

PRACTICAL VALUE OF EFL TEXTBOOKS FOR TEACHING MAIN ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCES)

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ABSTRACT

Two very important components of the concept of Communicative Competence are sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. Since the advent of the Communicative Approach a lot of attention has been paid to the design and development of relevant teaching materials. This is especially important since in most of the language learning situations textbooks serve as one of the very few sources, in some cases as the only source of the target language. This article investigates two of the textbooks, from prominent publishing houses, in order to determine to what degree they focus on both competences. The findings are then summarized, analyzed and discussed.

Key Words: Communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, textbook evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Communicative Competence

Over the past decades the importance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely recognized in the field of English Language Teaching. Communicative language Teaching is a wide language teaching approach that emphasizes interaction within a classroom rather than a clear cut method with prescribed classroom practices. CLT refers to both the aims of the classroom learning as well as the processes that take place within it (Savignon, 2002). The central theoretical concept underlying the approach is the term "*communicative competence*".

The concept "*communicative competence*" was introduced to the field of Applied Linguistics by Dell Hymes (1972), a sociolinguist as well as ethnographer of communication, in the early 1970's of the previous century. The term was introduced as a reaction to Chomskyan (Chomsky, 1965) view of competence which refers to the knowledge of grammatical rules and did not include any notion of contextual appropriateness. Whereas, Hymes defined the notion of "*communicative competence*" as the ability to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meaning with other speakers in specific contexts. Over the years the term has evolved and developed with contributions of such scholars as Savignon, Canale, Swain and Bachman. We shall summarize most of their views regarding the notion as well.

Canale and Swain (1980) divide communicative competence into three components such as grammatical competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. In 1983 Canale added discourse competence to the model. If compared to the Chomsky's view of "competence" in a very broad sense than his notion of "competence" is similar to the grammatical competence of the framework developed by Canale and Swain that represents the knowledge of grammatical rules of the language. Strategic competence, on the other hand, refers to the knowledge of and the ability to use the communication strategies that improves the efficiency of communication and when and if necessary enables the speaker to repair communication breakdowns. The next competence, sociolinguistic competence is the mastery of the sociocultural aspect of language use such as politeness conventions, appropriate application of register, vocabulary and the like of given language in any given context. The last component of the model, discourse competence, refers to the ability to combine and organize utterances/sentences to produce cohesive texts/speech.

Another model of communicative language abilities, a more comprehensive one, was proposed by Bachman (1990), based on language testing research, and later was elaborated further by Bachman and Palmer (1996). The latest model of communicative language abilities by Bachman and Palmer is comprised of two components: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, both broken down into different subcategories.

Organizational knowledge is composed of textual and grammatical knowledge, i.e. abilities that control the formation of and recognizing grammatically correct sentences and sequencing them to produce texts. Grammatical knowledge is similar to the Canale and Swain's grammatical competence. Whereas, textual knowledge is a more elaborate version of the discourse competence by Canale and Swain.

Pragmatic knowledge deals mainly with what one utters and what function he or she intends to achieve through them, i.e. illocutionary force of an utterance referred to as functional knowledge in this model. In order to communicate effectively, one, however, needs more than illocutionary competence. One also needs to know the social rules and knowledge of appropriateness based on the context or a situation of the language use where one finds himself or herself. This knowledge is referred to as sociolinguistic knowledge and is another component of pragmatic knowledge of the model.

Finally, the last model of communicative competence to be discussed in this paper is the one developed by Common European Framework (CEFR) between 1989 and 1996 in an attempt to standardize language teaching, learning and assessment across Europe. However, it increasingly is being used as a reference by countries in other parts of the world as well. Communicative language competence (CEFR 2001) encompasses components such as linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic.

Linguistic competences include lexical, semantic, grammatical, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. In other words, they refer to the knowledge of and ability to use linguistic resources to form well-structured messages/sentences. The last two competences of the framework: sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence are going to be focused on in this study and thus will be summarized with more details.

Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of appropriate language usage depending on the given social context. Since language is an important part of culture, everything that relates to the language use in terms of appropriateness to a particular culture in a particular social setting is of relevance to sociolinguistic competence. Thus things like politeness conventions, linguistic markers of social relations, expressions of folk wisdom, register differences, and being able to recognize dialects and accents are the primary components of the competence.

