



COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCIES: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC SILENCE IN QUELLING EMOTIONAL RED FLAGS

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Abstract:

This study investigates the strategies and practices employed in schools to enhance the acquisition of Communicative Competencies in English language learning. It focuses on three key research areas: the activities learners engaged in to develop Communicative Competencies, the specific competencies applied, and the role of Strategic Silence in managing emotional challenges during lessons. A qualitative approach was utilized, with data collected through classroom observation, lesson recordings, and interviews with teachers of English Language. The findings revealed that learners participated in a range of interactive activities, including group discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks among others, fostering their ability to express ideas effectively and adapt to diverse communication contexts. Teachers emphasized linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competencies. The study has notably supported the proposition that Strategic Silence emerges as an effective tool in addressing emotional red flags, promoting reflection, and maintaining harmony. These insights contribute to the understanding of best practices for enhancing communication skills and emotional resilience among learners.

Keywords: intercultural competence, English language teaching, innovative pedagogies, communicative competence and strategic silence

1. Introduction

Language is a multifaceted system of communication used by humans and serves several essential functions: transmission of information, expression of emotions, social interaction, and cultural identity. It is acquired through interaction with other speakers; hence, it evolves and adapts over time within different cultural settings (Brown, 2014). Research reveals that language is a fundamental tool for human thought and communication; therefore, it shapes how people perceive the world and interact with others. It allows humans to express thoughts, ideas, emotions, and intentions. It enables people to share information, ask questions, give instructions, and engage in diverse

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discussions. Language is critical for social bonding and interaction. It facilitates socialization, allowing people to cooperate with each other, share experiences, collaborate on tasks, and develop social norms in addition to cultural practices. It is a key component of cultural identity, carrying the traditions, beliefs, values, and history of a community. Language is associated with cognitive development and thought processes (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It shapes people's perception and interpretation of the world around them, in addition to being fundamental to education and learning. It is the medium through which knowledge is transmitted, through spoken, written, or digital formats, depending on the education policy.

In Kenya, English is the language of instruction from grade four to university. The child's first language is used in rural areas apart from cosmopolitan areas where Kiswahili, the second official language, is used (Wendo, 2009). Therefore, the target language was English, because it is a lingua franca, one of the official languages in Kenya and the language of instruction from grade four to university. Notably, Proficiency in a language of instruction enriches one's ability to acquire new knowledge, engage in critical thinking, and achieve academically. Generally, proficiency in language is essential for economic development and mobility, as well as opening up opportunities for employment besides businesses locally and internationally due to cross-cultural communication and collaboration. Moreover, shared language can bring together people from different backgrounds and help bridge cultural gaps, upholding understanding, tolerance, and harmony. It also allows individuals to express their personal identities and emotions, among other uses. Certainly, language is essential to human existence, impacting nearly every aspect of life, such as: education, social relationships, culture, and economic development. It is an instrument for communication affecting every aspect of human civilization and progress. Therefore, it is crucial for one to be proficient in all aspects of language use.

1.1 Research Questions

- 1) Which activities were learners involved in to facilitate the acquisition of Communicative Competencies?
- 2) Which Communicative Competencies were applied?
- 3) How was Strategic Silence utilized in quelling emotional red flags?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language as a Skill

Language as a skill is an essential aspect of human communication that enables individuals to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas effectively. Proficiency in language guarantees clarity and effectiveness in delivering verbal or written messages (Manyasi, 2024).

Language is learned through exposure, practice, and reinforcement. Continuous use and interaction refine the skills over time. Language skills are interconnected;

improving listening skills enhances speaking ability, while reading strengthens vocabulary and writing. Language influences cognitive processes such as critical thinking and problem-solving. It allows individuals to organize thoughts, reason, and analyze complex ideas. In addition, it reflects cultural identity and emotions, providing a medium to preserve traditions, values, and beliefs besides enabling individuals to articulate their feelings. There are two significant types of Language skills: Receptive and Productive language skills, as summarized below:

Receptive Language Skills	Productive Language Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Listening○ Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Speaking○ Writing

Receptive language skills (listening and reading) refer to one's ability to understand and process language that they hear or read. They are crucial for effective communication and learning, as they form the basis for understanding spoken and written messages. In children, receptive language skills are fundamental as they precede expressive language - the ability to produce language (Manyasi, 2024). Receptive language skills involve:

- Listening Comprehension,
- Auditory Processing,
- Reading Comprehension, and
- Nonverbal Cues.

