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## Three Pillars of Communicative Competence

### Trzy filary kompetencji komunikacyjnej

#### Abstract

The main point of view demonstrated in the present paper is to express criticism to those program of foreign language studies which still rely on the traditional approach to language education and favor the development of linguistic competence in students.

Harmonious functioning of the contemporary world depends, to much extent, on human coexistence and communication both on the micro and macro scale. In the case of the macro scale contacts, the English language has been sanctioned an international means of communication. The examination of the Internet resources with reference to higher education language programs of studies as well as programs offered by some language schools, shows that the teaching/learning process is mainly concentrated on developing students' linguistic competence. The Polish reality of practical English application in a variety of situations shows that the language user's knowledge, when limited to the linguistic sphere only, is not sufficient. Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to turn the reader's attention to the need of verification of educational policy, adopted by many higher education institutions, and expand the offered programs of studies by courses directing the teaching/learning process at the functional approach.

Hence, the suggested in the present discussion approach would rely on giving priority to the development of communicative competence, instead of linguistic.

Therefore, in the course of the discussion there appears a suggestion of designing an optimal program of studies in the form of “trivium” based on three pillars: comparative studies, discourse analysis, and translation studies.

**Key words:** *communicative competence, communication channel, language variable, comparative studies, discourse analysis, translation.*

### Abstrakt

Punktem wyjścia niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie postawy krytycznej wobec programów studiów filologicznych, które ustawicznie preferują tradycyjne podejście do nauki języka obcego ukierunkowane wyłącznie na rozwój kompetencji lingwistycznej studenta.

Harmonijne funkcjonowanie człowieka we współczesnym świecie, tak w skali mikro jak i makro, w znacznym stopniu zależy od umiejętności współdziałania i porozumiewania się. W przypadku skali makro, międzynarodowym językiem komunikacji stał się angielski. Przegląd zasobów internetowych pod kątem programów akademickich oferujących studia filologiczne jak również przegląd programów szkół językowych wykazuje, iż proces nauczania i uczenia się jest głównie skupiony na rozwoju kompetencji lingwistycznej ucznia. Polska rzeczywistość w odniesieniu do praktycznego wykorzystania języka angielskiego w różnorodnych sytuacjach wykazuje, że wiedza użytkownika języka, kiedy ograniczona wyłącznie do sfery lingwistycznej, okazuje się wiedzą niewystarczającą. Zatem celem niniejszego artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi odbiorcy na potrzebę weryfikacji polityki edukacyjnej, prowadzonej przez wiele instytucji akademickich, i poszerzenie oferty programowej studiów o zajęcia dydaktyczne prowadzone z myślą o rozwoju kompetencji w sferze funkcji języka.

Zatem, sugerowane w niniejszym artykule podejście polegałoby na przyznaniu pierwszeństwa rozwojowi kompetencji komunikacyjnej, zamiast lingwistycznej. Stąd też, w trakcie rozważań pojawia się sugestia skonstruowania optymalnego programu studiów w formie „trivium” opartego na trzech filarach: językoznawstwa porównawczego, analizy dyskursu i translacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *kompetencja komunikacyjna, kanał komunikacji, wariant językowy, komparatystyka, analiza dyskursu, translacja.*

### The role of international communication

Our surrounding shows evidently that we are living in the world of human contacts and communication, resulting in changes which are of double nature. Some changes are positively received as they exert a positive influence on us

(our inner world) and our vicinity (family, friends), while some other changes are destructive and harmful to the world we live in (the outer world).

On the micro scale we often point to human activities and especially, to the outcomes of such actions which bring about effective results of human cooperation – usually, local. As a matter of fact, we are able to notice some local problems, especially the problems which have an effect upon us directly. Simultaneously, we forget that the changes of negative character which usually result from misunderstanding and misinterpretation of human communication – such as agreements or acts worked out in the course of international cooperation, cannot be treated locally. The evoked by misunderstanding chaos and destruction refer both to the decomposition of the inner and outer worlds. It means that all the changes we experience, both positive and negative, can be found within human nature.