The last component of this model, pragmatic competence, includes two subcomponents: discourse competence and functional competence. Design competence or the so-called planning competence, which stands for the ability of ordering messages to in line with interactional schemata and is the part of both of the aforementioned subcomponents (discourse and functional competences). Generally speaking, pragmatic competence is concerned with the user's/speaker's knowledge of patterns according to which the sentences/utterances are organized and sequenced (discourse competence), used to carry out communicative functions (functional competence) and ordered according to the interactional and transactional schemata (design/planning competence).

We have briefly reviewed some of the models for communicative competence and their key components. Two of the main components of the concept, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, will be taken into consideration for evaluating EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks as to how much they focus on teaching these two competences. Thus, before proceeding with the study we shall look briefly at the term "*textbook*".

Textbook and its importance

A textbook or a course book is a book used for the study of a subject, in our case English. A textbook is teaching material for the teacher and a learning material for the learner (Awasthi, 2006). Sheldon (1988) describes it as a 'visible heart of any ELT program'. Garinger (2002) believes that a textbook can serve different purposes for teachers: as a core resource, as a source of supplemental material, as an inspiration for classroom activities, even as the curriculum itself.

Teaching materials are a key component in most of the language programs whether it is a textbook or teacher's own material. They serve as the basis for much of the language input that the learners receive and language practice that occurs within the classroom. (Richards, 2001). Textbooks are very important since most of the time they are the sole exposure to the language that the learners get especially in EFL situations. EFL students usually end their language programs without adequate ability to respond appropriately to different verbal and non-verbal signals, including the teachers themselves. Majority of teachers are non-native speakers of English that have not lived in the English speaking community, thus they have to rely on textbooks to teach pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences to the learners.

Advantages of using a textbook in an EFL class are aplenty. To name a few, they serve as a reference for students, give a sense of progress, move from simple to more complex, usually provide a lot of extra materials such as interactive computer software for classroom use, photocopiable games and activities, video/audio material, are well-organized and include integrated skills appropriately, they lift off the heavy load from the teachers' shoulders, they even act as teacher trainers with the teacher's book and it's thorough guidance on how to teach what.

Disadvantages of using textbooks are fewer: sometimes they are blamed for not being authentic, they are a product of a large business and as such they are forced to be appealing to a wider range of markets which sometimes makes them boring with their usual topics about weather, music etc.

Background of the study

The most important challenge encountered while reviewing the literature on the concept of communicative competence was that there is no single model that would be unanimously accepted by all the linguists and ethnographers of communication. There are several models proposed by many scholars, sometimes contradicting one another, sometimes not clear or ambiguous about the main components of the notion especially when it comes to two components: pragmatic and sociolinguistic.

It's important to notice at this point that sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence are quite intertwined, mainly focus on the same aspects of language use but look at them from different standpoints, e.g. making/answering requests- while sociolinguistic competence looks at requests in terms of politeness conventions, pragmatic competence, on the other hand looks at them from the functional point of view, i.e. from the communicative functions that they perform. Thus the items looked at in this study will not be broken into two separate categories, sociolinguistic and pragmatic respectively, but rather will be looked at as complementing parts of a whole.

The aim of the present study is to evaluate two of the typical EFL textbooks in terms of their practical value for teaching two main components of the communicative competence: sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. And to reveal the parallels between the CEFR requirements for the B1 level sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and the textbooks under study.

The CEFR requirements for the B1 level, in terms of *sociolinguistic appropriateness* can be summarized as follows:

- Being aware of and able to use salient politeness conventions and acting appropriately
- Being aware of the most significant differences in customs, attitudes, values and beliefs in the community concerned and that of the learners

Requirements for the B1 level, according to the document, concerning *pragmatic competence* can be briefly pointed out as follows:

- Being able to adapt his/her expression to deal with unusual or even difficult situations and being able to use a wide range of simple expressions flexibly to express much of what he/she wants
- Being able to intervene in a discussion on a familiar topic with a suitable expression to get the floor, or to initiate, manage and close simple conversations on familiar topics.
- Ability to connect and link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
- Being able to explain the main points in an idea with reasonable precision.

