



**Dell Hymes' 'S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G' and Various Other Models of  
Communicative Competence: A Comparative Study from a Communicative  
Perspective**

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<https://doi.org/10.66376/criterion.v17.n2.2>

**Abstract:**

The concept of Communicative Competence being more practical demands a contextual use of language. It is more experimental and talks about how language should work in action, when something is being communicated. The models of Communicative Competence fulfil this need of experimentation. This research paper aims to explain the models of Communicative Competence since the 1970s, their theoretical framework and practical significance in the light of language use in an Indian multilingual context. There are five models of Communicative Competence which this paper will elaborate on. The theoretical framework of these models focuses on the competence of an individual and its practical applications are significantly related to the communicative performance of an individual. All these models can be applied to various situations and at each academic level. This paper focuses on how the SPEAKING model is most appropriate to develop the Communicative competence through the comparative analysis with other models.

**Keywords: Model, Communicative, Framework, Practical, Theoretical.**

**Introduction:**

Since the 1970s, the concept of communicative competence has been central to debates in linguistics, anthropology, and language pedagogy. Noam Chomsky distinguished between competence and performance underlying the difference between linguistic knowledge and actual use of language. Contrary to his distinction, Dell Hymes debated that competence must also include the ability to use language appropriately within social and cultural contexts. The SPEAKING model was developed out of his ethnographic approach, which provides a guideline for analysis of the speech events in terms of setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre.

Communicative competence is central to modern communication skills, styles and strategies. It definitely is the most influential factor of the 21st century. It can be called as a key word, central idea, major concern or a dominant prerequisite in today's globalized world and multilingual context. In the last several years, English language teaching has emerged as an independent field of study, highlighting the changing scenario of language use and the user-friendly characteristics of language. The communicative perspective is counted everywhere; people look for it while communicating. The concept of Communicative Competence clearly highlights being communicative.

Communicative competence plays a very significant role in the success of human beings in all areas of life- social, personal, educational, and professional. It will not be wrong to say that communicative competence helps people achieve their objectives in life. The 20<sup>th</sup> century global scenario definitely requires people to be effective in communication and communicative competence helps them to achieve this skill. In today's world communicative competence in the

English language is the most demanding prerequisite. How a person communicates in different social and professional settings has become the key to success.

The present study aims to show a comparison from a communicative perspective. Various models have been created since the concept of communicative competence is in use. The present paper will discuss all these models and their applications and implications in comparative analysis to why the 'SPEAKING' model by Dell Hymes is more significant and useful in the light of Communicative Competence. In addition to the 'SPEAKING' model on Communicative Competence, there are four other significant models. These models elaborated this concept in several different perspectives including, syllabus design, user competence, language discourse and communicative language abilities of people underlying the knowledge and skill types of competence etc.

To present the relevance of the 'SPEAKING' model, understanding other models of communicative competence, proposed after it is necessary. The nutshell description of each model is presented as follows including the SPEAKING model itself.

### **1. The SPEAKING model of Dell Hymes (1972)**

This model is considered as the pathway to context creation. The eight elements of this model include setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre. This model of speech analysis was introduced by Dell Hymes in 1970s. In his book *The Ethnography of Communication*. Later, in his other book *Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (1974) Hymes gave a detailed analysis of the 'SPEAKING' model. According to Hymes, in order to speak a language correctly, one does not only need to learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which the words are used. The 'SPEAKING

'model helps to create the context for language use. This model is used in various studies related to verbal discourse of language. In more specific words, this model is useful to enhance communication. It is a research tool which helps many researchers to study language use in specific contexts.

This model underlines the fact that contextual relevance is a crucial aspect of one's language knowledge. It gives a wide scope to create a context with the help of elements included in it. The 'SPEAKING' model and its elements show how setting, participants, goals, norms, or keys etc. makes a difference to what a person is communicating with, with whom, in which communicative situation, and how?

Hymes' 'SPEAKING' model is a very useful research tool for those who wish to interact with people of different cultures, in different contexts or situations. It is useful for researchers who want to study language from a functional and interactional perspective. It is useful for context creation with the help of speech events and speech acts as well as to provide an opportunity to communicate in different contexts which helps to develop communicative competence of an individual.

The present model is useful in the context of communicative competence as it paves the way to develop it. This model is most trustworthy and authentic because of its elements- the parts of the speaking model that form the acronym SPEAKING.

The elements of the 'SPEAKING' model are as follows:

### **1. Setting or scene-**

This is a situation which includes the setting and scene. Setting is a place where a communicative activity takes place. The setting of the conversation can be physical, psychological or cultural. Physical settings include places of communication like classroom, manager's office, prosecutors'

room, church, drawing room of a home, cafeteria etc. Psychological setting refers to the mood or mindset in which people are interacting such as happiness or sadness. The cultural scene belongs to the various cultures people belong to. The setting of the speech event needs to be considered because it affects the variety and quality of language used.

## **2. Participants-**

Participants are the people who are involved in communicative situations. Participants can play various roles as they want like addressee, addressor, speaker, hearer, audience etc. It also includes personal characteristics such as age and sex, social status, and relationship with each other. The role of participants in the conversation may be permanent or may change according to the situation and demands of a communicative setting. This consideration of nature and role of participants is important because they directly condition the choice of linguistic items in speech.

