The Concept of Competence in Foreign Language Teaching for Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

That the globalization occurs in all fields of life is an undeniable fact on the one hand and necessity of foreign language teaching and learning according to the requirements of globalization and intercultural communication is another reality on the other... The demands and expectations from language teachers, enabling the language learners to be successful interlocutors in the intercultural spaces have long been the issue of investigation and discussion in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. We think the term 'competence' has the key role for this issue and it needs to be dug and discussed as deep as possible to be figured out in detail. Once the content, concept and boundaries of the term 'competence' is defined and described neatly in the field of foreign language education we believe that the path to be followed by both language educators and learners would be more definite. In this paper it is aimed to discuss and figure out the term 'competence' in terms of foreign language teaching for intercultural interaction and communication. The very general purpose of foreign language teaching/learning, the role of competence in cognition of foreign language and the use of it in intercultural spaces have also been tackled throughout the paper.

Keywords: Globalization, foreign language teaching, competence, cognition, intercultural communicative competence (ICC)

1. Introduction

Interactions of communities among the people of diverse cultures have increased tremendously in our era. The most significant type of interactions of the nations and people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds is communication. Language is a basic tool and means of communication. Thus, foreign language teaching and learning have become world-wide under the influence of globalization in the last few decades. The governments try to establish policy, nations give effort to adapt and people want to develop their skills for the requirements of globalisation to integrate the world through this gate and benefit from the profits of the globalizing world. It is quite normal that people do not learn foreign language to talk to themselves or with in the same nation, vice-versa, mostly the aim of learning a foreign lagnauge is to communicate, run the bussiness and have interaction in the intercultural spaces. The interactions and communication, take place in intercultural space, are called by the special term *'intercultural communication'*. In its denotational meaning international communication is interacting and communicating with others who are linguistically and culturally (lingua-culturally) different from oneself (Doganay Y. 2013). It could be said that the requirements of intercultural communication are more complex than the communication happens in the same society in native language. Intercultural communication necessitates acquiring cognition and competency in using the target language as a means of cross-cultural and intercultural communication effectively and appropriately. Because as Intercultural Communication takes place "dynamic interactional patterns", what happens when people from at least two different cultures meet and interact, and what "frames" are generated from this interaction, e.g. understanding vs. misunderstanding, agreement vs. disagreement, cultural adaptation vs. cultural isolation, emerging of "third cultures", conflict vs. cooperation, intercultural team cohesiveness vs. team misunderstandings, intercultural projects success vs. projects failure, emotional improvement vs. emotional deterioration, and any other relational outcome (Trevisani, 2005). When two interlocutors from diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds communicate and interact with each other, overcoming the problems mentioned above by using a common learned target language appropriately and effectively, it can be claimed that they have succeed and achieved to communicate and reached up to their goals and these people are called competent in this area. Their competency is called, because of the nature and mechanism of the event, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). One of the numerous definitions of ICC is that it is the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting and communicating with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. In this definition "effective" usually reflects one's own view of one's performance in the L2 while "appropriate" relates to how one's performance is perceived by one's hosts. The term 'competence' comes to front in foreign language teaching according to the requirements of global world for intercultural communication. We think that the concept of '**competency**' in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) deserves deeper and more detailed analysis. Then it could be hoped that a path would be opened to be inspired by language educators. It can be said that the issue of foreign language teaching and learning for the requirements of intercultural communicative competence gains crucial importance.

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2. The magic term 'competence'

People live in society and need some qualifications, abilities, potentials, attitudes and skills to survive in a socient that they live in and overcome difficulties they face in their lives, to fulfill their needs and to achieve their goals. They can get these qualifictaions during their lives through out experiences and education. If any person is able to suceed his/her aims and overcome the difficulties then s/he is called a capable or "*competent"* person. Competence acts as the integrated characteristics of qualities of formation and preparation of graduates or is a set of abilities, considered as final qualitative result of education. There are various competencies such as; intellectual, methodological, personal, social and communicative competence. We think it is almost impossible to explain the concept of competence in all details with all components and types in an article. Therefore, our main concern in this paper is *competence* in foreign language teaching for the requirements of intercultural communicative competence.