Listening Comprehension is the ability to understand spoken words, sentences, and conversations involving: recognizing sounds and distinguishing them from one another, understanding vocabulary and grammar, and interpreting the speaker's intent, tone, and context.

Auditory Processing, the ability to analyze and interpret sounds and their sequences includes: Discrimination of phonemes, sequencing and remembering auditory information, and understanding complex verbal instructions.

Reading Comprehension is the ability to understand written text encompassing: decoding words and phrases, grasping the meaning of sentences and larger textual structures, plus inferring and interpreting meaning beyond the literal text.

Nonverbal Cues mean understanding gestures, facial expressions, and body language, they usually accompany verbal communication.

Productive Language Skills, involves the active production of language - the ability to *produce language* orally (through speaking) or in writing. They are considered active skills because they comprise the generation of language rather than its reception. Speaking involves *verbal communication* and combines vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency (Hinkel, 2017). Writing, the ability to express ideas through a written text, requires planning, organizing, and presenting thoughts coherently. Depending on the type of written text, coherence and cohesion in writing are critical. Productive language skills are essential for effective communication, fostering academic

progress by aiding in presentations, writing essays, reports and supporting professional interactions.

2.2 Communicative Competence

Communicative competence requires both *linguistic knowledge* and *practical skills* for effective interaction in different social contexts. The main components of communicative competence are summarized in Figure 1:

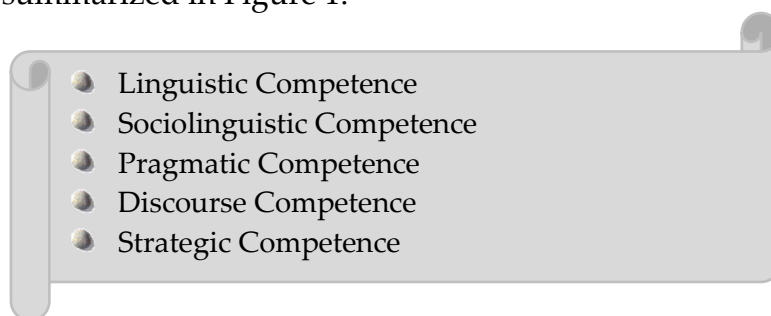


Figure 1: Components of Communicative Competence

Linguistic Competence is knowledge of the language system: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, which results in the ability to produce and comprehend well-constructed sentences.

Sociolinguistic Competence is the ability to use language appropriately in diverse social contexts. It includes understanding social norms, cultural shades, and context-specific guidelines of language use, such as: conventionalism, graciousness, and cultural allusions.

Thirdly, *Pragmatic Competence* is understanding the practical aspects of language or how to use language to achieve specific communicative goals, such as: requesting, apologizing, proposing or convincing (Bachman, & Palmer 2010). In addition, it includes knowing how to interpret implicit meanings and details.

Furthermore, *Discourse Competence* focuses on the ability to construct coherent and cohesive spoken or written texts, understand how to link sentences and ideas in a meaningful way and organize information logically to produce precise and effective communication (Savignon, 2018).

Strategic Competence is the skill to use communication tactics to overcome difficulties in communication or to enhance its effectiveness, such as: the use of gestures, rephrasing, asking for clarification, and managing conversation breakdowns.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence

Practical use of language in conversations calls for Emotional intelligence. It assists people in understanding and managing their own emotions, as well as understanding and empathize with the emotions of others. A good grasp of emotional intelligence enables people to communicate effectively, build stronger relationships, and resolve conflicts successfully. Being aware of our own emotions can better control our reactions during discussions. It allows one to respond *thoughtfully* rather than reacting impulsively,

therefore fostering more productive and meaningful exchanges. Moreover, emotional intelligence helps us understand the emotions of others by empathizing with their feelings. As a result, people can connect on a deeper level, demonstrate compassion, and build trust. It allows us to tailor our communication style to meet the needs of others, promoting better understanding and cooperation. Another important element of emotional intelligence is emotional *regulation* (Zeidner *et al.*, 2004). It assists people to manage their emotions during challenging or tense discussions. By staying calm and composed, we can express ourselves more clearly, avoid misunderstandings, and prevent conflicts from escalating. Emotional intelligence acts *as a guide* for effective communication. It enables us to navigate conversations with empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation, building stronger connections, fostering positive relationships, and promoting harmonious communication (Lin *et al.*, 2004). Quite often, it is demonstrated through Strategic Silence, which is essential for effective communication.

