetal (1984) shows that many arguments have been raised against designing language programmes for FL contexts to achieve this level of competence. this is due to the challenges that have been encountered by both EFL teachers and students in these contexts since the introduction of this concept. The language teachers in these contexts will face difficulty in choosing what

skills are to be taught for students and in identifying the effective methods for developing students' communicative competence. Huda (1999) states that another difficulty may result from teachers' misunderstanding of the concept of 'communicative competence'. However, Nazari (2007) reports that three Iranian EFL teachers had distinct views about this concept and were not able to distinguish between its 'broader' and 'narrower' meaning. Butler (2005) points out the lack of clear definition about 'what constitutes 'communicative competence' for FL and about what teaching for achieving this aim constitute. He argued that implementing communicative activities in classrooms would not necessarily lead to enhance students' learning. Another significant challenge which may encounter EFL teachers in teaching language programmes aiming at developing students' communicative competence is the high proficiency level required for the effective teaching of these programmes. In line with this argument, EFL teachers' low proficiency level is always reported as an impediment for implementing communication methods for language teaching and learning. Another relevant issue could be related to the difficulty of measuring language learners' 'communicative competence or communicative language ability as there are many factors more than the language ability we intend to measure can affect the language user's performance. Bachman (1990) states that The difficulties and challenges led Alptekin to criticize the validity of the conventional model of 'communicative competence' in terms of native speaker norms for non-native contexts. He suggested redefining the concept of 'communicative competence' in terms of its use in FL settings into "intercultural communicative competence. This argument was later advocated by Sowden. It seems that complexities of the skills and the high proficiency level required for achieving communicative competence make it unrealistic objective for non-native speakers. These arguments suggest that course designers for EFL contexts have to be

realistic in their expectations and aims when they design language courses and or plan learning programmes. The formulation of the aims of these courses in terms of Alptekin's (2002) concept of "intercultural communicative competence" can be a successful model. Through setting attainable goals and selecting appropriate methodologies we can enhance the likelihood of the success of language learning programs in FL contexts. It is believed that Reflecting on this influence, the development of the communicative competence for foreign contexts in terms of the native speaker's level seems to be a far-reaching goal. This could be due to the low language proficiency level of students and teachers' in these contexts which is often reported as a main challenge. surroundings the objectives of language knowledge in these contexts should be guided by the realities and condition of these contexts. The difficulty of the tasks which the FL learner needs to perform in learning the language through communication should be considered.

Klein (1986) explains that the language learner "must learn the language by which he intends to communicate" and "must communicate by means of the language he intends to learn", however, integrating communication and learner-centeredness as two complementary aspects of FL instructional strategies may lead to improving students' communication skills. The active participation of FL students in carrying out communication activities such as pair and group work, role-plays, games and problem-solving independently can develop their communication skills in order to be able to apply what they learn in classrooms in the outside world.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted at Sudan University of Science and Technology with students in the fourth year from faculty of Education in the department of English language. A purposive sample was used for this study which includes (70) students ,as

well as (50) university teachers selected purposely from different Sudanese Universities as their experience and knowledge about teaching communication.

### **Tools of the Study**

The researcher used observation and questionnaire as tools to gather the data of this study. The observation was administered to (70) students as a purposeful sample, who were observed in communicational conventions. As questionnaire, it was delivered to (50) teachers in different Sudanese Universities. The researcher used the descriptive and analytical methods as well in carrying out this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The researcher used observation and questionnaire as tools for collecting the data related to this study. The researcher has designed an observation to measure the students' performance when they are involved in oral communication. And the questionnaire was designed to obtain teachers' views and attitudes towards the barriers that hinder oral communicative competence.

### **The Analysis of the Observation in Relation to the Hypothesis**

**H1: The BA students of EFL cannot use suitable communication strategies related to the situation.**

**Item (1): She/he correctly understands gestures of others.**

**Table (1)**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Always	12	17.1%
Sometime	33	47.1%
Never	25	35.7%
Total	70	100.0%

The table and figure above show that (17.1%) of the students always who understand gestures in oral communication .While those who sometime do that amount to (47.1%). Those who never do that represent (35.7%).This means the majorities sometime correctly understand gestures of others while, others do not.

**Item (2): She/he uses informal language in formal context**

**Table (2)**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Always	40	57.1%
Sometime	15	21.4%
Never	15	21.4%
Total	70	100.0%

The table and figure above show that (57.1%) of the students always who use informal language in formal context .While those who sometime do that amount to (21.4%). And those who never do this represent (24.1%).These results show the majorities always use informal language in formal context.