Without pointing to any specific factor as responsible for any sort of transformation effecting either the inner or outer world, it is reasonable to undertake preventive – educational in character steps, in case an expected change might be of negative character. Special attention should be paid to changes which appear on the macro scale and thus gain an international momentum. In the case of the negative character of transformation, the undertaking of preventive steps and actions requires the analysis of those factors which are supposed to influence the results of international communication and cooperation. Successful joint actions for mutual profits on the macro scale (where a cooperating team is composed of experts and researches representing many countries), have a requirement for a common and intelligible means of communication.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the international language commonly used for communication on the macro scale was taken by English and is still maintained. Therefore, the number of English users all over the world is enormous and covers a variety of spheres of human activity. Thus, English nowadays has become the language of education and science, diplomacy and business, international trade, aviation or mass media, just to mention a few fields of social activeness. (c.f. Johnson, 2008) Taking only these fields into account, we can imagine to what extent the knowledge of English as used for the purpose of negotiation by politicians, economists or military personnel, may have a forceful consequence for people and their environment, viewed both locally and internationally. Any deficiency in communicative competence (i.e. linguistic competence combined with cultural) among representatives of negotiating parties may have unfortunate and dire effects. Without doubt, the results of message misunderstanding are more

dangerous than the consequences of non-understanding at all. If you do not understand the discussed issue, you do not come to any agreement but if you only think or pretend that you understand it, the intended agreement or contract can be concluded on premises, usually false and therefore open to numerous interpretations. An occasion for interpretations gives rise to dilemmas concerning the genuine meaning of the already negotiated treaty or agreement. In such a case, dilemmas are usually caused by misunderstanding due to the communication channel misuse by the negotiating parties.

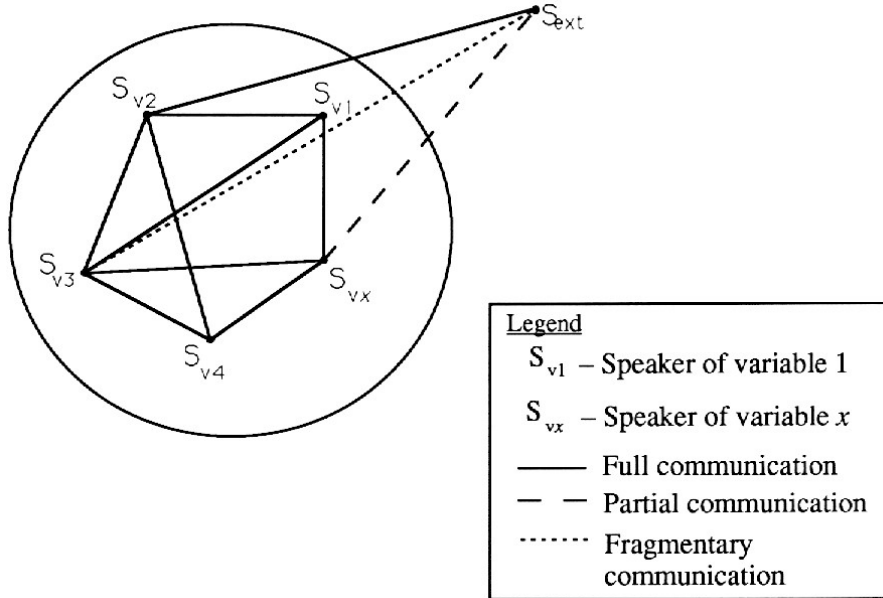
### Consequences of communication channel failure

It is commonly known that the communication channel is filled with language and thus, it is a language channel, *nomen omen*. Unfortunately, it is not that obvious what kind of language can be used by a given speaker at the very moment of his or her linguistic performance intended to succeed in communication. What, then, happens when a sort of deficit in the language use and therefore – in communication, appears.