2.4 Culture and Silence in Communication

Different societies have unique communication norms and expectations, therefore, Silence during oral communication can be influenced by various cultural factors such as:

- Traditional Beliefs and Taboos
- Role of Gender
- Respect for Authority and Hierarchy
- Religious and Philosophical Influences
- Social Upbringing
- High-Context and Low-Context Communication Style

Some communities, especially in Africa, associate silence with wisdom or spiritual depth. They believe that speaking too much can diminish one's credibility. In many patriarchal societies, women remain silent in the presence of men due to gender norms that discourage female assertiveness (Gatwiri, 2016). However, in democratic societies, both men and women are encouraged to participate equally in discussions. In many Asian and African societies, silence indicate respect for elders, leaders, or superiors. In most cases, People may avoid speaking unless spoken to, especially in the presence of elders or those of higher status. *Religious teachings* often emphasize the virtue of silence in moments of reflection, prayer, or meditation. In some African traditions, silence may indicate deep thought or spiritual connection with ancestors. *Social conditioning* in early childhood can reinforce norms where children are taught that silence is golden. Japan, Korea, Native American and African communities are High-context cultures - they rely heavily on *non-verbal cues*, indirect communication, and silence to convey meaning (Yuarata, 2016). Most western countries are Low-context cultures, therefore; they prioritize explicit verbal communication, hence; silence may be seen as unproductive.

During marriage negotiations in many African communities, silence is not a sign of indifference but a cultural tool for ensuring respect, thoughtfulness, and harmony in a process that is deeply rooted in tradition and community values (Diala, 2019). It represents maturity, and strategic communication, playing a critical role in ensuring that

negotiations proceed harmoniously. In African traditions, elders are the custodians of wisdom, and their words carry substantial weight. Remaining silent while they speak displays acknowledgment of their authority. Therefore, silence is a way of displaying respect for elders and those leading the negotiations. It is also seen as a sign of emotional intelligence and maturity. It shows that parties are thoughtful and not quick to react, an essential quality in resolving delicate matters like marriage, besides avoiding to make hasty decisions hence ensuring that agreements are reached thoughtfully and consensually. Moreover, silence helps ensure that the process remains collective rather than dominated by individual opinions. It fosters an environment where decisions are made collaboratively, ensuring that the agreement represents the community's shared values. Silence is ingrained in cultural norms. It signifies humility and reverence, qualities that are highly valued in traditional ceremonies. Culturally, silence in oral communication is not always an indication of shyness or lack of knowledge, it often reflects engrained cultural values, respect and conflict avoidance strategies (Kimani, 2021). Appreciating these cultural differences is essential for effective cross-cultural communication.

2.5 Silence in Communication

Silence is a form of nonverbal communication that can convey emotions, intentions, and attitudes. It can indicate attentiveness, contemplation, agreement, disagreement, discomfort, or even disinterest. In some cultures, silence is valued and considered a sign of respect or wisdom. It can be an essential part of active listening. By remaining silent, individuals can give others the space and opportunity to express themselves fully without interruption. It shows that one is attentive and willing to hear the other person's perspective. In addition, Silence allows individuals to reflect and process information before responding, utilizing the moment to consider the message, formulate thoughts, and select words carefully. Silence can enhance the quality of responses and promote deeper understanding in conversations. In some societies, silence is seen as a sign of respect or thoughtfulness, whereas in others, it may be perceived as uncomfortable. Understanding cultural norms and expectations regarding silence is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication. Similarly, Silence can be a powerful way to express emotions such as sadness, anger, surprise, or happiness. Sometimes, silence is used intentionally to create a pause or to allow emotions to settle before continuing the conversation. In some contexts, it is used to create anxiety, intimidate, or manipulate others. Distinguishing the dynamics of silence in different situations is critical for understanding the fundamental messages being conveyed.

