



Goce Delcev University – Štip
Faculty of Philology



REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Mind the Meaning: Developing Language Competences in Pragmatics



Date: Tuesday, 28 October 2025



Time: 10:30

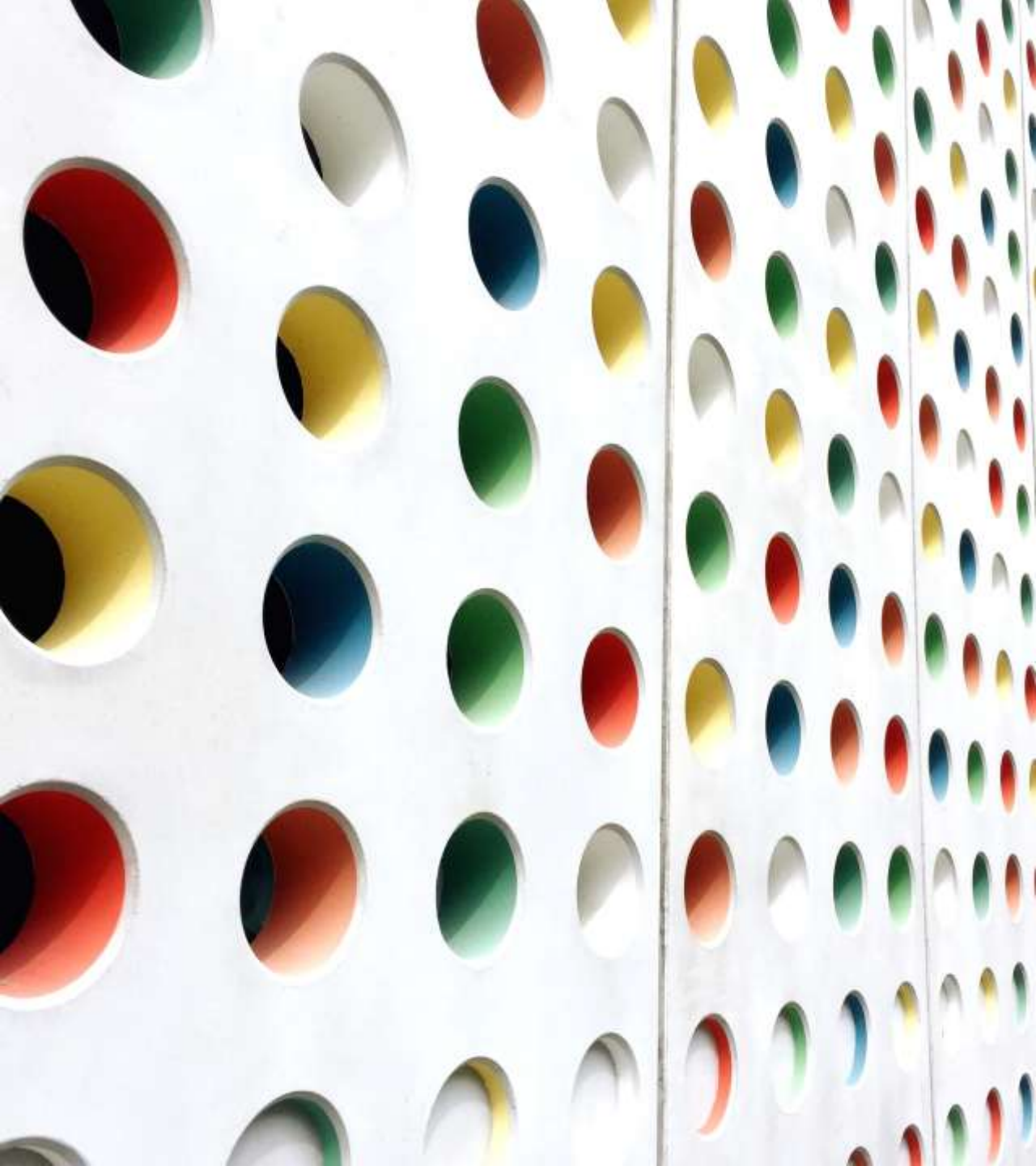


Venue: Classroom 4, Campus 4 – Štip

This event is part of the project:
Modern Approaches in the Research of Intercultural Pragmatics and Its Application in Teaching – From Scientific Concepts to Practical Implementation funded by the Ministry of Education and Science.

ORGANIZERS:

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Developing language competence

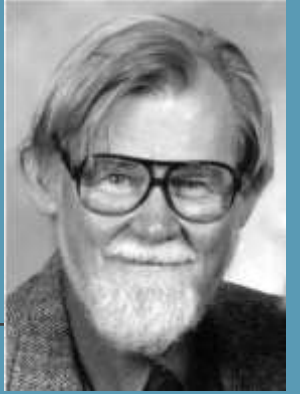
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❖ Language competence



- introduced by linguist **Noam Chomsky** in the 1960s.
- refers to the implicit knowledge that speakers of a language have about their own language – the mental system that allows them to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences, even those they have never heard before.
- **competence vs. performance:**
 - Competence is the *idealized* knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and rules of use that exist in a speaker's mind.
 - Performance is the *actual use* of language in real situations, which can be affected by memory limits, distractions, or errors.