The figure below illustrates a hypothetical situation where the “external speaker” – Sext, representing, for example a native user of English, is running a discussion panel composed of speakers (S) whose knowledge of the language in use substantially differs (variables 1-4 and *ad infinitum* – x). The type of link between Speaker(ext) who is in charge of the panel and its members (Sv1; Sv2; Sv3; Sv4, and Sv<sub>x</sub>, etc.), exemplified by the type of line, solid or dotted, standing for full communication and fragmentary communication, respectively, gives a clear image of communication efficiency. It is evident that only linguistic competence of speaker Sv2 allows for the maintaining of a full, intelligible contact with speaker Sext. In the case of two other panel members, that is Sv3 and Sv<sub>x</sub>, communication with Sext is only fragmentary and partial, respectively, while two other participants of the panel, Sv1 and Sv4 are only passive observers of the discussion or problem presentation by Sext.

The above described example, although presents a hypothetical situation, to much extent has been based on observations of international panels functioning in reality. It often happens, in Poland, that representatives of business enterprises, local or central government agencies as well as politicians who are supposed to participate actively in international panels, negotiations or cooperative teams, fail to fulfil their roles due to their language deficit. Only their ignorance and lack of criticism with reference to personal skills and abilities cause that they dare represent national agencies or enterprises. In consequence, the idea of international cooperation based

on direct thought exchange, negotiations, and working out agreements, is far from an ultimate standard of perfection or excellence.



### Harmony of cooperation

The harmony of the world to much extent depends on human cooperation and understanding of the main principles giving guidance to life maintenance. Human life is human dependent due to the human ability of co-existence and adaptation to the environment. Moreover, man is responsible for the working out of these principles which all of the living human inhabitants of the earth are supposed to follow in order to live in harmony and concord. Harmonious coexistence is both the local and international issue. In the case of local problems, their solution is facilitated by the very fact that the involved in the problem solving parties and their representatives belong to a single sphere of language and culture. In such a case, communication cannot be hampered so, the mutual agreement can be reached easily. Of different case is the use of language as a means of international communication on the macro scale. It has to be remembered that language is what constitutes semantic dimension. (Taylor, 2006) So, only a relatively good command of the language in use guarantees the understanding of internationally discussed issues. It appears that linguistic competence combined with

cultural, becomes the key instrument of successful communication, which results in universal solutions acceptable by all the negotiating parties, on the international ground.

Yet, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edward Sapir, in his discussion on international language, expressed the opinion that a standard international language should be not only simple, regular and logic but also rich and creative. (Sapir, 1949) All these features, that is simplicity, regularity and richness can be found in English which since the end of WWII has become an international means of communication. Although English does not have monopoly on the market of language communication, its grammatical simplicity and the economic and military position of Great Britain and the USA in the world, testify to its role and standard.

A commonly adopted belief that English is simple (or at least simpler than French or German) had the effect in ignorance resulting from not analyzing thoroughly all aspects of English teaching and learning. A well-balanced teaching/learning process of any language, no matter how difficult or easy it is, is not expected to focus on the linguistic feature only. Ignoring the cultural aspect makes the whole process fragmentary, which is reflected in the learner's competence or, as a matter of fact, the lack of it. It must be underscored that the clash between two different languages during the teaching/learning process, that is the mother tongue and the studied language, becomes automatically a comparison of two different cultures and then, second language learning is simultaneous with learning a second culture, perceived as a distinctive element of people of different ethnic background. (Zygmunt, 2007) Otherwise, the learner's deficit in cultural competence may have a devastating effect. As Carmen Fought noticed,

“When people of different ethnic backgrounds are using the same language, however, very different problems can arise. To begin with, neither person may be aware that there even exists a difference in language use associated with the other group; ...[...] interactional differences, like all aspects of culture, are relative to the norms of a particular community. What is perceived as somewhat abrupt in one group may seem unnecessary polite to another, but our socialization is such that we are blinded to this relativity. Instead we feel confident that certain things are just “obviously” rude, bad manners, arrogant, and so forth, without any sense of how these judgments can vary from community to community”. (Fought, 2006, p. 174)

To escape from “blindness” which Fought (2006) identifies with ignorance, it is strongly recommended, if not mandatory, that a modern teaching/learning process of English as a second or foreign language be much more culture oriented. Moreover, it is mandatory that a properly designed foreign language program of studies offered by higher education institutions of any rank, should include, as its component parts, such courses as **comparative studies**, **discourse analysis** and **translation studies**, hence creating simultaneously three main pillars of the educational program.