2.5.1 Strategic Silence in Communication

Strategic Silence, which is usually utilized as a tool for emotional intelligence, plays a powerful role in communication, particularly in managing emotions and creating space for emotional regulation. In various interpersonal and cultural contexts, Strategic Silence can serve as a tool to de-escalate tension, promote reflection, and foster understanding

(Fisher, 2024). The importance of silence in communication, especially for quelling emotions are:

- Allows Emotional Regulation,
- Prevents Escalation,
- Promotes Active Listening,
- Encourages Reflection and Thoughtfulness,
- Facilitates Emotional Processing,
- Signals Self-control and Empathy,
- Creates a Calming Effect,
- Encourages Openness and Vulnerability, and
- Provides Space for Emotional Healing.

Strategic Silence provides individuals with a moment to pause and reflect before responding. When emotions flare up, the pause can be fundamental for calming down and preventing impulsive reactions that may escalate the situation. It allows time for self-regulation, hence helping individuals process their feelings, and reducing the probability of saying something spiteful or unconstructive (Altano, 2024). During conflicts, responses driven by rage can promote escalation. Strategic Silence can act as a cushion, providing a break in the interaction that prevents the conversation from spiraling out of control. By not reacting immediately, individuals can maintain a more constructive dialogue. It encourages active listening, which is vital for understanding the emotions and perspectives of others. It signals attentiveness and respect for the other's feelings and viewpoints. It creates a safe space for the person to express themselves fully, fostering empathy and reducing emotional tension.

In addition, Strategic Silence provides an opportunity for reflection, allowing individuals to think more deeply about their words and the implications of their actions, leading to effective communication. It can help individuals progress from reactive to more thoughtful responses, enhancing the quality of the conversation and reducing emotional explosiveness. Emotions often need time to be fully understood and processed. Therefore, Strategic Silence gives people ample time to acknowledge and identify their feelings without the pressure to respond immediately, enabling them to address underlying issues more effectively.

Furthermore, using silence strategically in communication can demonstrate self-control and empathy. It enables individuals to manage their emotions and be considerate of the other person's emotional state, creating a more respectful and supportive atmosphere, conducive for resolving conflicts and understanding each other better. Similarly, silence can have a calming effect on both the speaker and the listener. It can serve as a pause that allows everyone involved to take a break, relax, and reset their emotional state (Altano, 2024). Likewise, silence can create an environment where individuals feel more comfortable being open and vulnerable. By not rushing to fill every pause with words, they can convey that they are truly listening and open to hearing what the other person has to say, which encourages more honest and genuine communication. In the context of emotional pain or grief, silence can be a powerful tool for healing. It

allows individuals to acknowledge their pain and begin the healing process without the pressure of exchange. This kind of silence can be predominantly supportive, displaying solidarity without the need for words.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research paradigm, which is used to gather an in-depth understanding of issues that concern education, such as the role of research in generating knowledge (Cohen, 2007). The paradigm was appropriate for the study because the researcher could gather an in-depth understanding of communicative competence elements used during discourse, classroom interaction and in the school contexts. Specifically, activities learners were involved in to facilitate the acquisition of communicative competencies, the communicative competencies utilized in the school context and the application of Strategic Silence in quelling emotional red flags. A sample size of 20 schools was used. Data was collected using observations, recordings and interviews as summarised:

S/N	Sample size	Activity	Research Instrument
1.	20 Schools	Classroom observation of 20 lessons of English Language	Observation
2.	20 Teachers of English Language	Interview of 20 teachers of English	Interview

Interviews enable researchers to generate data about what a participant thinks, believes, and reasons for thinking in a certain way or for doing certain things (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). It enabled the researcher to generate qualitative data about the communicative competencies utilized and the application of Strategic Silence as a tool of emotional intelligence. Yin (2003) asserts that in the qualitative paradigm, data analysis is done by assigning categories and coding emerging issues into themes relevant to the research questions. Data was analyzed and reporting of findings was done according to emerging themes relevant to the study questions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Activities for Acquiring Communicative Competencies in the School Setting

Acquiring communicative competencies in a school setting is crucial for students' personal, academic, and future professional lives. The competencies include the ability to effectively communicate in various contexts, understand others, and use language appropriately. Activities that enabled students to develop the skills were:

- Role-playing,
- Simulations,
- Group Discussions,
- Debates,
- Storytelling,

- Oral Presentations,
- Listening Tasks,
- Peer Feedback Sessions,
- Writing and Reflective Exercises,
- Collaborative Projects,
- Language Games and Activities,
- Digital Communication Practice,
- Cross-Cultural Communication Workshops,
- Interview and Negotiation Practices,
- Nonverbal Communication Activities,
- Dramatization and Improvisation,
- Hot seating.

