Is Strategic Competence 'Competence?': Reconsidering Strategic Competence as a Pedagogical Notion

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether it is appropriate to employ the term 'competence' for the notion of *strategic competence* by Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996). Section One reviews the emergence and revisions of the term 'strategic competence.' The term first referred only to communication strategies, yet as the notion of 'competence' was enlarged, 'strategic competence' began to denote explicitly the notion of *ability for use*. It is demonstrated that the terminology of Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) is not necessarily consistent. It is contended that the notion of strategic competence is *pedagogical* rather than *explanatory*. Section Two follows the use of the term 'competence' in a wider context of theoretical and applied linguistics. After examining the different meanings of the term by Chomsky (1965, 1995, 2000a) and Hymes (1972), the author endorses the trichotomy of *knowledge*, *performance* and *actual use* by McNamara (1995, 1996) and Lyons (1996). It is indicated that the term 'competence' is a problematic one, which invites unnecessary confusion. In Section Three, communication is described as a multi-faceted, evolving and interactive process. If strategic competence were to deal with communication as such, the term 'competence' is misleading in that it now assumes the Chomskyan implication of I-language. The notion of strategic competence is probably beyond our current scope of explanatory theories, and as such it should remain as a pedagogical concept. After examining alternative terms for 'strategic competence,' the author suggests that a new term 'strategic capacity' may best describe the notion currently expressed by the term 'strategic competence.'

1. Emergence and revisions of strategic competence

The term 'strategic competence' first appeared in a landmark paper by Canale and Swain (1980) in the first article of the first issue of *Applied Linguistics*. The paper was significant in that it first presented a comprehensive framework of *communicative competence*, a notion proposed by Hymes (1972) with much room for theoretical refinement (Taylor 1988; McNamara 1995, 1996; Bachman and Cohen 1998). One aspect of such refinement by Canale and Swain was the theoretical distinction between *knowledge* and *ability* (or *capability*, *capacity*, and *skill*, terms

that are to be clarified gradually). Although Hymes included the notion of *ability for use* in competence (1972: 282-3), Canale and Swain disambiguated the term and stated clearly that competence referred to 'underlying knowledge', whether competence was 'communicative, grammatical, or whatever' (1980: 7), excluding the notion of *ability* (and related notions) from the notion of competence. As Taylor (1988:158) later assessed, it was a 'welcome clarification' that brought the notion of competence into line with Chomsky (1965). Canale and Swain were hesitant to incorporate the notion of 'ability for use,' because this notion had not been pursued rigorously, and they doubted there would be any theory of human action that could explicate it adequately (Canale and Swain 1980: 7). 'Ability for use' was elsewhere included in what they termed as 'communicative performance' (Canale and Swain 1980: 6). They also expelled from the notion of competence factors such as volition, motivation and general psycholinguistic traits (e.g. memory, perceptual strategies). Thus in the first section of the paper, they presented as components of communicative competence *grammatical competence* and *sociolinguistic competence*.

However, in the third section, Canale and Swain made a case for the necessity of another component to explain how breakdowns in communication could be compensated for, or 'how to cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open' (1983: 25). Specifically they called it 'communication strategies,' but they employed a new term 'strategic competence,' crediting A.S.Palmer in personal communication with suggesting the term. (A.S.Palmer had written a paper on communication strategies). They defined strategic competence as 'verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that *may* be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence' (Canale and Swain 1980: 30, emphasis added). It was also suggested that strategic competence should be divided into two types, one that relates to grammatical competence and the other that relates more to sociolinguistic competence. Hence communicative competence was formulated to consist of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence.

However, this inclusion of strategic competence was criticized later as a failure in distinguishing between knowledge and ability, a pledge Canale and Swain made in the first section of their paper (Taylor 1988: 158, McNamara 1996: 62, Shohamy 1996: 143). It was hard to conceive of strategic competence, or more plainly, communication strategies, as 'underlying knowledge.' The term 'strategic competence' had been a problematic one since its conception.

In spite of this, the term was carried over in the framework of communicative competence by Canale (1983), who added *discourse competence* as a fourth component of communicative competence.¹ It was not without a certain amount of revisions, though. One revision was the inclusion of *skill* in the notion of competence. Canale alleged that it was important to stress 'again' that communicative competence

referred to 'both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge when interacting in actual communication' (1983: 5), citing page 34 of Canale and Swain (1980). There was a brief and passing description of competence as 'what the learners know about the second language and how to use it' on the page. The 'skill' here amounted to the 'ability for use.' Despite this description, given the explicit statement of competence as underlying knowledge in Canale and Swain (1980: 7), it would be fair to say that Canale altered the notion of competence, resulting in strategic competence fitting the notion better. Furthermore, Canale claimed that the knowledge and skill in communicative competence underlay actual communication 'in a systematic and necessary way' (1983: 6). Whether strategic competence exists in a systematic way is a point that we need to discuss later.