## **3. Ends –**

It refers to the goal or outcomes of the communicative situation. Each situation represents different ends. It denotes a purpose or objective of communication. It is the function that a speech event serves for the speaker.

## **4. Act Sequence –**

It is specifically about the order in which a communicative event takes place. The purpose, beginning, middle and end of the conversation is the part of the act sequence of any communicative situation.

### **5. Keys -**

These are the cues which establish “tone, manner, or spirit “of the speech acts. It pays attention to how the speech sounds or is delivered. Whether it is serious in tone, or mocking, joyful in tone or simply conveyed in anger.

### **6. Instrumentalities –**

It refers to forms and styles of speech which differ as per context. It may have any form of communication like face-to-face, telephonic, or oral /verbal discourse. Moreover, the style of speech is a register which is used in speech acts. It includes any linguistic or non-linguistic tools used to make the speech act possible. i.e. speech or writing.

### **7. Norms –**

These are standard socio-cultural rules of interactions and interpretations. It can also be called as conventions used by the speakers to complete their set communicative goals. In verbal discourse between participants norms of communication should be considered. Social norms of interpretation do make a difference to communicative situations in which the participants are involved.

### **8. Genre –**

Genre is a kind of conversation which is associated with speech events. According to Hymes’ model. It can be used to analyses spoken discourse based on the genre. Cultural and traditional genres like proverbs, stories, prayers, small talk etc. can always be used in speech events and speech acts.

## **2. Model of Communicative Competence for Curriculum Design. John Munby. (1978)**

Munby talks about the preparation of teaching material for second and foreign language students. His framework for communicative competence addresses syllabus design keeping communicative purpose as the foundation. It is divided into three major constituents: viz Socio-cultural Orientation, Socio-semantic basis of linguistic knowledge, and Discourse Level of Operation.

While discussing Socio- Cultural Orientation, Munby is of the view that communicative competence has socio- cultural orientation and believes that this orientation should be kept in mind when language is used for any communicative purpose. This socio-cultural orientation includes competence and the community, contextual appropriacy, and communication needs.

Socio-semantic basis of linguistic knowledge, consists of two elements. First, language as semantic options deriving from the social structure. Here he emphasizes that the programme designers, material producers, teachers and testers should give priority to the meaning of language than any other aspect. Secondly, to the communicative approach as it ensures the communicative value of linguistic content. Munby advocates Wilkins (1976) semantic or notional approach and says that it should be used according to the level and requirement of the learner. Thus, this approach can be helpful for the acquisition of communicative competence.

At the Discourse Level of Operation according to Munby communicative competence is essentially a matter of discourse- oral or written. Discourse is defined as 'a level between grammar and non-linguistic organization.' The terms like Speech Acts, Speech Event, and Speech situation are the parameters of discourse. Munby maintains that Communicative Competence includes the 'ability to use linguistic forms to perform communicative acts and to understand the communicative functions of sentences and their relationships to other sentences.

### **3. Model of Communicative Competence- Canale and Swain (1980, 1983)**

Canale and Swain defined communicative competence as global competence. Many have accepted it as a common guide because of its fourfold functions, including syllabus design, instructional methodology, teacher education, and teaching materials. This model gives more emphasis on apt curriculum structure to increase the communicative competence. It also attempts to make communication as meaningful as possible.

**Grammatical Competence** – It refers to knowledge of lexical items and of the rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar, semantics, and phonology.

**Sociolinguistic Competence** – It includes two types of rules: the socio-cultural rules of use and the rules of discourse.

**Strategic Competence** - verbal and nonverbal communication strategies are used to compensate for a breakdown or gaps in communication.

**Discourse Competence** – It is the ability to produce a unified spoken or written text in different genres. Using cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. This competence is more important in respect to the skills.

### **4. Discourse Model of Communicative Competence and Performance- Widdowson, H. (1983)**

The theoretical background to teach English for Specific Purpose is a primary concern of Widdowson's model. This discourse model is firmly based on schema theory or schemata. This model contains the three levels, Systematic level (linguistic competence) Schematic level (ability for use, or communicative capacity) and Procedural level (actual performance)

Through this model Widdowson reserves the term “communicative competence” for linguistic knowledge, and introduces the term “communicative capacity” or “procedural knowledge” for Hymes’ ability for use. This model underlines Widdowson’s opinion that communicative competence is not a matter of knowing the rules of constructing sentences and employing them to combine expressions when required. It is the ability to make necessary adjustments according to the contextual demands. So, the model essentially focuses on adapting the ‘contextual cues.

### **5. Model of Communicative Language Ability (CLA)- Lyle Bachman (1990)**

In his original work, ‘Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing’ (1990) he proposed his model of communicative language ability, where he tried to present the complexity of language use beyond grammar and vocabulary. Bachman’s model is different from previous models. He clearly distinguishes between ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills. His model of communicative language ability includes language competence which is divided into two broad categories of organizational and pragmatic competence. These categories are subdivided into grammatical and textual competence and illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence. Bachman’s CLA model offers a structural taxonomy that could be useful in language testing, pedagogy and assessment. Bachman talked about different dimensions of language ability to interact in real communicative situations. He explains communicative competence through the lens of broad multidimensional philosophy covering theoretical linguistics and language pedagogy.