The textbooks under study will also be evaluated against aforementioned criteria, as to what extent they are compatible with the Common European Framework requirements for the B1 level in terms of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.

METHODOLOGY

Two of the representative textbooks were selected for this study. Criteria for their selection were that they are both taught in university English language preparatory schools, their main purpose is to teach communicative competence and they are offered by world-renowned publishing houses. Textbook A focuses on developing listening and speaking skills whereas Textbook B is an integrated skills textbook that focuses on developing communicating skills (this can be inferred from the title of the book as well). The level of both of the textbooks is Intermediate (B1 level CEFR) since it is the level that university preparatory schools mainly focus on and it is at this level and onwards when sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences can be taught efficiently. Each textbook consists of 10 units, Textbook A consists of 205 pages and Textbook B consists of 126 pages. Activities in Textbook A are not very dense while Textbook B is more densely “stuffed” with activities so the difference in number of pages does not make a significant difference. The names of the books are not disclosed so as not to express direct criticism. The items looked at in present study are:

Discourse strategies (organizing techniques) such as;

- Ordering writing and speech according to cause and effect
- Managing discussions
- Building coherence
- Turn-taking
- Summarizing and sequencing main points

Expressions of folk wisdom such as;

- Sayings, proverbs
- Idioms
- Quotations
- Expressions of values, beliefs
- Using and understanding figurative speech

Politeness strategies

- Apology
- Making requests/ responding to requests
- Question tags
- Formal/informal register
- Welcoming phrases

Expressing attitudes and emotions such as;

- Expressing interest
- Asking/giving reasons
- Inferring speaker's attitude
- Dealing with misunderstandings
- Giving good/bad news, responding to news

- Making a complaint/ suggestions
- Identifying facts vs. opinion
- Using context to identify meaning
- Giving/supporting opinions
- Taking part in a discussion
- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Giving/answering advice

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The tables below show us the fact of occurrence of the studied item in the unit but do not represent the number of activities in which they occur. In other words, if there are two ticks next to *building coherence* item it means it occurs in two units thus in at least two activities, in most cases in two or three successive activities.

Discourse strategies (organizing techniques)

Table 1: Discourse Strategies (organizing techniques)

Items under study	Textbook A Units											Textbook B Units											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	ALL
Cause and effect		√	√								2											0	2
Turn-taking	√		√	√	√						4					√						1	5
Managing discussion				√	√						2				√		√					2	4
Building coherence			√	√	√						3				√	√						2	5
Presentation Techniques							√	√			2											0	2
Sequencing key inform.											0		√	√				√		√		4	4
Summarizing main points											0							√		√		2	2

As can be seen from the table above (Table 1) Textbook A focuses greatly on building coherence and turn-taking in conversation, then on organizing the ideas according to the cause and effect while not paying much attention to summarizing main points since Textbook A focuses on two skills: listening and speaking. Textbook B, unlike Textbook A, is an integrated skills textbook that includes writing activities as well where techniques such as sequencing and summarizing key points are taught. In Textbook A in the end of every unit there is a speaking assignment that is usually performed in the form of a speech before the audience (class). This textbook teaches presentation skills and techniques at the end of two units. Textbook B aims at developing communication skills in general without focusing much on presentation skills.

Expressions of folk-wisdom

Table 2: Expressions of Folk-Wisdom

Items under study	Textbook A Units											Textbook B Units											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	ALL
Sayings, proverbs	√	√	√								3			√								1	4
Idioms			√								1			√								1	2
Quotations			√								1							√				1	2
Values, beliefs etc.			√	√	√				√		4											0	4
Using figurative meaning								√			1											0	1

Expressions of folk-wisdom, one of the main components of sociolinguistic competence, do not receive enough attention in Textbook B, they only appear as proverbs, sayings and idioms on three occasions while in Textbook A they not only appear frequently in forms of quotations, sayings and proverbs but also appear as expressions

of values and beliefs: e.g. money does not always bring happiness, family is more important than career or financial success, personal responsibilities etc.

Politeness conventions

Table 3. Politeness Strategies and Conventions.