Another revision was that strategic competence now assumed the function of enhancing the effectiveness of communication as well as the aforementioned function of compensating for breakdowns in communication. All in all, the revised notion of strategic competence was an enlarged one, meaning both knowledge and skill (or ability for use), and assumed a flexible role of adapting to communication in both enhancing of and compensating for communication. Although the whole framework of Canale's model was later criticized as 'a static framework' with little discussion of how the components of communicative competence interacted with each other (Bachman and Cohen 1998: 6), the expansion of the notion of strategic competence was a seminal revision that was to be developed later by other scholars like Bachman (1990).

Bachman (1990) is to be examined with regard to strategic competence in the following three points: (1) definitions of ability, knowledge and competence; (2) separation of strategic competence from language competence; and (3) strategic competence as an important part of *all* communicative language use.

The first point is about ability, knowledge and competence. Despite the established use of 'communicative competence' as a cover term to explain language use, Bachman employed a new term 'communicative language ability' as the cover term. Presumably this followed from his definitions of related terms. First, he equated competence with knowledge ('I use knowledge and competence more or less synonymously, to refer to entities which we may hypothesize to be in the minds of language users.') (Bachman 1990: 108). Next, he defined ability as including both knowledge (i.e. competence) and 'capability for implementing that competence in language use' (ibid). Thus communicative language ability was defined as 'both knowledge of language and the capacity² for implementing that knowledge in communicative language use' (Bachman 1990: 107). This description of ability as knowledge (i.e. competence) plus capacity for using this knowledge was, according to Bachman, consistent with earlier works in communicative competence (Bachman 1990: 81. cf. Hymes 1972; Munby 1978; Canale and Swain 1980; Savignon 1983; Canale 1983; Widdowson 1983. See also Bialystok and Sharwood-Smith 1985;

Widdowson 1989). It appeared that the notion of competence was once again free from the notion of ability for use, and the dynamic nature of the interaction of various competencies was retained in the cover term 'communicative language ability.'

However, the description was in fact confusing. If we were to use knowledge and competence 'more or less synonymously,' it would follow that it would be admissible to call strategic competence 'strategic knowledge,' a very weird term given the integrative function of strategic competence as stated by Bachman. In all likelihood, Bachman knew this oddity and stated in an end note (1990: 108) that he used competence in Hymes's (1972) sense, and did not limit this to 'linguistic competence,' as originally defined by Chomsky (1965). So the notion of competence was not unequivocal with, nor exactly the same as, the notion of knowledge.³ While grammatical competence (one of Bachman's four language competencies), for example, was to be considered more in terms of competence as knowledge for its stable nature, strategic competence was to be considered more in terms of competence as ability for its interactive nature (McNamara 1996: 68). Bachman thus failed in disambiguation of competence. His definitions were redundant or circular: ability is knowledge (i.e. competence) plus capacity, but the competence includes ability for use.

The second point to make is that strategic competence had now become separated from language competence. The whole picture Bachman presented was that of communicative language ability emerging from the interaction of *language competence* (*grammatical competence, textual competence, illocutionary competence* and *sociolinguistic competence*) and *knowledge structures* (knowledge of the world), all in *strategic competence* (Bachman 1990: 85). Strategic competence was no longer juxtaposed with language competencies because the former was now considered as 'the mental capacity for implementing the components of language competence in contextualized communicative language use' (1990: 84). It assumed a higher order function of utilizing language competence.

This leads to the third point. Strategic competence now assumed an even more important role than as stated by Canale (1983). In addition to enhancing and compensating roles, it now 'provided a means for explaining how the various components of language competence interact with each other, and with features of the language use situation' (Bachman and Cohen 1998: 6). Bachman's model had a more general description of strategic competence than Faerch and Kasper (1983)'s psycholinguistic model of speech production,⁴ which included a planning phase and an execution phase (Bachman 1990: 100). Bachman included three components in strategic competence: assessment, planning and execution. The components were, however, laden with enormous burdens. The *Assessment component* allegedly enabled us to (1) identify the information that was needed for realizing a particular communicative goal; (2) determine what language competencies were at our disposal for the most effective achievement of the communicative goal; (3) ascertain the abilities and knowledge that were shared by our interlocutor; and (4) evaluate the

extent to which the communicative goal had been achieved. The *Planning component* was supposed to retrieve relevant linguistic items from language competencies and formulate a plan. Finally, the *execution component* was to implement the plan in psychophysiological mechanisms. With these three components, strategic competence was now described as 'an important part of *all* communicative language use' (Bachman 1990: 100 emphasis added). All communicative language use, not some particular use on special occasions, was to be covered in this type of problem solving model of strategic competence. Strategic competence now had a function of integrating language competencies and world knowledge in the context of a situation, a function that was necessary for *any* communicative language use.

The notion of strategic competence was now so large that Bachman actually likened it to 'a general ability, which enables an individual to make the most effective use of available abilities in carrying out a given task, whether that task be related to communicative language use or to non-verbal tasks such as creating a musical composition, painting, or solving mathematical equations' (Bachman 1990: 106). At the same time, however, he did not allow strategic competence to be identified with intelligence and take strategic competence out of consideration. He argued that dismissing strategic competence as a general ability with unmeasurable effect on language test performance would be abandoning an empirical question. Bachman believed that the effect of strategic competence should be measurable in language test performance if proper test design were provided (Bachman 1990: 107). It was no problem, he thought, to suppose two persons 'to have the same control of the rules of usage and use, but to differ in their willingness to exploit what they knew and their flexibility in doing so' (Bachman 1990: 105).