In the essence of teaching, there is what the teachers give to their students in language education, represented by the term *'input'* (Johnston H.N. 1992). Therefore, most of the methods and approaches focus on inputs in language teaching and learning. But it is known that the process of education is much wider than just learning and teaching, it includes teaching, learning, gaining some qualifications, grasping some skills, etc., represented by the term *"acquisition"*. As a result of globalisation, intercultural interaction and communication have gained great importance as *outputs* of language education. For that reason, effective and appropriate use of target language comes to front. It can be said that language teaching should concentrate on inputs, acquisition but mostly "*outputs"* - the ability of applying the inputs (knowledge), performing practical tasks or being able to show the inputs in behavior and using the target language effectively, appropriately and successfully in interaction and communication with others in intercultural spaces. We think that putting *output* to the first place in foreign language education for the requirements of intercultural interaction is of crucial importance.

The demands and nature of intercultural interaction, mostly *outputs*; the practical use of target language, in the globalizing world, caused some new paradigms, approaches, educational movements and methods to come into existence in the field of education especially in foreign language teaching such as *"Competency-Based Education", "Competence Based Language Teaching"* and *"Competence Based Approach"*. We think it would not be wrong to glance over the above-mentioned paradigms, approaches and educational movements to understand the concept of *competency* especially in the field of foreign language teaching.

Competency-Based Education is an educational movement that focuses on the outcomes or outputs of learning process in development of teaching programs. Findley and Nathan (1980) define competency-based education as "a philosophical system or model in an educational service where "competency is the specification of a capability in designated areas of knowledge, assessed through student performance" (Findley C.A., Nathan L.A, 1980). *Competence-Based Language Teaching,* emerged from Competency-Based Education, is a language teaching approach which focuses on also the outcomes of language education. This approach emphasizes what learners are expected to achieve in target language and gives more importance to outputs than to the teaching/learning process and inputs. Docking (1994) summarized what competency-based language teaching is: "it is designed not around the

notion of subject knowledge but around the notion of competency". *Competence Based Approach,* in language teaching, is one of the approaches giving afford to formulate a profitable, expressive and useful framework for successful foreign language education. The stress on the competency-based approach is not "what the students know about a language but more to what learners can do with language" (Auerbach E.R. 1986). This approach is conceived as an extension of the communicative approach, thus the theory underlying it ascertains that language is communication and language teaching seeks to develop coins *"communicative competence"*. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is "an application of the principles of Competency-Based Education (CBE) to language teaching". It can be inferred from the definitions given above that Competence Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is a realization of ideas of Competence Based Approach (CBA) and an application of the principles of Competence Based Education (CBE) to language teaching, in our concern, to foreign language teaching.

We think that in these three, *'Competency-Based Education', 'Competence Based Language Teaching'* and *'Competence Based Approach'* expressions or phenomenas the common point and concept is *"competence"*. It can be understood that in all educational perspectives, approaches and movements the main issue is teaching *competence*. Competency is usually equated with observable and measurable behaviors for the use of the target language especially communicatively.

In the history of development of competence there are three main periods; 1) the early period (the beginning, 60th years) when this theory has appeared as the theory of children's competence, in a projection to develop children or babies, *"ability" and "intelligence"* was considered in the same row with concepts (D.Bruner, R.Sternberg, D.Elkina, etc.); The term *"competence"* first appeared in an article written by R.W. White in 1959 as a concept for performance motivation. 2) "The maturity" period (70th years) connected with maintenance of *"an individualization", "self-improvement", "self-estimation" and "self-measurement"* of achievements which were widely adopted in pedagogics in the USA. The urgency of measurement and definition through *"competence"*, stages have forced to be taught to expand borders of the maintenance of *"competence"* by inclusion not only pedagogical receptions and additional areas of knowledge, but also social indicators. The term gained attraction when in 1973, David Mc Clelland, Ph.D. wrote a seminar paper entitled, *"Testing for Competence rather than for Intelligence"*. 3) The third period was a stage of a socially educational recognition (the beginning of 90th years) when on scientific horizon, there were works by definition of concept, *"competence"* new model of formation with expansion of the maintenance of formation-strategy of development of *intelligence* and *competence*. It has since been popularized by one-time fellow McBer & Company colleague Richard Boyatz is and many others, such as T.F. Gilbert (1978) who used the concept in relevant to *performance* improvement. We think competency, in a general sense, can be seen as *task performance*. According to Mirela-Cristina (2010) competence is "the sum of *"knowledge", "skills"* and *"characteristics"* that allow a person to perform actions and are grouped into two large categories: *"general competences"* and *"communicative language competences"*. General competences comprise declarative *knowledge, skills, know-how* and *existential competence*, while communicative language competences comprise *"linguistic", "sociolinguistic"* and *"pragmatic competences"*.

