

THE SIX COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE ABILITY:

VAN EK (1986)

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Annotation: this article includes explores the relationship between language proficiency and communicative competence in the CEFR. It offers a brief outline of the components of communicative language competences since 1980 until 2001 following the outstanding works by expert such as , Van Ek (1986) and van Ek and Trim (1991). The most relevant differences between the general competences set out in the CEFR.

Key words: communicative ability, linguistic competence, learning-activities, social competence, context, subject.

Аннотация: в данной статье исследуется взаимосвязь между владением языком и коммуникативной компетенцией в CEFR. Он предлагает краткий обзор компонентов коммуникативных языковых компетенций с 1980 по 2001 год после выдающихся работ таких экспертов, как Ван Эк (1986) и Ван Эк и Трим (1991). Наиболее существенные различия между общими компетенциями изложены в CEFR.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативная способность, языковая компетенция, учебная деятельность, социальная компетентность, контекст, предмет.

This article considers the term “communicative ability” for its affinity with the term “communicative competence” in the CEFR. Van Ek is the first applied linguist who explicitly indicates different types of competence for the Projects of the Council of Europe. In his view, the components of communicative ability are “different aspects of one and the same concept” and is aware of a considerable overlap among them (van Ek 1986,).

Van Ek’s notion of “communicative ability” has a twofold origin. On the one hand, the affinity with Canale and Swain’s (1980) theory and description of communicative competence. And the Bremen directive and the National Congress on Languages in Education (NCLE) specification for their relevance with the term “communicative ability” (van Ek 1986), on the other.

Van Ek opted for “communicative ability”, among the components in the NCLE specification, because it “covers almost the whole range of interpersonal contacts, including the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for fruitful interaction” (van Ek 1986,).

First, in his definition of “linguistic competence,” van Ek (1986) states that it is “the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning” (van Ek 1986). Moreover,

he asserts that “linguistic competence” is the basic component of communicative ability, since it “lends itself most obviously to differentiation, grading and level distinctions” (van Ek 1986).

Second, the contextual or situational meaning is what distinguishes sociolinguistic competence from linguistic competence. In this sense, van Ek (1986) argues that “linguistic competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their conventional meaning , whereas socio-linguistic competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual - or situational – meaning.” Therefore, “sociolinguistic competence” is considered to be fundamental in communication processes, since “successful communication requires the ability to use and interpret language forms with situational appropriateness” (van Ek 1986).

Third, “discourse competence” is defined as “the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts” (van Ek 1986, 30) and distinguishes between “text-types which the learner will be able to produce and those which he will be able to interpret” (Van Ek 1986). Van Ek also clarifies that “the individually produced texts may be spoken texts or written texts”, whereas “those produced by two or more people are usually spoken texts” (van Ek 1986).

Fourth, van Ek (1986) and Canale and Swain’s (1980) agree on the definition of strategic competence: “the use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for gaps in the language user’s knowledge of the code or for breakdown of communication for other reasons.” In addition, van Ek recommends the inclusion of communication strategies in foreign language learning objectives, since these kinds of strategies “should encourage the planning of learning-activities aimed at «learning how to cope» as well as “encourage acceptance of natural consequences of using a language which is not one’s native language, both by teachers and learners” (van Ek 1986).

Fifth, as regards socio-cultural competence, van Ek focuses on the Bremen directive¹⁴ which specifies that “every language act is situated in a socio-cultural context and is subject to conditions which in the foreign language are partly different from those in the native language” (van Ek 1986). Consequently, van Ek puts forward the planning of learning-activities that “engage the learner not only as a learner but as a human being.” In this sense, this expert considers that “socio-cultural competence should go beyond the cognitive domain and address the learner’s attitudes, opinions, value-systems and emotions as well” (van Ek 1986).

Finally, concerning the last type of competence that integrates the concept of “communicative ability”, van Ek (1986) points out that “social competence brings the general education aims within the compass of the subject-specific aims of FLL.” In addition, he claims that this kind of competence involves the will and the skill to interact with others, hence the relevance of all the qualities of “communicative ability”, arguing that “communication is a social activity” (van Ek 1986, 31). Nevertheless, van Ek considers “social competence” as a component

of FLL objectives assuming that “it is less linguistically oriented than the other components and more directly concerned with the personality of the learner” (van Ek 1986)¹

Referances:

1. Van Ek, Jan A. 1986. Objectives for Foreign Language Learning. Volume I: Scope. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
2. Van Ek, Jan A. and Alexander, 1980. Threshold Level Syllabus. Oxford: Pergamon.
3. Van Ek, Jan A. and Trim, John L.M. 1991. Threshold Level 1990. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
4. Van Ek, Jan A. and Trim, John M.L. 1997. Vantage Level, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹ See the directives for the teaching of English in secondary schools issued in 1982 by the Senator for Education of the Free City of Bremen (note 20) in van Ek (1986)