The notion of strategic competence in Bachman (1990) was now much larger than the conservative notion of strategic competence as communicative strategies: it was the mental capacity for exploiting the components of language competence in contextualized communicative language use, and as such, a necessary competence for any communicative language use. It became, to use McNamara's (1995, 1996) exquisite phrase, a *Pandora's Box*. Yet keeping the Pandora's Box shut was an unwelcome option for Bachman, for the effect of strategic competence in language tests should be measurable. Strategic competence was now an essential component of communicative language ability, with its measurable effects in test performance, but the detail of its actual mechanics had not yet been empirically explained. Bachman only speculated that there should be three components in the box. Bachman's formulation of strategic competence was not a theory with *explanatory adequacy*.

Now we have come to what is currently the most standard model of communicative language ability, that of Bachman and Palmer (1996). Bachman and Palmer (1996) were rather conservative in their primary purpose. They stated reservedly that in most cases they were not interested in generalizing to just any, or

all language use domains. They instead defined a *target language domain* as a set of specific language use tasks that the test taker was likely to encounter, and to which they wanted their inferences about language ability to generalize (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 44). Their basic philosophy was stated as follows: 'in order to be useful, any language test must be developed *with a specific purpose, a particular group of test takers and a specific language use domain*' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 18 emphasis added). This contrasted sharply with Bachman's 'common thread that runs through much recent writing in language testing,' which pronounced that 'a precise, empirically based definition of language ability can provide the basis for developing a "*common metric*" scale for measuring language abilities *in a wide variety of contexts, at all levels, and in many different languages*' (1990: 5 emphasis added).

Despite this conservative aim in general, Bachman and Palmer's (1996) model of communicative language ability was a more comprehensive one than Bachman's (1990). It progressively modeled aspects of Hymes's ability for use (McNamara 1996: 74) and an *affective component* and a *personal characteristic component* were explicitly added. The whole picture of the model was that of *strategic competence*, through the *affective component*, interacting with *language knowledge* (formerly 'language competence'), *topical knowledge* (formerly 'knowledge structures'), and the *personal characteristic component*, whilst at the same time having reciprocal influence with *characteristics of the language use or test task and setting*.

Although McNamara did not include this point among major revisions of Bachman and Palmer (McNamara 1996: 72), it should be noted that the term 'competence', as we have just seen, was replaced with 'knowledge.' Bachman and Palmer's new *language knowledge* were all not termed as competence (*grammatical knowledge, textual knowledge, functional knowledge, and sociolinguistic knowledge*), while *strategic competence*, distinct from linguistic competence/knowledge since Bachman (1990), retained the term 'competence', indicating a distinction from language knowledge.

However, Bachman and Palmer seemed not entirely happy with the term 'strategic competence,' or at least they were not completely consistent. Although in the Figure 4.1 on page 63, where they presented the whole picture of language use and language test performance, they employed the term 'strategic competence' alone,⁶ they sometimes rephrased 'strategic competence' with 'metacognitive strategies' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 62, 67, 70, 78). In Table 4.2 on page 71 and Figure 4.2 on page 72, the running titles included 'metacognitive strategies' but not 'strategic competence.' These instances of the paraphrase of 'strategic competence' with 'metacognitive strategies' and the occasional preference of 'metacognitive strategies' to 'strategic competence' went in the opposite direction to the rephrasing by Canale and Swain (1980), who preferred 'strategic competence' to 'communication strategies.' But as the difference between the two modifiers ('metacognitive' and 'communication') showed, Bachman and Palmer did not wish to go back to the pre-Canale and Swain

era. Despite these instances of occasional rephrasing, Bachman and Palmer generally retained the term 'strategic competence' as the definiendum, and defined it as 'higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70). The notion of strategic competence contained an interactive and integrative function for language ability and extended beyond linguistic communication. Strategic competence was not a mere set of communication strategies.

Another paraphrase that immediately followed 'strategic competence' was 'metacognitive components' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70). As Bachman and Palmer stated in an endnote (1996: 82), this term is from Sternberg's (1985, 1988) theory of intelligence, although Sternberg's term was 'metacomponents', not 'metacognitive components.' Sternberg's theory of intelligence was named as a 'triarchic theory of human intelligence' in that it argued that one needed to understand the relationship of intelligence to (1) the internal world of the individual, (2) the external world of the individual, and (3) the experience with the world that mediated between the internal and the external worlds (Sternberg 1988: 57-8). *Metacomponents* were concerned with the relationship of intelligence to the internal world of the individual.⁷ Metacomponents are executive processes used to plan, monitor, and evaluate problem solving (Sternberg 1988: 59; For a schematic representation of the triarchic theory, see Figure 4 on page 68). This characterization served as one of the sources of Bachman and Palmer's formulation of strategic competence.

