Communicative Competence,
Intercultural Understanding, and International Tourism

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Effective English communication for international tourism requires total communicative competence and deep intercultural understanding. Basic ability in grammar and vocabulary is not enough to be able to communicate properly and effectively. People using English as a second language need a concrete understanding of these base elements. Further, they need total communicative competence which includes a mastery of grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic factors. The absence of one or more of these factors may impede intercultural understanding on a professional level within the international tourism and service industry. Communicative competence and better intercultural understanding are also essential for individuals who would like to travel abroad and use English for interpersonal communication.

This paper will discuss the significance of communicative competence relative to the field of international tourism and explore an enjoyable way to increase students' intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge through collaborative, group-generated role plays. Within this pedagogical framework and methodology, small teams of students create characters, develop a story, write dialogs, and perform extended role plays based on various cross-cultural situations concerning international travel and tourism. This technique utilizes an active, four-skilled process of communicative pre-writing tasks, multi-draft scripts, rehearsal, self-direction, performance, and peer feedback. This long-term process allows learners to develop expressive intercultural language skills which improve communicative competence and broaden international sensitivity.

Language Skills

People who intend to use English professionally in the tourism and service industry or for personal travel need to develop productive and receptive language skills. Learners need to develop proficient ability in the four basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In addition, a higher level of understanding regarding appropriateness must be addressed in detail. Gumperz (1972) explained that :

> " whereas linguistic competence cover's the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters."

Considering the fact that English is also used by non-native speakers in international tourism situations around the world, communicative competence and intercultural understanding are becoming more and more essential.

The English language is one of many necessary elements for the international tourism and service industry. Total communicative competence is essential for anyone choosing to use English in any situation. Indeed, for professional situations, such as the international tourism and service industry, communicative competence is crucial. People need to understand how to express themselves in

> ". . . ways deemed appropriate by the group in which we are doing the learning. These ways also differ from group to group ; consequently as we move from one group to another or from one language to another, we must learn the new ways if we are to fit into that new group or into that new language." (Wardhaugh, 1992)

This notion of appropriateness may vary from culture to culture and situation to situation. Learners need to develop skills which allow them to adapt to foreign countries and foreign cultures which may use English as a second or third language as well as native English speaking cultures. In order to develop total communicative competence, learners should be exposed to variable styles of appropriateness and discourse in English.

Tenets of Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) provided a more detailed, practical model of communicative competence. This model includes grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence. They argue that the neglect of any of these four main components will inhibit an individual's ability to communicate effectively. Grammatical competence refers to knowledge, understanding, and ability to use correct sentence structure, semantics, and syntax. Discourse competence is the ability to use a language above the sentence level and being able to communicate cohesively and logically. Strategic competence is about being able to manage breakdowns in communication and how to better negotiate meaning and understanding. Finally, sociolinguistic competence pertains to being able to use language appropriately depending on the culture, social position, and situation.

Basic English ability is the first step toward overall communicative competence. The first factor, grammatical competence addresses this issue. Without a doubt, grammatical understanding is a key element. A second-language user must be able to understand what is being said to them and how they should reply. Corder (1976) supported communicative competence and suggested that knowledge of grammar increases as a result of communicative needs. In addition, learners would also increase their knowledge of the linguistic system while learning how to communicate and negotiate meaning on a higher level.

Discourse competence, the second major factor, requires communication ability above the sentence level. In order to effectively communicate complex ideas, second language speakers need to understand others and need to be understood. Brown and Nation (1997) pointed out that :

> "language learners should also be exposed to and given opportunity to practice and use meaning-focused communication, in which they must both produce and listen to meaningful oral communication."

While this also mandates a necessary degree of basic speaking and listening dexterity, most important is the cohesion of the message and what should logically come next based on the situation. Concerning international tourism and intercultural service communication, people using English should be familiar enough with the potential discourse they would logically encounter.