A useful and valuable quality of comparative studies, viewed as the contrastive analysis of two languages, that is the mother tongue and the studied, foreign language, is a thorough overview of the intricacies concerning the two languages in question. The essence of comparative studies is to show how the two compared languages are similar and how the compared languages are different. More importantly, the quality of comparative studies is dependent on their validity for students whose deepened knowledge in the two contrasted spheres of language allows for syntactic and lexical error avoidance and better understanding of encoded in language messages due to the analysis of cultural features found in the lexical sphere, which is responsible for meaning formation. (Zygmunt, 2007) Moreover, the contrastive analysis of two languages makes students penetrate and compare the spheres of both language and culture. Such an approach is of paramount importance for the development of students’ inner world – their knowledge and intellectual ability, especially critical thinking.

Discourse analysis, as another pillar of competence development, familiarizes students with a variety of social roles played by language users – it shows all communication aspects and the requirements for expressiveness and language clarity. *“Explanation, apologies, and jokes are all ways in which the individual makes a plea for disqualifying some of the expressive features of the situation as sources of definitions for himself”*. (Goffman, 1961, p. 105) Furthermore, discourse analysis teaches students how to achieve cohesion and coherence and how to identify patterns and regularities of language “beyond the sentence”. And, students are also made sensitive to the dialogic and interactive properties of everyday communication. They have to be aware of various types of discourse as reflected in the features of negotiation, discussion or everyday communication between politicians, businessmen or people of considerable prominence. (Zygmunt, 2017) So, discourse analysis shows all aspects of the individual’s linguistic behaviors, “which stem neither from normative nor from typical standards, but must be explained by circumstances in the situation [...] and by the performer’s personal style while on duty”. (Wadensjö, 1998, p. 83)

To complete an optimal course design, the final pillar of the “trivium” in language education is undoubtedly translation. Hence, comparative studies, discourse analysis and translation studies, once put to work together, pave the triple way to eloquence.

Coming back to the discussed earlier hypothetical situation of the panel discussion where not all its participants are able to be active due to their limited knowledge of the language in use, it can be concluded that in order to avoid fruitless meetings, panel representatives of, for example, business, local or central government agencies as well as political life, have no choice but be supported by translators or interpreters. Then, translators, as highly trained professionals, can guarantee that communication on the international level allows for complete thought exchange and fruitful negotiations which, in turn, ensure harmonious cooperation. Thus, it becomes obvious that the translator’s performance also contributes to harmonious cooperation of international panels working for the benefit of the outer world.

Unquestionably, the position of translator or interpreter on the labor market is high and in demand, due to the fact that we live in “the global village”, which requires numerous human contacts and information exchange in a variety of fields. Besides, it should be stressed that the translator’s professional activity covers a wide scope of language varieties, ranging from colloquial style, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to *belles lettres*, hence ranging from non-literary to literary texts. Such activity as the above mentioned, necessitates superb linguistic and cultural competence which turns into a powerful instrument utilized by the translator in his work when the ability of distinguishing discrete differences between non-literary and literary texts becomes the decisive factor of successful translation. (Gibova, 2012)

### **Justification for the tree pillar model**

Language is a living organism attributed to a national or social community and as such undergoes the same changes which effect a given community using its own ethnic language. Moreover, human language is a culturally based dynamic construct which expresses the power of intellect by means of conventionalized forms of speech, writing, or gesture.

The presented above opinion provides a strong support for designing a program of studies where priority is given to the development of the functional system of language, which is responsible for communicative competence shaping. Then the shaping process can gradually but systematically familiarize students with an array of language norms, functions, and styles –