The internal formulation of strategic competence in Bachman and Palmer (1996) was different from that of Bachman (1990) and also different from that of Sternberg (1985, 1988), although no reason was given for this revision. They divided strategic competence into the three components of *goal setting*, *assessment*, and *planning*.⁸ The new formulation was, however, no different from that of Bachman (1990) in that the three components were supposed to fulfil a tremendous amount of functions. Goal setting involved (1) identifying the language use tasks; (2) choosing one or more tasks among them; and (3) deciding whether or not to attempt to complete the task(s). Assessment had three aspects: (1) determining the desirability and feasibility of accomplishing the language use task; (2) determining whether the necessary topical and language knowledge is available; and (3) monitoring and evaluating response to the chosen task. Planning was about (1) selecting elements from topical and language knowledge for completing the task; (2) formulating one or more plans for implementation; and (3) selecting one plan (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70-75, 79). Despite this reformulation, explanatory adequacy was not aimed for. We might assert that the notion of strategic competence by Bachman (and Palmer) became an inflated one.

However, Bachman and Palmer should not be criticized for what they did not aim for. Their conceptualization of strategic competence was to provide 'an essential

basis both for designing and developing potentially interactive test tasks and for evaluating the interactiveness of the test tasks we use' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70). They were more involved in language testing than in psychology. They presented the formulation of strategic competence 'not as a working model of language processing, but as a basis for understanding how to design and develop language tests and how to use their results appropriately' (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 78). Their formulation was *pedagogical*, not *explanatory*: it provided a working framework for designing and developing language tests, but it was not focused on providing *explanatory adequacy* of the actual mechanics of the mind.

Our question is whether it is appropriate to employ the term 'competence' for such a notion. Has the notion of strategic competence not become too inflated to be called 'competence'? Should we stay liberal and use the term ambiguously as Canale (1983) and Bachman (1990)? Are we to allow ourselves to paraphrase the term occasionally as Bachman and Palmer (1996) did? Dare we go back to the notion of Canale and Swain (1980) and think of strategic competence completely in terms of communication strategies? In the next section, the use of 'competence' in a wider context of theoretical and applied linguistics will be examined.

2. Competence in theoretical and applied linguistics

The emergence and spread of the technical term 'competence' in both theoretical and applied linguistics is usually attributed to Chomsky. It is because of his influence that 'competence' rather than alternative terms like 'ability(ies)' or 'proficiency' became a term of reference (Spolsky 1989: 150). Chomsky's classical statement (1965: 4) distinguished *competence* (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of the language) and *performance* (the actual use of language in concrete situations). He thus established the basic distinction between *knowledge* and *use* of that knowledge (cf. Taylor 1988: 149), but he also made clear the distinction between *knowledge* and *ability*. His favorite argument (Chomsky 1986: 10, 2000a: 51), based on pathological cases of brain injuries, maintained that the ability to put the knowledge to use may be impaired with no loss in the knowledge, suggesting that the knowledge and the ability were distinct both categorically and physiologically.

However, to many minds, Chomsky's 'competence,' is misleading (Spolsky 1989: 138). The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Ninth Edition) simply gives 'ability' as the first definition of competence. It is not surprising then that many people including Hymes took competence as involving the notion of ability. Chomsky himself was not unaware of this type of confusion. He actually wished to use 'knowledge'; he chose 'competence' only in an effort to avoid entanglement with the problem relating 'knowledge' at that time (Chomsky 1980: 59).

Hymes (1972: 282) took competence as 'the most general term for the capability of a person' and assumed that competence was dependent upon both knowledge and

ability for use. Hymes criticized Chomsky's view of performance as being like a 'dustbin,' yet as Taylor pointed out (1988: 157), this criticism also applied to Hymes's view of competence since the above definition of competence included too many factors. Furthermore, it can be argued that as competence had now become extended, or rather changed, to include the ability for use (Taylor 1988: 156), the term carried over its implication of analyzability beyond its proper scope. It was implied that ability for use was systematically analyzable, but given the lack of proper theories it was not a sound assumption.

Yet it would be unfair to claim that Hymes arbitrarily changed the notion. Hymes (1989: 247) later remarked that his use of 'ability' followed Katz and Fodor's (1962: 218) statement that 'the goal of a theory of a particular language must be the explication of the abilities and skills involved in the linguistic performance of a fluent native speaker.' Besides, Chomsky was not in fact consistent in his use of the term. Chomsky (1980: 59, See also 2000a: 26) argued that 'it is possible in principle for a person to have full grammatical competence and no pragmatic competence, hence no ability to use a language appropriately.' Evidently in the term 'pragmatic competence' Chomsky included in competence the notion of ability⁹ (Taylor 1988: 154; Widdowson 1989: 130).