Competency deals with the areas of personal capability that enable people to perform successfully in their jobs by completing tasks effectively. N. Chomsky (1965) introduced the distinction between *"competence"* and *"performance"*. He defined competence as "knowledge of a language, on the part of an ideal speaker-hearer, that permits him/her to use his/her language and defined performance as how speakers and hearers actually produce and understand utterances, how they use their competence". He used this kind of distinction to limit the scope of linguistic theory to what he regarded as linguistic competence. We think the point, idea and distinction given here are not sufficient, need some more explanations and interpretations to draw the definite line between competence and performance.

No matter whether *competence* or *performance* it is, any person needs the sum of *qualities, abilities, potentials and characteristics (attitudes)* to survive and overcome the difficulties, problems and also fulfill his mission and duties. S/He needs some knowledge and cognition about any area to be able to make right and appropriate decision, some skills to perform these decisions, some characteristics and attitudes to maintain his/her appropriate behaviors.

As for the operational definition of competency: there are two types of competencies. According to Bunda & Sanders (1979), the first type of definitions conceives of competence "as a hypothetical construct, the second type of competence refers to a standard of performance either implicitly or explicitly". The first type of competency is much like the terms such as: *"skill", "achievement",* and *"intelligence constructs"*. In some cases the definition of construct, competency is broader than the word "*skills*" and refers to a combination of "*cognitive*", "*affective*", "*psychomotor*" skills. Some other scholars use competency as synonyms with *"behavioral objective"* which is generally a restrictive definition of *skill*. For the second type of competence which refers to a standard of *"performance"* either implicitly or explicitly, "the term closely parallels definitions of mastery or criterion levels of performance" (Ruth Ming Har Wong, 2008). It can be understood form the definitions given above that the term competency is rather complex and it needs the broader definition which defines competency as a combination of *"social", "cognitive"* and *"communicative skills"* as the operational definition.

As it has been mentioned before, the requirements and paradigms of competency in language field have changed in the globalizing world for the demands of intercultural communication. From this point of view whenever the term competency is mentioned, *"know-how – to act"* is implied or meant. Because of its global and integrating characteristics, acquiring competency requires learning in *motor*, *affective* and *cognitive* fields. Competency differs according to needs, goals and objectives of the learners; however, it can be emphasized that it is the students' ability to apply basic and other skills in situations that are commonly encountered in everyday life. As for the use of it practically, competence can be classified as *"communicative competence"* and *"interpersonal competence"* where under communicative ability is accepted to establish contact. Madsen (1975) divides competencies into three areas that can be reached up through tutoring, courses or self-instruction through programmed materials. Those areas are: *"knowledge", "skills"* and *"students' outputs"*.

From fore given definitions for competence, four key elements can be retained: *"knowledge", "skill", "capacity"*, and *"attitude"*. In other words competency can be classified as; *"knowledge for axiology", "action for skill"* and *"values for attitudes"*. (Kunanbayeva S.S,

2005). We think it is convenient to give an effort to explain these key elements one by one to get the general picture or frame of *competence* for better understanding.

The verb form of **knowledge** is "*to know".* It means that to have some information about any object, phenomena or how to do any issue. According to Greene knowledge refers to "all the information we have stored in memory, including common sense of knowledge" (Greene G, 1999). Thus, knowledge can be thought or learned as a record of past experiences, in a process of education as declarative information of facts and know-how about what, how, where and when to do.