thus, furnish students with knowledge which is indispensable for realistic and creative use of the studied language. Hence, understanding norms and language behavior of native users of English is *conditio sine qua non* of superb language application and therefore – success in discourse and negotiation. Especially, the very act of negotiation demands from its participants cultural competence, which turns into a priority when thought exchange, argumentation and language formality, including politeness, are at stake. It has to be underscored that social interaction such as negotiation, for example, requires from co-interlocutors to understand each other as a multiple-role-performer. This, in turn, is imperative to be familiar with language functions and know how to utilize them simultaneously in conversation. (Halliday, 1973) The importance of communicative competence with reference to language functions and register is emphasized by practically every definition of language. For example, *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* says that “Language” must be understood as “*the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves; – as any such differentiated system as used by a section of a human race, the English language*”, for example. Language is also “*a system enriched by words and phrases used by persons having special knowledge, scientific language*”, for example. Besides, language is viewed as “*a system adapted to a special purpose, the language of diplomacy; – a manner of expressing oneself, strong language; – any other organized system of communication, e.g. by symbols, mathematical language; – or gestures, deaf-and-dumb language; – any apparently organized system of communication – the language of animals*”. (The New Lexicon Webster's..., 1989, p. 554)

With language functions and register in focus, it is advisable to modify language study programs run by higher education institutions. The main reason of the suggested revision lies in the change of language perception and therefore – approach. Unfortunately, the traditional approach and viewing it as a set of forms is still prevailing, which is evident in the programs of studies accessible via the Internet. Although the knowledge of grammar, pronunciation rules, and lexis constitutes the fundamentals of linguistic competence, the elimination of functional system penetration from the course curriculum, which often happens, is a serious fault. By contrast, the penetration of the functional system of the studied language gives a chance of viewing it through the prism of linguistic and cultural competence development. In consequence, joining the process of linguistic competence development with the process of cultural competence enlarges and improves the teaching/learning process as a whole. By doing so, we foster communicative competence in students.

So far, much has been said about competence which is the key issue and goal of a well-balanced philological program of studies. However, the very term, i.e. “competence” arises controversy as there is a certain dose of disagreement among educators whose preferences are split between the followers of Chomsky’s route towards linguistic competence, *nomen omen*, and Hymes’s – communicative competence as the course indicator and ultimate goal. According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence is what you know to be able to communicate effectively while Chomsky (1972) views competence as the knowledge that enables the creation of well-formed sentences. Yet, there are some other routes, solely directing educators towards sociolinguistic competence, functional competence or strategic competence. This is so because, as far as the very notion of “competence” is concerned, there does not exist a general *consensus* among linguists who often use the term in many interesting but also confusing ways. As a matter of fact, confusion in this respect is inevitable, as Sandra Savignon (1983) notices. The attempts headed at the explanation of the term differ in approach and complexity. It seems that disagreement on the definition of competence has its roots in the approach to language and to foreign or second language teaching. However, probably the most accepted definition says that:

“Competence is what we intuitively know about a language in order to be able to use it. It is a kind of internalized knowledge that allows us to distinguish well-formed from ill-formed sentences, ...[...]. It is also the knowledge that allows us to appreciate the ambiguity of a sentence ...[...]. According to Noam Chomsky, *competence* contrasts with *performance*, which is the way that competence is realized, with all its ‘imperfections’, in actual speech or writing. More recently, the distinction between competence and performance has been re-labeled as the difference between *I-language* (internalized language) and *E-language* (the way this internalized language is put to use correctly). (Thornbury, 2010, p. 38)

The problem of the learner’s competence and its division has also been raised by Canale and Swain (1980), and it appears that this problem has been greatly clarified by them. Following their point of view, it comes out that the presence or absence of the so-called “competence problem” in foreign language education is directly connected with the approach to language. In fact, it depends on the image of language we keep in our mind. The traditional as opposed to contemporary perception of language can be illustrated in the following way:

## LANGUAGE PRESENTATION

Traditional	Contemporary
<u>Set of Forms</u>	<u>Functional System i.e.</u>
(a) grammatical	Communicative Competence
(b) phonological	(a) grammatical competence
(c) lexical	(b) sociolinguistic competence
	(c) strategic competence

Images of language (after Canale and Swain, 1980)