Items under study	Textbook A Units										Textbook B Units													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	ALL	
Apology			√								1												0	1
Making a request			√								1			√		√							2	3
Responding to requests			√								1					√							1	2
Question tags					√						1						√						1	2
Formal/Informal email wrt.											0	√								√			2	2
Welcoming phrases											0									√			1	1

In Textbook A politeness forms such as apology, requests and question tags appear on 4 different occasions and in Textbook B politeness forms appear in more elaborate ways such as requests, question tags, formal and informal types of register in addressing people, particularly in email writing. Unlike Textbook A, Textbook B also includes welcoming phrases like “*make yourself at home*” and “*be my guest*”.

Expressions of attitude and emotions

Table 4: Expressions of Attitude and Emotions

Items under study	Textbook A Units										Textbook B Units													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	ALL	
Expressing interest/emotions				√						√	2		√										1	3
Asking/giving reasons				√							1								√				1	2
Inferring speaker's attitude	√				√						2												0	2
Dealing with misunderstandings											0			√									1	1
Giving good/bad news											0			√			√			√			3	3
Responding to news											0						√						1	1
Making a complaint											0				√								1	1
Making suggestions											0					√							1	1
Identifying fact vs. opinion						√					1								√				1	2
Using context to identify meaning						√					1												0	1
Expressing attitude via modals						√					1												0	1
Giving/supporting opinions						√					1								√				1	2
Taking part in a discussion						√			√		2												0	2
Agreeing/disagreeing									√		1												0	1
Giving/responding advice											0									√		√	2	2

Textbook A and Textbook B largely focus on different ways of expressing attitudes and emotions. Textbook A focuses more on expressing interest for example by varying intonation and expressing emotions of approval/happiness/sadness/sympathy, on using modals to express attitude, giving opinions, inferring speaker's attitude by noticing how the speaker talks (the use of voice, intonation, hesitation etc.), identifying

fact and opinion, taking part in a discussion, agreeing/disagreeing all of which are relevant to developing speech/presentation and discussion skills. On the other hand, Textbook B focuses more on expressions of attitude and emotions which are more relevant to everyday use of the language such as giving and responding to news, making suggestions, complaints, giving opinion, advice and responding to them among others. This difference in the two textbooks makes it clear that Textbook A is for developing speaking and presentation skills in the language, perhaps for the academic use later on while Textbook B is for teaching general communication skills for everyday use.

One example of Textbook B activity teaching sociolinguistic competence appears in the beginning of the book in Unit 1 was not included in any of the tables above; we believe it is more relevant under the title of: Expressions of Attitudes and Emotions. The activity is interesting from our perspective since it gives tips on how to behave appropriately both verbally and non-verbally in a specific social context, in this case, job interview.

5 tips to help you do well at interviews;

1. Be prepared: do some research about the company/university so you know what questions to ask
2. Dress appropriately: you don't have to dress smartly but you should look clean. And don't wear "bling".
3. Arrive on time. Fifteen minutes early is OK.
4. Shake hands firmly and make eye contact. First impressions are important.
5. Speak clearly and try to offer full answers rather than short responses. This shows your enthusiasm.

DISCUSSIONS

Sociolinguistic competence

With respect to CEFR guidelines for sociolinguistic competence for B1 level, such as being aware of and able to use salient politeness strategies and acting appropriately, both Textbook A and Textbook B can be considered quite successful in fulfilling this requirement since they both focus on politeness forms such as making and responding to apology/requests and using question tags. Registers of the two textbooks is rather different, Textbook A is a more formal book, thus not focusing much on formal and informal registers, whereas Textbook B focuses on these two types of register and is a book with a more informal register in a general sense.

The second requirement for the sociolinguistic competence: "being aware of the most significant differences in customs, attitudes, values, beliefs in the target language community and that of learners" is hard to measure and even harder to analyze it statistically. However, it is clear that this can be achieved through teaching different ways of expressing emotions, interest, asking for and giving reasons, agreeing/disagreeing and inferring speaker's attitudes which both of the textbooks focus on. Textbook A lacks some of the key forms in this respect such as making complaints, suggestions, giving and responding to news.

Pragmatic competence

The requirements for pragmatic competence, as mentioned above according to CEFR documents, are: learner's ability to adapt his/her expressions to deal with unusual or even difficult situations, being able to use wide range of simple expressions flexibly to express much of what he/she wants, ability to connect shorter elements into sequence of points, to explain the main points in an idea and being able to get the floor with a suitable expression, to start, manage and close a conversation on a familiar topic.