It is not surprising therefore that this ambiguity was inherited by applied linguists that followed. Canale and Swain (1980) were an exception in that they explicitly excluded the notion of ability from competence. The majority of applied linguists and educational psychologists used the term 'competence' to refer to both knowledge and skills (Dubin 1989: 172), or, as we have seen, knowledge and ability. Canale (1983: 7) even defined grammatical competence, which was usually considered to be static, as 'knowledge and skill.' Where teaching and learning were emphasized, the term was often associated with proficiency (Taylor 1988: 161; Dubin 1989: 172). The term 'competence' apparently ceased to have a precise meaning.

Chomsky, on the other hand, began to avoid this problematic term 'competence' from the mid 80s (Chomsky 1986, 1988, 1995, 2000a, 2000b). The title of Chomsky's 1986 study was in fact *Knowledge of Language*, a term he once deliberately avoided. His three basic questions¹⁰ were (1) what constituted knowledge of language; (2) how was knowledge of language acquired; and (3) how was knowledge of language put to use. Knowledge of language was now at the forefront of his arguments and the term 'competence' disappeared from the major areas of discussion.¹¹ Thus comes Lyon's (1996: 29) judgement that Chomsky came to 'regret having chosen the word "competence" as a technical term of linguistic theory.'

One of the rare occurrences of the term 'competence' in Chomsky (1995: 14) can be seen where he defined *competence* as knowledge and understanding and *performance* as what one does with that knowledge and understanding. This distinction is basically the same as Chomsky (1965).¹² Other occurrences are Chomsky (2000a: 26) where he equates "grammatical competence" with I-languages,

and Chomsky (2000a: 60) where he remarks that 'the mature state of competence is a generative procedure.' The term 'competence' is used here as an index of Chomsky's new terms I-language and the generative procedure.

I-language is a relatively stable steady state of the language faculty attained *internally* by an *individual* (hence the name *I-language*). I-language is identified with the generative procedure, which assigns structural descriptions to linguistic expressions. The generative procedure is furthermore assumed to be embedded in performance systems. (Chomsky 1995: 167, 2000a: 15, 26, 50, 60). I-language, a new term for (grammatical) competence, is connected to, but distinct from the ability for use.

Furthermore, it should be noted that in Chomsky's recent writings (1995: 14, 167) the term 'capacities' is used to refer to a larger portion of linguistic phenomena. He states, for example, that 'the human brain provides an array of capacities that enter into the use and understanding of language (*the language faculty*)' (1995: 167). Since I-language (i.e. the generative procedure or (grammatical) competence) is 'one component of the language faculty' (ibid.), we may infer that the term 'capacities' is used to refer to a wider spectrum of the language faculty.

The terminology of Bachman (and Palmer) should be understood in this context. First, Bachman's (1990) equation of competence with knowledge was a move that reflected Chomsky's terminological shift since the mid 80s. Bachman and Palmer's (1996) complete expulsion of the term 'competence' from the former 'language competence' was another move that brought their terminology closer to Chomsky's terminology.

However, despite the terminological shift, the term 'competence' remained in strategic competence in Bachman and Palmer. Chomsky's concept of competence now assumes the implication of I-language. Whether strategic competence should carry the internal and individual implication of I-language is a point we will explore in the next section.

But before we discuss that, let us see what general agreement we seem to have in terminology. In his extensive review of the related literature, McNamara (1995, 1996) summarized various models of communicative language ability in terms of three basic dimensions: *knowledge*, *performance*, and *actual use* (1995: 162-7, 1996: 54-60), or in slightly different terms: *knowledge*, *ability for use*, and *instances of language use* (1996: 48). This trichotomy can actually be obtained if we combine and clarify the basic definitions of competence and performance by Chomsky in 1965 and 1995. In 1965, he defined competence as 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of the language' and performance as 'the actual use of language in concrete situations.' In 1995, the definition of competence was more or less the same, whereas performance was defined as what one does with the knowledge. Thus competence in both 1965 and 1995, performance in 1995 and performance in 1965 duplicate the above trichotomy of knowledge, performance (ability for use), and actual use (instances of language use).

Lyons (1996) also examined the issue of competence and suggested that we need to distinguish between competence, the process of production, and the products of production, and termed each as 'language-system', 'performance' and 'text.' He further offered a 'non-technical definition' of (linguistic) competence, which was intended to be comprehensible without the benefit of any training in linguistics, philosophy, psychology or any other related academic discipline. The definition expressed (linguistic) competence as 'the knowledge of particular languages, by virtue of which knowledge those who have it are able to produce and understand utterances in those languages' (1996: 11-12). It should be concluded that Lyons also shared McNamara's trichotomy of knowledge, performance (ability for use), and instances of language use. Their general agreement is that we distinguish between knowledge of language, the ability and process of using the knowledge, and instances of produced language use: competence only refers to the knowledge, and not to the ability or process.

Despite this agreement, however, the standard dictionary definition of competence as ability is hard to eradicate. In this sense the term 'competence' is a problematic one that invites unnecessary confusion: it should probably be replaced by 'knowledge' when appropriate in order to eliminate such confusion. Our question is about the use of the term 'strategic competence.' Apparently it can be maintained that strategic competence, being not exclusively linguistic competence, can justifiably be understood as ability according to the standard dictionary definition. It could also be argued that the term 'strategic competence' is analogous to Chomsky's exceptional term 'pragmatic competence.' However, given the argument and agreement we have reviewed, it is hard to escape the denotation of competence as knowledge, which is distinct from ability or process. In the next section, we will examine the alleged roles of strategic competence from the viewpoint of communication, and consider alternative terms for 'strategic competence.'

3. COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIC CAPACITY

Communication is more than simple encoding and decoding (Akmajian 1995). It is a multi-faceted, evolving and interactive process. As Canale and Swain (1980: 17) reminded us, ethnography of speaking assumed the following items as constitutive components of communication: participants, setting (physical time and place), scene (psychological or cultural setting), the actual form of a message, topic, purpose, key (e.g. serious, mock), channel (e.g. oral, written), code (variety within a language), norms of interaction, norms of interpretation, and genre. Among those, only the actual form of a message is dealt with in linguistics. The purpose of communication is related to strategic competence, for without a purpose, it is impossible to plan, execute and evaluate an utterance. In reality, however, the purpose of communication is much more flexible than it is assumed in strategic competence, particularly in test

taking situations (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 71 Cf. Winograd and Flores 1986). Genre may be examined in stylistics, and norms of interaction in anthropology, but the interaction of these factors is rarely studied. Evidently, theoretical and applied linguistics deal with only limited aspects of communication and they do so separately. Communication may be a topic of theoretical and applied linguistics, but because it involves a range of language-relevant but not language-exclusive factors, it is beyond linguistic explanatory devices.

The same point¹³ can be made in Goffman's (1967) terms, as quoted in Hymes (1972: 283) and McNamara (1996: 56). You may need to consider such factors as courage, gameness, gallantry, composure, presence of mind, dignity, stage confidence, etc. to explain communication fully. Obviously, such a list is not expected to be exhaustive by any means: complete specification is not possible. Yet, as a matter of reality, communication can and probably should be considered with regard to these factors. These factors are certainly countable, but at the same time *countless* in the sense that the list cannot be fixed or complete (Wittgenstein 1953). Communication is an infinitely multi-faceted phenomenon.

Moreover, communication is an ongoing process and factors in communication are constantly evolving (Canale 1983: 4). It is 'continual modification in response to change, negotiating the value of convention rather than conforming to established principle,' and does not have ready-made and tailored solutions (Bachman 1990: 84). The problem that is set in this changing context is in principle an unforeseen problem. Thus strategic competence in communication cannot be a set of established strategies, whether metacognitive or communicative.

Besides being multi-faceted and evolving, communication has further complications. It is an interpersonal, not intrapersonal phenomenon (Savignon 1983: 3). In other words, it is not internal or individual. Even in a test situation, which is much more restricted than an actual communicative situation, a participant may be required to interact with an interlocutor, who may be a native speaker, a proficient non-native speaker or another test-taker, with a variety of personal characteristics (McNamara 1995: 173). The variety is much wider in actual communication. Strategic competence is supposed to deal with such interdependent factors. Whether strategic competence is reducible to individual competence is highly dubious (Cf. Hymes 1972: 283). If McNamara was right when he said that strategic competence in Bachman and Palmer addressed questions of interaction only from a viewpoint of one participant (McNamara 1995: 174), this limitation shows the influence of our practice of thinking about linguistic phenomena internally and individually. The notion of strategic competence in communication has to be free from such a constraint.

However multi-faceted, constantly evolving and interpersonal communication may be, though, it could be argued that communication and strategic competence that produces it should be topics of scientific inquiry and that as such the term 'strategic competence' is a proper one that implies analyzability. Chomsky (2000a: 29)

maintains that a reasonable approach to understand what humans are and what they do is 'to try to isolate coherent systems that are amenable to naturalistic inquiry and that interact to yield some aspects of the full complexity.' Such coherent systems are our *problems*, to which we can reasonably expect some answers, whereas the full complexity remains as a *mystery* which is beyond our range of naturalistic inquiry (Chomsky 2000a: 83).

Our question would be, then, whether questions concerning strategic competence are within the range of our problems. As far as performance systems are concerned, Chomsky does not share the optimism that some applied linguists might entertain. He cautions against the danger of trying to capture the full complexity, saying that it would be a mistake, in considering the nature of performance systems, to move at once to a vacuous 'study of everything' (2000a: 29). The *effect* of strategic competence is, as Bachman said, an empirical question, which can be answered if a proper comparative test design is provided. However, the actual integration and interaction of competencies and other factors within strategic competence has not been detailed, nor is it likely to be in the foreseeable future. The notion of strategic competence is inspirational, and the effect of it is observable. Yet the notion itself may be one of the 'pseudo-questions that indicate topics of inquiry that one might hope to explore – but little more than that.' (Chomsky 2000a: 45). Just as *matter*, *motion*, *energy*, *work* and *liquid*, for example, are familiar notions that must be, though, abandoned in naturalistic inquiry because of their wide and unfixed scope (Chomsky 2000a: 21), *strategic competence* may also be a notion that does not belong to naturalistic discourse.

