A Critical Analysis of the Required Components for Basic Skills in English Language

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigated the required components for basic skills in the English language. The paper discovered that the English language comprises communication potential, which also has to do with pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and intonation. Students have to acquire this potential in order to accelerate their performance in the English language. The paper also discovered that competence can be studied independently of language use, which falls under "performance", for example, through introspection and grammaticality judgments by native speakers. The conclusion was made in the paper that acquiring an extensive vocabulary is one of the largest challenges in learning a second language. Vocabulary usually develops when the ability to recognize and produce grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences. Hence, vocabulary competence serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. The paper also concluded that students can only acquire the basic skills for learning English if they try to develop their communication competence, and this can be done by boosting their pronunciation efficiency, grammar, and vocabulary, and improving their fluency. For learners of the English language, it is recommended to rely primarily on the letters in the words in order to develop pronunciation rather than context or pictures to identify familiar and unfamiliar words.

KEYWORDS: English language, Basic skills, Competence, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Fluency

Introduction

English studies is an academic discipline taught in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in English-speaking countries; it is not to be confused with

English taught as a foreign language, which is a distinct discipline. It involves the study and exploration of texts created in English literature. English studies include: the study of literature (especially novels, plays, short stories, and poetry), the majority of which comes from Britain, the United States, and Ireland English composition, including writing essays, short stories, and poetry; English language arts, including the study of grammar, usage, and style; and English sociolinguistics, including discourse analysis of written and spoken texts in the English language, the history of the English language, English language learning and teaching, and the study of World Englishness. English linguistics (syntax, morphology, phonetics, phonology, etc.) is usually treated as a distinct discipline, taught in a department of linguistics. According to Vorachek (2017), the skills gained from studying English include acquiring tools that will never lose value, understanding the ever-changing media, to explain your own world, and more.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence encompasses a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that underlie the communicative approach to foreign language teaching Leung (2005). According to Chomsky (2005), competence is the ideal language system that enables speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language, and to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences. In Chomsky's view, competence can be studied independently of language use, which falls under "performance", for example through introspection and grammaticality judgments by native speakers. Canale & Swain (2008) distinguished four basic dimensions of communicative competence: (1). Grammatical (linguistic) competence, i.e. the speaker's ability to use the language accurately, knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the language, ability to recognize and produce grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences; (2). Sociolinguistic competence, i.e. the speaker's ability to use the language appropriately with respect to the social environment, ability to recognize and adapt the message (choice of topic, vocabulary, style) to the interlocutors, the social and situational context in which exchange takes place, the activity type, etc. Socio-linguistic competence results from the speaker's knowledge of society, of its norms and taboos; (3). Discourse competence, i.e. the speaker's ability to produce texts that are coherent and connected, the coherence of a text is its "overall quality of unity and meaning, its cohesion (or "continuity") is provided by the logical relations that exist among the apparently isolated chunks of language – relations which bind together the separate elements of a text, ability to produce texts that are adapted to the requirements of the given discourse type, e.g. a letter, an article, a short story, etc.; (4). Strategic competence, i.e. the speaker's ability to use language, functionally; i.e. using the language to perform actions; strategically: using linguistic strategies of repair, to cover personal inadequacies; of indirectness and politeness, to obtain real-world advantages and/or avoid negative consequences: e.g. to avoid imposing or hurting feelings; to create a favourable atmosphere; etc.