For international tourism, polite language is a key element of grammatical and discourse competence. The more complex forms of polite language stimulate more effective and better communicative interaction. From a service point of view, a formal expression will lose effectiveness if the interlocutor fails to speak with correct grammar. Failing to speak correctly will result in a loss of professionalism or could create misunderstanding. Savignon, in an interview with Harris, explained :

> "I think it's (grammar) at the very center of communicative ability ; without grammar, you can't communicate. But 'grammar' here means a system that is mutually intelligible, and accepted by all participants. Here again it doesn't mean that you have to use it just like the native speaker does. So if grammar really means 'rule,' in that sense you can have not only grammatical but social rules as well." (Harris, 1998)

Accepting and adopting this paradigm, proper choice of polite and suitable vocabulary is one way grammatical suitability and social appropriateness is ensured within tourism situations. Polite language is necessary for both workers and tourists as it will foster better and deeper cross-cultural appreciation. Making efforts to speak politely in English while traveling abroad will project a higher image of one-

self as an internationally knowledgeable and sensitive individual. Ultimately, the use of polite language within international tourism and service situations will lead to greater levels of mutual cooperation and respect.

Strategic competence is the third component of communicative competence. Learning how to handle breakdowns in communication, learning how to properly and effectively clarify meaning, and learning how to ensure and maintain understanding are the key goals of strategic competence. Within an international tourism setting, strategic competence is vital for exchanging information, desires, and opinions. People need to be prepared to deal with breakdowns in communication. This may occur between native speakers, a native speaker and a non-native speaker, or between two non-native speakers. Paribakht (1985) maintained how both native and non-native speakers use various strategies to express themselves and ensure understanding. Language users need to develop strategies and systems of clarifying, simplifying, and checking meaning. In this way, the people involved in discourse should negotiate communication collaboratively. Methods of clarification and appropriate techniques to ensure understanding need to be understood from an international and intercultural point of view.

People who work with others in the international tourism or service industry and people who travel abroad to other countries need to have a heightened sense of awareness toward other cultures while speaking English. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) explained that :

"Many of the meanings and understandings, at the level of ongoing processes of interpretation of speaker's intent, depend upon culturally specific conventions, so that much of the meaning in any encounter is indirect and implicit. The ability to expose enough of the implicit meaning to make for a satisfactory encounter between strangers or culturally different speakers requires communicative flexibility."

Understanding the culture of the people you are trying to negotiate meaning with or clarify communica-

tion with will foster better exchange and deepen international respect and appreciation. Considering this, the cultural appropriateness of a response needs to be established. In addition, various intercultural communication styles should be understood. This leads into the final tenet of communicative competence - that of sociolinguistic competence.

Sociolinguistic competence details notions of appropriateness. Various cultures have various ideas about what is and what is not appropriate to say. While it is the moral responsibility of people who choose to visit another culture as a tourist to develop an understanding and appreciation of that culture, it is the professional requirement that host culture service workers be especially forgiving and understanding of any lapses of sensitivity or cultural rule breaking which may occur. Goodenough's definition (1957) is particularly insightful :

"... a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves."

As more and more people choose to travel abroad as tourists, it is necessary for them to become more aware of sociolinguistic competence. They should appreciate and be sensitive toward the host culture of the country they are visiting. Learners need to increase intercultural sensitivity and develop sociolinguistic grace.

Intercultural Sensitivity and Communicative Competence

Krahnke's (1987) task-based approach, with a firm foundation in content knowledge, actively benefits learners who use English while traveling abroad and people who work in the international tourism industry. Examining, discussing, and considering topics from both the perspective of a worker and a traveler will further increase cultural appreciation and knowledge. Developing a deep cultural awareness and sensitivity is an essential aspect of providing the best possible service or conducting oneself appropri-

ately abroad in an international tourism setting. Service workers who understand the various needs and expectations of people from different cultures will be able to satisfy those specific needs more effectively and more efficiently. Educators need to address not only linguistic and semantic needs, but also intercultural content. Collaborative, task-based frameworks allow learners to assimilate knowledge through a communicative learning process. Extended role plays provide learners with an opportunity to develop overall communicative competence.

Team Work and Collaboration

Team work and collaboration are two of the key elements within an extended role play task. Learners will be able to take part in authentic communication about their group presentation while at the same time improving their ability to speak clearly and effectively with each other. Members of the group will have individual and group responsibilities which will foster an atmosphere of team work and sharing knowledge. Indeed, this type of group activity has a great social benefit in terms of giving people the chance to develop their interpersonal skills while using English.