❖ Communicative competence



- First introduced by **Dell Hymes** in the 1970s.
- emphasizes the social and contextual language use.
- Hymes argued that knowing a language is not just about grammar, but also about knowing how, when, and why to use it appropriately in social contexts.
- communicative competence is the overall ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in real-life situations.

Example: Someone may know perfect grammar (competence), but if they use overly formal language with friends, communication might fail – showing a lack of communicative competence.

4 specific components of communicative competence

- Canale and Swain's View (1980)

1. Linguistic / grammatical competence

➤ knowledge of the rules of a language: its vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. It allows you to form correct and meaningful sentences.

- "She goes to school", not "She go to school."

➤ "You are happy" / "Are you happy?"

2. Sociolinguistic competence

➤ knowing how to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts.

- "How are you?" – "I'm fine, thank you".

➤ Sociolinguistic competence helps us adjust our language depending on who we're talking to, where, and why.

4 specific components of communicative competence

- Canale and Swain's View (1980)

3. Discourse competence

- "I woke up. I went to school. I was late. The bus broke down."
- "I woke up late because my alarm didn't ring, and to make things worse, the bus broke down on the way to school."
- Produce coherent and cohesive speech.
- how we connect our sentences to form coherent, meaningful communication.

4. Strategic competence

- "microwave",
- "The thing you use to heat food quickly."
- "Oh, I mean it's like an oven, but smaller."
- the skill of using strategies to overcome communication problems.
- using gestures, tone, or paraphrasing to make yourself clear.

❖ Putting It All Together !

➤ Imagine this situation:

You're a student studying abroad, and you meet your professor for the first time.

Grammatical competence helps you form correct sentences like, "Good morning, Professor. I'm really interested in your course."

Sociolinguistic competence tells you to use a polite tone and maybe shake hands – not give a casual "Hey, what's up?"

Discourse competence helps you carry on the conversation smoothly – asking about the class, sharing your background, and ending politely.

Strategic competence helps you keep communication going when you forget a word, by rephrasing or using gestures.

❖ New insights (1990s – 2000s)

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

- the ability to use and understand language according to context
- to interpret what people mean rather than just what they say.
- In other words, it's about using language appropriately to achieve communication goals and interpreting others' intentions accurately.
- “Could you open the window?” (a polite request, not a question)
- “It’s getting late” -> “We should leave.”
- Understanding how meaning changes depending on the situation, the speaker, and the listener.
- communication is both effective and appropriate.

❖ New insights (1990s – 2000s)

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

- The ability to use language appropriately and effectively when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- It involves understanding cultural norms, values, and communication styles to avoid misunderstandings.
- Intercultural competence is not just about speaking another language – it's about understanding values, behaviors, and communication styles across cultures, and showing respect through appropriate adaptation.

Sample situations

Saying “No” Politely

- In some Asian cultures (like Japan or Indonesia), people often avoid saying “no” directly to maintain harmony. They might say, “That could be difficult,” instead.
- ❑ An interculturally competent person recognizes this indirect refusal and doesn’t keep insisting.

Gift-Giving Etiquette

- In China, it’s polite to refuse a gift once or twice before accepting, to show modesty. In Western cultures, refusing a gift might seem ungrateful.
- ❑ Someone with intercultural competence knows to offer or accept gifts according to local customs.



Direct vs. Indirect Communication

- Americans prefer direct communication -> ("I disagree with you")
 - Mexicans might use indirect language to avoid confrontation
 - > ("I see your point, but maybe we can think differently").
 - A culturally competent communicator interprets both styles correctly without misunderstanding them as rude or weak.
- ❖ Language competence is increasingly seen as a spectrum or portfolio of skills (grammar, discourse, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, strategic, intercultural), rather than a single monolithic ability.

Type of Competence	Meaning / Focus	Example
Grammatical Competence	Knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure – the formal rules of a language.	Knowing that we say “ <i>She goes to school</i> ” (not “ <i>She go to school</i> ”).
Sociolinguistic Competence	Using language appropriately in different social contexts, considering roles, relationships, and formality.	Saying “ <i>Good evening, sir</i> ” to a teacher vs. “ <i>Hey!</i> ” to a friend.
Pragmatic Competence	Understanding and expressing intended meanings beyond the literal words; interpreting implied messages and speech acts.	Realizing that “ <i>Can you pass the salt?</i> ” is a polite request, not a question about ability.
Discourse Competence	Connecting sentences and ideas to create coherent and cohesive speech or writing.	Using <i>first, next, finally</i> to organize a story logically.
Strategic Competence	Using strategies to maintain communication and overcome gaps or breakdowns.	If you forget a word, saying “ <i>the thing you use for...</i> ” or using gestures to explain.
Intercultural Competence	Communicating effectively and appropriately across cultures, being aware of cultural differences and perspectives.	

❖ Remember:

- “She’s fluent in English” – it’s about how well she uses language in real social interaction.
- Language is more than words – it’s a tool for building relationships, expressing identity, and navigating the world.
- Effective communication isn’t just about speaking the same language – it’s about sharing and negotiating understanding across cultural boundaries.
- So next time you talk, write, or learn a new language, remember – it’s not just about grammar drills or vocabulary lists; it’s about how you connect with people, adapt to context, and keep the conversation alive.