Pronunciation

According to Yates (2002) as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani, (2016), pronunciation is the production of sounds that is used for making meaning. English pronunciation is one of the most difficult skills to acquire and learners should spend lots of time to improve their pronunciation (Aliaga García, 2007; Martínez-Flor et. al., 2006; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016). Understandable pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' competence and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction. Good pronunciation leads to learning while bad pronunciation promotes to great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2012). According to Fraser (2000), teachers should be provided with courses and materials that help them improve their pronunciation instruction. She continued that second language education research should not be concerned with the significance of English pronunciation instruction but with the methodology of pronunciation instruction. Morley (1991) stated that understandable pronunciation is a main objective of pronunciation instruction. In is a necessary component of communicative competence. It includes attention to the particular sounds of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), how the voice is projected (voice quality) and, in its broadest definition, attention to gestures and expressions that are closely related to the way we speak a language. Each of these aspects of pronunciation is briefly outlined below, and references for further study are suggested. According to Hismanoglu (2006), pronunciation instruction is very important for oral communication. It is also a significant part of communicative competence. Harmer (2001) emphasized that the main aim of teaching and learning in any language is to enable students to communicate in the target language and if this is the case, communication is an important term to explain. Communication means to understand and be understood.

Intonation

In linguistics, intonation is variation of pitch while speaking which is not used to distinguish words. All languages use pitch semantically, that is, as intonation, for instance for emphasis, to convey surprise or irony, or to pose a question. Tonal languages such as Chinese and Hausa use pitch to distinguish words in addition to intonation. According to Crystal (2005), intonation is primarily a matter of pitch variation, it is important to be aware that functions attributed to intonation such as the expression of attitudes and emotions, or highlighting aspects of grammatical structure, almost always involve concomitant variation in other prosodic features. Graven et al. (2008) stated that language development in humans is a process starting early in life. Infants start without knowing a language, yet by 10 months, babies can distinguish speech sounds and engage in babbling. Some research has shown that the earliest learning begins in utero when the fetus starts to recognize the sounds and speech patterns of its mother's voice and differentiate them from other sounds after birth. Language development is thought to proceed by ordinary processes of learning in which children acquire the forms, meanings, and uses of words and utterances from

the linguistic input (Cameron-Faulkner et, al. 2003). There are three different types of intonation which can differentiate the same word or sentence dependant on how it is spoken:

Fall-rise intonation: Fall-rise intonation is the way that the voice both falls then rises during the conversation. This usually puts uncertainty across to the receiver, the fall-rise tone of voice often suggests confusion, questioning or that there is more to add to the sentence. For example: "Is the clothing new or used?" Both [↗] 'new' and 'used' [↘] have different tones of voice. It also suggests uncertainty and questioning due to the rise and fall.

Falling intonation: Falling intonation describes the fall in the tone of voice. This is often used when the speaker wants their sentence to sound definite and assured. It's also frequently used in 'wh-' questions. For example: "What's for dinner **t↘ onight**?" This example uses a 'wh-' question. "My work is nearly **f↘ inished**." Another use for a falling intonation is to express boredom or disinterest. "It's going to snow **t↘ oday**." This sentence shows certainty and assurance, which means that the tone falls at the final word.

Rising intonation: Upward inflection or rising intonation is used to up-talk or upspeak in a conversation. This also puts certainty across, but it's often used more positively. Not only that, but using rising intonation is ideal for answering yes-no questions. "Are you **hun↗gry**?" "Do you need a **phone-↗call**?" Rising intonation can often put across excitement, understanding and positive attitude.

Grammar

In linguistics, the grammar is its set of structural constraints on speakers' or writers' composition of clauses, phrases, and words. The term can also refer to the study of such constraints, a field that includes domains such as phonology, morphology, and syntax, often complemented by phonetics, semantics, and pragmatics. There are currently two different approaches to the study of grammar, traditional grammar and theoretical grammar. According to Holmes (2001), the term "grammar" can also describe the linguistic behavior of groups of speakers and writers, rather than individuals. Differences in scales are important to this sense of the word: for example, the term "English grammar" could refer to the whole of English grammar (that is, to the grammars of all the speakers of the language), in which case the term encompasses a great deal of variation. Jeremy (2008) claimed that, for non-linguists, Grammar is often a generic way of referring to any aspect of English that people object to. The formal study of grammar is an important part of children's schooling from a young age through advanced learning, though the rules taught in schools, are not a "grammar" in the sense that most linguists use, particularly as they are prescriptive in intent rather than descriptive.