"At whatever stage, students should be asked to perform tasks collaboratively. . . . one purpose of collaborative learning is to teach students how people in a particular discipline. . . make judgments that are regarded as sound. Another purpose is to illustrate to students how knowledge is generated and arrived at." (Bruffe, 1985)

People who plan to work in any aspect of the international tourism and service industry need proper social and professional interpersonal skills. These techniques and skills, like many aspects of human interaction, vary depending on culture. Therefore, a multicultural class with people from various backgrounds creates a natural, humanistic setting. (Moskowitz, 1978) If a class is mono cultural, as is often the case in many of our classes, having members of the class adopt another cultural and role-play as an individual from another cultural will serve the same purpose quite well. Using English in a purposeful way while discussing the elements of the various adopted cultures provides topics for authentic, meaningful communication. Learners need to discuss their group presentation with their peers from the creation of the topic and situation to the feedback after the performance. Thus, from the beginning until the end of this long-term collaborative task, learners must communicate using the target language.

Pupil's Roles

Pupil's begin by either choosing a culture to adopt or by choosing to represent their own culture. Content based research about the various cultures will have to be done and learners will have to create convincing and culturally accurate characters. Even if a student chooses to represent their own culture, research is necessary in order to ensure the content is appropriate and believable. Since students have chosen their own topic of content research, a high level of interest will be maintained. Ernst (1994) noted that choice of topic is critical for stimulating motivation. Conducting research gives learners a foundation of basic knowledge and understanding of a particular culture. This knowledge is important for the entire class as it will enlighten people to look deeper than the any cultural stereo types which may exist.

Forming a multicultural group, learners discuss and decide who they will become and what type of characters they will portray. Decisions about which country the story is taking place, the tourism industry setting, and who are the tourism workers and who are the travelers will need to be made. Learners should work collaboratively while generating a basic theme and story concept. For better character development, aspects of an individuals' character, personality, and attitude must be discussed and decided early on.

The goals of these activities also include improving communication ability for people providing service and for people traveling abroad, therefore, stories should be related to intercultural tourism situations. From the pre-writing activities, students will begin

working on the actual script writing and story development of the extended role play. After a basic plot is created and outlined, by using a tape recorder or a video camera initial free-writing may be done improvisationally and verbally. Later, learners should transcribe the tape and begin their multi-draft process of writing, rewriting, and reworking their scenario. Students would be free to add or remove various dialog lines. This is a type of active, creative sentence combining exercise which :

> ". . . improve students' sentence structure, length of sentence, and sentence variety. For ESL students, . . . it does provide plenty of practice with the synthetic structures. . . " (Raimes, 1983)

Peer-feedback will improve skills during these initial stages of creativity and is accomplished by having two groups join together and critique each other's drafts.

International tourism plays may be longer or shorter (five to fifteen minutes) depending on the level, particular goals, and requirements of the class. In either case, as the language and the linguistic aspects of writing the script are accomplished, students should be encouraged to start thinking about their culturally representative body language, gestures, facial expression, personal space and numerous other aspects of non-verbal communication. In addition, volume, pace, and tone of voice must all be culturally representative based on the particular situation the learners have created. Students should actively practice their role-play during the writing process as a way to foster fluid creativity and collaborative efforts. Self direction or peer direction will also promote discussion and information exchange. In addition, another peer feedback component, with groups critiquing each other's reversals, should be undertaken and explored. Finally, the finished product, a well polished and well rehearsed role play is presented to the entire class. Naturally, the interaction between the characters, which the audience is able to observe, will allow the entire class to learn about all of the various cultures their classmates have researched and represented. In this way, the class continues to foster a positive collaborative atmosphere.