Does the notion of strategic competence as such benefit from the term 'competence?' Does the employment of the term not cause more confusion than less? As for the term 'communicative competence' there have been a number of piercing criticisms. As far back as in 1983, Widdowson, for example, discouraged the use of the term because it implied an analytic, rather than a user, perspective and conformity to pre-existing code and convention (Widdowson 1983: 25). Taylor (1988: 166) gave such a conclusive remark as 'much could be clarified by doing away with the overall term "communicative competence" which has been abused that it has lost all precise meaning.' Davies (1989: 157) was also critical of the term and notion because he believed it did not explain communication. Should we, likewise, do away with the term 'strategic competence?' If replacing 'competence' with 'knowledge' in 'language knowledge' was an important step in Bachman and Palmer (1996), would it not be another important step to replace 'competence' with another term in 'strategic competence?'

The fact that 'strategic competence' originally came from 'communication strategies' and that it is sometimes defined as 'metacognitive strategies' in Bachman and Palmer easily leads us to think of 'strategies' as an alternative term for 'strategic competence.' Shall we simply stop using the term 'strategic competence' and say

'communication strategies' or 'metacognitive strategies?' First, let us think about 'communication strategies.' 'Communication strategies,' or CS, as they are often abbreviated to nowadays, usually refer to the employment of some specific tactics in communication (Bialystok 1990; Kasper and Kellerman 1997). The current strategic competence in Bachman and Palmer refers to cognitive management for all communicative language use, and it is way beyond an array of communication strategies. The study of communication studies should be treated as an established area of its own, which is related to, but distinct from, the study of strategic competence. How about 'metacognitive strategies,' instead? This compound may not stand well as 'metacognitive components' (Bachman and Palmer 1996) or 'metacomponents' (Stern 1985, 1988). In cognitive psychology, according to Faerch and Kasper (1984: 223), 'strategy' usually refers to a particular sub-set of 'procedures,' which is regarded as a higher order concept. The modifier '*metacognitive*' (a higher order notion) does not really fit well with 'strategies,' (a lower order notion). 'Metacognitive components' and 'metacomponent' are free from such an internal contradiction. Let us hold them as candidates until we come across a better term.

The next alternative candidate is 'proficiency.' This is in fact what Taylor (1988: 166) proposed after recognizing that 'competence,' in its unambiguous and restricted sense as knowledge, was still useful. Taylor drew a distinction between 'competence' as knowledge and 'proficiency' as 'the ability to make use of competence.' He actually shared the trichotomy of *knowledge*, *performance* and *actual use* but termed the three as 'competence,' 'proficiency' and 'performance' in this order.¹⁴ He then proposed to replace 'communicative competence' with 'communicative proficiency,' which he claimed to consist of 'grammatical competence' plus 'grammatical proficiency,' 'pragmatic competence' plus 'pragmatic proficiency,' and 'strategic competence' plus 'strategic proficiency.' The juxtaposition of 'strategic competence' and 'strategic proficiency' is not free from problems, as Taylor himself admitted (1988: 167), because we are not sure whether it is possible to 'define closely enough what is meant by "strategy" and what constitutes knowledge of a strategy.' Should we therefore use only 'strategic proficiency' for what we have termed as strategic competence? This term is probably better than 'strategic competence' in that it explicitly expresses the aspect of ability that this notion possesses. However, the term 'proficiency' itself has its own established use and it might not fit very well in the compound 'strategic proficiency.' In general, 'proficiency' has been, and still is, used to refer to linguistic knowledge and ability *as a whole* and so the compound it makes is usually '*overall* proficiency' or '*general* proficiency' (Spolsky 1985, 1989). Besides, the term 'proficiency' is often associated with the integrative type of test and again its implication is of wholeness. Therefore, the term of specified proficiency, 'strategic proficiency,' might connote some internal contradiction, as 'metacognitive strategies' does. 'Strategic proficiency' is probably not the best candidate for the notion.

How about a direct expression 'test-taking process?' This is actually the term many experts in language testing use (Bachman 2000: 11)¹⁵ and it best specifies the processes and strategies test-takers employ in language testing. Yet, obviously the notion we are interested in is not about language tests alone, but about all communicative language use. The expression may be useful in research in language testing, but it cannot be used as a general term for the notion of strategic competence.

We then come to our last candidate 'capacity.' 'Capacity' in its plural form is used by Chomsky (2000a) to refer to a wide range of linguistic phenomena. However, more importantly, Widdowson (1983) afforded 'capacity' detailed pedagogical implications. He first contrasted *training* and *education* as the two ends of a continuum in English teaching. Training was concerned with the development of restricted competence, which should be specified as precisely as possible, whereas education was about the development of general capacity for use. Training was best exemplified by ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and education by GPE (General Purpose English). As was already assumed in the above distinction between training and education, competence and capacity were theoretically contrasted as well. In Widdowson's terminology, competence implied conformity to pre-existing rules. Capacity referred to what competence did not account for: the ability to create meanings by exploiting the potential inherent in the language for continual modification in response to change. In other words, capacity was needed for an unforeseen problem, which involved more than simple application of knowledge (Widdowson 1983: 8).