Role-playing and Simulations inspire active listening, empathy, and adjusting communication style to diverse audiences. They acted out scenarios in pairs or small groups, such as a job interview, a marriage negotiation, and a nurse's visit, among others.

Debates and Group Discussions cultivate critical thinking, persuasive skills, and the ability to articulate arguments clearly and concisely. They structured discussions on various topics where students share opinions and ideas and argue for or against a particular viewpoint.

Presentations and Storytelling enable learners to create and share stories or give presentations on topics of interest or academic content. It is quite helpful because it enhances narrative skills, confidence, and the ability to organize and present thoughts logically.

Listening Activities such as listening to audio recordings improve active listening skills, attention to detail, and the ability to comprehend spoken language.

Peer Feedback Sessions, after discussions and presentations, allow fellow learners to provide constructive feedback on communication skills such as: clarity, volume, and non-verbal cues. It assists learners to recognize areas of improvement and develop the ability to give and receive constructive criticism.

Writing Tasks such as writing journals, letters, essays and *reflective activities* where students think about their communication, improve written communication skills, self-awareness, and reflective thinking.

Collaborative or Group Projects, where students communicate to plan, research, and present their findings collectively, promote teamwork, negotiation skills, and the ability to convey ideas clearly and respectfully within a group.

Engaging Language Activities such as word games and language puzzles that encourage spontaneous use of language makes learning enjoyable while enhancing vocabulary, quick thinking, and conversational skills.

Digital Communication Exercises, using digital tools like emails, discussion forums, or social media simulations to practice formal and informal communication styles, prepare learners for the digital communication landscape, helping them understand online etiquette.

Mock Interviews and Negotiation Role-plays, enable learners to negotiate under various scenarios to develop persuasive communication skills, confidence in expressing oneself, and the skill to comprehend and address others' perspectives.

Nonverbal Communication Activities, focusing on body language, facial expressions, and gestures, such as miming activities, and interpreting others' nonverbal cues among others, cultivate awareness of nonverbal aspects of communication, improving overall communicative effectiveness.

Dramatization Tasks, where learners engage in drama activities or improvisational exercises, expecting them to respond spontaneously in character, nurture creativity, adaptability in communication, and the ability to think and respond rapidly.

4.2 Communicative Competence Elements Used

Data revealed that the elements of communicative competence used were:

- Linguistic Competence,
- Sociolinguistic Competence,
- Discourse Competence, and
- Strategic Competence.

4.2.1 Linguistic Competence

The aspects of linguistic competence are:

- Grammar,
- Syntax,
- Morphology,
- Phonology,
- Generativity,
- Linguistic Intuition.

Competence and Performance Linguistic competence is the internalized knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and syntactic rules of a language which speakers possess, facilitating them to generate and comprehend an infinite number of sentences, including those that they may never have heard before. Language teachers focused on the following aspects of linguistic competence:

Grammar, syntax, Morphology and Phonology: language teaching, including formative and summative checks, emphasized knowledge of *Grammar Rules* of a language, which incorporates *syntax* (the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences), *Morphology* (the structure of words), and *Phonology* (the sound system of a language).

Some activities tested the *Generativity Aspect* of linguistic competence - the ability to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences, including sentences that have never been spoken previously, to demonstrate the depth and flexibility of linguistic knowledge.

As reported by Noam Chomsky, who distinguished between *Linguistic Competence* (the knowledge of a language) and *Linguistic Performance* (the actual use of language in

concrete situations), a number of language activities went beyond assessing linguistic competence to assessing the actual use of language in real settings hence stressing the need for both competences.

Through *Linguistic Performance*, one can determine the *Linguistic Intuition* of the speaker, the unconscious awareness and the ability to acknowledge what is grammatically correct or incorrect in a language, even if they cannot explicitly state the rule.