Beneficial Experiences

Within a creative, communicative, and collaborative setting, role plays benefit learners in many ways. Students can be exposed to an incredibly wide variety of experiences and potential experiences while improving overall communicative competence. Structures, functions, and the vocabulary necessary for dealing with these situations may be introduced and exercised in a realistic and meaningful way. Role plays provide training for both speaking and listening in any service situation. Role plays are an essential dress rehearsal which enable learners to do more than learn a set of phrases as they will experience how communication and interaction might take place in a variety of situations. (Early (Ed.), 1977)

Role plays enable students to build up more confidence while speaking English. Further, they provide an opportunity for shy students to adopt a different persona. Reticent students occasionally have difficulty participating in conversations about themselves or in voicing their own opinions. The adoption of a character who is from another culture may be a liberating experience. The character is guided by the character's cultural norms and communicative desires, not the learners'. Adopting another's cultural role creates freedom for experimentation while it also creates a significant learning situation for the participants and for the audience. Role plays in front of an audience provide more useful feedback as the other members are able to be informed, outside observers. This is another part of the collaborative framework as active participants (the people role-playing) and passive participants (the audience) are able to critique and give feedback on the performance together. As this feedback will take place during and after the creation of the situations, students will be working together from the onset of this task.

Role plays inherently foster a wide range of participatory, communicative activities which require an incredible array of various communication techniques. These techniques go beyond simple language as intonation, stress patterns, and tone of voice are all explored. In addition, non-verbal communication methods such as body language and gestures must

all be understood and appreciated from an intercultural perspective. Eye contact, hand gestures, and personal space are all inherently explored while participating in a role play. Finally, role-plays may be justified as a fun activity which provide useful language exchange, promote interaction, stimulate creativity, develop fluency, increase intercultural awareness, deepen understanding and increase communicative competence.

For individuals working in the international tourism industry, intercultural awareness and sensitivity is an essential tool in providing the best service. Workers on any level need to possess communicative competence and they need to understand and appreciate the various cultures of their customers. When one is working with people from various cultures, it is necessary to understand that although they are individuals they are also members of a culture.

"Culture is woven intricately into the very fiber of every member of the group and is a controlling influence in the way people live, the way they think, the way they speak, and the way they behave." (Kohls, 1996)

Content based situational role plays provide learners with the opportunity to work collaboratively toward this goal.

Students adopting a role must take on several responsibilities. These include learning about the cultures they may have to encounter and provide service for. As the cultural expectations of people from around the world varies, it is necessary to be able to anticipate needs and be ready to satisfy expectations. Content based role plays give students the unique opportunity to explore another culture in detail from a variety of perspectives. Speakers of English should be able to express themselves properly and understand the grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic factors for any given situation based on a higher level of communicative competence. They also need to be able to use the culturally appropriate language in order to communicate with respect while avoiding any stereotypes. Having knowledge about another culture which ex-

tends beyond stereotypes is necessary in order to treat various people as individuals and provide the best service while using the most appropriate English in order to deal with any inter-cultural situation.

"Stereotypes are natural ; they are one way people everywhere deal with things which are too complex to handle or about which they have inadequate information. But they are also destructive in personal encounters because they are unfair. . ." (Kohls, 1996)

Deeply understanding the various cultures of the people which learners may come into contact with will allow for better cross-cultural understanding, better communication, and ultimately better service.

These communicative activities will train students to deal with the unpredictable nature of language and intercultural communication. Whether a student is role-playing as a worker (their possible future career) or as a customer (possibly traveling abroad), learners will experience the situation from both points of view concerning international tourism and intercultural service. This inherently improves the ability to be able to deal with unpredictable situations or needs. Knowledge of other cultures is the base behind being able to communicate effectively. Learners taking part in this collaborative task will need a certain degree of creativity and imagination. These tasks are flexible and fluid, living entities in themselves that will grow and develop depending on the initiative, imagination, and intensity of the participants. Students will be able to learn from each other as they share knowledge with their peers. A non-teacher centered, student fronted setting is a necessary approach for successfully allowing students to increase their cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Tourism role plays provide learners with the opportunity to examine, understand, and acquire knowledge which will assist and better facilitate intercultural communication. This type of creative, communicative task will provide an opportunity for experimentation with language and experimenting with knowledge about various cultures. Experimen-

tal interaction with other people in a 'safe' setting will prepare second language users for possible future professional or personal encounters. Learning from peers through group activities will benefit students implicitly and explicitly. Within this framework, a higher level of communicative competence and a broader understanding of intercultural exchange may be obtained. In conclusion, while this paper offers suggestions based on educational theory to improve English communication for international tourism and intercultural service, more research and experimentation should be done to discover other suitable solutions which will benefit pupils.

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