Skill is "a task or group of tasks performed to a specific level of competence or proficiency which often use motor functions and typically require the manipulation of instrument and equipment" (Sullivan R, 2004). As we see, in skill, capability or capacity of being able to do any action or issue is important. So, we can say that in skill, outputs as a result of foreign language teaching, comes front. Capacity in support document for the Competency-Based Approach is esplained as know-how, adequate acting which allows someone to take up a role, a position or activity.

Attitude is identified by the Competence-Based Approach as "a relatively stable and sustainable integration of certain values which facilitate certain behaviors. It is not directly observable, but can be inferred from the observation of behaviors" (Sullivan R, 2004).

As it is seen the term or concept of competence is so wide that we think it would be convenient to classify it depending on the aspects, components it has and fields it is used in.

The classifications and typologies offered for competency are rather extensive. The social and professional expectations connected with competency in all areas are quite high in the globalized and multicultural world. Competence is mostly related to performance, making decisions about vital problems, social functions and social roles. Competency is not taught or acquired at the same level and stable or just in educational institutions and process. Thus, the level of competency can be defined as ability to consult with difficult unpredictable situations and changes. We think dividing competence roughly into five types, under the lights of ideas, definitions and explanations given above, as *"epistemological competence", "professional competence", "communicative competence", "intercultural competence"* and *"intercultural communicative competence"* may meet the explanation of it sufficiently for our concern.

Each competence has sub-competencies that we will not be able to discuss here not having enough space. Having focused on language we will discuss language competency in advance. Kunanbayeva (2005) offers three main types of competencies related to language competency: *"competence of dialogue", "communicative competence"* and *"interpersonal competence".* In another classification, language competency involves three basic competencies such as; *"interactive competency", "interpretive competency"* and *"productive competency".* Actually, the both classifications given here are similar and can be compromised. Therefore, we prefer second classification to continue to discuss. *Interactive competency* is the ability to use language orally to interact with others in order to create social relations, express oneself, and understands needs of others and to get things to be accomplished. Joining and maintaining a discussion, dialogue and giving a speech are examples of using one's interactive competency. *Interpretive competency* is the ability to understand written language through reading or spoken language through listening and to interpret it appropriately. In this case *cognition* plays very important role and mental process

takes place. *Productive competency* is the ability to produce coherent, logical, appropriate and relevant messages by writing and speaking. It is also the ability to organize thoughts and ideas appropriately and express them effectively. In order to develop *interactive*, *interpretive* and *productive* competencies, students also need to develop supporting competencies. One of the most important one of these supporting competencies is *"linguistic competency"*. This competency includes the learning and mastery of grammar, pronunciation and the vocabulary needed in a given context.

Language users are active, in communicating and having interactions with others, therefore they are social actors, leading, designing and maintaining intra or intercultural interactions. The ability of making decision about the nature, process and design of communication, especially intercultural communication is of un-ignorable importance. In sum, we think the most widely known standard judgment in the concept, *"competence"* is ability as knowledge, intellectual potential and professional development of a person, regarding to our subject, in intercultural interactions and communications. For successful intercultural interactions and communications wiht the ones form diverse lingua-cultural backgrounds in other words intercltural communicatiove competence the all above mentioned competencies are of great importance.

3. Conclusion

Researches into second language acquisition list several factors - social, psychological, cognitive, and affective - as reasons for the failure or low performance of many adult language learners (Cetin Y. 2010). Teachers feel upset when the class discussions result failure for the expected competency in target language. In fact, language is rather complex and dynamics. The use of language is much more complicated than repeating patterns and imitating the language use that has been learned along with the classroom instructions. The aim of the paper is to discuss and find out the place and role of competence to in foreign language teaching overcome the reasons of failure.

Language learners are to gain more abilities, skills, potentials, cognitions and characteristics to be able to use the foreign language especially in the intercultural space effectively, successfully and appropriately. Language educators are to focus on all the components of the concept of *competence* in FLT in the globalizing world. Consequently, developing students' skills and enabling them gain characteristics and knowledge required by intercultural communication are thus necessarily part of foreign language teaching.

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