Linguistic competence emphasizes the *Internalized Knowledge* that allows individuals to use language effectively, however, linguistic performance refers to how language is actually used in everyday situations. Understanding linguistic competence helps linguists and language educators, who are applied linguists, to utilize the concepts to facilitate language acquisition in learning institutions.

4.2.2. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. It involves understanding the social norms, cultural expectations, and situational factors that influence how language is used and interpreted in communication. Unlike linguistic competence, which focuses on the knowledge of grammar and syntax, sociolinguistic competence emphasizes on the social aspects of language use, such as:

- Contextual Appropriateness,
- Understanding Social Norms,
- Cultural Awareness,
- Pragmatic Skills,
- Code-switching and Style-shifting,
- Sociolinguistic Variation,
- Communication Effectiveness in Multicultural Settings.

Contextual Appropriateness involves choosing the right words, tone, and style for different settings. For example, the language used in a formal job interview is different from that used in an informal conversation with friends. Sociolinguistic competence helps individuals comprehend these discrepancies and alter their language appropriately.

Understanding Social Norms includes knowledge of the unwritten rules that govern language use in different communities, such as politeness strategies, using formal titles when addressing elders or superiors, or knowing when it is appropriate to use informal language.

Similarly, *Cultural Awareness*, being aware of cultural differences in language use, is a fundamental part of sociolinguistic competence. It encompasses understanding idioms, expressions, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication that vary across cultures. For instance, the way humour is expressed in conversation can vary considerably from one culture to another.

Another aspect of sociolinguistic competence is *Pragmatic Skills*, the ability to use language effectively to accomplish specific communicative goals, such as making requests, giving tributes, or managing disagreements. The skills require knowledge of the language besides an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics and the intentions behind diverse speech acts. Sociolinguistic competence also deals with the ability to switch between different dialects, languages, or styles depending on the social context, known as *code-switching*. It is often seen in bilingual or multilingual speakers who adjust their language use to fit the audience or setting.

Kenya being multilingual, *Code-switching and Style-shifting* was evident.

In addition, *Sensitivity to Sociolinguistic Variation*, which means recognizing and understanding regional, social, and ethnic variations in language use, is also an aspect of sociolinguistic competence. It involves being aware of accents, dialects, sociolects (language variations associated with particular social groups), and how the variations affect communication and social perceptions.

Sociolinguistic competence is crucial for effective communication, especially in diverse or *Multicultural Settings*. It helps individuals navigate complex social landscapes, build rapport, and avoid misunderstandings or infringement that could arise from inappropriate language use. In language learning, developing sociolinguistic competence is as vital as mastering grammar, syntax, *Morphology* and *Phonology*. Understanding the social rules of language use significantly impacts the ability to communicate effectively and integrate into diverse cultural settings. Language teaching approaches that incorporate sociocultural contexts help learners acquire not just linguistic knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in real-life situations. Therefore, sociolinguistic competence is an essential component of communicative competence, focusing on the social and cultural aspects of language use. It involves understanding and applying social norms, cultural expectations, and situational factors to communicate effectively and appropriately in different contexts. This competence is crucial for navigating social interactions in multicultural and multilingual settings, a significant area of focus in language education.

4.2.3. Discourse Competence

Discourse competence is the ability to understand, produce, and effectively manage extended stretches of spoken or written language in a coherent, cohesive, and contextually appropriate manner. It focuses on how sentences connect to form meaningful and structured discourse in conversations, narratives, descriptions, arguments, and other types of communication. The main aspects used were:

- Cohesion,
- Coherence,
- Organization and Structure,
- Genre and Register Awareness,
- Interactive Skills,
- Pragmatic Understanding,

- Critical Thinking and Interpretation.

Cohesion refers to linguistic components that connect sentences and parts of discourse to each other. It is achieved through the use of devices such as pronouns, conjunctions, transitional phrases and other means that construct links between sentences and paragraphs. They support the flow of discourse and make it easier for the listener or reader to follow.

Coherence is the logical arrangement and meaningful connection of ideas within a discourse. It involves structuring information in a way that is clear and logically organized, so that the overall message or argument makes sense to the audience. Coherence is not just about linguistic markers but also about the logical progression of ideas, ensuring that each part of the discourse contributes to the overall meaning and purpose.