**Item (3): She/he uses idiomatic expression in oral communication.**

**Table (3)**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Always	5	7.1%
Sometime	29	41.4%
Never	36	51.4%
Total	70	100.0%

The table and figure above show that (7.1%) of the students always who use idiomatic expressions in oral communication. While who sometimes do that amount to (41.4%). And those who never do that represent (51.4%).These result indicates the majorities never use idiomatic expression in oral communication.

**Item (4): She/he manages to keep the flow of speed despite linguistic problem**

**Table (4)**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Always	1	1.4%
Sometime	50	71.4%
Never	19	27.1%
Total	70	100.0%

The table and figure above show that (1.4%) of the students always who manage to keep the flow of speed .While those who sometime do that amount to (71.4%).Those who never do that represent (27.1%).These results show that the majorities sometimes manage to keep the flow of speed despite linguistic problem.

**The Analysis of the Questionnaire in relation to the hypothesis**

The first part of the questionnaire is an opening part looking for information about the teachers. In fact, the items in this division draw out information about the targeted teachers in terms of their gender, qualifications and years of teaching .They were requested to indicate their answers by ticking (√) one of the five options:"Strongly agree", "Agree". "Neutral", "Disagree", "Strongly disagree"

**H2: The BA students of EFL cannot use the appropriate vocabulary and grammar.**

**Table 5 Gender** This table classifies the students tested in terms of gender.

Gender	Frequencies	Percent
Male	13	66.0%
Female	17	34.0%
Total	50	100.0%

The table above shows that female number which represents 71% is greater than males number that represents 29%. In this study.

\*The hypothesis of this study is tested at significance level.

**Table 6 Qualification:** The table below classifies the targeted teachers in terms of qualifications.

Value	Frequencies	Percent
BA	18	36.0%
MA	19	38.0%
PhD	13	26.0%
Total	50	100.0%

**Table (7)** below illustrates the targeted teachers according to their years of experience in teaching oral communications.

Value	Frequencies	Percent
1-5 years	33	66.0%
6-10 years	17	34.0%
Total	50	100.0%

**Statement (1):** Students provide an alternative word when faced with a linguistic hurdle

**Table 8**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Strongly agree	2	4.0%
Agree	18	36.0%
Neutral	4	8.0%
Disagree	24	48.0%
Strongly disagree	2	4.0%
Total	50	100.0%

The table above shows the distribution of the sample by the statement as follows: strongly agree by (%4.0) agree by (%36.0) Not sure by (%8.0) disagree by (%48.0) Strongly Disagree by (%4.0). And the majorities (52.0%) of the respondents do not support the statement which claims that Students provide an alternative word when faced with a linguistic hurdle.

**Statement (2): Students pronounce words correctly**

**Table 9**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Strongly agree	0	0.0%
Agree	7	14.0%
Neutral	2	4.0%
Disagree	31	62.0%
Strongly disagree	10	20.0%
Total	50	100.0%

The table above shows the distribution of the sample by the statement as follows: strongly agree by (%0.0) agree by (%14.0) not sure by (%4.0) disagree by (%62.0) Strongly Disagree by (%20.0). And the majority (82.0%) of the respondents do not support the statements which claims that Students pronounce words correctly.

**Statement (3): Students give telegraphic answer while communicating**

**Table 10**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Strongly agree	4	8.0%
Agree	15	30.0%
Neutral	4	8.0%
Disagree	21	42.0%
Strongly disagree	6	12.0%
Total	50	100.0%

The table above shows the distribution of the sample by the statement as follows strongly agree by (%8.0) agree by (%30.0) Not sure by (%8.0) disagree by (%42.0) Strongly Disagree by (%12.0). And the majority (38.0%) of the respondents do not support the statements which claims that Students give telegraphic answer while communicating

**Statement (4): They use wrong lexical choice such as red tea**

**Table 11**

Value	Frequencies	Percent
Strongly agree	5	10.0%
Agree	19	38.0%
Neutral	3	6.0%
Disagree	11	22.0%
Strongly disagree	12	24.0%
Total	50	100.0

The table above shows the distribution of the sample by the statement as follows strongly agree by (10.0%) agree by (38.0%) Not sure by (6.0%) disagree by (22.0%) Strongly Disagree by (24.0%). And some (38.0%) of the respondents do not support the statements which claims that they use wrong lexical choice such as red tea.

### **Report Discussion**

The data collected was analyzed in relation to the hypothesis of the study. The data was collected by the observation which has been administered to students of English in fourth year at Sudan University , and questionnaire that had been administered to different teachers of English who teach in different Sudanese Universities. After analyzing and comparing the results with the main hypothesis, the results have shown that students of EFL cannot use the appropriate vocabulary and grammar and cannot use suitable communication strategies related to the situation.

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