From the above language presentation comes out that the contemporary approach to foreign language instruction, at least in theory, favors the functional system, aimed at communicative competence development. On the other hand, observation and its results seem to deny this preference. A brief analysis of the accessible on the Internet curricula of language programs run by many higher education institutions in Poland, gives evidence that although elements of culture are included in programs of studies, the programs themselves are still grammar, phonology, and lexis oriented. Moreover, we learn from mass media that many politicians and top representatives of state enterprises or agencies attend language courses, especially English, to enable their active and efficient participation in international negotiations and discussion panels. But we also learn that the same politicians and top representatives of state agencies are supported, in their work, by translators and interpreters. If there is no way out for language schools to achieve more effective results in their work with officials, businessmen or people of considerable prominence so, at least higher education institutions with their philology departments, should revise and adjust their programs of studies to concentrate on developing in students communicative competence *sensu stricto*. This sort of communicative competence would put the functional system of language at work by combining courses designed for developing linguistic competence, in Chomsky's understanding, with courses improving cultural competence viewed as an educational program *en bloc*, developing simultaneously sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Such a combination is in concord with both Chomsky's and Hymes's point of view upon competence, in general, and additionally expands the so-designed course by a substantial amount of material on culture.

With the above presented suggestion in mind, it is expected that a language/culture wired course, in its process of developing cultural competence in students, would rely "on a generic concept of culture as a collective name for

*language, religion, art, law, state, history, society, craft, etc.*” (Tenbruck, 1989, p. 18) Thus, such approach, based on a language/culture wired course where apart from pure language, students enter into numerous spheres of language-culture interrelationship and interconnectedness due to a given them chance of delving into the essentials of history, religion, society, art or social conduct and norms, in order to equip language users with intellectual and emotional resources to be utilized in the process of communication and interaction on the macro scale. (c.f. Zygmunt, 2021) It is clearly possible to experience misunderstanding even when the linguistic forms are perfectly clear as the interlocutor’s interactional style may not be adopted to the norm. Thus, it is necessary to underscore that miscommunication is usually based on differences in interactional style. Therefore, introduction and promotion of the philological program which is based on the three discussed here pillars, that is **comparative studies**, **discourse analysis** and **translation studies**, is fully justified as a successful route, directing language students and users at the goal.

## Conclusions

Human coexistence requires communication which enables functioning on the micro and macro scale, that is locally and globally. With this thought in mind, it has been decided to check several program of studies run by higher education institutions and accessible on the Internet. The intention was to find out to what extent the examined programs are adjusted to the contemporary requirements of developing communicative competence in foreign language students.

Unsatisfactory results of the Internet resources survey gave rise to the occasion of premeditation of the present state of language education. In consequence, a brief discussion and comparison of two approaches to language, that is traditional (set of forms) and contemporary (functional system) pointed to a higher effectiveness of teaching in the case of the latter one. Apart from its effectiveness, the process of contemporary approach implementation makes possible to combine activities and materials developing linguistic competence with activities and materials responsible for cultural competence growth. Hence, communicative competence, covering both the sphere of language and culture, becomes a very useful instrument in the language user’s linguistic interaction, especially on the macro scale where apart from the knowledge of language more important is the knowledge of norms, history and habits or social conduct. This sort of knowledge, as the discussion shows, is fundamental in communication where the language user’s demon-

stration of linguistic competence is strongly supported by his knowledge of culture. The suggested by the article fusion of two spheres: linguistic and cultural, in the process of shaping communicative competence in students, finds a strong support in Beth Haslett's opinion who says that "*culture is a shared consensual way of life, and that sharing and consensus are made possible only through communication*". (Haslett, 1989, p. 20) Moreover, the discussion presented in the article was guided by another widely known and esteemed opinion of Elinore Ochs who clearly underscores the position and role of culture in shaping competence in general, and in interaction, communication and message understanding, in particular. According to her, culture is "*a system of implicit and explicit ideas that underlies and gives meaning to behaviors in society. These ideas are related (in various ways, to varying extents, according to school or paradigm) to political, economic, religious, and kinship relations, events, interactions, and institutions; to values; to conceptions of the world; to theories of knowledge; and to procedures for understanding and interpreting*". (Ochs, 1987, p. 307)

Bearing in mind the above expressed guidance, and being aware of a strong interrelationship and interconnectedness between language and culture, promotion of the philological program of studies based on the three pillars discussed in the present paper, is fully justified.

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