Vocabulary Improving

A vocabulary is a set of familiar words within a person's language. A vocabulary, usually developed with age, serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. Acquiring an extensive vocabulary is one of the largest challenges in learning a second language. During its infancy, a child instinctively builds a vocabulary. Infants imitate words that they hear and then associate those words with objects and actions. This is the listening vocabulary. The speaking vocabulary follows, as a child's thoughts become more reliant on his/her ability to self-express without relying on gestures or babbling. Once the reading and writing vocabularies start to develop, through questions and education, the child starts to discover the anomalies and irregularities of language. According to Brysbaert *et, al.* (2016) vocabulary grows throughout one's life. Between the ages of 20 and 60, people learn about 6,000 more lemmas, or one every other day. People expand their vocabularies by e.g. reading, playing word games, and participating in vocabulary-related programs. Exposure to traditional print media teaches correct spelling and vocabulary, while exposure to text messaging leads to more relaxed word acceptability constraints (Joan, 2011).

Types of Vocabulary

Reading vocabulary: A person's reading vocabulary is all the words recognized when reading. This class of vocabulary is generally the amplest, as new words are more commonly encountered when reading than when listening.

Listening vocabulary: A person's listening vocabulary comprises the words recognized when listening to speech. Cues such as the speaker's tone and gestures, the topic of discussion, and the conversation's social context may convey the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Speaking vocabulary: A person's speaking vocabulary comprises the words used in speech and is generally a subset of the listening vocabulary. Due to the spontaneous nature of speech, words are often misused slightly and unintentionally, but facial expressions and tone of voice can compensate for this misuse.

Writing vocabulary: The written word appears in registers as different as formal essays and social media feeds. While many written words rarely appear in speech, a person's written vocabulary is generally limited by preference and context: a writer may prefer one synonym over another, and they will be unlikely to use technical vocabulary relating to a subject in which they have no interest or knowledge.

Final vocabulary: All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes… I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary". Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them is only helpless passivity or a resort to force.

Fluency

Fluency (automaticity) is reading words with no noticeable cognitive or mental effort. It is having mastered word recognition skills to the point of over learning. Fundamental skills are so "automatic" that they do not require conscious attention. According to Owens, (2016) and Bloom et al, (2008), developing proficiency in any language begins with word learning. By the time they are 12 months old, children learn their first words and by the time they are 36 months old, they may know well over 900 words with their utterances intelligible to the people who interact with them the most. Proficient readers are so automatic with each component skill that they focus their attention on constructing meaning from the print. Developing language proficiency improves an individual's capacity to communicate. Over time through interaction and through exposure to new forms of language in use, an individual learns new words, sentence structures, and meanings, thereby increasing their command of using accurate forms of the target language.

Conclusion

Competence combines knowledge, skills, and relationships that are the preconditions for success, which can be studied and mastered, primarily due to the fulfillment of certain tasks and requirements. Acquiring an extensive vocabulary is one of the largest challenges in learning a second language. Vocabulary usually develops when the ability to recognize and produce grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences. Hence, vocabulary competence serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. The study also concluded that students can only acquire the basic skills in learning English if they try to develop their communication competence, and this can be done by boosting pronunciation efficiency, grammar, vocabulary, and improving their fluency.

Recommendations

1. For learners of English language, it is recommended to rely primarily on the letters in the word in order to develop in pronunciation rather than context or pictures to identify familiar and unfamiliar words.

2. For advanced learners of English language, continuous vocabulary increase and fluency is very crucial to acquire higher communication competence and skills to support understanding.

3. And as for instructors of English language, basic skills such as proper pronunciation, grammar structure and intonations should be adequately explored to students at the initial level. This will help to minimize certain difficulties and complications during the advanced processes.

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