Thus 'capacity' was called for to explain the creative aspect of language use. The scope of this creativity is larger than that of the 'creativity' that is sometimes associated with competence. The creativity in competence referred to the generative application of the knowledge of language to produce and understand an infinite number of grammatical *sentences*. The creativity in capacity referred to the ability to produce and understand contextually appropriate (and of course grammatical) *utterances*. Creativity in capacity was purported to deal with a problem that is beyond a pre-existing formula (Widdowson 1983: 8). It is capacity that enabled a language user to negotiate the gap between the formula and the problem.

Capacity in this sense depended upon, even if it was not determined by, competence. Capacity, in other words, presupposed a point of reference in competence (Widdowson 1983: 11). The recognition of capacity as such renders language teaching something more than simple training or knowledge transfer. The notion of capacity is associated with the notion of education. Widdowson further claimed that 'capacity' carried with it the assumption that human beings were in control of their own destiny and exploit the knowledge at their disposal for their own ends (Widdowson 1983: 3).

The connotation of 'capacity' we have just reviewed fits perfectly well with the notion of strategic competence. Besides, it is relatively stable in its denotation¹⁶ and

free from such confusion as 'competence' suffered. The term 'capacity' is also inspirational because it has pedagogical implications that Widdowson explicated. In addition, this is a term that Bachman (1990: 84) used in his definition of strategic competence. Our suggestion, then, is to use the term 'strategic capacity' instead of 'strategic competence.' 'Strategic capacity' is probably better than 'metacognitive component' or 'metacomponent' because the last two only have mechanical or psychological connotations. The notion of strategic competence is not explanatory but pedagogical. The notion should be expressed by a pedagogical term, not by a psychological term.¹⁷

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NOTES

¹ Savignon (1983) shared the framework of communicative competence by Canale (1983).

² Note also that Bachman used 'capability' and 'capacity' interchangeably. Because of this synonymity I use the more frequently employed term 'capacity' and omit further references to 'capability.'

³ For a view that regards knowledge as ability, see Kenny (1984) and Chomsky's (1986) refutation of the view.

⁴ Faerch and Kasper (1984: 216-7), though, presented three components: goal-information and context-analysis, verbal planning and monitoring execution.

⁵ To do justice to Bachman (1990), he was well aware of 'the potential dilemma' between the measurement assumptions of unidimensionality and local independence, and actual language tests involving authentic language use. (Bachman 1990: 12)

⁶ The same is true with the section title on page 70 of Bachman and Palmer (1990).

⁷ *Performance components* and *knowledge-acquisition components* were also postulated to account for the relationship of intelligence to the external world and to experience respectively.

⁸ Perhaps it was not a mere coincidence that both 'execution component' and 'psychophysiological mechanisms' in Bachman (1990) were removed from Bachman and Palmer (1996).

⁹ See also Chomsky (1965: 15), where he briefly said, 'knowledge of a language involves the implicit ability to understand indefinitely many sentences.' Despite these exceptional remarks, Chomsky's basic stance is the distinction between knowledge and ability (Chomsky 1986, 2000a).

¹⁰ Chomsky added to the three questions a question concerning the physical mechanism of knowledge and use (1988: 3) and another question concerning the evolution of these properties (1995: 17).

¹¹ There is no entry of competence or performance in the index in Chomsky (1985, 1988)

¹² Though the word 'understanding' was added to 'knowledge', no further explication of

it was given: the addition was not a theoretically major one. A more interesting revision was concerned with performance (what one does with the knowledge and understanding), which used to be 'the actual use of language in concrete situations' in Chomsky (1965). Performance was now seen more as ability for use than as instances of language use.

¹³ See Davidson (2001) for a philosophical analysis of actual communication.

¹⁴ The crisscrossed use of the term 'performance' between 'knowledge, performance, and actual use' (by McNamara and Lyons) and 'competence, proficiency, performance' (by Taylor) is another problem of Taylor's terminology. McNamara's and Lyon's use of 'performance' is in line with the current Chomsky, whereas Taylor's is with the classic Chomsky of 1965.

¹⁵ There is no mention of 'strategic competence' in Bachman's (2000) comprehensive review of researches in language testing. One might guess that 'test-taking process' has virtually replaced 'strategic competence' in Bachman's terminology concerning researches in language testing.

¹⁶ Kenny's (1984: 139) definition of capacity as 'a second-order ability to acquire abilities' is a special one and it might crisscross with our terminology of 'strategic capacity' and 'communicative language ability.' Yet, even this definition does not diminish the relative stability of the meaning of the term in that 'capacity' is still 'ability,' and is free from the ambiguity that 'competence' suffered.

¹⁷ One might argue that 'strategic ability' is as good as 'strategic capacity.' Yet 'ability' lacks the pedagogical implications that 'capacity' has. I would further argue that a more familiar word ('ability') should be retained for the whole phenomena of linguistic communication in order to imply that 'strategic capacity' is a relatively more technical notion than 'communicative language ability.'

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