### **6. Sauvignon’s inverted pyramid Model of Communicative Competence:**

In Sauvignon’s model (2002), she asserts that strategic competence is conducive to three main components of grammatical, discourse, and sociocultural competences. In addition, the term sociolinguistic competence, as used in previous models, is replaced with sociocultural competence

to emphasize that social acceptability is combined with linguistic devices and extralinguistic factors. Aligned with her depiction, she recommends a communicative curriculum with five themes to touch upon different sub-competences each time so that the other related areas of communicative competence could likewise benefit from a possible improvement.

### **7. Littlewood's interpretation of Communicative Competence:**

Littlewood (2004) identifies five aspects of communicative competence as the ultimate goal of second language acquisition. Although he does not necessarily claim it to be different from other models, his interpretation displays some distinctive features. Littlewood's perspective on communicative competence accordingly focuses on linguistic competence, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and sociocultural competence. With the careful combination of these five aspects, communicative competence is realized in language education. The synthesis that can be observed in this model changes grammatical and strategic (or illocutionary) components to linguistic competence and pragmatic competence, respectively. Littlewood maintained that these new terms represented their scope of definitions better than the labels used previously in other models. Also, sociocultural competence is seen as a separate piece from sociolinguistic competence, rather than being a compound unit.

Every model of Communicative competence has its own significance and application. These models can be applied to any level of students from high-school to university level. But in comparison to these models mentioned above Dell Hymes SPEAKING model offers a larger scope to develop the communicative competence of students. This model underlines the fact that contextual relevance is a crucial aspect of one's language knowledge. It gives a wide scope to create a context with the help of elements included in it. The 'SPEAKING' model and its elements reveals the idea that setting, participants, goals, norms, or keys makes a difference to what a person

is communicating, in which communicative situation, and how? The present model comprises eight elements which acts conducive to communicative interactions. So, this model can be applied to any specific group of people to observe how they communicate in a formally structured or created context.

Effective communication is effective use of language along with communication strategies. The speaking model with its elements can help students to develop such communication strategies. Language is dynamic, it speaks in the context. If not spoken appropriately to the context it can create miscommunication. This is the simple principle of language use: Communicative Competence is about how an individual speaks- appropriately, wrongly, casually, formally, friendly or carelessly in a given situation or in any situation that comes across. The tone, choice of words, sentence framing, while speaking thoroughly contribute to good communicative competence.

The speaking model is comparatively more useful to develop the Communicative Competence of students majorly for two reasons- firstly it acquaints students with the elements of it from setting to genre, they can understand how it works in communication. Secondly, it can help anyone to understand settings and participants and communicate accordingly or to set the act sequence or ends (objectives) when they are communicating in different settings. The Speaking model can thoroughly help an individual to understand the context and alter the language use accordingly. as by definition communicative competence means using language socially appropriate.

Communicative perspective includes the language use- emotive, expressive, formal, informal. Context- social, personal, educational, business. It can be cognitive aspects, cultural insights, social identities and emotional influences. This paper compares these other models of communicative competence from a communicative perspective. The SPEAKING model is the

functional, more practical model that creates ample scope for communicative situations, language use and creation of the social settings where people communicate.

In this regard the SPEAKING model conceptualizes communicative competence of an individual within the broad setting of its elements. The very elements of the SPEAKING model are self-explanatory to understand the way someone should communicate. Dell Hymes' idea of communicative competence is a response to Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence model. As Chomsky said, grammatical competence is must to use language, adding to that Hymes claimed beyond grammar, the setting, and use of language should be appropriate. He emphasized on contextual appropriateness of language in his idea of communicative competence.

The SPEAKING model is useful from a communicative perspective for a few reasons. To analyze communication, it acts as a practical ethnographic tool. Firstly, a meaningful understanding of the context is possible because of the SPEAKING model. Secondly, its focus is appropriate use of language in social and cultural contexts. Thirdly, its nature is dynamic, it emphasizes on real life speech acts. It can be used to analyze the speech events in personal and professional and social context. Context understanding can be made really easy for students with this model.

### **Conclusion:**

The comparative analysis of Dell Hymes' *SPEAKING* model and following other models of communicative competence shows that each model uniquely contributes to our understanding of communication and how it works and how it should work. Hymes' the SPEAKING model emphasizes the rooted nature of speech events, ensuring that appropriateness and context are made prominent. In comparison, taxonomic models such as those of Canale and Swain (1980), Widdowson (1983) Bachman (1990), and Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) provide structured categories

that are indispensable for pedagogy, curriculum design, and standardized assessment. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that communicative competence is both socially practicable and pedagogically teachable. Combining ethnographic approach with pedagogical structure offers the most comprehensive teaching methodology ensuring that learners not only master linguistic forms but also develop the ability to use them meaningfully and appropriately across diverse contexts, that is being able to exhibit a communicative competence as Dell Hymes intends.

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