Discourse competence also includes - *Organization and Structure* - knowledge of the typical structures and conventions associated with different types of discourse. For example, a story might have a standard narrative structure with an introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution, whereas a persuasive essay might follow a different structure with an introduction, body paragraphs presenting arguments, and a conclusion. Understanding these structures helps in effectively organizing content to suit the communicative purpose.

In addition, *Genre and Register Awareness*, which deals with the different types of discourse such as: academic writing, casual conversation and formal communication, require diverse language choices, styles, and tones, the competence comprises recognizing these differences and adjusting language use accordingly. One has to understand the expectations and conventions of various genres and registers.

Similarly, *Interactive Skills* such as: turn-taking, maintaining and repairing conversations, using appropriate intonation, stress, and managing the flow of dialogue in spoken discourse are considered critical in communicative competence. There is a need for one to understand and utilize strategies that keep the conversation going, manage interruptions and clarify misunderstandings.

Pragmatic Understanding, requires comprehension of the social and cultural contexts in which communication occurs, knowing how to adjust discourse according to the context, audience, and purpose, as well as recognizing the implicit meanings, assumptions, or cultural references that might be present in a discourse.

Engaging with discourse necessitates *Critical Thinking Skills* to interpret, analyze, and evaluate the content in complex texts or discussions. It involves recognizing biases, identifying the main arguments or themes, and understanding the implications of what is being communicated. Language learning should emphasize discourse competence which is a critical aspect of communicative competence that involves understanding and producing coherent, cohesive, and contextually appropriate spoken and written language.

4.2.4. Strategic Competence

Strategic competence, the ability to effectively use communication strategies to manage and overcome potential challenges or breakdowns in communication, is a key component of communicative competence. The main aspects used were:

- Paraphrasing,
- Asking for Clarification,
- Using Fillers and Hesitation Devices,
- Guessing,
- Code-switching,
- Non-verbal Communication,
- Simplification, and
- Avoidance.

Paraphrasing was used by rewording an expression when the exact word or phrase was not recognized. For example, if someone doesn't know the word "scissors," they might say, "the thing you use to cut paper." Furthermore, learners asked for *clarification*. They requested an explanation or repetition to ensure understanding. The other strategy used is utilizing *Fillers*, words, phrases, or sounds that speakers use to fill pauses or gaps in speech. They frequently occur when a speaker is *thinking, hesitating, or searching for the right word*. Some of the fillers used were: "Like" "You know" "In fact" "I mean" "Well" "So" "Basically" "Right?" "Okay" "um," "uh," "let me see....." It gave the speakers time to think without losing control of the conversation. One can also use an educated *guess* about what a word might mean or what the speaker might be trying to convey based on context.

Code-switching in this context may involve alternating between languages or dialects, especially in multilingual settings, to fill gaps in vocabulary or express something more clearly. Most of the code switching was alternating between English and Kiswahili, the two official languages in Kenya.

Non-Verbal Communication involves using gestures, facial expressions, and body language to assist in communication when words are insufficient or unclear. It was largely used by both teachers and learners. Using *simpler language* or reducing the complexity of a message to make it easier to understand or convey is another critical strategy that was utilized.

Avoiding topics, words, or expressions that might be difficult or unclear was also used. Strategic competence is essential. It allows speakers to maintain communication and convey their messages even when they face difficulties or lack adequate linguistic knowledge. It is crucial for language learners because it helps them navigate real-life communication despite limited vocabulary or grammatical proficiency in a language.

4.3 The Missing Link - Strategic Silence in Communication

The missing link was a failure to utilize Strategic Silence in quelling emotional red flags. Silence is a powerful and often an undervalued communication tool. *Strategic or intentional silence* is not about repressing feelings or avoiding expression, it's using *silence as a tool* for thoughtful, intentional communication. Hence, it should be acknowledged as

a conversational skill and considered as one of the aspects of communicative competence. It is critical in dealing with:

- Disrespectful Remarks,
- Emotional Outbursts,
- Uninvited Intrusion,
- Ignorant Perspectives,
- Escalating Arguments, and
- Unfruitful Discussions.

When faced with *Disrespectful Remarks* in a conversation, it is important to respond calmly and assertively. You can acknowledge the remark, express how it made you feel, and set boundaries for respectful communication. It is beneficial to redirect the discussion back to the topic at hand or seek clarification on the intent behind the remark. If the disrespect continues, it may be necessary to disengage from the conversation or seek support from a mediator or authority figure, maintaining professionalism in managing the situation.