Textbook B covers at least few of the different strategies used to cope with unusual situations, e.g. giving good or bad news, responding to them, making complaints and dealing with misunderstandings.

Following activity is an illustration of how Textbook B teaches to handle misunderstandings. There were three successive activities that focused on the strategy, one matching exercise, one listening and identifying the type of misunderstanding and one fill-in-the-blank activity. Below is the matching activity:

Complete sentences 1-8 with phrases a)-h).

1. Make sure you go to the King's Street in the centre of town because...
2. We mistakenly left home at 5:30 because...

3. I was expecting to see Pete, my old school friend, but...
 4. I didn't do the homework...
 5. We thought her birthday was 16th July but...
 6. I ended up at the wrong house because...
 7. When I called Mary Lou, she thought I was a stranger because...
 8. I answered the phone but...
-
- a) It was a **wrong number**.
 - b) I'd got the **wrong address**.
 - c) We **got the date wrong**.
 - d) **We thought** it started at six.
 - e) **It was a different** Peter Smith.
 - f) There are two streets **with the same name**.
 - g) She **didn't recognize** my voice.
 - h) I **didn't realize** it was for today.

With respect to the components of the discourse strategies of pragmatic competence such as connecting shorter elements into sequence of points and summarizing them, it is worth our notice that Textbook A does not cover them, at least not explicitly. Another component of discourse is coherence, which is almost equally covered in both of the textbooks.

The last criterion, ability to initiate, that is to get the floor, to maintain and close a conversation/discussion on a familiar topic is covered in both of the books. Managing discussion is covered equally in both of the books, taking part in a discussion appears in two units of Textbook A and does not appear in the other. Giving and supporting an opinion, which is part of any discussion, is covered in both textbooks equally.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study demonstrates that textbooks are a good source for developing sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences and yet they alone cannot be totally relied on for teaching them for the following reasons:

- One of the textbooks (Textbook A) does not cover some important aspects of discourse strategies such as: summarizing main points, sequencing the main points and Textbook B does not emphasize turn-taking patterns in English.
 - One important aspect of sociolinguistic competence is expressions of folk-wisdom and Textbook B does not cover them adequately, they only appear in three different places throughout the book as sayings, idioms and proverbs. Understanding figurative meaning, expressions of values and beliefs does not receive adequate attention in Textbook B.
 - Both of the textbooks do not focus enough on teaching main everyday speech acts such as: apology, making requests, responding to request, agreeing/disagreeing etc.
 - Textbook A does not include any video material. Being able to communicate appropriately in specific social situations involves knowing non-verbal clues like gestures, as well; videos can be a good source for teaching them.
 - One of the textbooks (as mentioned in results part) focuses primarily on developing presentation skills, thus not emphasizing everyday communication skills. The other textbook emphasizes everyday communication skills and does not focus much on developing presentation skills. Communicative competence includes them both. Thus a textbook developing one aspect of communicative competence may neglect other aspects.
- The study found out other elements that are not part of the research question, but deserve to be pointed out:
- The communication activities need to include a wider range of topics; what is very relevant and interesting in one culture might not be so in another.
 - The grammar parts of the books are not as long as they used to be in the past and do not include too many rules and explanations like they used to before (say 10-15 years ago).

- Textbooks are very appealing in terms of their design and layout.
 - The unit structures are same throughout the book, being predictive might be good but it also might be boring.
 - The topics are appropriate for the target community.
 - The textbooks encompass cross-cultural issues, thus promoting cultural awareness.
- Recommendations for the teachers aiming at developing communicative competence:
- Teachers using these two textbooks should incorporate authentic materials such as: audio/video material, newspaper articles/ads, and short stories.
 - Activities such as role-play, project work, presentations on different topics and discussions may be incorporated into classes wherever possible.
 - Where possible, intercultural differences and the importance of accepting and respecting one another's culture should be explained and emphasized.

IJONTE's Note: This article was presented at World Conference on Educational and Instructional Studies - WCEIS, 06- 08 November, 2014, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 6 Number 1 of IJONTE 2015 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.

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