Moreover, when dealing with *Emotional Outbursts* in a conversation, one should approach the situation with empathy and understanding. Initially, remain calm and composed to aid in de-escalate the situation. Listen actively to the person expressing their emotions, allowing them to vent and express themselves without judgment. Anger can cloud judgment and lead to impulsive reactions that we often regret later. In the heat of the moment, emotions can take control, resulting in hurtful words or actions. Silence, in this context, enables one to process emotions before reacting. Instead of saying something hurtful, taking a step back, breathing deeply, or even walking away can prevent escalation. Once you've calmed down, you can respond from a place of clarity and respect, ensuring your words reflect your true intentions and contribute to a constructive conversation rather than conflict.

Similarly, when you encounter an *Uninvited Intrusion* in a conversation, it is important to handle the situation tactfully and assertively. Acknowledge the incursion while upholding a calm and composed demeanor. Politely redirect the conversation back to its original purpose, stressing the importance of staying on track. If the incursion persists, set clear boundaries by politely but firmly stating that the intrusion is unwelcome. It may be necessary to assertively guide the conversation back to its intended direction. Maintaining professionalism and assertiveness while handling uninvited incursions can help ensure that conversations remain focused and productive.

Furthermore, when encountering *Ignorant Perspectives* in a conversation, it is critical to approach the situation with patience, empathy, and a willingness to educate. Listen actively to understand the perspective being shared, even if it is based on misinformation or lack of understanding, then gently and respectfully provide factual information, evidence, or alternative viewpoints to challenge and correct any misconceptions. One should avoid responding with resentment as it may advance ignorance and hinder productive dialogue.

Encourage open-mindedness and a willingness to learn by fostering a respectful and *Non-judgmental Environment* for discussion. Use clear and concise language to explain your perspective and provide sources to support your points.

When confronted with an *escalating argument* in a conversation, it is crucial to prioritize de-escalation and constructive communication. Effectively manage a heated argument by maintaining a composed and level-headed demeanor to prevent the situation from worsening. Practice active listening, show empathy and try to understand another speaker's perspective. Validating other speakers' feelings can help diffuse tension. Acknowledge the emotions and feelings of the other persons even if you disagree with their viewpoint. It is prudent to use courteous language and tone when expressing one's thoughts and feelings, avoiding personal attacks or inflammatory language. If the argument continues to escalate, take a break from the conversation to cool off, then revisit the discussion at a later time when emotions have settled.

Occasionally, one may experience *Unfruitful Discussions* in discourse due to miscommunication, differing perspectives, lack of clarity on goals, or emotional barriers. Consequently, it is important to assess the situation and consider potential strategies to steer the dialogue towards a more productive outcome. There are occasions when one is unsure of what to say. It is critical to note that there is great wisdom in admitting that you don't have an answer or need more time to think. Silence in such moments is an indication of humility and a commitment to thoughtful communication.

Taking a pause allows you to reflect on the situation, gather your thoughts, and respond with more clarity and accuracy, besides, choosing silence and reflection over hasty words demonstrates *Deeper Understanding* and emotional intelligence.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In language acquisition and learning, communicative competence is a central goal, stressing not only understanding the grammar, vocabulary, and syntax of a language, as well as the ability to produce and comprehend spoken and written forms of the language, but also the ability to use language in real-life situations. Therefore, individuals should navigate various communicative contexts effectively using: linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competencies, besides Strategic Silence. It is recommended that Strategic Silence should be acknowledged as a significant conversational skill that tackles the challenges of: disrespectful remarks, emotional outbursts, uninvited intrusion, ignorant perspectives, escalating arguments and unfruitful debates. It is not about repressing feelings or avoiding expression. It is about choosing to use it as a tool for thoughtful, intentional communication. Strategic Silence is a powerful tool in communication that quells emotions by providing space for reflection, emotional regulation, active listening, and empathy. It prevents escalation, promotes thoughtful responses, and can create a calming effect, making it easier to traverse emotionally charged situations. Using it strategically can enhance the quality of

communication and foster meaningful interactions utilizing self-control and emotional intelligence.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the Author

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